

A Minister's Fall

How It Affects Faith

By Loretta Richardson
Post Staff Writer

Something happens when a member of the clergy has been afflicted with a crime. Whether that crime revolves around sexual offenses, acts of perversion or murder. Something happens to members of society. Whether that person is non-religious or religious. Something happens.

With each printed news story or with each aired television report detailing the events leading to a religious leader's connection with a crime, explanations are demanded; answers to questions that possibly have no answers are desperately sought.

Non-religious persons eagerly poke fun at and ridicule those who claim an allegiance to God. Religious persons, particularly those who are weak in the faith, feel the onset of devastation and confusion.

In the past few weeks, members of the clergy have been the focus of several crimes. Ministers have been arrested for frequenting pornography stores. One area minister confessed to the murder of a young girl in Statesville and in Fort Mill, SC an entire empire is riding the tumultuous currents of turmoil.

In light of such current events local ministers, Rev. Phillip Davis of Gallian Baptist Church; Dr. Clifton Jones of Friendship Baptist Church and Rev. Leon Riddick of Mount Carmel Baptist Church talked freely about the effects a minister's "fall" has on faith.

Rev. Davis segments the problem into two parts, dealing with those individuals who are unchurched and those who aren't. "At those times when a minister is connected with a crime, the person who is not affiliated with a church or who does not hold to any religious beliefs seems to be looking for an excuse to continue the kind of life that they're living. That minister's crime gives this person the justification he or she is looking for," responded Rev. Davis.

Agreeing Dr. Jones added, "non-Christians can often use the failure of the clergy member as a crutch to document their own beliefs, attitudes and total aloofness from the Christian experience. This is unfortunate." What Dr. Jones said must be done is that people learn to separate the message of God from the messenger. But he furthered stated that this was a difficult task to do.

Rev. Riddick who added his comments stated; "There is something wrong with people who think ministers aren't human."

People who value themselves based on other people are individuals, according to Rev. Davis, whose own self-esteem are lifted in their own minds when others fall.

But for the religious person, the person who is growing in the faith of Christianity, Rev. Davis said that the effects of a minister's fall

Relic Challenges

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Another touchy area is school-based health clinics. Although polls reveal that most people favor them, Relic has reservations about what the numbers mean and what is in the best interest of students.

"The situation in Charlotte-Mecklenburg has become confused," he said. "The problem is one of definition. If you have 10 people in a room, you'll probably get eight different answers on what a school-based health clinic is. It means different things to different people."

Relic stated that he expects to make a recommendation to the school board whether clinics should be allowed at county schools later this month. The centers, he said, should provide health services for students, not contraceptives or information on how and where to obtain them.

"What I'm for is providing information for health and treatment," he replied.

Personally, Relic said the size of the school system has posed no problems for his work habits. With about 73,000 students, Charlotte-Mecklenburg is more than nine times larger than the West Hartford, Ct., system he headed until July.

"I've had to make no adjustments," he stated. (Charlotte-Mecklenburg) is bigger and more complex than West Hartford, but my style, involvement and time on the job, whether it was in the federal government at HEW (Health Education and Welfare), West Hartford or Charlotte-Mecklenburg is the same."

could have a devastating effect. "The Christian has a tendency to question his or her faith, when the person the Christian has seen his Christian experience through does not measure up to his or her standards," replied Dr. Jones.

However, this is not the case for a Christian who has based his religious experience on Christ commented Rev. Davis. "If Christians continue to study the Bible and do their parts as believers, they know that these things (ministers fall) will happen." Rev. Davis expounded even more by saying that it is the mystery and magnificence of God who takes fallible and imperfect people to accomplish His will.

"Throughout the Bible," Rev. Riddick explained, "there are imperfect people. If folks are going to lose the faith, then they can simply read the Bible and just close it up. Moses was one of God's strong men and he was a murderer. Noah, another one of God's strong men got drunk and David, still another of God's strong men committed adultery. They were angels in heaven that rebelled and who fell into hell. So how can we hold people to be faultless?"

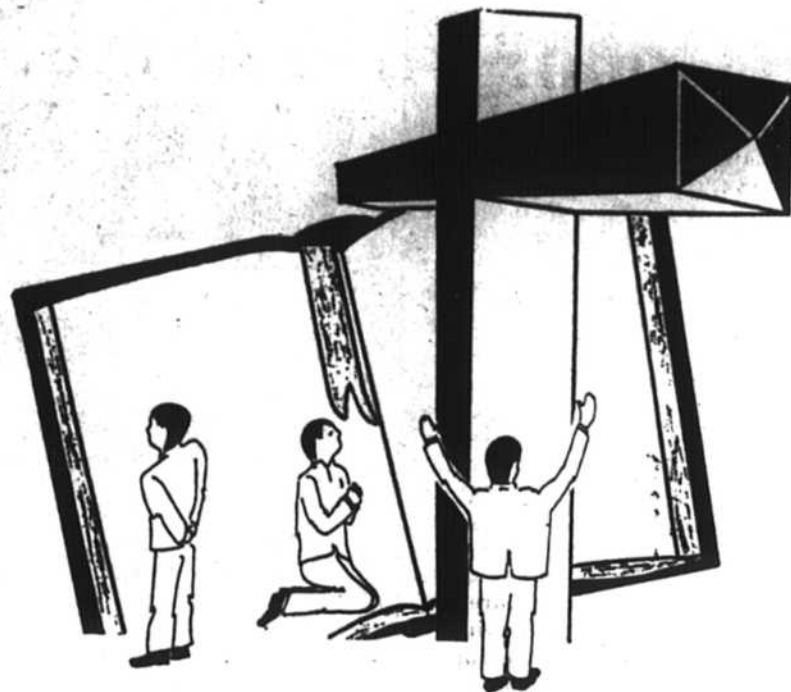
"Even among the disciples," Rev. Jones pointed out, "there was one who was prone to doubting, one who lied, one who was prone to cursing and another who loved money. Two others had mixed up values and still another was a coward."

