

New Thoughts by The Nixon Priest

Washington

Describing Richard Nixon as a thoroughbred with a flawed personality, former presidential speechwriter John J. McLaughlin said yesterday he has a new feeling of "excitement and peace" with President Ford in the White House.

McLaughlin is a Jesuit priest who was one of Mr. Nixon's strongest defenders during the months of the crisis which preceded his resignation. He said in an interview his feelings during the final Nixon days were "instantly rage, desolation, the bends; and now a feeling of excitement and peace."

In comparing the two presidents, McLaughlin said:

"I think Richard Nixon is very complicated: a flawed personality, but a thoroughbred . . . he left office with dignity and with colossal discipline and with good heart."

Mr. Ford, he said, is a "liberal conservative" politically, while personally he is extroverted, action oriented and candid."

He also said Mr. Nixon was a "great peacemaker — that is what the historians will put on the good side of the ledger."

"The difference between this administration (Ford) and the last in terms of atmosphere is the difference between cruising down the highway in an open car on a

sunshiny day and driving in a limousine with the curtains drawn on a rainy day," he said.

"The incubus has been lifted from our backs," he added.

McLaughlin said he did not feel betrayed by Mr. Nixon, but did feel rage, stemming from his belief that the former president permitted "a mountain to grow out of a mole hill" in terms of the coverup.

When the June 23 tapes were made public August 5, McLaughlin said, he felt that for the first time substantive evidence had appeared.

The question of whether Mr. Nixon should be prosecuted is a value judgment and "nobody can do that but God," McLaughlin said.

White House press secretary Jerald F. terHorst said that McLaughlin has remained in the White House during the transition period, but will be leaving "shortly."

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