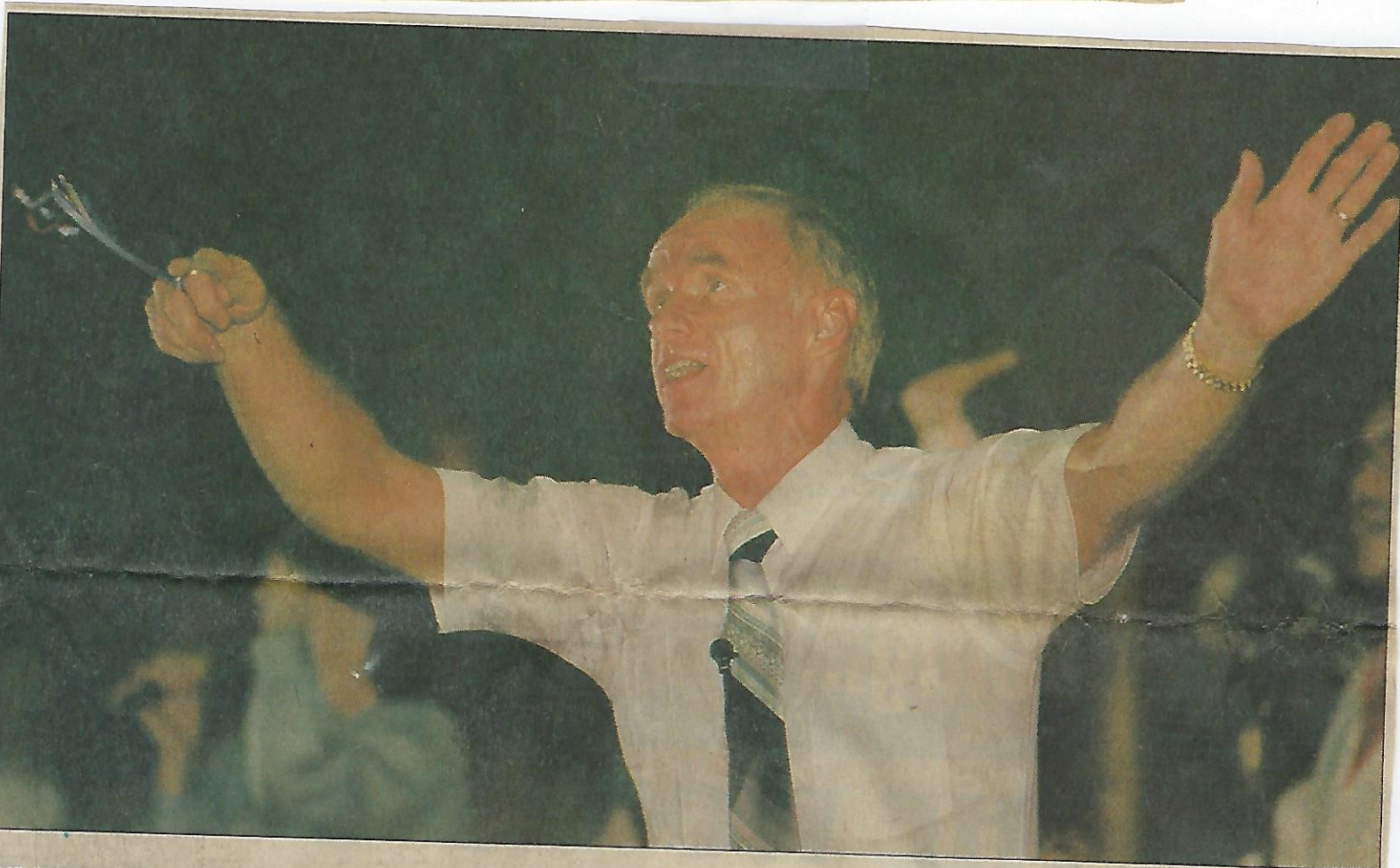


Florida Today

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Pastor: Holy war just heating up



THE REV. JAMIE BUCKINGHAM: Melbourne minister with ties to national evangelists predicts 'pure church' will overcome scandal.

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TV ministers' tower 'about to topple'

By Vincent Willmore
FLORIDA TODAY

Expect more "dirty laundry" from television evangelists before the cleansing of their ministries is complete, a local minister with close ties to several of the evangelists said Sunday.

