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Elton Trueblood calls for commitment

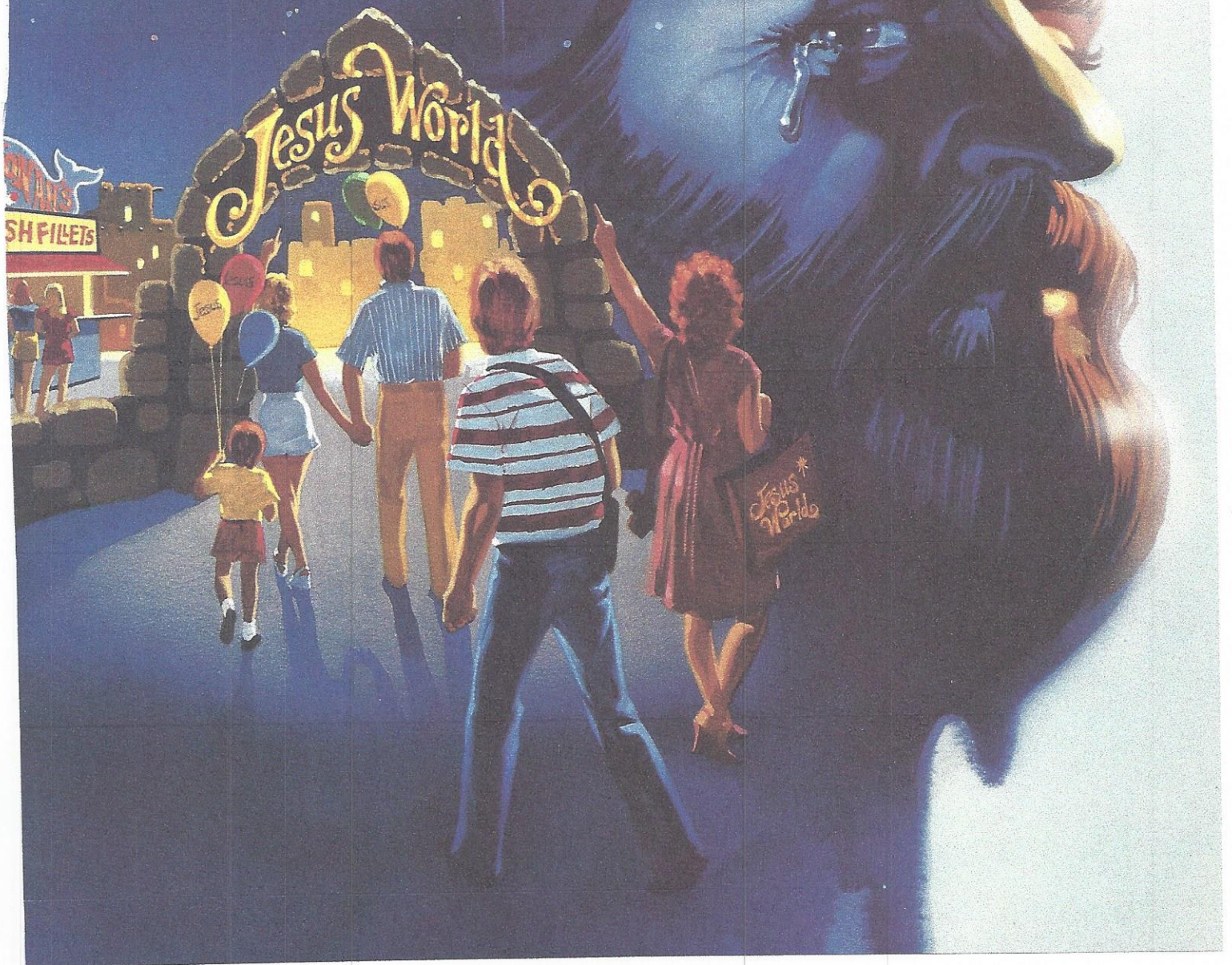
THE MAGAZINE ABOUT SPIRIT-LED LIVING

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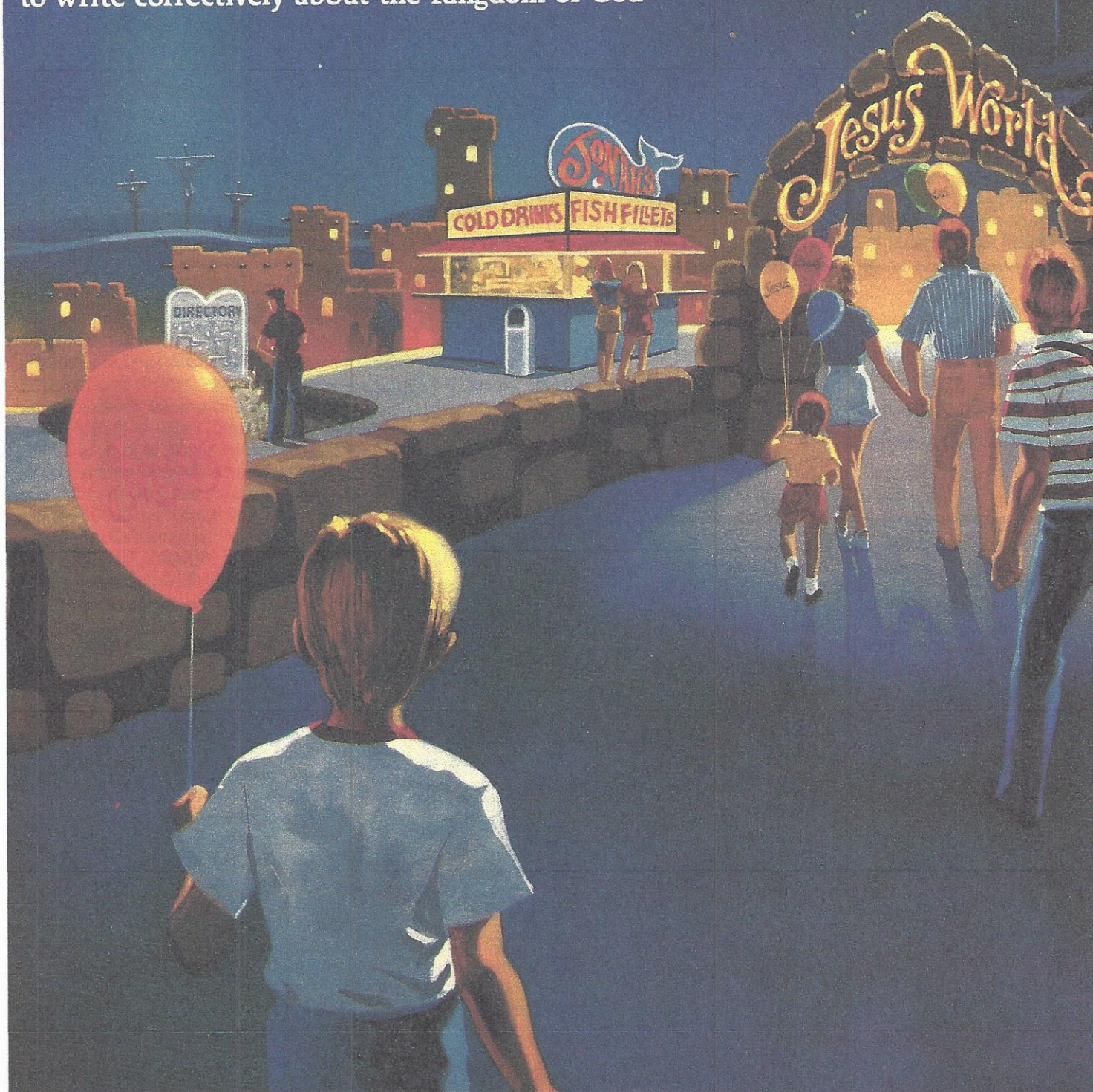
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'JESUS WORLD'

Breaking Barriers
in Christian Fiction



Breaking new barriers in Christian fiction Jamie Buckingham uses a genre of literature recently rediscovered by Christian publishers— fiction—to write correctively about the Kingdom of God



JESUS WORLD

The story rings true—too true. And, it has all the elements.

A flashy, charismatic preacher with a gift for communicating the Gospel over his national television program—a man so respected nationally his picture has appeared on the covers of both *Time* and *Newsweek*.

He has a dream—a big dream, to create a center so huge it will draw millions of people from around the world. It will be, the evangelist boasts, Christianity's answer to communism, Islam and humanism.

The evangelist also has wealthy friends who pour millions of dollars into the project and overnight it is a success. Millions flock to it and thousands are saved each day.

But gradually the once tender-hearted evangelist with a passion for lost souls becomes consumed with bigness and with the mechanics of running his multi-million dollar business. He no longer has time for personal ministry. The task of winning souls is left to others.

The story has all the excitement, page-turning intrigue and you-can't-believe-what-happened-but-it-really-did suspense of an exposé like Woodward and Bernstein's *All The President's Men*.

But the story isn't true. It's fiction. It's the product of Jamie Buckingham's fertile imagination, a novel about the dangers of using worldly means to accomplish spiritual ends.

It's called *JESUS WORLD* (all caps, of course), a book about a respected evangelist's dream to create a giant theme park in Central Florida that would overshadow even Walt Disney World—complete with talking robots, overhead satellites that trigger electronically-produced miracles.

