

# REDEMPTION REWARDED

## Watergate figure honored for ministering to inmates

Star-Ledger Wire Services

**NEW YORK** — Charles W. (Chuck) Colson, who was imprisoned as the Watergate scandal's "hatchet man" and later built a worldwide ministry for prisoners, won a \$1 million religion prize yesterday.

"It's amazing grace that I could be redeemed from the degradation of prison by the power of Jesus Christ to serve his gospel," Colson said.

The 1993 Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion is the largest prize for achievement in any field.

The prize is kept higher than the Nobel prizes in such fields as science and literature in the belief that religion is more important.

Colson, 61, served seven months in prison for obstructing justice in the Watergate coverup as the tough special counsel of former President Richard Nixon.

He later founded the Prison Fellowship of Reston, Va., in 1976.

Colson said at a news conference at the Church Center for the United Nations that his own downfall had been his restoration.

"Out of tragedy and adversity come great blessings," he said. "I shudder to think of what I'd been if I had not gone to prison. Lying on the rotten floor of a cell, you know it's not prosperity or pleasure that's important, but the maturing of the soul."

The prize, established by investment manager John M. Templeton, has been awarded annually since 1972. Previous winners include Mother Teresa, Billy Graham and Alexander Solzhenitsyn. A international panel picks the winner.

Colson's Prison Fellowship ministry has programs in 800 federal and



Associated Press

Watergate figure Charles W. Colson was awarded the \$1 million 1993 Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion

His conversion initially met widespread skepticism. But his work since then in advocating prison reform, testifying before legislatures and helping inmates has gained respect in religious and secular circles.

In the Nixon White House, Colson was often described as "the toughest of the tough." A popular legend grew up that quoted him as saying he would run over his own grandmother for the president.

"I never said that. It was said of me in a Wall Street Journal article. I used to think that Watergate was the biggest scandal of our times, but because of the erosion of our values it is just one of many 'gates,'" he said.

As for his old boss, the former White House counsel said, "I still think he had the keenest intellect of any man I ever met and is a great visionary of our times."

At the news conference, Colson sharply criticized the U.S. prison system, calling it the "most serious failure of government."

He said half of all prisoners are locked up for nonviolent crimes, and should be put on community-service projects instead of being maintained in overcrowded prisons at an annual cost of \$18,000 each.

"Prisons just breed more crimes," he said.

Colson, a Baptist, often is classified an evangelical, but he veers from that camp in his opposition to the death penalty.

The award will be presented in a private ceremony May 12 at Buckingham Palace in London.

A public ceremony led by Chicago's Roman Catholic Cardinal Joseph Bernardin will be held Sept. 2 at the University of Chicago.

lawyer, Colson related his conversion in the first of a dozen books, "Born Again: What Really Happened to the White House Hatchet Man."

"God's grace is amazing. You can be redeemed and you can turn adversity into a blessing because God gives you a second chance when you are born again," Colson added.

state prisons and in 54 other countries. It has a paid staff of 280 and about 50,000 volunteers, offers Bible studies and runs work-release programs, marriage seminars and classes to help prisoners after they get out.

Colson said the prize money would go toward his work. An ex-Marine captain and former