

# Charles McCabe

# Himself

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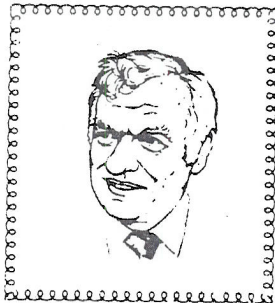
## Me and Nixon

“HOW IS IT,” asked my good friend, “that you can be so tolerant about so many things and so intolerant about Dick Nixon?”

And he added: “Since you have often said that nothing which anybody has done you would not do, if the pressures were sufficiently great, including the horrors of Hitler, why cannot you view Nixon with charity as a man in torment who has simply done what he has done under enormous pressure to survive?”

Good questions, both of them.

It is not that these questions have not occurred to me before. I have just been unwilling really to face them, which in itself is certainly a kind of symptom.



I have toyed with the idea that I envied Nixon, a man I have known since the day he entered Congress in 1946. There was little cause for envy in those days, since I was a Washington wire service reporter and he was a freshman congressman. The distance between us was not all that great, in terms of status. Nobody, least of all Nixon, of Yorba Linda, Calif., could in those days have seen him in the White House.

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**Y**ET I HATED him on sight. He fascinated me, and I watched his tactics closely. They revolted me then, as they have throughout his career. In his subsequent public pillorying of Alger Hiss, I found Hiss a figure only somewhat less appealing than Nixon himself. That bit of American history, in fact, turned me off an

ambition to become a political reporter — a decision I have never regretted.

No. I realize now, as I imperfectly realized then, that Nixon had for me a serpentine attraction. There was something in Nixon that was terribly like something in myself. This was something that the better (i.e., more secure) part of myself deplored; but which another part of me was deeply drawn to.

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**T**HIS WAS the feral Nixon. The beast in the jungle, who is in all of us, snarled in Nixon. He was stripped to the instinct. He was pure Id, or so it seemed to me. He did without thinking things which the unprincipled part of me, which is by no means inconsiderable, totally balked at.

I had principles, which could translate as either timidity or cowardice. He was unprincipled, which could translate as the life force. And I suspected principles just about as much as Lord Melbourne: “Nobody ever did anything very foolish except from some strong principle.” I did not think the beast in the jungle was admirable, or even respectable. I had a dreadful suspicion, though, that he was right.

In rough outline, this phenomenon is what the psychiatrists call projection. Projection is “the unconscious act or process of ascribing to others one’s own ideas or impulses, especially when such ideas or impulses are considered undesirable.”

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**N**IXON was not the first person to whom I have ascribed my own faults, nor will he be the last. A man I instinctively hated more than even Nixon was a publisher. It took me years to realize the reason: I was so much more like him than himself, that I felt I should have his job.

All of this being true, and it is, should I then become a Nixon-lover, or at least a Nixon-forgiver? Hell, no, never. I’m not that much a Christian. I still hate the part of me that is like Nixon, and will do everything to make it heel. If recognizing that Nixon is a horrid little creep, as indeed he is, helps me keep in control, then may God forgive me.