

Jesuit at the White House Defends Nixon

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By JOHN HERBERS

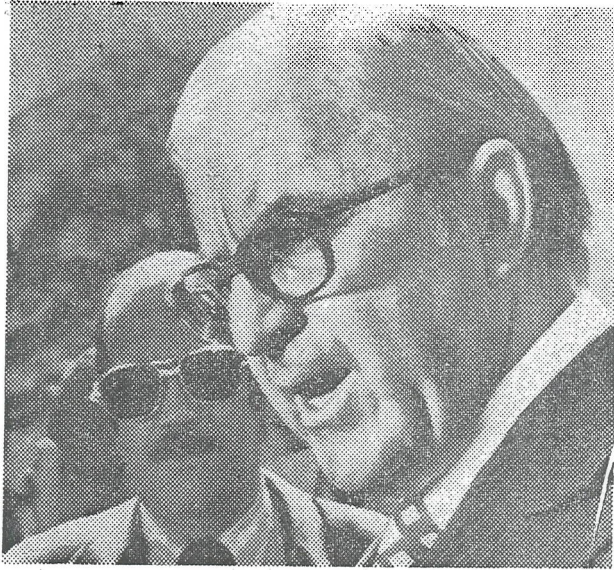
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WASHINGTON, May 8—Dr. John McLaughlin, the Jesuit priest who is a special assistant to President Nixon, held an extraordinary news conference today to deny charges by Hugh Scott, the Senate minority leader, and other Republicans that, as Mr. Scott put it, the Watergate transcripts portrayed "deplorable, disgusting, shabby, immoral performances" by the President and his aides.

This unusual defense of the President was part of a White House effort, seen throughout the day, to block defections of old friends and allies as Mr. Nixon once again was "stonewalling" the House Judiciary Committee and the special prosecutor against further release of Watergate conversations.

Father McLaughlin, in a theological analysis of the transcripts, said that any conclusion that they are amoral or immoral "is erroneous, unjust and contains elements of hypocrisy." Over all, he said, "the President acquitted himself throughout these discussions with honor."

Mr. Nixon's concern over keeping the Watergate scandal from spreading to the White House, he said, was merely the exercise of "damage control."



Associated Press

Dr. John McLaughlin, a Jesuit priest and Presidential aide, defending Mr. Nixon's conduct to reporters.

Behind the scenes, the President's aides talked of his latest hard line against release of more tapes. Mr. Nixon made his decision yesterday, they said, when he saw that release of the Watergate transcripts last week had not brought the favorable reaction he had hoped but another deluge of criticism.

Before Mr. Nixon made that decision, according to several sources, his chief lawyer, James D. St. Clair, was talking of a more conciliatory approach and

so told other aides, including Dean Burch, Presidential counselor, who told reporters early in the day that the White House was asking an accommodation with the special prosecutor, Leon Jaworski, and the House committee.

Mr. Nixon was reported to have decided, however, that releasing the materials had brought him little but grief over

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the last few months and that he was determined to hold the line from here on out against erosion of executive privilege.

As the new hard line went into effect, the public relations effort to make the President's position acceptable was stepped up.

Dr. McLaughlin met with reporters for almost an hour in the office of the President's communications director Ken W. Clawson, seeking to offset the criticism of the transcripts that has sprung from Republicans in Congress and may be spreading to Mr. Nixon's "middle America" constituency.

As to the liberal use of profanity by the President and his aides, Dr. McLaughlin said that language had "no meaning, no moral meaning" but served as a "form of emotional drainage."

"This form of therapy is not only understandable," Father McLaughlin said, "but I think, if looked at closely, good, valid, sound; used as a form of release by previous Presidents."

"We may be offended that all of the canons of ethics, that Emily Post, has not been lived up to," he continued. "The President doesn't speak in iambic pentameters. There is a demythologization of the Presidency going on. This may be good. However, it is too early to say."

Father McLaughlin, who holds degrees in theology, English and philosophy, spoke passionately in the President's defense, his voice rising as if he were in a pulpit and his sentences punctuated with Latin phrases.

"There are 500 volumes that could be brought into existence, 500 volumes of blue books on Presidential confidential conversations," he said, his face grave. "That is my estimate, and about 15,000 hours of Richard Nixon's confidential conversations. This volume represents one of 500 volumes. That means that 99.7 per cent of the President's confidential conversations are not recorded here."

"To select one volume," he continued, "and to declare that this is representative of a complex man's full thinking or expression is unjust, it is inaccurate and it is politically tentative."

