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## Colson's Prison Evangelizing Proves Irsksome to Chaplains

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LEXINGTON, Ky.—Charles W. Colson, former aide to President Nixon and a convicted Watergate figure, stood before 200 attentive inmates at the Federal Correctional Institute here the other day and preached his "born again" message.

Wearing a blue blazer, gray slacks and button-down shirt, Mr. Colson struck an image of his White House days when he was at the reins of the establishment.

But his national drive to carry religion into the prisons under the aegis of his Prison Fellowship program has put him on a course that makes him something of an outsider. Aside from some skepticism about his sudden spiritual conversion, some prison officials chafe at his scathing criticisms of the penal system, and there is some resentment among the prison chaplain establishment over the program's apparent political influence, which has enabled it to bypass regular prison channels to carry out its aims.

Prison chaplains on the Federal payroll are keeping an especially watchful eye on an experimental program at a new Federal prison in Memphis, where Colson organization has been given charge of chaplaincy services. In the past, this service has been under the



Charles W. Colson speaking at the Federal Correctional Institution in Lexington, Ky.

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interdenominational scrutiny of the Federal prison system.

Pacing back and forth behind the pulpit in the spotless white-chapel of the Lexington prison, Mr. Colson repeated a key theme, attacking the concept of Christianity as a "white, middle-class religion for nice people" and declaring that Jesus suffered for the sake of outcasts.

"Jesus Christ is the prophet of losers," he thundered. "We are all losers. I'm a loser and those behind bars—any stinking jail—are losers."

Mr. Colson struck a chord of camaraderie, noting his own experience of loneliness during seven months of incarceration for obstruction of justice and asserting that the general public "couldn't care less if you rot in prison."

The loudest responses were evoked by touches of humor. "I changed my registration from Republican to Democrat before I went to prison," he said wryly, "because I couldn't stand the idea of a Republican going to jail."

Filing out of the chapel later, most inmates said they had been impressed by Mr. Colson's approach. Reflecting this opinion, George Hill, of Detroit, Mich., one of the institution's 1,200 inmates, remarked, "He was surprising. He really seemed to anticipate what was on our minds."

Since the Colson-inspired Prison Fel-

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lowship program began two years ago, 30 of the nation's 600 prisons have had soon contact with one of its evolving projects. The most unusual aspect has involved a special arrangement by which inmates are released for two-week periods to attend religious training sessions at Fellowship House in Washington.

Mr. Colson, accompanied by Harold Hughes, a former United States Senator and a fellow "born again" Christian, went to the director of the Bureau of Prisons, Norman Carlson, to get clearance for the program. Thus far, 87 inmates have undergone the training and have returned to prisons to minister to other inmates.

The Prison Fellowship staff numbers nine and its projected budget for the coming year is \$700,000. Most of the income is derived from the sale of Mr. Colson's book, "Born Again," which recounts his conversion; the rest comes from private donors.

In addition to the Washington-based programs, the staff enters prisons such as the one in Lexington, a co-ed medium security facility, to conduct one-week seminars in Bible study and spiritual growth.

The program is still in its formative stages. So far the largest groups of inmates have been attracted in the toughest prisons. "We may have to provide the medicine where it's needed most," Mr. Colson explained. "At the worst places the pain seems to be greatest."

Mr. Colson's reputation as a forceful, demanding White House official carries over to his new work. He directs the program from Washington, in concert with Mr. Hughes and other highly placed political figures, and exudes the air of one in command.

Along with those qualities he has a penchant to stir things up.

Most prison officials applaud Mr. Colson's ability to cast the spotlight on conditions of prison life, to give a lift to the cause of judicial reform and to introduce new forms of prison chaplaining.

They also speak admiringly of his apparent success in coming across to inmates as a sincere, concerned Christian. They note that Mr. Colson, unlike many prison visitors, evokes few cat-calls as he mingles with inmates, and they say he has won over many who were considered unreachable. Some officials report that chapel attendance has increased and that Fellowship program have dramatically changed some lives.

But the program has also aroused a number of complaints. For example, some regular prison chaplains, employed by the Bureau of Prisons, resent the fellowship's ardently evangelical approach and its apparent ability to employ political influence to circumvent regular prison practices.

"It's very frustrating for some chaplains," said the Rev. Richard Houlihan, director of the chaplaincy program for the Federal prison system. "The world goes around on political clout. Mr. Colson comes along and can accomplish instantly what they have been refused permission to do in the past. Institutional regulations get stretched for him."

Friction between the established chaplaincy and the Prison Fellowship

has become most acute at the new Federal prison in Memphis. Last spring, the Fellowship received permission to operate the chaplaincy service there, in a departure from the practice of employing Government-approved clergy.

The move drew sharp criticism from several quarters, including Government-paid chaplains and Memphis religious leaders. The debate centers on whether chaplains should be provided by the Government and how chaplains should be screened.

The Memphis experiment is the first in which the two Protestant clergymen, one black, the other white, are accountable to the Colson organization rather than to the Bureau of Prisons Chaplains office.

Critics charge that Government-paid clergymen too often ally themselves with prison officials against inmates instead of remaining impartial. Backers of the present system maintain that chaplains can have impact only if they are regular members of the staff.

The Rev. Richard Summer, head of the Federal prison chaplains unit until his retirement this summer, tried to prevent Prison Fellowship from establishing its program in Memphis but was overruled by Mr. Carlson, who has promised to let the program continue.

Hal Hopkins, the warden at Memphis, said he was "very much impressed" with the program, although he said "it's had some problems."

Mr. Colson said of the program: "It's worked well. The inmates would give their lives for those two chaplains because they trust them."

Mr. Colson also said his group will consider sending full-time chaplains into other institutions at the group's expense.

Another problem involves the difficulty of keeping the spiritual momentum going after the prison Fellowship team has left a particular prison. "If you get a bunch of guys pumped up and then drop them on their heads, that's bad," said the Rev. Timothy A. Ondahl, the Roman Catholic chaplain at the Atlanta Federal prison where one of the most rousing Prison Fellowship rallies took place in August. "The fellowship doesn't have all the mechanics worked out to continue the program."

But Father Ondahl, like Father Houlihan and other chaplains have witnessed the program, applauded its overall impact. "The spirit generated was a very warm, appropriate Christian response," Father Ondahl said. "It was not simplistic."

Prison chaplains who were interviewed agreed that any efforts such as Prison Fellowship that strove to improve the lives of largely forgotten inmates deserve support.

"Nobody gets a hearing like Mr. Colson does," said Mr. Summer. "The benefits outweigh the problems."

Mike, an inmate at Lexington who asked that his last name not be used, had come to the spiritual seminar out of curiosity, to catch a glimpse of Mr. Colson, "to see if he was real."

At the end of the week, the muscular, intense young man was still taking part, and his interest was increasing. I always thought Christians were pretty weird," he said, smiling broadly. "Obviously I haven't felt that way here, because I've been going to all the programs."