There is tingling suspense, science fiction, machines which take on the qualities and characteristics of men, a demonized satellite and finally robots gone wild. The huge theme park includes a scale model of Herod's temple, complete with escalators, Jesus walking on the water and many other scenes from the Bible.

The story climaxes with several bizarre murders and a sad sell-out to the forces

of evil, including a deal by the evangelist with oil-rich Arabs to bail him out of financial trouble if he will include Mohammed in the theme park.

It is a book that was almost destined to happen. At a time when Christians are increasingly interested in fiction and at a time that many ministries seem to rely more and more on worldly methods to accomplish their spiritual goals, this novel may be a major breakthrough in Christian literature.

That is because the story about a major problem in the Kingdom of God—what happens when worthwhile ministries run amuck is pursuit of Money and Bigness—written in a dynamic, page-turning, narrative style.

Of course Buckingham isn't the first to write about the problem. Joe Bayley wrote a stinging allegory 20 years ago about some well-meaning people who wanted to emblazon the heavens with their message. The men formed a committee and bought *The Gospel Blimp*. That project, too, lost its spiritual power and in the end the men could not name a single convert who had been won to Christ through the floating broadcast station.

Another book to look critically at the evangelical subculture was James L. Johnson's thought-provoking novel, *Nine to Five Complex*, published by Zondervan in 1972. In it, Johnson portrays a fictitious "Christian" company which sells bumper stickers with religious slogans as its "ministry." A mythical entrepreneur uses "ministry" as an excuse to pay his people poorly; puts the wrong people in the wrong position; and greedily hoards the profits himself.

While the book—reissued by Harvest

House in 1980 under the name *Profits, Power and Piety*—is not about a ministry organization *per se*, readers can draw parallels between it and ministries that mix evangelism with business.

Now Christian publishers are coming out with books that are increasingly introspective about problems facing society and the church. Some of these are non-fiction works about big ministries like *Prime-Time Preachers* by Jeffrey K. Hadden and Charles E. Swann (published by Addison Wesley) or Eerdmans' *Your Money/Their Ministry* by Edward J. Hales and J. Alan Youngren, a critical study of the \$20-million-a-year religious fundraising industry.

Even Buckingham wrote about the less-than-perfect aspects of Kathryn Kuhlman's highly successful ministry in 1977 in his biography of her life—*Daughter of Destiny*. If some of Miss Kuhlman's followers expected a puff piece they were disappointed.

Buckingham did not pull any punches in analyzing the Kuhlman ministry. However, where the cynic would have stopped with the negative, Buckingham went ahead to point out the tremendous contribution she made to the Kingdom of God in this century.

Thousands of readers applauded the effort as a major contribution to honesty in writing—an oft-missing ingredient in today's biographical works.

When Buckingham writes about his own life as he has in semi-autobiographical books like *Risky Living* (Logos, 1976) and *Where Eagles Soar* (Chosen, 1980), he has both inspired and shocked readers to a new level of personal honesty. His

Continued on page 32

transparency and humor have been used as gentle probes to warn and convict others.*

Buckingham has been privy to the inner workings of many of the super-ministries in America. Of the 30 nonfiction books he has written, more than half are ghost-written testimony books with some of the most successful ministers and ministries in America. Besides this, he has spent much time in most of the Christian TV studios in America, as well as at the large rallies. Much of what he has learned in his backstage research is reflected in *JESUS WORLD*.

He is quick to point out that he believes God has not only raised up many of these ministries, but is blessing them as well. However, he warns, the pinnacle of the temple is dangerously slippery. There is constant danger the super-leader will, for whatever motives, use mammon's means to try to accomplish God's ends.

To portray the dangers inherent in Ministry Bigness, Buckingham uses a literary medium called the "anti-utopian novel" made popular in the first part of

ods now being used in the Kingdom.

At the same time Buckingham chose to use fiction, there is a resurgence of interest in Christian novels—a trend spotted by *Publishers Weekly*, the secular publishing industry's trade journal, in its report of the 1981 Christian Booksellers Association convention.

After years of churning out the old standbys of teaching books, Bible commentaries, theological tomes and celebrity testimony books, it's as if Christian publishers have recently discovered fiction. And, there is a growing feeling that the future may be with the novel.

A year ago Bob Wolgemuth of Word Books told *Publishers Weekly* that acceptance of the more contemporary novels with Christian themes was slow.

"Buyers in the religious marketplace generally purchase books that offer inspiration and/or information," he said. But Wolgemuth and others believe that fiction can impart messages that will inspire, comfort and instruct, *Publishers Weekly* reported.