Celebrating the 20th anniversary of Tabernacle Church in Melbourne, the Rev. Jamie Buckingham, church founder and pastor, devoted his entire sermon Sunday to the recent controversies. Services were held at the Melbourne Jai-Alai Fronton.

Not yet known is how the Rev. Jerry Falwell, a fundamentalist Baptist, came to replace the Rev. Jim Bakker as head of the more-charismatic PTL ministry, said Buckingham, who describes himself as a close friend of Bakker.

Bakker resigned as head of PTL March 19 after admitting he had extramarital sex with a secretary in 1980. Falwell, who has criticized the PTL — Praise The Lord — ministry, agreed to take over for Bakker.

"(Falwell's) presence in the midst of this is the greatest of the mysteries," Buckingham said. "He's been billed as the great peacemaker. I think there's a great deal more that will come out."

As evidence of this, Buckingham pointed to a U.S. News and World Report article saying Falwell persisted in raising money for a famine relief operation in the Sudan, even though he was unable to spend it. Falwell denied the allegations.

Buckingham referred to the reports as evidence God is "cleaning up what is going on in Lynchburg," the Virginia base of

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Sect facts

■ **Evangelicals:** Emphasize preaching gospel as sole basis of faith, and persuading others to accept Christ. Personal conversion experiences are important.

■ **Charismatics:** Emotionally expressive in worship, they believe God communicates through people in faith-healing and speaking in "unknown tongues."

■ **Pentacostals:** Charismatics who believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible. The Assemblies of God, which includes Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggert, is one group.

■ **Fundamentalists:** They believe God speaks only through the Bible and stress strict interpretations and are hostile to Pentacostalism's emphasis on speaking in tongues. The Rev. Jerry Falwell is one.

Minister: Holy war just heating up

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Falwell's own \$100 million ministry.

Buckingham spent three days last week with Bakker and his wife, Tammy, who is being treated for prescription drug addiction, at their California home. Buckingham said he received a call for help from the Bakkers.

Later that week, Buckingham met with Oral Roberts in Roberts' Tulsa, Okla., prayer tower. Roberts has attracted his share of controversy by claiming God had threatened to "call him home" if he did not raise \$8 million for his university by the end of March.

The spotlight on the electronic ministry should be welcomed as a call for accountability, Buckingham said. Buckingham said he had a vision on his way to visit the Bakkers of the electronic church as a tower about to topple.

"All across this nation the (television ministry) has been building its tower. And it has gotten higher and higher and higher, until it almost reaches the heavens. And there are now cracks in the base of that tower. The wise man will step out of the way when it begins to fall.

"God was saying, 'There is a mighty shaking that is about to happen in the kingdom of God. I am

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going to loose the press on the kingdom of God as I once loosed the locusts on the Kingdom of Israel.' "

Christians must "circle the wagons and stay together" while the controversies rage, Buckingham advised. He warned his congregation not to stand in judgment of the evangelists, exhorting them instead to look closely at their own lives and the work of their church.

"Nobody has the right to throw the first stone in these kind of things. That's whether you live in Melbourne or you live in Baton Rouge," he said, referring to Louisiana evangelist Jimmy Swaggert. Bakker has accused Swaggert of a "diabolical plot" to seize his \$172 million religious empire, the PTL.

Buckingham predicted a "pure and holy church" will emerge once the controversies die. "I'm excited about what God is doing with the church today," he said. "He is purifying it, washing it, drying it, and wringing it out. We are at the stage where he is hanging it out to dry."

As for his own future, Bucking-

ham said he will try to remain on good terms with all the evangelists involved in the recent controversies. Falwell is the only one he does not know personally, Buckingham said.

"I think it's wise for me to stay home," he said. "I've had good personal relationships with all these men. I don't want to get in the position of taking sides. There are forces out there that would have me do that."

Buckingham said he will appear on the Rev. Pat Robertson's 700 Club television program in two weeks, but has turned down invitations to appear on PTL programs.

Robertson cabled anniversary greetings to Buckingham. "Congratulations on the 20th anniversary of the Tabernacle," he said. "I pray God's richest blessing on your ministry in the years to come."

After Sunday's service, Robertson supporters collected signatures encouraging the Republican to run. Robertson's visit to Brevard earlier this month was sponsored by Buckingham's church.