

Free From the Press

By Jamie Buckingham

The morning after the Swaggart scandal broke I woke to the inner words "Beware of the tumblebugs." It's been a long time since I thought of tumblebugs. Lying in bed, I remembered kneeling as a child in our barnyard watching those little beetles at work. A tumblebug finds a pile of manure. With his front claws he pulls out a small amount, mixes it liberally with beetle spit, works it into a ball, then rolls it across the barnyard in front of him—pushing it with his nose.

As I look out over the kingdom I realize God has given His church a huge dose of laxative. The secular media—the tumblebugs of society—smelling the results of God's purgative, have rushed out from under the rocks. They're not looking for the hand of God, much less the face of God. They're not even interested in the type of physic administered by the Holy Spirit to cleanse and purify His church. All they are nosing for is expelled waste. Once found—and God's people never have been good at digging latrines—they roll it into a neat little TV spot and serve it up on the 6 o'clock news.

The tragedy is we bite into it.

No one is a stronger proponent of "freedom of the press" than I. But it is truth which makes us free, not twisted, slanted, one-sided, incomplete facts. Such stories put us in more bondage than any journalistic censorship imposed by government regulations. A free press, in the hands of irresponsible journalists, is as dangerous as a vindictive man who shouts "fire!" in a public theater. The journalists whose primary intent is to catch people in wrongdoing (or who edit film to create the impression of wrongdoing) are instruments of the devil.

Why does the press continually ask questions of Pat Robertson which set him up to look like a Pentecostal buffoon?

Remember what the media did to former Secretary of Interior James Watt? Once the newspapers discovered he believed in the return of Christ they twisted it to mean Watt felt it was OK to



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destroy our natural resources since the world would be burned up when Jesus returned anyway—the exact opposite of what the secretary believed.

Following my brief foray into the world of the secular media during the PTL scandal, I quickly realized that no good can come from Christians being interviewed on programs such as "Larry King Live," "Nightline" or "60 Minutes." Yet, following the Swaggart scandal, I saw publicity-hunting preachers by the score drooling to have their pious faces making non-sensical statements on the tube.

Please, please, I said to my friends, don't go on public TV. Your words will be twisted. Let God do His work without your opinions or interference. But it's hard to say no when ABC is on the phone saying the world is waiting for your wisdom.

When will we realize the world does not understand our terminology, our values, our commitment to walk to the sound of a different drummer? Yet we go on public TV and toss out terms even we don't fully understand—terms such as repentance, forgiveness and discipline.

Please, my brothers, shut up and stay home. Talk theology among yourselves. If you go on public TV, talk about God's love.

Remember, dear reader, today's free press is not really free. The facts—especially slanted facts—do not make us free. Only the truth makes us free. Until the press begins reporting on what God

is doing, rather than what man is doing (or man's angry or confused reactions to what God is doing), it is never qualified to claim to be free.

Why didn't the free press headline Jimmy Swaggart's outstanding overseas crusades—the largest in history—as well as his sin?

Why doesn't the free press, in their 90-seconds-a-night report on the problems in Israel, also remind us that the *Koran* promises Moslems who kill Jews and Christians a place in heaven?

And would you expect to read in the papers any account of spiritual changes Jim and Tammy Bakker might have undergone since their fall?

Like tumblebugs, the media is only interested in something that stinks.

A January survey of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) found that 51 percent of American Jews thought Israel was responding "too harshly" to the Palestinian rioters. Where did the ADL, Israel's greatest American friend, get its information? From the slanted news served up by the TV tumblebugs.

A *U.S. News and World Report* survey says half the country thinks Pat Robertson is a "religious weirdo" who "scares people." Where does America get its information on Robertson's theology? From the media tumblebugs.

On the basis of a single column in *USA Today* telling us Jimmy Swaggart is a porn addict, or a horrible picture of Jim and Tammy in the *National Enquirer*, we draw mind-shutting conclusions.

Jesus did not tell Peter, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-jona, for Dan Rather has revealed this unto you." He said His church was to be built on knowledge from God. Since media revelation is earthly, I'll have to look elsewhere to find what God is saying. It's time for Christians to turn off their TV sets and open their Bibles. Where else can you find a true word on Israel, politics or how to treat a fallen preacher? ■

Editor's Note: Jamie Buckingham's prophetic novel, Jesus World, is being re-released by Paraclete Press (Orleans, MA) for \$6.95. Originally released in 1981, the novel is about a televangelist who cashes in on Jesus.