

Colson Feels 'Pity' for Nixon

By Robert Bartlett

Charles W. Colson, former Nixon aide turned evangelist, said yesterday he pitied Richard Nixon for his "pathetically defensive" demeanor during his interview on national television Wednesday.

"But for the first time," Colson told a jammed news conference at the Fairmont Hotel, "(Nixon) took his full share of responsibility" for the Watergate scandals that led to his resignation in 1974.

Nixon's performance in the interview by David Frost did not reveal "the razor-sharp mind I knew" while a White House special counsellor, Colson said.

"He was groping for words." But he lauded the interview because it "continued the healing process which I think has already begun."

He said he hopes Americans who have not forgiven Nixon "may find it in their hearts to do so now; not for Mr. Nixon, but for the country."

Colson said he felt "a great deal of compassion and pity" for the former chief executive after watching the interview.

"Although I went to prison because I followed Mr. Nixon's orders," Colson continued, "I don't have a shred of bitterness in my heart."

(The White House aide pleaded

guilty to obstruction of justice for complicity in the burglary of the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist, and subsequently served seven months of a three-year federal prison term.)

Colson disputed Nixon's televised assertion that the former President had committed no criminal or impeachable offense because, he said, his deeds "sprang from purely political and humanitarian motives."

Had Nixon not resigned, contended Colson — at one time one of Washington's most prominent lawyers — he "would have gotten convicted."

The former White House counsellor again denied a recent Washington Post story saying that Colson and Nixon discussed "hush money" payments to the Watergate burglars on Jan. 8, 1973.

He waved a transcript of White House tape-recordings and offered "the best dinner money can buy" to anyone who find any mention of "hush money" in the conversation between Colson and Nixon.

"Mr. Woodward (Washington Post reporter Bob Woodward, author of the article) has been strangely silent on this," Colson said, then got a laugh when he continued:

"I have added Mr. Woodward to the list of those I pray for daily."



CHARLES COLSON
He said he wasn't bitter

Since his release from prison, Colson has written a best-selling book on his religious experience as a "born-again Christian," and now lectures extensively before religious groups.

Yesterday, he spoke at a Santa Cruz prayer breakfast and is scheduled to speak again today at a public interdenominational religious rally at the Cow Palace at 8 p.m.