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Charles McCabe

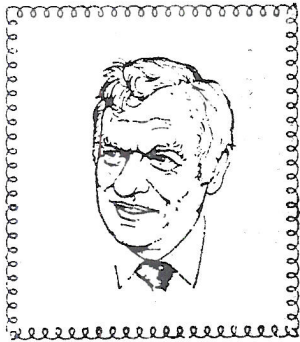
Himself

Nixon As Catholic

DOUGLAS HALLETT is a young Yale graduate now finishing at Harvard Law School after a fascinating year as a staff member of the White House "dirty tricks" man, Charles Colson.

Colson had many responsibilities. They varied from making threatening calls to the top men at CBS to keeping the Teamsters and the Roman Catholics happy. Hallett helped out in all these things and recently in The New York Times gave a totally absorbing account of his stewardship.

Colson claimed to Hallett that, largely because of his prodding, Mr. Nixon had become convinced by the time of the 1972 campaign that the Roman Catholics represented "the real America." Mr. Nixon had taken positions on abortion, pornography and aid to parochial schools which were most satisfactory to the Catholic hierarchy and laity.



Even more remarkably, Hallett reported, "Colson believes that the President even entertained the idea of converting to Roman Catholicism before the election. Chuck, however, told him it would be contrived and phony."

As one who has often said he would believe anything of Mr. Nixon, I must admit that this was something of a stopper. That Mr. Nixon should even "entertain" the idea of becoming one of our own kind was a totally numbing suggestion. Perhaps even I underestimate his versatility, or volatility.

Yet, politically, Mr. Nixon's reported views were sound, as they usually were in his career. The average middle-aged American Catholic, whether he be German or Polish or Irish in descent, was in 1972 as close as anybody in the country to the political views espoused by the former President.

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I KNOW. The lads I went to school with in New York are now among the most reactionary people in this country. They hate blacks and Puerto Ricans and kids with long hair. Especially kids with long hair. They think that smoking marijuana is sib to Satanism. They hate, with a passion, people on welfare. They hate a lot, in fact.

These are the same people who were ardent New Dealers when they were in high school and in college. We were all brought up on the politically liberal encyclicals of Popes Leo and Pius. We were good Tammany Democrats, which meant in those days that we were decidedly to the left, in our belief of the need for government intervention in the lives of the poor.

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BUT THE underprivileged were whites in those days. They were, in fact, us. Now with the kind of affluence that comes with a trade union society and a hard hat, a different ox is being gored. The Catholics in the big cities are, almost to a man, racist, and racist in the worst way.

This is not nice, but it is understandable. The Catholics are newly-risen in the American mainstream, and thus most directly threatened by the claims of the blacks and the browns. I cannot say that I would not be just as racist and just as moss-back had I ended up as a New York cop rather than as a San Francisco journalist. I can only hope.

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THE SADDEST NEWS I got out of New York in a long time was the report of the jury selection in the Mitchell-Stans case. The defense strategy, which turned out to be bang-on right (both were acquitted) was to select as jurors, if possible, blue collar Roman Catholics who read The Daily News, a tabloid of unregenerately backward social views.

The God of the Roman Catholic church is a God of love; but you wouldn't know it in those parts of the country which still have large Catholic enclaves. That these people, with whom I share basic religious belief if damned little else, could see in Mr. Nixon some kind of a savior, and that Mr. Nixon could see in them "the real America" are pipe dreams that sadden me more than I can say.