This year *Publishers Weekly* asked Joe Bayley why he chose fiction for a recently published futuristic novel called *Winterflight* with abortion and euthanasia as its

Chosen Books, publisher of *JESUS WORLD* believe that is changing.

"Twenty years ago our churches were filled with women," said Leonard LeSourd, executive vice-president of Chosen Books (see article on page 41).

"Today you find as many men in the pews as women. We believe the same will be true with men who read books."

The reason, many experts feel, that men are now attending church is the re-emergence of the supernatural in the worship service. Men simply did not come to church because they were not challenged.

The same is true of the novel. Men will read Christian novels when the novels are written in a challenging manner, LeSourd believes.

In the meantime, most of today's Christian novels are written by and about women—to reach the female market. Marjorie Holmes, a roving editor for *Guideposts* has penned several of this nature. Her best selling *Two from Galilee*, a love story of Joseph and Mary, is an example of the woman-to-woman approach.

Like Holmes' novel, most Christian novels are of the historical—or Biblical narrative—genre, reminiscent of Frank G. Slaughter's novels of the early fifties.

In 1973 Tyndale House published Ellen Tralor's *Song of Abraham*. The book has sold 75,000 copies, and was recently released in a mass paperback edition.

Joyce Landorf's recent novel on *Joseph* (Fleming Revell, 1980) is the story of a man in a man's world, written by a well-known woman author. An extensive promotion campaign put on by the publisher has helped sell more than 65,000 copies.

Landorf's earlier novel, *I Came to Love You Late*, an intimate look at Jesus through the eyes of Martha, the sister of Mary and Lazarus, was also well accepted.

Most women novelists are majoring on things which interest women. Earlier this year Revell published Bette Ross's *Song of Deborah*, Chosen Books published Roberta Dorr's *Bathsheba*, which was preceded by the novel *Hagar* by Lois Henderson, published by Christian Herald Books.

Mrs. Henderson also wrote *Lydia* and *Abigail*, novels about women lifted from the pages of the Bible.

Her latest biblical novel—*Ruth*, released in August by Christian Herald Books—is an example of how books of this type are written.

In a full page ad, the publisher gushes: "The book of *Ruth* is one of the shortest of the Old Testament, yet it holds a timeless grasp on the hearts of the faithful.

It is a well-known fact that most Christian readers are women (some polls show that women buy 85 percent of today's Christian books). However, the editors at Chosen Books, publisher of JESUS WORLD believe that is changing.

this century by British writers George Orwell (1984, *Animal Farm*) and Aldous Huxley (*Brave New World*) to warn the world of impending social dangers.

But very few Christian writers have dared venture into that arena—to write correctively of the dangers facing the Kingdom of God.

The anti-utopian novel is a specialized branch of fiction. In it we see Powerful Evil pitted against seemingly Weak Good. It is interesting that Buckingham chose it as the genre to use to enter the world of fiction.

It is also interesting that a charismatic is among the first to break through the veil of niceties which has hamstrung most of today's Christian writers (Joe Bayley and James L. Johnson excepted) to voice a serious criticism of some of the meth-

theme, after writing many non-fiction books?

"Because I felt that people in the Christian community are gradually becoming too passive and accepting about such things as government control over life decisions," Bayley told *Publishers Weekly* "and because I felt the format of a novel might be a more effective way to help Christians face the future."

The problem with novels is obvious. Unless they are extremely well written they cannot compete with the flood of secular novels, many written by highly professional authors. The average Christian will not pay money and take the time to read a poorly written, bland, non-challenging novel—even if it does have some kind of Christian message.

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*Jamie Buckingham often uses humor in his monthly column in *Charisma* entitled "Dry Bones." This month he plants his tongue firmly in his cheek before posing as Solomon's publisher, commenting on the merits of his manuscript entitled *Song of Songs*. Enjoy reading it on page 12.

Mrs. Henderson has filled in the details, filled out the gaps, created a novel that moves and breathes with excitement. This is the story of Ruth as it could have been, and very close to what it must have been. Read *RUTH*—and find courage and hope for living your own faith-centered life!”

Biblical novels aren't the only themes Christian publishers are grasping. Bethany House Publishers from Minneapolis have sold more than 150,000 copies of the first two homespun prairie adventure stories by Janette Oke's—*Love Comes Softly* and its sequel *Love's Enduring Promise*. Her latest book, *Once Upon a Summer*, is the story about a young orphan boy.

Another of Bethany House's books appealing to this new female audience is *Love's Secret Storm*, a novel by Leonora Pruner set in eighteenth century England. The copy on the back cover promises “if you love gothic romances, this story is made-to-order.”

Novels by men are still rare. An exception to this was William Stephens' book about the prophet Elijah, *The Mantle*, published by Tyndale five years ago.

