

Colson's Sermon Lures Doubters

By Elizabeth Becker
Washington Post Staff Writer

The strong pull of skepticism drew 200 Christians to Largo Senior High School yesterday morning to hear and judge Charles V. Colson, who served a prison term for his role in the Watergate scandal and who is a widely publicized Christian convert.

"To be truthful, I came because I doubted him," said Gene Burroughs, of Grace Brethren Church of Temple Hills. "I wanted to eyeball him and see if his conversion really took place . . . the statistics on people over 40 making public confessions of Christ are very very small, and consider the nature of who he was."

Colson did not discuss his former life in his 45-minute sermon to the Largo Community Church, a new interdenominational parish in

Prince George's County. Instead of detailing the intrigues and "dirty tricks" that led to his conviction in 1974 for directing E. Howard Hunt Jr. in the break-in of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office among other things, Colson spoke about the need for more Christians in and out of government service. He mentioned Abraham Lincoln as a president who embodies

his newly found Christian ideals.

Colson received no pay for his sermon, pastor Jack Morris said.

After Colson's guest sermon, Burroughs walked out of the building with an autographed copy of "Born

Again" tucked under his arm and satisfied that Colson was "genuine, I was curious to know, I had to know."

Within half an hour after the sermon all the copies of Colson's testimonial autobiography stacked on a back table had been sold at \$8.95 a copy. All of the proceeds, Colson said, will go to the Fellowship House in Alexandria, the center out of which he practices his "prison ministry." He takes no profit for himself, he said.

Before he served seven months in prison, Colson told reporters that he would preach to the youth of America once he was released. Yesterday, Colson told the congregation that during his time in prison, "a barren wasteland where souls are forgotten," he discovered his present vocation.

Colson spoke calmly of the history of the penitentiary

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system, how the Quakers of Philadelphia had built the first jail for penitents rather than leave them out on public stocks and how he feels that the present system — which costs "billions and billions of dollars to maintain . . . only turns out criminals."

He briefly described his "prison ministry," which has sent him to 20 prisons where he preaches to inmates. After the sermon, one woman, who said she was impressed by Colson, also said she was disappointed that he had not dwelt on his prison work and that he was not "flamboyant."

Not an emotional evangelist, Colson said after the sermon that he saves his crusading for lectures outside of a church.

He also said he was not at all surprised that many Christians in the audience came because they doubted his sincerity, that, in fact, skepticism is his biggest drawing card.

"I spoke at Bethel College in Pennsylvania recently and there were 4,000 persons in the gymnasium and 1,000 outside, all had come to see if it is possible that I converted to Christianity," he said. "It's a great chance for me to reach a wide audience and preach."

Wearing presidential cufflinks and tieclasp, Colson said that he is still in touch with some of his old friends, including former President Richard M. Nixon with whom he spoke Jan. 9.

On further political involvement, Colson took a decidedly vague approach. Quoting from scriptures, Colson spoke of "God's secret plan . . . and the secret is simply this — go with Christ in you . . . our problems won't be solved with another new agency or another new armistice . . . that's what I learned from my 11 years in government service."



By Ken Feil—The Washington Post

Former Nixon aide Charles Colson preaches to church group at Largo Senior High School.