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THE PRESIDENT AND PERSONALITY CULT

The President of the Philippines as the first citizen of the Republic, is the central figure in our national life. It is not only in politics that he occupies the topmost position. In the social sphere, he is a sort of reigning monarch. Business chambers, chambers of industries, businessmen's clubs vie with one another to have him in their big affairs.

Whatever the President does is carefully reported in the newspapers. He may be talking about economics, religion, or education; he may discuss marriage, business, athletics, food, clothing, or morality. In all these fields his comments and his opinions, regardless of his knowledge of the subject matter, are always published and quoted with a great deal of interest. His pictures are given prominence in newspapers and magazines. He is the favorite speaker in any

celebration. He is made the recipient of academic awards. His clothes are closely imitated; they set the fashion for the nation.

This image of the Filipino executive is not unique. We see it in a much larger scale in the President of the United States. He stands as an object of the cult of personality. This is a phenomenon which observers have lately been analyzing. It does not seem natural in a democracy; but it is intentionally and actively promoted in it. For in protecting the dignity of the office, it is deemed essential to adopt something similar to a royal cult. But should it be so? Is this right? Must the President be painted and shown as a superman to give him the dignity and the majesty of his high office? How has this exaltation come about?

A very interesting study of the subject was made by Sis-

ter Mary Paul Paye, a 32-year old member of the Sisters of Marcy. In the *Nation* magazine, Sister Mary wrote: "The American public is exposed to a dangerous phenomenon: the personality cult of the President. I protest — vehemently, vigorously, apolitically and almost alone. The suppression or the obscuring of significant news; the amassing by the President of personal power; and — most insidious of all — the irrational worldwide identification of him with the country as a whole . . . Mr. Kennedy has become synonymous with the U.S.; his victories are American victories; his health, American health; his smile, his family, his hobbies, his likes and dislikes, become symbolic of the country."

Sister Mary holds the press largely responsible for this extreme adulation of a political figure, this identification of the President with the character, the condition, the virtues, and the glories of the nation. She continues: "The President and his family are naturals for publicity, and journalists have not been slow to exploit the co-

lor, the drama, the human appeal that emanate from the White House. Galleys of type and yards of picture spreads about the birthdays of the children, the social affairs of the First Lady, the horsemanship of the sister, the recreational habits of the Attorney General's family, feed the public's desire to know all about the White House inhabitants. Everything goes to deepen the cult,

"That the mass media should so exploit the President and his family for circulation purposes is serious enough. But even more dangerous implications arise: the danger of the imbalance of the news. Every inclusion means a corresponding exclusion. And, even when significant news is reported, as prisoners of the cult we may be tempted to overlook it. Readers often prefer to be amused rather than informed. Who doesn't gravitate toward the human-interest story, perhaps to the neglect of the duller but more significant news? . . . The effect is the displacement, or downgrading, of significant events."

This state of things is not right. For this problem,

which is indeed a problem, Sister Mary Paul presented this solution: "Awareness, by the President, the public, the press. The White House — elections or no elections — should guard itself more stringently against frivolous reporting. Editors and (radio and TV) program directors should weigh news and features for inherent values.

And the American people should be aware that we are beginning to respond to the Chief of State as we have responded to movie stars." In plain language, what the good Sister suggested is for the press and the public to develop and use a sense of proportion and to improve our sense of values.

THE LOYAL FRIEND

We all need the good word and advice of a loyal friend to inspire and encourage us to do the things we are not quite sure we are capable of doing. Very few people have the courage to set out by themselves alone. A good push and you either sink or swim — that's life all around. "Show me your friends and I will tell you who you are," is not a mere proverb. People judge you by your friends. Just because people are shabby-looking or poverty-stricken does not mean that they would not make wonderful friends. They may possess the wisdom of Confucius or Socrates. The good rule is to associate with the kind and the wise, and kindness and wisdom will be the reward — to do for them what they do for you, to go fifty-fifty in life. Never make friends for what they have to offer you and never keep friends whose only interest in you is what you have to offer them. If you associate with the ignorant, be sure you do not willfully expose their ignorance. If you associate with the intelligent, don't try to outsmart them. Friends remain friends only when all parties concerned are themselves. No one can hide his emotional or intellectual standards for long; sooner or later the true colors will appear.