



Behind the Wall

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A PHOENIX VISITS OSP

By Dave Wright

When Chuck Colson first appeared as a born again Christian, the nation was shocked. The conversion was exposed after a prayer-breakfast at the White House in December of 1974. The headlines were disastrous. Critics were devastating. "If he (Colson) isn't embarrassed by this sudden excess of piety, then surely the Lord must be (Columnist Harriet Van Horn). If Colson can repent his sins, then there just has to be hope for everybody (Boston Globe). I hope He (Christ) can save your butt now, because I can't. This (the conversion)...must be the dirtiest trick you've ever pulled...they ought to indict you for it (Colson's attorney, Dave Shapiro).

The most crushing blow must have come from Wendell Colson, already pressured at college by the accusations against his father. When he was informed of his father's conversion he said: "Oh no! Dad's a Jesus freak."

By then it was too late. A new man had come to life, born from the most wicked manipulator in politics. Some people, seeing Colson's sincerity, praised him. Eric Severeid devoted an entire commentary to Colson's conversion. Bill Greider of the Washington Post, Colson's sworn enemy, published the first sympathetic view of Colson's new way of life. The nation's Christians prayed for him, sending letters welcoming a brother and praising God. A marine staff sergeant, Nathaniel Greene, sinner and confessed alcoholic, was touched by Colson's conversion and wrote him of his decision to attend church, give up booze and praise those who confessed their sins. "This letter said it all," Colson wrote in *Born Again*.

As the indictment proceedings progressed, Colson journeyed through a maze of legalities and critical attacks, standing firm, assuming the burdens of his past.

Ironically, at another prayer-breakfast, Colson made the decision to plead guilty. After a hearing and sentencing he was escorted to Holabird Army Base, a federal detention center, and the lofty locks of a man were humbled, the haughtiness bowed down. Finally, soon after the death of his father, federal marshals escorted him to Maxwell Federal Prison Camp, Dormitory G, and numbered him 23226.

I wonder if sergeant Greene's letter was in Colson's mind that lowly night he asked himself and God about starting a prison ministry, visiting the world's prisons, and attending to the applause of fellow convicted felons. This sequence of events from the rebirth to incar-

ceration is summarized, in a sense, by John Dryden's early poem alluding to the Phoenix, a bird that resurrected itself to a new life and disposed of the old.

*When the newborn Phoenix first is seen,
His feathered subjects all adorn their King,
And while he makes his progress through the East,
From every grove his numerous train's increased;
Each poet of the air his glory sings
And around him the pleased audience clap their wings.*

Wednesday, October 24, Chuck Colson appeared at OSP to be applauded by the clapping wings of felons gathered from every grove of society, feathered subjects adorning A king, a felon, reborn from himself, singing the glory of biblical prose. The Class of Legal Processes, sponsors of the campaign, sat patiently in the control center awaiting Colson-already twenty minutes late. A procession of invited political, judicial, and social groups filed through, and then came Colson.

His smile was warming, but compared to his picture on the cover of *Born Again* the more prominent bags under his eyes and even sagging dimples clearly indicated not the Chuck Colson I expected, one touched by the Holy Spirit and somewhat rejuvenated, but one tired and weary, the crusades having taken their toll. During his introduction and speech, this analogy between the Phoenix and Chuck Colson came together.

His reign as assistant to Nixon, Colson told the class, dwelt on materialism as a way of life, years of prosperity, White House dinners, limousines, mansions, and chartered planes. The Phoenix, too, fed not on ordinary fruit and flowers, but, according to Herodotus, fed on frankincense and odiferous gums.

Colson told us of climbing to the top of the political ladder, secured in a nest of adamant governmental supremacy, surrounded by ambassadors, attorneys, and the president. The Phoenix also prepared a nest as it reached maturity, a lair in the branches of a mighty oak, composed of cinnamon, spikenard, and myrrh. Unfortunately, in this bulwark, the Phoenix drew its last breath, died, and from its body a new creature emerged, a babe, young, and with one objective in mind: to dispose of the body from which it has issued.

We asked Colson how he dealt with his past, the hatchet-man image, and the ex-con status. He thought a moment and explained that it's carried with him, to be accepted, rejected, or criticized, a



Chuck Colson discusses prison meeting with Larry Baker.



