

# The President's Priestly

by Lloyd Shearer

WASHINGTON, D.C.

**P**resident Nixon has the largest White House staff of any President in U.S. history. Every now and again one of his men surfaces, and the public asks: Who is he? What does he do? Where does he come from?

One such staffer is the forceful, charismatic, argumentative Jesuit priest, Dr. John McLaughlin, with a Ph.D. from Columbia and two master's degrees from Boston College.

McLaughlin, 47, from Edgewood, R.I., currently works for the President as a "fact-finder, spokesman, and adviser" at approximately \$30,000 a year. "I don't like to reveal exactly how much they pay me," he says. "But \$30,000 is in the ball park." McLaughlin also owns a \$50,000 apartment in Watergate West, which he shares with Oliver, his basset hound.

Before he became a jack-of-all-White-House-trades, McLaughlin was a speechwriter on the staff of Ray Price, an old Yale who used to write editorials for the defunct *New York Herald Tribune* and is now chief Presidential speechwriter.

## Behind the scenes

Publicity did not come his way, however, until this past May when McLaughlin declared over television that history would judge Richard Nixon "the greatest moral leader of the last third of this century." Referring to Nixon's profanity, conspicuous by the numerous "expletives deleted" in the tape transcripts, McLaughlin adjudged the rough language to be a form of emotional catharsis with "no moral meaning." Richard Nixon, in the tapes, he announced, has "acquitted himself with honor."

Such hyperbole plus the image of a Jesuit priest, who had vowed perpetual poverty, living in the Watergate at \$30,000 a year, brought Father McLaughlin a mild summons from his superior, Jesuit Provincial Richard Cleary in Boston. Cleary ordered McLaughlin to take time out periodically for prayer and reflection.

## Threw off tradition

Father John McLaughlin is a politician-priest who describes himself as "a cradle Democrat with two uncles and a father who were staunch Democrats."

"I didn't become a Republican," he confesses, "until I decided to run against John Pastore for the U.S. Senate in 1970." In that Senatorial race Demo-



President Nixon with Dr. John McLaughlin, 47, a Jesuit priest on the White House staff. He has called Nixon the "greatest moral leader of the last third of this century."

crat Pastore overwhelmed McLaughlin with 67 percent of the vote, then Pastore returned to the Senate while McLaughlin took a vacation from Rhode Island.

"In July, 1971," Father McLaughlin narrates, "I went to work at the White House, largely through the recommendation of Pat Buchanan. Pat's in charge of preparing the daily news summary for the President. He'd read an article I'd written for *America*—that's a Jesuit magazine of which I'd been an associate editor—and he'd liked what I had

written on the subject of public regulation and the news media, and my praise of Vice President Agnew's speech in Des Moines in 1969."

Buchanan introduced McLaughlin to Ray Price, and on July 1, 1971, Father McLaughlin joined the White House speechwriting staff. "He is very good," says Price. "A lot of print people can't write the spoken word. But John is excellent. He's a spoken-word man. He's made so many speeches himself on the campaign trail that he knows how to shape a sentence so that it sounds bet-

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ter than it reads."

McLaughlin, who claims "politics is in my genes," admits frankly that he is a paid and outspoken supporter of the President. "I am the centrist Republican in our attack group," he says. "Pat Buchanan is over on the right, and Ray Price is ideologically on the left."

Does McLaughlin ever plan to resign from the Jesuit order and run for office as a mere politician?

### **Satisfying work**

"I've thought about it from time to time," he concedes. "But I really have no such plans. I've been wed to the Jesuit order for 30 years. I like the Jesuits socially and culturally; their sophistry and intellect appeal to me. And besides I'm having such a good time. I'm not a speechwriter any more. The President is using me as a sort of trouble-shooter. He's sent me to Vietnam and Bangladesh and other places to get a first-hand view of the refugee situation. And it's been extremely satisfying work."

McLaughlin, who wears civilian clothes except on church occasions, is an old classmate of Father Robert Drinan, the Jesuit Democratic Congressman from Boston, who was one of the first members of the House Judiciary Committee to advocate the impeachment of Richard Nixon.

Drinan, former dean of the Boston College Law School, attended Weston College in Massachusetts with McLaughlin; but in life styles the men differ sharply. The first Catholic priest to serve as a voting member of Congress, Father Drinan wears his priestly raiments in the House, lives in the Jesuit community at Georgetown University, pays rent to the Jesuits and contributes the remainder of his \$42,500 salary to charities.

### **'Charities of my choice'**

McLaughlin, who is cagey about revealing his exact salary or the fact that he owns his Watergate apartment, says, "I make an autonomous judgment on the disposition of my salary. I pay my bills and I contribute to worthwhile charities of my own choice at my own discretion."

A smart wordsmith, Father McLaughlin is sharp, shrewd, controversial, knowledgeable and blessed with a delightful sense of humor. Or as one of the White House staff suggests, "He would have made a helluva corporation president."