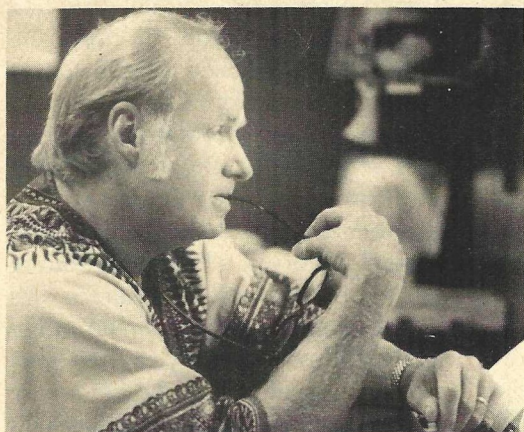


HEART OF THE ISSUE



Jamie Buckingham, Melbourne, Florida: The writings, frequent national television appearances and speaking at conferences across the world have made the name of Jamie Buckingham a household word in many Christian circles.

Respected as a significant leader in the charismatic renewal, this former Southern Baptist pastor continues as the spiritual overseer of the Tabernacle Church in Melbourne, Fla.—a church making radical commitment to New Testament norms of church life and order.

Kissing Frogs

by Jamie Buckingham

Perhaps my friend the prophet, Bruce Morgan, is right when he says: "The trouble with Christians is no one wants to kill them any more."

Every place the Apostle Paul went there was a revival or a riot. Today's seminaries teach a lot of good things, but few of them teach pastors how to react when rioted against—especially if the pastor is the instigator. Maybe such things can't be taught, and must be caught instead. But very few church leaders seem interested these days in getting spit on.

Mike Evans, founder of the B'nai Yeshua Center on Long Island, sponsors a bi-annual conference for Messianic Jews called *Shechinah*. Last year's conference was to feature Ruth Stapleton, sister of President Jimmy Carter, as the keynote speaker. The significance of her appearance and the recognition it would have provided for the evangelistic effort among Jews, was too much to go unchallenged. Powerful organizations such as the American Jewish Committee and the National Council of Churches combined to exert great pressure—and forced her to cancel at the last minute.

Badly discouraged, Mike Evans

called me at my home in Florida, wondering if he should call off the conference. I encouraged him to examine his motives. Maybe God wanted to send a prophet instead of a princess.

Mike agreed, and invited me.

I accepted—and got spit on.

There were about 1,500 present that opening night—most of them Messianic Jews, some of them former rabbis. About ten minutes into my message twenty militant young demonstrators jumped to their feet and stormed the platform, shouting slogans like "Death to Jews for Jesus." All were members of the Jewish Defense League, led by Howard Barbanel, the National Student Coordinator.

It was a nasty scene. They took over the platform and threatened to cut the microphone wires if not allowed to speak. The police were there but Mike wisely refused to let them arrest the demonstrators. The more the JDL youth shouted hate and death slogans, the more the people in the audience responded by shouting "We love you!" When the demonstrators began singing a lively Jewish song, the audience joined in, clapping and dancing the

hora. They then went on to sing another six stanzas of the same song which the demonstrators didn't know. They had obviously hoped to be handcuffed and dragged bleeding from the stage while the news photographers and TV cameras (which had appeared mysteriously out of the night) snapped their pictures. But none of this happened. Finally Mike agreed to let the leader speak for five minutes if he would then leave peacefully. Fortunately his threats were captured on the still running tape recorder.

"This house of slime, this house of profanity will never be allowed to exist. This is just the beginning of the JDL campaign to eradicate the bastard movement. We consider you whores and traitors to your people. This is just the beginning. The burning of this building will be the end."

The group then marched off stage, shaking their fists—but not before someone spit on me, the only Goya on the platform.

The next morning the New York Times carried the story, along with the accusation from a leader that all those people at B'nai Yeshua had been paid \$10.00 a person to love—for no one loves without being paid for it.

He was closer to the truth than he suspected.