Focusing on the moral issue, Father McLaughlin said, "It seems to me the essence of morality is charity. St. Paul says if you have all of the moral virtues and you don't have charity, you are a tinkling cymbal."

"So," the priest continued, "in evaluating the Presidents morality, we ought to look at the extent to which he has produced a climate of charity in the international community and at home. He has reduced those forces that would militate

against charity, against constructive human interaction, and I would say to you that he has more than any leader of this century reduced violence, aggression, insurgency, militarism and war in the 20th century by a thousand per cent."

Attacking the President's critics, Father McLaughlin spoke of "hypocrisy and sanctimonious and self-righteousness which is peculiarly odious in terms of our Judeo-Christian heritage, and you remember that Christ reserved his most scourged condemnations for this particular type of moral arrugancy, calling such individuals 'white sepulchers' who appear on the outside intelligent but within they are dead men's bones."

Meanwhile, rumors were beginning to circulate in Washington again, as they did frequently last fall, that President Nixon was considering resigning. Gerald L. Warren, deputy press secretary, reasserted in the daily press briefing that Mr. Nixon had no such intention.

He was asked about Senator Barry Goldwater's statement, made at the Naval Academy last night, that he believed Mr. Nixon would resign if impeached "rather than through two or three months of televised horror" in a Senate trial. The Arizona Republican added that he did not think Mr. Nixon should resign.

"The president has made it clear what his position is," Mr. Warren said. "He does not believe he will be impeached."

Asked about a statement by Vice President Ford that in the "Watergate climate any votes by Congress to cripple the defense budget or commitments to our allies made it much more difficult for the President to negotiate for peace," Mr. Warren said.

"The President never approaches negotiations from a position of weakness and he is not going to approach this [forthcoming international meetings] from a position of weakness."

Since the Watergate transcript were released, Congressional leaders have been noticeably absent from the White House. Mr. Warren announced that Mr. Nixon would have breakfast with Republican leaders tomorrow, to discuss the economy, not the Watergate developments.

The well-orchestrated public relations effort of the last few days has not diminished the continuing effort to show that the Presidency is functioning normally. This was demonstrated in the East Room at midday when William E. Simon was sworn in as Secretary of the Treasury, and George P. Shultz, after five years with the Administration, bowed out.

A Marine band played as several hundred guests arrived and

took seats under the sparkling chandeliers.

Mr. Nixon entered to a round of applause. He looked tanned and rested and cracked jokes and there was nothing in the ceremony to indicate the deep trouble for the President that his aides now routinely concede.

Mr. Simon, the President said, is a "man of austerity" but he wanted to make the ceremony a little more festive than usual.

"Not only because there are so many distinguished guests, but because we have this wonderful family [Mr. Simon's] here, and young people are always just a little hungry, we should have refreshments," Mr. Nixon said. "Now we will have the refreshments."

Priest a '70 Candidate

A tall, ruddy-faced man, Father McLaughlin was named to the White House staff in 1971 after attracting national attention in 1970, when he ran unsuccessfully on the Republican ticket in trying to unseat Senator John O. Pastore, Rhode Island Democrat. Senator Pastore won by a 2-to-1 margin.

In recent months Father McLaughlin has vigorously defended the President's position in the Watergate situation. He told a Republican group in Arizona that historians would regard Mr. Nixon as "the greatest moral leader of the last third of this century."

Questioned on the CBS-TV program "Sixty Minutes" last Sunday about the "moral tone" of the White House as reflected in the Watergate transcripts released by Mr. Nixon, Father McLaughlin replied that morality was quite a complex matter and added:

"We certainly don't want a saint in the Oval Office." He went on to say that having a "saint" as President would lead to chaos and catastrophe.

Father McLaughlin also said that the idea of taping White House conversations—which he attributed to key Nixon aides rather than to the President himself—had an "honorable motivation."

The rationale, he explained, was that "this is going to be the greatest Administration in the history of the republic and therefore everything ought to be preserved." He added that the President apparently had often "lost sight" of or forgotten the fact that the talks were being taped.

Father McLaughlin, 47 years old, was an associate editor of the Jesuit weekly publication, America, before deciding to run for the Senate. He ran as a peace candidate in 1970.

After joining the Nixon Administration he went to southeast Asia and defended the Administration's policy, including the bombing of North Vietnam and the mining of Haiphong harbor as moral and necessary to bring about a lasting peace in the world.