One of the things that set Stephens' book apart from the other biblical narratives was Stephens' qualifications as an archaeologist and editor who personally traced Elijah's every step so vividly described in his narrative. Despite its historical accuracy, however, the book lacked the drama necessary to make it a best-seller and sales quickly languished.

It's still a woman's world when it comes to Christian books.

Exceptions to the women-to-women novels are two recent Catholic novels, *The Clowns of God* by Morris West (Morrow) and *The Cardinal Sins* (Warner Books) by Catholic theologian and columnist, Andrew Greeley. Both have made national best-seller lists.

West's novel is about a fictitious pope in the late 20th century who has a vision that he is the prophet of the Parousia—the Second Coming. But when he tries to share his vision the conservative Vatican hierarchy forces him into exile in a monastery. West is an artful storyteller and moves his hero from one crisis to another before he meets his bizarre fate.

Andrew Greeley, on the other hand, seems to be striving to become the Harold Robbins of the Vatican. The cover sets the stage. Beneath the superimposed title is a gorgeous female back—naked. The lower portion, halfway down the buttocks, is swathed in unmistakable sacred crimson of a Roman Catholic cardinal.

Despite bad reviews, the book is selling well—primarily because Greeley is

Continued on page 35

JESUS WORLD

Continued from page 33

stumping the nation on TV talk shows, answering such questions as "If you're a priest, how do you know so much about sex?"

Greeley has a second, similar novel in the works—and has sold it with a bare five-page outline. It all probes the saying in secular publishing the mixture of sex and sacred sells books.

This is the first fictional work of Greeley who is described on the bookjacket as "one of the ten most influential Christian thinkers in the world." It is filled with the names of real Catholic leaders, but Greeley, in a long author's note, denies the main character is actually modeled—as many reviewers have suggested—after the current and often controversial Archbishop of Chicago, John Cardinal Cody. Interestingly, Cody was in the headlines in early September after Chicago newspaper reports he had diverted Church monies to a woman friend.

Thus Greeley employs an old, but successful formula for selling books: "Write a novel based on real lives, then deny the obvious parallels."

Jamie Buckingham denies that he was writing about any specific real-life evangelist when he created his fictitious Bert Jessup, the evangelist who yearns to win the world to Jesus Christ and masterminds the building of JESUS WORLD to help accomplish that end. Yet as the story progresses, the reader cannot help but substitute the names of many of today's super-preachers for that of Bert Jessup. Especially is this true when Jessup gradually finds himself at the mercy of a purpose—an evil purpose—over which he has no control.

Buckingham, by the way, specifically endorses Billy Graham so the reader will not be tempted to include the famous evangelist in his list of any possible "fits" for the character of Jessup.

To add to its real-life-is-stranger-than-fiction obvious parallels, *JESUS WORLD* is set in Buckingham's own Central Florida. He was born and reared in tiny Vero Beach on Florida's Central East Coast. And, he has pastored at Melbourne, Florida, 60 miles east of the spot Walt Disney chose to create his Magic Kingdom where there were once only orange groves, swamps and pastureland.

Buckingham has watched from Melbourne as Central Florida and especially Orlando has become a boom-town where anything can happen and usually does. The Disney Magic, and the millions of dollars drew Sea World, Circus World and other major tourist attractions. Ob-

viously JESUS WORLD was a logical next step.

Ironically, there have been several attempts to create a huge Christian entertainment complex that would capitalize on 12 million tourists—many of them born-again Christians—who visit Central Florida every year.

Several years ago one couple, perporting to have inherited millions of dollars from an uncle (money they hadn't received yet) got a group of Central Floridians excited about a Christian entertainment complex that "God had shown them in a vision." When it became obvious there was no inherited fortune and that the couple was merely using the story to sponge off people, the couple disappeared and along with it their vision.

"In the novel Joe Panther plays the role of the suffering messiah, continually questioning Jessup's methods. As the giant theme park goes up near Walt Disney World—complete with talking robots, that act out Bible stories, overhead satellites and electronically produced miracles, Panther asks: 'Can anyone improve on the methods of Jesus?'"

Others have proposed religious theme parks. But none have gotten off the ground.

Interestingly, after Buckingham finished the first draft early this year, he became aware of a group circulating a prospectus to get investors for just such a theme park called "Jerusalem USA"—designed to be built near Orlando to offer wholesome entertainment with a Christian Theme.

Sensing what he felt was "prophetic urgency," he hurried to finish the novel so it would come out before the theme park became a reality. He also made sure that his novel portrayed the theme park as a good idea when it started. It was only after the evangelist Jessup became obsessed with Bigness and Money that JESUS WORLD ran into problems, Buckingham notes.