Chuck Colson addresses inmates and visitors.

bright key opening the doors for his campaign and prison reform, and a burden, too, at times one difficult to bear; but, nevertheless, one he cannot escape. The Phoenix burdened itself with myrrh which, ironically, was used in medicine, embalming, and perfume, making frequent journeys, building up the strength to carry its progenitor's body to the altar of the sun to be consumed by fragrant flames. Is this Mr. Colson's objective: to build strength carrying the burden of his past off to be consumed in fragrant flames of illumination? Someone once said if you want to see the scum of the earth, stand outside a prison during the changing of the guard, (however, after having spent two years inside these walls, I might add there are some sincere individuals in guard uniforms). Or, come inside and meet society's social deviates; spend the day and fraternize with visiting citizens, the guest judicial, political, and social groups, people who care and devote hours toward inmate interests. See this prison as a source of light, a sun, illuminating the most respected and most rejected of society, an excellent altar to consume the sacrifice of a hatchet-man and begin a new life of reform, wholeness and Christian attitude.

Mr. Colson, I believe your burden, is heavy-heavier than most could bear. But you have increased the strain by reaching for the moon, unwilling to accept even Skylab. First, you commented that 80 percent of incarcerated felons should be released to community corrections. I challenge you to accept the responsibility and flak for the release of the 80 percent set free in society under any program. Seen from the eyes of public partisans it's a pipe dream, visions of elons disguised as myrrh.

Second, you responded to one inmate's question about religion and mental health in a skirting manner, expressing disdain, in so many words, for confidence in psychiatric care. However, Bill Glass, during his crusade at OSP last month, responded this way: "Mental health without religion is humanism; religion without mental health is psychosis!"

Furthermore, your suggestion to release only non-violent first offenders is an unconscious advocacy for mental health in itself. "Non-violent" and "first offender" defined in general enough terms to include 80 percent of the prison population would be a contemptuous cloaking of the need for mental

the law, we, too, can see our past consume in fragrant flames.

As a final contrast, the Phoenix had a peculiar reproductive cycle. Only one of the magnificent birds could exist at any given time. Unfortunately, Mr. Colson, in view of the pipe dreams you have expressed, the skeptical public must thank God only one Chuck Colson can exist during these troubled years, one needed to keep things in perspective; but, one that if let loose in great number, might pressure our society to self-destruct by disregarding mental health and relying only on the power of Christ.

You did make several points, though, one being restitution. Our

superintendent suggests certainty of punishment. In conjunction, I suggest certainty of objectives, be they include restitution, length of incarceration, vocational or academic training, or even regularly scheduled prayer-breakfasts.

The Phoenix left OSP carrying his burden, building the strength he needs to see his past consumed in the fright for human dignity. Pipe dreams or possibilities, only tomorrow will tell. One thing is certain, though. Whatever questions were left un-answered, Chuck Colson's work to bring to light the inconsistencies in the prisons of America will help him in his fight to rise from the ashes of the past.

"We should behave to friends as we would wish friends to behave to us."
Aristotle

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If you are a spiritual seeker who needs help not promises—call me. I am a "God Gifted" man. I can help you in a hurry.

TESTIMONIALS

1) Miss Joyce J.W., Portland, OR., was in a fix where she could not find or keep a good man. I, Rev. Hoskins, removed the fix and the jinx from her. NOW she can draw the man of her desire to her like a magnet.

2) Mr. & Mrs. C.P. of Compton, CA., could not win the BIG one. They called Rev. Hoskins and Rev. sent them a for-sure win blessing money hand. They went to Las Vegas and their luck kept on coming, winning more than \$16,000.

3) Ms. Barbara T., Inglewood, CA., had a man who left home for another woman. She called Rev. Hoskins with tears in her voice. She wanted him back!! Now he is back and eating out of her hand.

4) Mr. Paul, Los Angeles, CA., was in a fix and rooted by this woman. As a result he lost his nature for other women, but through Rev. Hoskins' work, Paul regained his nature and became luckier than ever with women, money and his business.

5) Mrs. O.I., Long Beach, CA., had demons in her body, and in her home, causing all kinds of bad luck, and unnatural sickness. She called Rev. Hoskins and in 72 hours her home and body were free of unclean spirits.

(The names in the above testimonies have been changed for the protection of the individual.) I guarantee to do what I say I can do. I have a big reputation to protect.

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Thomas Boothe
Author of the Follow-Through Concept