

The Duty of Citizen-Kings

Since June 17, 1972, the Watergate case has unrolled before the nation like some giant cyclorama that grows ever more crowded with ever more agitated figures under ever darkening skies. At the start, it seemed a sordid enough incident, but one that might reasonably be regarded as the aberration of a handful of desperadoes. As months passed, however, another and much more important two-headed scandal has preempted the murky scene. In the first place, Watergate changed its shape. Now it looks, not like the bungling malfeasance of some minor agents of the Committee for the Re-election of President Nixon, but like the malfunction of a sinister strategy overseen by some highly placed Administration men whose faces, at this writing, are still in the shadows. In the second place, the White House itself appears to have been shielding those faces from the light. Until Mr. Nixon's April 17 statement, the efforts of his office seemed mainly concerned with covering up as much Watergate detail as possible and minimizing the significance of those untidy pieces that could not be swept from sight.

In recent weeks, Watergate has developed so much momentum that the factual picture may have been redrawn before these lines are printed. But the basic problem posed for the American people will not have been altered. Last summer, political commentators were complaining that these people were not interested in the case. But by now the average American is clearly concerned. In fact, he may find himself drawn toward one of two dangerous extremes that can evolve from valid reactions. An excess of moral indignation may lead some of us to lose faith in our democratic system and to demand that it be replaced. An excess of sensible realism may lead others to a cynicism that declines to take governmental scandals seriously on the grounds that they are inevitable. This second attitude is, if anything, even more despairing of the Republic.

At this moment, therefore, we would do well to remember that in a democracy, as Robert M. Hutchins put it, every person is a king. But it is the duty of kings to care about truth and justice in the political realm and not to despair. Our kingship, of course, is very imperfect. We usually seem to be only constitutional monarchs who are not asked if we want Cambodia bombed or the Office of Economic Opportunity dismantled. Still, we have some power. We can support

by the silent force of our massed approval those agencies of our society that work fairly well. For all their faults, the news media did press the Watergate issue. In the person of Judge John J. Sirica, the Federal Court did serve conscientiously. And even the lumbering Senate machinery has finally moved into position. In a March 29 speech, Mr. Nixon boasted that the United States is the world's strongest and most prosperous nation, but Watergate reminds us that these material benefits are not the commonwealth's highest ideals. If that reminder renews the President's determination to work responsibly for the nobler values of truth and justice, he should be able to mobilize the support of all the rest of us, his fellow citizen-kings.

Taxation and Freedom of Religion

In 1951, Billy James Hargis, well-known fundamentalist preacher and duly ordained minister of the Disciples of Christ, founded the Christian Echoes National Ministry. Christian Echoes uses radio, television and the press to spread its gospel, which is ardently pro-Christian, anti-Communist and antiliberal.

In 1953, the Internal Revenue Service ruled that Christian Echoes was a religious and educational organization that qualified for federal income tax exemption under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. For the next eight years Christian Echoes preached its gospel freely, without any visits from the tax collector. Sometime early in 1962, however, the Washington office of IRS took an unusual interest in what Christian Echoes and Rev. Hargis were saying. Many of their statements were directly contrary to the foreign and domestic policy of the White House. IRS denies any political motivation for its 1964 revocation of Christian Echoes' 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status or for its subsequent assessment of enormous back taxes.

Christian Echoes took IRS to court, won the first round and lost the second round. Now Christian Echoes is appealing to the U. S. Supreme Court to hear its case. An extraordinary array of Protestant and Jewish organizations has intervened as friends of the court in support of Christian Echoes' petition. If the court