Buckingham borrows from his inti-

mate knowledge and love for Florida when he writes. As he describes the Florida landscape, an experienced tourist will not only identify landmarks and highways, but catch the flavor of the tropical state as well.

He also borrows from real-life for his characters, too. Joe Panther "part Seminole Indian, part Greek scholar," is the book's hero. He runs a tiny discipleship training center next to Jessup's extravaganza. Panther uses hard work on a cowboy-style ranch as a method for getting Americans caught up in the materialistic rat race to slow down enough to be disciplined in the things of the Lord.

This is the exact technique used by Buckingham's close friend Mickey Evans who runs the Dunklin Memorial Camp near Lake Okeechobee, 150 miles south of Walt Disney World. Evans disciples ex-alcoholics who come to his ranch to put their lives together. (Buckingham, by the way, dedicated *JESUS WORLD* to Evans.)

In the novel Joe Panther plays the role of the suffering messiah, continually questioning Jessup's methods. As the giant theme park goes up near Walt Disney World—complete with talking robots, that act out Bible stories, overhead satellites and electronically produced miracles, Panther asks: "Can anyone improve on the methods of Jesus?"

It is in Panther's character that Buckingham sees himself.

Panther is a man who is tough enough to run a rough-and-tumble ranch, skilled enough to track an injured animal through the woods, yet scholarly enough to lead an evening Bible study that delves into the meanings of original Greek words in the Scripture.

Like his creator, Panther once had a nationwide evangelistic ministry—a ministry he laid down so he could give personal spiritual oversight to a small group of men.

Panther is also strong enough to confront the most powerful with warnings of God's judgment. He is no two-bit Indian preacher. He is one of the few who aren't intimidated by Jessup.

JESUS WORLD begins with Bert Jessup on a yacht in the Bahamas belonging to Simon Pedersen (pun intended), a wealthy president of Pedersen Enterprises. For years Pedersen has used his yacht to witness to wealthy people (and some not so wealthy) in a personal "fishers of men" ministry. He has also been the money behind Bert Jessup's evangelistic ministry.

Now Jessup presents his wealthy patron with a dream: to build a giant theme park *a la* Walt Disney World, "so big, so

Continued on page 37

JESUS WORLD

Continued from page 35

electrifying, so exciting that nobody on earth will miss it."

The inspiration for the park came through a vision as Jessup was comparing his small ministry with nearby Walt Disney World. The vision, he tells Pedersen, was immediately confirmed by Scripture: "make to yourself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness" (Luke 16:9).

Unfortunately Pedersen is not enough the Bible scholar to realize the words have been taken out of context — and mean just the opposite of what the evangelist suggests.

"Why should Walt Disney be more attractive than Jesus Christ?" Jessup asks, echoing a question thousands of preachers have asked from pulpits all over the nation. "Why is it you can pick up a phone book and find any item you want in the yellow pages — except salvation?"

Interestingly, it was while Buckingham was vacationing on a yacht in the Bahamas with his cowboy friend, Mickey Evans, that he came up with the idea for *JESUS WORLD*.

"I was working early one morning while we were at anchor at West End with the plot running through my mind," he said. "I crawled on the fore deck and by the time the sun had come up, had the entire plot scribbled in a note pad."

In his story, Pedersen, harboring reservations about Jessup's grandiose scheme,

finally gives in and donated the land for the theme park (reserving space for Joe Panther's Koinonia Ranch discipleship center next door.)

Despite the suicide of Pedersen's alcoholic wife because she feels he is ignoring her in favor of spreading the Gospel, and the angry defection of his son from the family business, Pedersen agrees to put his vast resources behind the park.

What follows is a classic example of a small-time preacher with a dream who gradually shifts from spiritual to material means to fulfill his goals.

JESUS WORLD goes up, despite the subtle objections of Joe Panther. His warnings to his old friend, Pedersen, that this is a modern-day Tower of Babel, fall on deaf ears. After all, how can you argue with success?

Panther warns that even though the Children of Israel had manna every morning, they were still out of the will of God — and doomed to wonder until they die. "You cannot equate material success with God's blessing" he states.

Yet Jessup is caught up with excitement of the growth, publicity and materialism of the park's success. To him, outward success is a sure sign of God's blessing.

Panther's words are unheeded until the frightening climax of the story when the robots seem to actually take control of the park, leaving even the technicians helpless before them.

It is only after this frightening finish that Simon Pedersen realizes he must make a decision: to stay with the flash JE-

SUS WORLD which continues on, more prosperous than ever after the infusion of Arab money, or to withdraw to his first love, the one-on-one ministry he had in the beginning.

Leonard LeSourd,* executive vice-president of Chosen Books, worked as Buckingham's personal editor on *JESUS WORLD*. It was LeSourd who helped shape the plot and warned against being so pointed that the characters would be recognizable.

