

'What's His Angle?'

The Rabbi Who Believes

"Christians have their Pilate, Jews have their Haman, and Nixon has the media. Somewhere there may be a connection."

—Rabbi Baruch Korff, "The Personal Nixon: Staying on the Summit."

By Sally Quinn
Washington Post

Washington

"I must have been asked 100 times, 'Rabbi, what is your angle? You must have an angle.' And frankly speaking I wish I had one. It would make these discourses easier. But I am an enigma . . .

"The President asked me if I would like to see his house. I said, 'No, I don't want to enjoy your hospitality. Just seeing you is enough . . .' The President asked me on the 22nd of February, wouldn't I want to give a sermon in the East Room.

"I said, 'I don't want to benefit to this extent . . .' He said, 'I never met anyone like this who doesn't want anything.'"

Rabbi Baruch Korff is the president and chief executive officer of the National Citizens' Committee for Fairness to the Presidency, Inc., which he founded a year ago with \$1200 of his own money.

Starting with "the grass roots," Rabbi Korff claims to have picked up over two million followers and 233 supporting groups around the country "with 25,000 to 30,000 joining the bandwagon each week."

President Nixon, grateful for the support of this personable, even jolly, retired rabbi, has embraced him



AP Wirephoto

At a dinner sponsored by the Committee for Fairness to the Presidency, Rabbi Baruch Korff took a phone call from Nixon

enthusiastically — well, sort of.

The President reportedly isn't exactly sure just what Rabbi Korff is all about. He isn't altogether sure Rabbi Korff doesn't, in fact, have an angle.

How can Mr. Nixon be sure the rabbi is not a kook?

"He can't," laughs the rabbi.

One thing for sure, Rabbi Korff is an adamant believer in the President. Or rather the presidency. "There is

no difference between the presidency and the President," he says in his thick Ukrainian accent.

"I will not speculate on the President's guilt. They have not established a single point against him . . . but

in Nixon

hell (and the word *hell*, by the way, is in the Bible, so don't tell anyone I use bad language), what government agency doesn't run a covert operation? If they didn't, we'd be out of business. George Washington did.

"And what is all this about perjury?"

The rabbi shrugs, bringing his shoulders up around his round face. "So what's perjury? People commit perjury every day, wittingly and unwittingly. It's a catchall. It is this holier-than-thou attitude that kills me."

He rolls his eyes to the ceiling for effect, and intones his favorite line, "Save me, Lord, from the saints that haven't been caught."

Rabbi Korff says there is only one thing that the President could do that would drive him away. "Treason. And it will have to be proved beyond a flicker of an eyelash; nothing else will make me turn against him.

"There isn't a President worth his salt who hasn't done things for which an ordinary citizen would go to jail. And I mean George Washington.

"Nixon is not gregarious. He's not engaging. He's too straight-laced, too aloof. I didn't tell him that because I told him enough that was presumptuous. But here is a man who can send a love letter to someone and sign it, 'Sincerely Yours.'

"Even so, I regard him with the highest esteem, as my President, a man who has been vilified, savaged, brutalized, whose blood has been sapped by vampires."

The rabbi leans back and puffs on his cigar for a moment, thinking. "They used

to shoot at Nixon with rifles, now they use cannons. That's a good quote," he says, pleased.

"Darling, with me you only get good quotes. If you stay around me for more than a day, you will have a paperback."

The rabbi comes across as a Jewish comedian, Myron Cohen perhaps, or a Yiddish Kris Kringle. He is always laughing or smiling, quipping or patting someone affectionately. He seems like a nice "small-town Jewish rabbi." Just what he insists he is.

Rabbi Korff was born in the Ukraine, the son of a rabbi who fled during the upheaval following the Russian Revolution (leaving his family behind) and came to America where he served as a rabbi in Massachusetts.

Shortly after his father's escape, Korff's mother was killed in a pogrom, but she managed to protect Korff and his sisters and brothers.

"Perhaps this earlier incident had a lot to do with my present pursuits," he says. "That particular night had enough trauma on which to feed for the rest of a lifetime. Inherently I developed a resistance to upheaval, any form of anarchy."

He retired because of heart condition about a year ago.

Korff's Washington office has one paid worker and several young volunteers sitting under a picture of a smiling Pat Nixon with a bouquet of roses. His desk is piled with file folders (one of them marked "ego boosting material") American flags, a picture of Nixon, a copy of the Nixon transcripts, and "The Drew Pearson Story."

Over lunch Rabbi Korff

talked about his other favorite subject, besides the President: women.

"We all have our hangups, in the American vernacular," the rabbi says. "The American family is more matriarchal than in other countries. It's a plague.

"The man becomes subservient outside the home where he should be aggressive and domineering, and then the sons see their fathers yield to their mothers. It's not good."

In fact, the rabbi has a theory that what's happening in Watergate could have stemmed, in part, from this.

"Take, for instance, the female of this country. If it were JFK being persecuted in the same situation as Nixon, the media would have a hard time to convince the ladies that JFK is anything but JFK. And if they don't convince the ladies then, well . . ."

Rabbi Korff assures one that here is no matriarchal situation in his home. The rabbi, who is now 60, has three children, two by a former wife and a 7-year-old daughter by his current wife, who is 35. His wife is his researcher but, accord-

ing to the rabbi, she wasn't always.

"I was going off to the Middle East with a beautiful researcher but my wife went to the Library of Congress school of research and took a course. She knew me well enough to know I might have digressions.

"I would not keep any digressions from her if she asks, but she doesn't ask."

Rabbi Korff has only spent one night at his farmhouse in Rehoboth, Mass., since February. "My wife calls me a lot and she comes down when she can save enough of her allowance to pay for it.

"I'm a poor preacher. I always believe in examples, not preaching . . . but all this is detracting from the presidency."

Rabbi Korff will hang in there, giving his all, "until the President is absolved," though all he really wants, he says, "is to go home."

So what's his angle?

"If you were to ask if I'm an egotist, I will say, 'By all means I am.' If you were to measure my ego in terms of mileage, mine is quite an ego."