It's the business of the church to love—even when you get spit on.

Ironically, one of the classic statements on love (even though the word is never mentioned) was written by the German pastor, Martin Niemöller, one of the outstanding Protestant scholars in Europe during World War II. In writing about the political and religious persecution of the Jews in Nazi Germany, Niemöller stated:

"In Germany, the Nazis came for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the Jews and I didn't speak up because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the Trade Unionists and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the Catholics and I was a Protestant so I didn't speak up. Then they came for me—but by that time there was no one to speak up for anyone."

We are not only our brother's

keeper, we are our brother's lover—even when he spits on us.

Three weeks later I was speaking at Gerald Derstine's beautiful Christian Retreat in Bradenton, Florida. The second night I poked a little fun at some of Christendom's sacred cows—the idols we set up. After the service I was standing at the front of the auditorium shaking hands with a number of people who gathered around. There was a lot of love flowing when suddenly I was face to face with a stocky, serious-faced woman in her early fifties. Her grayish hair was pulled back and tied tightly in a bun. She wore no make-up and her face was hard, her eyes flashing anger.

"You are a servant of the devil," she said loudly.

Suddenly everything was deathly still. She continued, "How dare you make fun of the cross around my neck and the dove on my license plate. Jesus died on this cross. God sent that dove to bring his Holy Spirit."

I should have kept my mouth shut. "Lady, Jesus didn't die on that cross. That cross is made of gold and you bought it from some money changer in the temple."

It was then she spit on me. A great big spit which clung briefly to the lapel of my coat and then dribbled down toward my shoe.

"Why don't you give us the Word instead of all this garbage?" she sneered, and then stalked off in the direction of Gerald who was standing in the back of the auditorium. I hoped, for his sake, she was out of spit.

"Now what are you supposed to do?" a sympathetic woman asked as she handed me a Kleenex.

"I'm supposed to wait until she stops croaking," I said seriously. "Then I'll go up and kiss her. Who knows, perhaps she'll turn into a princess."

Everyone laughed and the fellowship was restored. But it's more than a laughing matter. The story of the handsome prince who came under the spell of the wicked witch and was turned into a frog—redeemable only through a kiss, is far more spiritual truth than fairy tale. There are a lot of froggy people in this world, not a few of whom are in the church. The only way they can be transformed is for someone who has a lot to lose—like a

pastor—to see the potential beneath their frogginess and kiss them into their inheritance.

But in kissing frogs the pastor makes himself vulnerable. There is always the danger the frog will spit on you—or even worse. It may be the frog is not a handsome prince at all, but just a frog keeping a tally sheet of suckers.

Yet we must keep on bending, stooping, kissing, and hoping. Sometimes it's the frog himself who objects. "I'm poison. Kiss me and you'll die too." Or perhaps he's a liberated frog who says, "I don't want to be a prince. I want self-fulfillment as a reptile." Other times the pressure comes from those around us who are too dignified to stoop and kiss, and are threatened by our serving posture. But someone must run the risk, for there is no other way this ugly, froggy old earth will be redeemed.

Under the warts is the image of God. It has been covered by sin and hardened, often, by those who came in the name of the church with whips rather than the balm of Gilead. But the potential of kingship remains, and can be released only through someone willing to bend, stoop and kiss.

Our life pattern is Jesus, who was the greatest frog-kisser of all. He gave up his exalted place in heaven to walk among us as a servant, to wash dirty feet, receive our spit and our spears, and in a final act of supreme grace to send his Holy Spirit to fill the very ones who rejected him so they could carry on the work he began—kissing frogs.

The young JDL leader said it's unnatural to love. He's right. Only those whose lives are controlled by another spirit will do such foolish things as turn the other cheek, walk the second mile, join an enemy in song (and teach him an extra stanza or two) and stoop to kiss frogs.

"Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were yet spitting on him, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:7-8 NIV/JB).

That's the ultimate in kissing frogs.

Can men of God, despite pride and rigidity, do less?

