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THE REV. JOHN J. McLAUGHLIN
 'Why don't we have power education?'

How Priest Views White House Role

Washington

"Power!" exclaimed the Rev. John J. McLaughlin, pacing his tiny office. "What do we know about it? We don't know anything about it."

"We have sex education—why don't we have power education? You can train yourself to handle power."

The 47-year-old Jesuit priest, a deputy special assistant to President Nixon whose forceful defense of Mr. Nixon in recent weeks has garnered his order more publicity than anything since "The Exorcist," talked about the bad things power could do to people when it became "an intoxicant, addictive, destructive."

He spoke of wives becoming "decorative accretions," of "Byzantine intrigue designed for the elevation of self." He mused about the power-drunk, those who "see themselves not as stewards but as proprietors, having absolute and unlimited authority to use it as they see fit."

No, he said, that is not the image of Richard M.

Back Page Col. 1

From Page 1

Nixon that emerges from those Oval Office transcripts. On the contrary, he said, President Nixon "remains a man of rooted fundamental deference—he listens, he wants to know."

The remarks in the edited White House transcripts of Watergate conversations the President recently made public, which some have read as indicating a proprietary attitude toward the power of the government, are, according to Father McLaughlin, just "political braggadocio, very little meaning, the political argot—a-r-g-o-t—of politicians."

"Anyone who takes it seriously or literally is not only naïve," Father McLaughlin said, "if he permits that to do duty as a fuller evaluation of the man, he's being simplistic and he's being unfair."

Dr. McLaughlin is the way he styles himself in the White House, just as he shed his clerical collar the other day for white shirtsleeves, the trousers of a blue-gray pin-striped suit, a bright regimental-stripe tie and gold tie clasp and cuff links. He often interrupts his flow of words to spell such words as

argot and Tacit.

He is friendly, like the broad smile on the heavy face below the blond hair, the handshake and the "call me John" suggestion.

He is willing to discuss almost anything, from his height — 6 feet, 2 ½ inches — to President Nixon, to the reasons why he dresses as he does, why he lives in a one-bedroom apartment in the Watergate complex rather than in a Jesuit community ("my lifestyle is designed to reflect more emphatically the separation, the absolute separation, of church and state.")

Father McLaughlin's problems with his superior, the Very Rev. Richard Cleary, were apparently settled Saturday. Father Cleary had recently criticized the priest's comments on the President's morality, but Saturday said Father McLaughlin may keep his job at the White House as long as he takes time off each year for prayer and reflection.

Father McLaughlin has said enough publicly to make it fairly clear how he feels, how it rankles that he should be singled out for criticism when other politically visible Jesuits, like the Rev. Daniel Berrigan or the Rev. Robert Drinan, the

Democratic congressman from Massachusetts, are left unscathed.

He said, with deliberation, leaning forward in one of the small, regency-striped armchairs clustered at one end of his office: "Anyone who says that I am being used is making a political judgment, and that itself may speak volumes about the true nature of what has been transpiring."

Regarding his defense of Mr. Nixon's language on the tape transcripts, he said: "I am not defending profanity per se," and he repeated it slowly with emphasis.

But in this case, he said: "I don't think there was any moral meaning to his use of it. I find it very hard to believe that Almighty God is going to be wringing his hands in despair" about Mr. Nixon's deleted expletives.

When Father McLaughlin joined the White House staff in July 1971, he was primarily a speechwriter. Now he spends about one-quarter of his time on the road doing what he calls "presidential spokespersonship," speaking about "the status of the presidency."

He joined the Jesuit order at the age of 18 after a childhood in Providence, R.I., that he describes as both loving — "lots of affection

and warmth" — and materially comfortable.

His family were "rootedly Democrats, and he was "a cradle Democrat" himself, became "an unlabeled Republican when I learned to read, an announced Republican in 1970."

That was when he ran unsuccessfully for the Senate against Senator John O. Pastore.

His hiring by the White House angered Pastore as well as conservative Republicans associated with the Nixon administration. In this spirit the conservative columnist and theoretician of the emerging Republican majority, Kevin P. Phillips, wrote:

"The most intriguing thing about Father McLaughlin is his pre-occupation with sex. . . . Before the political bug bit him he lectured widely — and enthusiastically — on the topic. . . . Father McLaughlin usually sheds his Roman collar for modern clothes: Double-breasted suits and wide, wide ties.

Today Father McLaughlin laughingly acknowledges that sex was by far the most popular of his lecture topic. But that did not exhaust my repertoire by any means. I had 14 possible topical areas and Kevin found

the one on human sexuality was the one that invited his interest and he gave that full coverage."

Father McLaughlin wrote a book, "Love Before Marriage" and lectured on such topics as "Love Intimacy Before Marriage and the Swedish Experience" and "Intimacy Outside Marriage."

"In the order, he received what he describes as an unsurpassed education in the classics," which, he adds, in the jargon of the field in which he later got his doctorate, communications, was also "an enormously useful structure for thinking, conceptualizing and for expressing oneself."

Sometimes striding the length of his red-carpeted office, always gesturing as he talked, Father McLaughlin talked about why he was a Jesuit, and why a President's man, and why the two were entirely compatible.

As a young boy, he said, he was an avid reader of historical fiction, and the Jesuits had "a gallantry, an intellectual adventurousness, a style, a panache that not only exercised, I'm sure, a spiritual attraction but also a certain social-cultural magnetism."

As a Jesuit, he was a lecturer, a college teacher, an

editor on America magazine, a teacher at cinema seminars. He also did the more usual things such as hospital chaplaincy and holding interfaith retreats.

As Father McLaughlin, S.J., he celebrates Mass every morning in his Watergate apartment, which he says "overlooks two filling stations and a motel" and is similar in comfort and style "to an average American Catholic rectory."

But at the White House, he says, "I do not do any administration of the sacraments." He adds that he does not drink or smoke.

"I see my priesthood as a function rather than as a state — my most exalted function, but it does not exhaust my identity," he said in discussing his White House functions.

There is no contradiction, according to Father McLaughlin, between his two commitments of "my supporting the programs and principles of Richard Nixon, and indeed, Richard Nixon the man, and the commitment that I have to the ideals and values of the Jesuit order. I believe that Richard Nixon is a good man and a good leader and that he will be vindicated historically and quite probably in our own time."