

The Watergate Comes Down

Ever since President Nixon announced on April 17 his discovery of "major new developments" in the Watergate investigation, the demand for the whole truth of the tangled affair became a national preoccupation. On April 30, the President broke his silence again. He announced the resignations of three key White House aides and the Attorney General. That evening he addressed the nation.

The effort must be judged disappointing. The President's speech revealed nothing that would resolve the conflicting versions of the conspiracy that had emerged from the newsleaks, rumors, charges and countercharges of the past several weeks. Respect for the judicial process still to unfold and for the rights of those who may be indicted and stand trial could explain why the President refrained from pinpointing responsibility more specifically. If this were the case, then the very different terms in which he described the departing officials were puzzling.

The expressions of confidence in Messrs. Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Kleindienst contrasted sharply with the cold reference to former White House Counsel John W. Dean. Did this mean the President had determined to his own satisfaction that the first three were innocent of any wrongdoing, or did it merely reflect resentment at Mr. Dean's well-publicized threats to implicate his superiors on the White House Staff? It was difficult not to wonder which was the more grievous crime in the President's eyes, the mistaken judgment of "even well-intentioned people" or the failure in team loyalty of someone who had loudly announced that he would not be a scapegoat.

The most serious disappointment of the President's speech, however, was his failure to come to terms with the true dimensions of the Watergate affair. It did not, as the President correctly pointed out, indicate the bankruptcy of the American political system. If anything, the difficult situation in which Mr. Nixon found himself was in its own way a victory for the American political system. What is at stake in the Watergate investigation is not an isolated case or two of bad judgment and excessive zeal. The fundamental danger is rather a pattern of power exercised in high places in total disregard of law. Such thinking is apparently so secure in a sense of righteousness of its cause that it moves above and beyond the law. Unchecked, such a

pattern could make a mockery of the American system.

This pattern of power above and beyond the law is evident not only in the original bugging incident itself but also in the whole web of campaign tactics of which it was a part: the huge sums of money available but not accounted for; the espionage and character assassination that not only invaded the rights of individuals but threatened to corrupt the democratic process.

The pattern of absolute righteousness is even more evident in the attempts to cover up the truth of the incident, attempts which included attacks on many of the institutions of the democratic system: public scorn and contempt heaped on distinguished newspapers, an arrogant defense before Congress of an unprecedented interpretation of executive privilege and finally the compromising of the integrity of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, once so jealously guarded from political interference.

A genuine resolution of the Watergate crisis must begin by an honest acceptance of its true significance and real dangers. The President falls considerably short of this when he attempts to reduce the incident to a context of campaign excesses indulged in by both parties. It is even less dignified for him to suggest that excesses of zeal on one side were prompted by anticipations of violence by the other. It has become quite clear that the men involved in Watergate should be no more identified with the traditional Republican party than with the Democrats. In recent weeks it has been Republican spokesmen who have been most insistent in demanding the truth about Watergate. Having been told once that former Presidential assurances of a complete investigation were "inoperative," it was understandable that they expected more than simply a repetition of such assurances. On the day after the President's address, under Republican sponsorship, the Senate passed a resolution urging the appointment of a prosecutor from outside the Nixon Administration.

Religious Education and Father Brown

There are a variety of tasks to be performed in the Church for which many offices have been created and for which a rich diversity of gifts has been divinely