While these Biblical figures show clearly the imperfectness of men, neither minister supported their examples as a license for libertinism, for unethical or moral misconduct. Rather, they suggested that throughout the years, ministers have been incorrectly thought to be perfect.

"Often we make our religious leaders heroes, and when they fail we simply find another hero. The clergy has to live with a double standard. More is expected of him or her simply by the nature of his or her calling," began Dr. Jones.

"Therefore, the assumption is that clergy is almost a cut above. The assumption is that clergy has more control, that he or she feels, thinks and does no evil. Yet they are persons like others persons. They hurt or are frustrated, suffer pain and anxiety, get angry and sometimes lose control. Yet if this did not happen to clergy, then clergy would cease to be human. We (clergy) would be so aloof and abstract we could not preach a gospel of wholeness. We could not speak to others experientially and help direct them spiritually in coping with life's experiences," explained Dr. Jones.

"People have got to stop looking at ministers as superhumans," confirmed Rev. Davis.



The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgement to be punished. (II Peter 2, 9.)

But even Rev. Davis had to admit that ministers are placed in separate categories. "What most people don't realize is that as a person a minister is typically alone and that most of the members see themselves far removed from him. But if we see a minister's strengths, we (church members) should also see his weaknesses so that we could protect him or her. Ministers need ministering to, as well. It is the responsibility of church members to use their spiritual gifts to uplift his or her pastor, because it is when the minister is at his weakest that temptation strikes."

Dr. Jones sees the toil the "tremendous burden" placed on religious leaders has taken.

"More and more clergy members are turning to other professions, the divorce rate among clergy is escalating and others are simply playing the game, finding out what people want and giving it to them."

"Does this mean that they're not called or believe in this God that calls inspite of all of our shortcomings? Does this mean that God's Spirit does not dwell with us? Does this mean that we're unfit to stand behind pulpits and lecterns and proclaim the wholeness of God's message? No! It means that we are partners in suffering. Yet, there is an in-explainable, unquestionable affirming that inspite of who I am or what I am, there is a power that transcends us and our task is to affirm in the oneness of God, the oneness of creation and the ultimate worth and dignity of each individual," expounded Dr. Jones.

Restressing the point that God uses ordinary people and that includes clergy too, Rev. Davis added, "In God's sight the minister's sins are no greater than the sins anyone else commits. It's just that when a minister gets

caught it's news." "What infuriates me", began Rev. Riddick is that people in the church can be shacking up, committing adultery and getting divorces and they don't lose faith, but time the minister does something, they lose faith. To me, that is mindless stupidity. Everyone should practice what they preach, not just the ministers."

"I think it would be wise as a society to realize just that there are some great doctors, there are some quacks. Such is the case in the law profession. You don't eliminate the law profession because of one lawyer," commented Rev. Davis.

"We need to quit shooting our religious leaders down. And learn how to pick them up, heal them and get them back in the battle. They are worthy of service somewhere. If the Christian takes seriously the Christian life, then he or she would be equipped to handle situations like a minister's fall. While we must learn to heal, reconcile and forgive, we have yet to understand and comprehend the power of forgiveness" concluded Rev. Davis.

"What we are experiencing is nothing new in religious communities, but often, it is only after the crucifixion, death and burial that one can experience the resurrection of life, truth and wholeness," replied Dr. Jones.

Black Churches Unite To Save Black Schools

CINCINNATI, OH - As another step to aid financially strapped black colleges, four of the nation's top Black religious leaders have joined together to help establish an educational trust. It is the first time in history that Presidents of the three major Baptist conventions have united behind a single fundraising program. As national co-chairmen of the Dr. Lacey Kirk Williams Educational Trust, the leaders plan to provide a historical perspective on the contributions made by black ministers to the growth and development of Black America.

The organization was established in 1986 under the direction of Dr. L. Venchael Booth, founder of the Progressive National Convention, Inc., along with the assistance of Dr. T.J. Jemison, president of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Incorporated, Dr. J. Alfred Smith, president of the progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc., and Dr. E. Edward Jones, president of the National Baptist Convention of America.

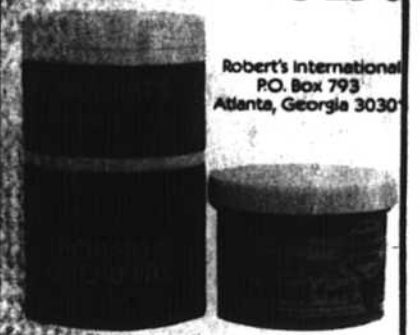
Named after one of the most dynamic Black ministers of the century, Dr. Lacey Kirk Williams, the organization was formed to provide on-going educational aid to students seeking a career in the ministry and to support historically black colleges offering theological programs. Dr. Lacey Kirk Williams was a former President of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Incorporated and former vice president of the Baptist World Alliance. The school of divinity at Bishop College was named in his honor.

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