

This Pastor Has a

By **GEORGE KORDA**
TODAY Staff Writer

This one-time Baptist preacher's first book has sold more than seven million copies. He calls himself a "charismatic," but says the meaning of the term has been distorted. He's still pastors a church, but it has no formal membership, and people of all Christian faiths gather there to worship.

Jamie Buckingham of Melbourne is probably one of the best-known Christian authors in the world today.

But Buckingham, 45, started writing only nine years ago, the same time he left the full-time ministry over what he termed "disillusionment with churches and the concept of institutionalized Christianity."

He's since written 25 books. One of them, "Run Baby Run," which Buckingham calls a sequel to David Wilkerson's book "The Cross and the Switchblade," has sold more than seven million copies, he said.

Two other works, "Tramp for the Lord," a book about Corrie Ten Boom, a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp, and

"Daughter of Destiny," about female preacher Kathryn Kuhlman, have sold 250,000 and 100,000 copies, respectively, in hard-back.

Buckingham is now "pastor" of the Melbourne Tabernacle church, but he calls himself a figurehead there. He is not on salary from the church, which has a membership that he says "encompasses most denominations in the community — Catholic, Episcopalian, Baptist — the whole works.

"My position is spiritual overseer," he said. "On any given Sunday we'll have about 1,000 people in attendance. Our meetings are more like rallies than church services. That's why people come, because they like the freedom."

Buckingham, born and raised in Vero Beach, was pastor of the Harbor City Baptist Church in Melbourne from 1965 until 1967. In 1967 divisions within the church's congregation caused it to split, he said.

A group that left the church decided to form the Tabernacle Baptist Church. Buckingham became its first pastor. The church

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was booted out of the Brevard Baptist Association in 1970 after it decided to drop the word Baptist from its name.

It was after the split, while he was researching "Run Baby Run," that he Buckingham says he had a "personal experience with the Holy Spirit.

"It basically made Christ real," he said. "The Bible refers to it as being 'filled with the Holy Spirit.' Somehow I had missed this."

He said that the same time he underwent this experience the small Tabernacle church began to grow, and he received the "gift" of writing. "I had nothing published until after this experience," he said.

Buckingham has become widely-known as a "charismatic" Christian. One controversial aspect of the charismatic movement has been the insistence among some charismatics that a person is not filled with the Holy Spirit until he "speaks in tongues," (believed to be a divinely-inspired prayer language).

"But this is not a scriptural position and it's not what I believe," Buckingham

said. "I did not speak in tongues at first. It was not part of my initial experience, though I do now. It depends on a person's need, and there is no structure or form to how God answers a person's need.

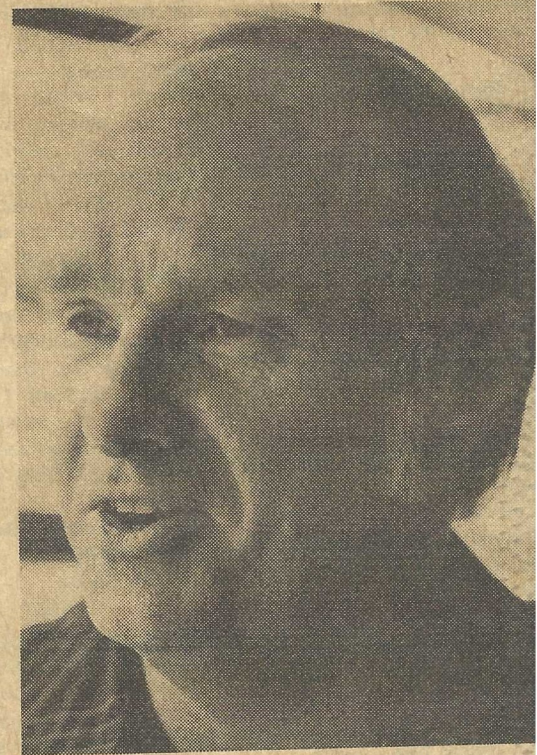
"It's not that tongues, healing, prophecy and other gifts of God aren't important," he said, "but none are as important as a personal relationship with God."

He said that a charismatic Christian is one who employs one or more gifts of the Holy Spirit in their ministry, and that speaking in tongues is not absolutely necessary.

Buckingham claims that a Christian who has not been "baptized in the Holy Spirit" is "powerless."

"He is like a soldier without a gun. He's in the army, but he's not equipped," he said.

"The church has become very structured," he said. "And that has taken away the power of Christianity and turned it into a form.



JAMIE BUCKINGHAM
... first book sold seven million copies