Even with LeSourd's editing, however, Buckingham's veiled insurgence still comes through in the novel as Bert Jessup jostles with Joe Panther, constantly warning him of the dangers of materialism and of the recreation of another Tower of Babel.

The problem, as Buckingham sees it, is not just the danger of using the world's methods to accomplish spiritual goals, but the impersonalization which always accompanies automation.

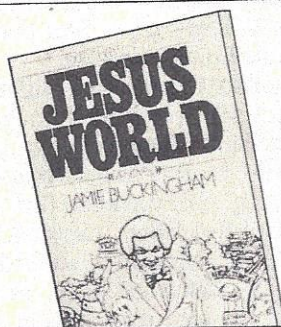
"Computers are great tools," he says. "The danger lies in allowing people to look to them for answers."

Is it possible, in this age of mass communications, flashy electronic gadgets, and ministries that take in millions of dollars a week through television offerings, to lead people back to the simple methods of Jesus?

Can one novel written about a fictitious ministry with real-life temptations make any difference?

We can only hope it does. <

*Read Leonard LeSourd's article on page 41 in which he tells how fiction can be used to excite the soul and point people back to God.



Excerpt from *JESUS WORLD* By Jamie Buckingham

It was Palm Sunday at Jesus World. The Crucifixion sequence was to begin at 11:00 A.M. Sunday had become the busiest day of the week with an average of 60,000 people in attendance. One Sunday in November it had outdrawn both the Tampa Bay Bucs and the Miami Dolphins professional football teams. But it was the Easter period beginning the week before on Palm Sunday that the biggest crowds arrived. By ten o'clock already there were 65,000 people in the park. It was to be a record-breaking day.

There had been growing complaints

from the churches in Central Florida, however, especially since Jesus World had become a legal church. Jessup had promised the pastors, who enthusiastically supported him in the beginning, that Jesus World would "draw people like flies" to the local churches. Many churches had built larger buildings to accommodate the anticipated crowds. The people had come, all right, but not to the churches. Instead they came by the millions to Jesus World. They came, and they brought their money. Again, not to the

Excerpted by permission from *JESUS WORLD*, to be released in November by Chosen Books, Lincoln, VA. © 1981 by Jamie Buckingham.

churches but to Jesus World. The average family, reported *U.S. News and World Report*, spent almost \$3,000 for a three-day visit to Jesus World. And that did not include the hotel fees, nor contributions which were now received on a daily schedule in the Apostles' Auditoriums. Nor did it include the annual membership fee ("contribution" was the legal term, used to satisfy the IRS) which only recently had been increased to \$1,500 a year — with no complaints from the partners.

Earlier that Sunday morning Joe Panther had made a special visit to see Bert Jessup in his office on the 8th floor of Herod's Palace. Bert Jessup was eating breakfast at his desk. Alone. He knew he would be needed in the park, so he was getting an early start. Panther's visit was a surprise.

Joe was angry. Four of his men had been hired away from him by Jesus World. All were ranch hands — rodeo riders. Over the last year Jessup had expanded his

Continued on next page

Christian fiction

Continued from page 37

concept, which originally limited the attractions at Jesus World to biblical events. There was a hot air balloon attraction now, so pilgrims could float over Jesus World and see it from a vantage point in the sky. There was a steel drum orchestra from the Bahamas, "Ju-Jitsu for Jesus" entertainers from the Orient, and the world famous "Flying Waldos" trapeze act—"see death-defying faith in action." Now from the heart of Florida's ranch land, a Jesus World Rodeo every Sunday night—complete with the biggest names in country music from Nashville. It was this event that had lured the men from Koinonia Ranch.

"How can you say you are a church?" Panther demanded, struggling to control his temper. "The word 'church' in the Greek is *ekklesia*—the 'called out ones.' It signifies a community, a fellowship, a family of people who do things together."

"We are a family, Panther," Jessup said calmly. "We have members all over the world."

"That's not a church," Panther grunted. "There is a place for the legitimate ministries which support, supplement, and assist the local church. These are Christian universities, evangelistic organizations, even TV ministries. But you are different. You are sucking the life from churches by taking people, and their money, and using them as the Egyptians used the Jews as their slaves. You're not a parachurch, you're a surrogate church—taking that which belongs to the Body of Christ and using it for your own ends."

"What do you want me to do, Panther?" Jessup asked. "Refuse to take the money when people actually thrust it at us?"

"Should a man refuse favors from another man's wife, even if she thrusts herself upon him?"

"Are you saying I am a spiritual adulterer?" Jessup snapped, pushing back his breakfast tray and wiping his mouth with an Irish linen napkin.

