

Virginian grabs Reagan's attention

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From wire, staff dispatches

WASHINGTON — A preacher from Petersburg, saying Jesus Christ "allowed me an opportunity to speak," gave a brief, emotional speech yesterday to a shocked President Reagan, his aides and an audience supporting Robert H. Bork for the Supreme Court.

The Rev. George J. Lucas Jr., who was invited with others to the Old Executive Office Building auditorium for a pro-Bork

Head count disputed, page A-1

talk, told Reagan that "America needs to get back to the word of God so that we can do what's right."

Reagan seemed stunned as he wrapped up his talk of about 15 minutes and Mr. Lucas commenced his talk from a seat in the second row. Mr. Lucas said later that the president had motioned for him to speak. "If he hadn't given me permission, I wouldn't have done it."

Reagan stood expressionless before the lectern but listened

with increasing interest as Mr. Lucas said that black people "do support you" and complained that "we allow certain black leaders who are not really black leaders" to speak for blacks.

Reagan recently took umbrage with remarks made by Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, who said that Reagan's civil rights record had been among the worst in U.S. history. Marshall is black.

Mr. Lucas said, "I think that the Judge Bork nomination is indicative of the times that we have, that we as Americans need to get back to revival, to the word of God and to the traditional things that we have in our society."

"I promised the Lord Jesus Christ that if he allowed me an opportunity to speak today, I would say what's on my heart," the preacher told the president.

"May I just respond?" Reagan asked when Mr. Lucas finished.

"When I came into this office, I came in with a declaration that I believed this nation was hungering for a spiritual revival and I believe all over the country that is happening and I've tried every way I can to help bring it about," the president said.

"You're so absolutely right. And Abraham Lincoln said that he

could not conduct the duties of this office for 15 minutes if he did not believe that he could call upon one who was stronger and wiser than all others and that he had been driven to his knees many times because there was no place else to go," Reagan said.

"Well, I subscribe to that," he continued, "and the only thing that worries me is that sometimes I wonder if maybe I'm going to call and he's going to give me a busy signal, because I do it so often."

Mr. Lucas said in a telephone interview later yesterday that on Sunday he had prayed with his congregation about speaking to the president. He is pastor of Race Road Baptist Church in Farmville, which is an independent, fundamentalist black Baptist church of about 100 active members.

Mr. Lucas, who had been chairman of Christians for Reagan-Bush in the Richmond area, said, "I took [the invitation to Washington] as a mandate from God that He was going to use me to glorify His name. My prayer was that if He gave me the

Continued on page 16, col. 5

Continued from first page

opportunity to open my mouth, I would."

He said his remarks were "impromptu" pleas for the nation to return to fundamental values. "There are many black people who have conservative values," for whom liberal black leaders do not speak when they "mouth a couple of platitudes that sell out the black community."

The minister said that after his remarks, "it was pandemonium" among the audience of about 200 with "whites and blacks hugging each other and just rejoicing" and congratulating him.

White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater, asked about Lucas' remarks, said, "We had no idea he'd speak up. It was spontaneous."

Audiences gathered in the auditorium to hear the president are exhorted beforehand not to attempt to question Reagan.

Mr. Lucas had been an unsuccessful council candidate from Petersburg's 7th Ward in the May 1986, councilmanic election.

The preacher, who is 53, said yesterday he was a retired career Army staff sergeant who was awarded a Bronze Star in Vietnam and became a minister 11 years ago.



The Rev. G.J. Lucas Jr.
Remarks were impromptu