

Chuck Colson: Open Doors President Pays Tribute

My appreciation for Charles Colson goes back to *Born Again*, the 1976 biography of his conversion. As a young man, I was incredibly moved by his story. As I have matured in my **Christian faith**, his influence has continued to encourage and direct me to my own area of influence for the kingdom.

The truth is, Chuck's global position of prominence, vision and striking personal capacities have paved the way for many younger leaders to take up the causes that so animated Chuck's ministry for more than three and a half decades. I liken Chuck's influence to that of a giant sequoia.

Like a sequoia, **Chuck Colson** has seeded many of us on the issues of human dignity and religious liberty. For example, his book, *How Now Shall We Live?* (with Nancy Pearcey), which speaks so powerfully about the integration of the Christian faith into every area of human life—including art, politics and academia—thrilled me as I studied in seminary. Absorbing the message of this book marked a clear milestone in my Christian faith.

At Rick Warren's **Saddleback Church**, where I later served as a pastor, Chuck's worldview curriculum made a significant impact in the congregation—and on my life. It also deepened my appreciation for the fact that Chuck was not just the leader of Prison Fellowship—as important as that calling is—but that he was a prophet calling God's people to renew their minds for the advance of God's kingdom on a whole host of fronts.

When I became president and CEO of Open Doors in 2003, Chuck's influence stayed with me. In fact, you might even say that it has cast an even larger shadow over our ministry. His passion for religious liberty intersects very powerfully with our

commitment to defend the persecuted church.

Chuck has such huge influence that whenever he becomes involved in an issue, it gets noticed, and things start to happen. That is certainly the case when it comes to religious liberty. Chuck has offered a strong and coherent voice on this vital issue, both in the U.S. and around the world.

That voice is exemplified in his spearheading of the Manhattan Declaration, a significant statement calling on Christians to keep human dignity, marriage and religious liberty at the top of our agendas at this moment in history. I enthusiastically, and gratefully, signed the Declaration and urge other believers to do the same.

Chuck's vision has helped the cause of religious liberty in other ways, too. It has provided some of us, including me, with a platform to discuss this issue and be heard. For example, David Hegg and I wrote *The Privilege of Persecution* (with Craig Hodgkins) and undoubtedly benefited from Chuck's decision to keep this issue before the global church using many venues, including his daily BreakPoint commentaries.

Chuck's commitment to work on behalf of suffering Christians led him to support the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church, an important annual mobilization event "set apart for us to remember thousands of our Christian brothers and sisters around the world who suffer persecution, simply because they confess Jesus Christ as Lord."

Truly Chuck Colson's testimony, ministry commitments, heart for people, intellectual and personal gifts, consistency, and unswerving allegiance to Christ have made him a giant in the arenas both of religious liberty and the encouragement of leaders around the world. It is time for all of these leaders—including me—to stand up and do what he has done so well for all these years: articulate the relevance and truth of the gospel in all areas of human life to a new generation.