"That's your terminology, not mine," Panther said, his black eyes smoldering.

"Listen, Panther, people go where they are fed. They give their money where they are fed. The churches aren't feeding the people; we are. It's as simple as that."

"Not so," Joe said, his voice rising. "Offer a child cotton candy or a bowl of health food and he'll choose the candy every time. That's all you are giving these people—cotton candy. It looks real, it tastes sweet, but it melts to nothing. There is nothing substantial about this entire program. And in the end it will rot their teeth, give them diabetes, and prevent

them from wanting real nourishment."

"You always play the intellectual role and it makes me weary," Jessup said, leaning forward. "Know what you are, Panther? You're a horse and buggy man—or should I say pony and blanket man—in a jet age. If you were in charge of the Lord's work on this earth, you'd set it back 200 years."

"Wrong," Joe said. "I'd set it back 2,000 years."

Panther fought to stay in control. He was aware of how out of place his scuffed cowboy boots looked against the deep red pile of the carpet. He really didn't want to fight Jessup. He wanted to believe Jessup was not an evil man, just a misguided one. But how can you convince a man against his will? The night before, he had spent an entire hour on his knees in his little office at the ranch, praying the Lord would give him wisdom when he confronted Jessup. Yet all he had done was accuse him.

"I'm not here pleading the cause of the local churches," Joe said finally. "Most of them are as suspicious of me as they are of you. I'm simply saying God has not given up on the church; even though most of them have become clubs rather than places of true relationship. Granted, the church may seem dead, but the Holy Spirit is still in the business of resurrecting the Body of Christ. Nor am I opposed to electronics, to TV, to satellites, the media, even a Jesus circus such as you have—but for Christ's sake, do not make it into a god. Do not allow this modern Baal to rise above the people, enticing them to bow before it, to bring it tithes, for eventually it will do as Baal always does—demand human sacrifice."

"Are you afraid the first blood might be yours?" Jessup asked, smiling slightly.

"You drew blood from me when you stole my men," Panther said, feeling the anger returning. "Did you know that last week an anguished father, carrying his eight-month-old son with a waterhead and a horribly deformed body, broke weeping past the security guards in the 'Upper Room' and laid his baby on the Last Supper table before your robot Jesus, crying, 'Master, heal my child!'"

Jessup leaned back, propping his expensive shoes on the top of his mahogany desk. "You don't know the half of it. For weeks people have actually been healed by reaching over the ropes and touching my robots, Peter and John, at the Gate Beautiful where they reenact the healing of the man crippled from birth. And yesterday an Arab princess, blind in one eye, said she could see light after being at the Pool of Bethesda. You can't argue with those results, Panther. Especially when

Continued on page 40

Christian fiction

Continued from page 38

the princess got her father to give Jesus World two million dollars."

"I do not deny miracles," Panther said his voice now quivering. "God blesses faith wherever He finds it. At Lourdes. At a tent meeting. In a home group. Even in Jesus World. But you are perpetrating a false gospel. You are the reemergence of Baal. You are Nimrod, raising a Tower of Babel that is bringing great confusion to the Kingdom. God will continue to bless His people. But woe to the false shepherd who feeds plastic to hungry sheep."

"I'm fed up with your accusations, Panther." Jessup swung his feet off his desk and stood up, his neck veins pulsating. "You tell me I am Baal, you call me Nimrod, you criticize me for putting on a rodeo that draws more on one Saturday night than all your rodeos have drawn in 20 years put together. Get lost, Panther. Go back to your cows and cowboys."

As Panther stamped out of his office, Bert Jessup stared after him morosely. The cowboy was a constant burr in his side. An Indian intellectual—what a combination! He knew that Panther would be back, madder than ever. During the night Jessup had ordered the lake, where Koinonia Ranch raised their catfish, drained. He had discovered it was partially on Jesus World property. All he had done was drain his half, intending to fill it in for additional parking. But when Panther discovered it, there would be another storm. So let it blow. He had much more important things to deal with.

Bert arose and paced the room. The financial problems were serious. Much worse than Pedersen knew. There was something almost diabolical working against him. The trouble seemed to center on Golem, the robot who checked the identification of the partners. It had on regular occasions refused entrance to some of their largest supporters. It was as if the robot were deliberately trying to sabotage contributions—trying to make it harder for Jesus World to receive money. This was the last thing he needed—a mechanical despot angering his most faithful contributors.

There was a large delegation coming that morning from Rhode Island, including five men who were giving a million dollars each—on an annual basis. It would be just like Golem to refuse them entrance.

Then there was the early morning call from Simon requesting a meeting with him that very morning. Simon had seemed upset. Though beautiful outside, the weather inside Jesus World was stormy. ⇨