

shows ranks of these young people cresting a rise, winding down a hillside and singing to a haunting guitar melody: "You gotta be a baby to go to heaven."

Your judgment on all this will depend in part on what you think of Jesus Himself. The dangerous limitations of these new evangelicals are obvious enough. Only time will tell whether they can be outgrown. Certainly Arthur Blessitt's converts have to discover that getting high on Jesus is no insurance against fatigue and boredom. In fact, the Children of God are critical of this hunger for "highs," and their stiff regimen has other aims. *The Jesus Trip* has a poignant scene in which a sobbing young man in jeans testifies to his desire for the Lord, while some Children of God pray with him. But if he chose to join one of their colonies, he was put through a tough, antihumanistic training devoted largely to austere living and the memorization of Bible verses. Professor Ellwood was told by a young woman who is the daughter of David Berg, the Children's founder, that they are indeed absolute fundamentalists and that they believe every generation needs a group that "drops out *all the way*."

Fanatical? Yes. But the tone has something in common with Francis of Assisi, and with Teresa of Avila, who wrote in her *Way of Perfection*: "O miserable world! Give hearty thanks to God, daughters, that you have left so wretched a place." I am reminded of what a learned priest with wide experience in spiritual direction once said: "The saints certainly don't act the way we do. So somebody is crazy. Either they're crazy or we're crazy."

Of course, there is a valid distinction between holy crazies and just plain crazy crazies. But in things of the spirit it is wise not to apply that distinction too quickly. In any case, those who confess that Jesus is the One who is authentically God and authentically man can hardly watch *The Jesus Trip* without suspecting that these American young people have had a genuine encounter with Him. What that may finally mean, both for them and the nation, remains to be seen.

[JOHN W. DONOHUE, S. J., is an associate editor of AMERICA.] ■

JOHN F. X. SHEEHAN

Amnesty for President Nixon?

Another six months of harassment, followed by punishment, might be good for Mr. Nixon. But the soul and psyche of the country cannot bear it

Nearly three decades ago, a rather sober and unimaginative Republican found himself in the center of a whirlwind. While the self-righteous among us—always large in number—were anticipating the Nuremberg trials with pleasure, Senator Robert Taft suggested that there might be a bigger issue at stake than the guilt or innocence of the Nazis at the bar. He worried aloud that there might be no legal justification for the trials and argued that to do things without legal justification is a sorry business.

The American public recently has found itself repeatedly invited to "think the unthinkable": the impeachment of the President. Sometimes thinking unthinkable thoughts serves to prevent unthinkable realities. But thinking is hard work, often done badly or incompletely. In the present problem, I suggest, another truism has been ignored: to do something simply because there is a legal justification for it can be a sorry business.

For the record, I am a registered Democrat who, while voting frequently for Republicans, has never voted for Mr. Nixon. I make no case for his guilt or innocence in *l'affaire Watergate*. My argument holds if he is guilty up to the tip of the most famous nose in American politics.

I believe American politics is on a perilous course, leading toward Presidential paralysis. "Ah!," say today's

self-righteous, "this is precisely the point we are making. If Nixon has a shred of the patriotism he so often avows, he need only resign and all will be well again." This is a simple solution. Like most simple solutions it is, sadly, false.

To move toward impeachment even with grave cause (and I am willing to postulate grave cause for a moment) would be to open Pandora's box. For there exists in the nation today a number of factors that the wisest of the Founding Fathers could never have foreseen. One of them is the existence of a spirit of "floating anarchy" among a certain, let us say, five percent of the American population. The spirit is a floating movement since it adheres on principle to neither the Left nor Right. This point is to be stressed. It may seem to some that joy in anarchy is a special prerogative of the Left. But this is a notion that affords false comfort to Left and Right alike. If it has recently been associated with the Left, it has been because the Left is "Out." Should the Left succeed in replacing a Right or Centrist President, today's "Ins" would then be "Outs," and the Left would discover that anarchy is a game any number may play.

What an anarchist five percent can do today is to destroy a President. It cannot—by democratic means—elect a President likely to satisfy its felt needs. Using a route other than im-

peachment, the five percent hastened the destruction of Lyndon Johnson. Then they sat at home rather than vote for Hubert Humphrey. Thus, in 1968, did they make Mr. Nixon President.

