

Charles McCabe

Himself

'Go Get a Good Jesuit'

AMONG THE VARIOUS scallywag groups that I grew up with there was always a house theologian. Though short in years, these lads were long on gutter wisdom. They knew how to cope with sin, a very big number in our lives.

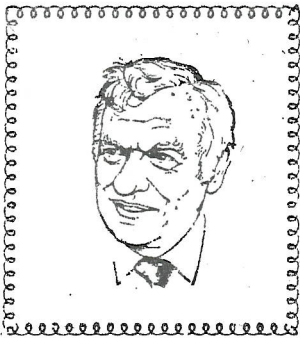
There was this weekly or monthly ordeal called Confession. All of us had to go into this black box, and tell black things, with special emphasis on black thoughts, to a black faced man in a black uniform called a cassock. When we sinners finished our moral laundry list we were given a condign black haircut and black punishment.

One of those young street-corner theologians, in an effort to ease the torment of this ordeal, gave out advice that I have never forgotten. "Get yourself a good Jesuit," he would say, "if it takes you six months."

The theologian always had one or two in his little black book. These obliging priests were usually resident at the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, on Park avenue and 84th street, in New York. Sins, especially those of the flesh, were taken with considerably less gravity on Park avenue than on Tenth avenue, or even Eighth avenue.

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THE THEOLOGIAN knew what the rest of us had an inkling of: that the Society of Jesus was rather more interested in the acquisition and maintenance of political power than whether our strength was as the strength of ten because our hearts were pure. Not that we of the street-corner faithful could do the Jesuit order much political good. No, the Jebbies were just sort of bored with masturbation, adultery, dirty books, and impure thoughts — the staples of the Irish parish priest.



And this was okay with us.

Through the centuries the Jebbies had acquired a hard reputation. They were thought, outside the fold, to believe that the end justified the means; that the oilier the method, the happier the result, and that the Church Militant meant just that.

To this day these prejudices are enshrined in the Oxford English dictionary. Jesuitical means "Having the character ascribed to the Jesuits; deceitful, dissembling; practicing equivocation, prevarication or mental reservation of truth."

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SO I CANNOT say I was truly surprised to find that Mr. Nixon has his own house Jesuit. Mr. Nixon is a man who gets around. He seldom fails to pick up that little thing from any group which is most likely to be useful to him in emergencies, which Mr. Nixon has an unfortunate tendency to collect.

And it cannot be said that the Rev. John McLaughlin, S.J., a White House employee in the speech-writing dept., has failed to deliver full service. Father McLaughlin is a cleric acute to fine theological and moral distinctions. Language which would have put me and my youthful companions in Coventry for a month is dismissed by the good cleric as "... a form of therapy" when Mr. Nixon ("a moral man") and his pals indulge.

Father McLaughlin defended Mr. Nixon's tape withholding on the strange ground that to do otherwise would be "like losing your virginity... the next time is a little easier." This is the first time I have heard a serious suggestion that Mr. Nixon, or anyone else for that matter, apart from certain actresses, could lose his virginity TWICE.

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WHATEVER THE outcome of Mr. Nixon's troubles, the Society of Jesus has its bets copped. One of the hounds baying for impeachment on the Judiciary committee is the Rev. Robert J. Drinan, who is very much S. J. himself, having taken his licentiate in sacred theology at the Gregorian University in Rome. This is top drawer Jesuit.

Labor leader George Meany, a practicing Papist, said it for a lot of us here Papists when he remarked the other day about Father McLaughlin. "I'd like to know the time and place he hears confession. I wanna go to him. He presents a very fine prospect for me."