

Cleaver and Colson

The 'Born Again' Odd Couple

Washington

There they were, former black militant leader Eldridge Cleaver and former Nixon White House political operative Charles Colson, embracing and talking about their newfound brotherly love.

Once poles apart politically, Colson and Cleaver, who both now profess to be "born again" Christians, have been making joint appearances since meeting last August.

They joke about being the odd couple but they say they are serious about their religious conversions.

"I just want to surround him and love him as a brother," Colson said of Cleaver at a press conference of religious broadcasters this week. "I think God has raised him up to do marvelous things."

Cleaver, who is awaiting trial on charges of attempted murder in a 1968 gun battle with Oakland police, described Colson as an "understanding person, someone who walks in the same shoes."

Colson was released from prison in February, 1975, after serving seven months of a one-to-three years term for obstructing justice in the prosecution of Pentagon Papers codefendant Daniel Ellsberg.

"He can understand what I'm

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regularly. About a year ago, voluntarily returned to the United States after seven years in exile, he became a Christian while in the Alameda county jail in Oakland.

The grandson of Baptist preachers, later a Roman Catholic, experimenter with various faiths and then an atheist, Cleaver said his Christian rebirth has been full of surprises.

"Since this has happened to me, I haven't met one person I don't love," he said.

Colson's conversion was widely publicized in 1974 and recounted in his book, "Born Again," which has sold hundreds of thousands of copies. His main work now is teaching prison inmates about Christ.

Colson and Cleaver were introduced to each other last August at Fellowship House in Washington, a location for Colson's prison ministry. They have made some joint appearances and plan several in the future, including public appeals for Cleaver's legal expenses.



ELDRIDGE CLEAVER

CHARLES W. COLSON

Old political foes talk about brotherly love

going through because he's an old convict," said Cleaver, grinning. The audience — and Colson — laughed.

Later, in an interview, Colson said of Cleaver, "He's one of the men I feel closest to."

Cleaver has indicated that his conversion began in the south of France in 1975 when he was feeling

low. He was watching the sky and began to see faces in the moon, faces of his old heroes — Fidel Castro and Mao Tse-tung. Then, when the face turned to Jesus, Cleaver has said, he began to cry uncontrollably.

Cleaver said he then began praying and reading the Bible

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While Cleaver spends most of his time rallying money and support for his case, Colson said his involvement is for Cleaver's sake. Any money Colson raises goes into his Prison Fellowship Foundation, he said.

"I'm not the author of the (Nixon White House) 'enemies' list, although everyone thinks I am," Colson said. "But, had I been, I would have put him (Cleaver) as Public Enemy No. 1. To me he was a radical Marxist-Leninist militant bomb-thrower."

As for Cleaver's earlier view of

Colson: "He was Nixon's hatchet man and therefore my enemy.

"I had contempt for him. I was glad when he got arrested and exposed ... When I was in jail, someone gave me his book and I put it on the shelf. I kept it there for several months. One day I picked it up and was immediately fascinated with the verse about the metamorphosis of a butterfly ..."

"Now I love him as my brother in Christ," Cleaver declared.

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