In recent decades, with the rise of the mass media and their insatiable appetite for "hard," i.e., exciting, news, the five percent came to have power beyond their numbers. This flowed from no conspiracy among the media, no secret covenants; but the result was nonetheless the same. Their power was also enhanced by the development of a steadily more complex and consequently more fragile society. (The Model T was never impeded by a failure in its automatic transmission.)

At the same time, the Presidency evolved into an elected monarchy. This is stated as a fact with little hand-wringing. It flowed from a number of factors including a growing complexity of foreign affairs and a passive Congress. But to say that the President is an elected monarch is to say both that he is a monarch and that he is elected.

If Mr. Nixon has come to be more monarch than elected monarch, how did this come to pass? It is my judgment that he is not solely responsible, that most of us are dimly aware of this and that we have deflected a number of rages onto this unattractive personality. First, there is the undeniable fact that Mr. Nixon was re-elected by a landslide. Those who voted for Mr. Nixon share a large measure of responsibility for his *hubris* even during the campaign. It would have been difficult for a more temperate man than Mr. Nixon to remain sober.

Senator McGovern shares the re-

sponsibility. With a skill in inner politics that was an improvement on Lyndon Johnson, he managed to wrest control of the party apparatus and so to load the deck as to make inevitable the nomination of the party's weakest candidate. Having won the nomination, he put his cards down. He needed his hands free so that he could wring them often in public while assuring us in a stern, nasal voice that he was Goodness and Mr. Nixon was Badness. Is it really a surprise that he could not get anyone excited about Watergate?

The Presidential campaign, pre- and post-convention, has been much criticized. It has many poor features, but it is the Presidency in microcosm. A tired and harried man must regularly make serious decisions under pressure. In no Presidential campaign does the buck stop in the campaign manager's lap.

Even as Senator McGovern's weaknesses became all too apparent in the past campaign, Mr. Nixon's weaknesses would have—if he had been smoked out. His deepened image of the President as monarch *tout simple*, his reliance on the insulated staff and his growing disregard for due process would inevitably have been revealed. But he was not smoked out and voters in 1972 knew very little about Mr. Nixon's weaknesses that they did not know in 1968. His growing strengths (and they were real) were regularly transmitted to us suffused with the Presidential aura. The responsibility for Mr. Nixon's posture of noncombatance in this past campaign (and our consequent ignorance) rests not on him alone but on the opponent and voting public that let him get away with it.

Whither? With the dangers inherent in developing the habit of government by impeachment, with the conviction that most of us share some measure of responsibility for the present muddled state, I am calling for an Act of Popular Clemency. I am suggesting that the President be forgiven for all those faults of which the Court of Hearsay has most solemnly found him guilty. Moreover, in virtue of public clemency, Congress could even instruct the federal prosecutor that his investigation stop short of the Oval Office. It is conceivable that another six months of harassment, followed by stern punishment, would do wondrous things for Mr. Nixon's soul and psyche, but I say the psyche and soul of the nation cannot bear it.

Is this to place the President "beyond the law"? To some extent it is. It is for this reason that I judge harshly all of us who cooperated in the events that placed the incumbent in the White House. Still prescinding from questions of guilt or innocence, one may well look at the President's administrative gaffes and suggest that in a nation of two hundred million citizens we could have elected a more competent man. But once elected, in a certain sense, the President is beyond the law.

But amnesty places any recipient of it beyond the law. One of the most valid arguments for a universal amnesty in the matter of those citizens who fled military service in the recent conflict is that the nation cannot endure the soul-wrenching question of who deserves punishment and who does not. I suggest that the argument is at least equally valid in the matter of the President's actions.

How will popular clemency come to manifest itself? I frankly expect it to be a steadily emerging consensus in the next few weeks. The polls will come to reflect it.

But I could be wrong. Senator Taft found little support for his suggestion. Self-righteousness is a heady brew, especially for those who half suspect they share the guilt.

[JOHN F. X. SHEEHAN, S. J., is chairman of the theology department at Marquette University and author of *The Threshing Floor* (Paulist Press, 1972).]



