

# It's a holy mess

## Local ministers deplore the saga of Jim and Tammy Bakker

By ALECIA HOLLAND  
Staff Writer

The problems of Jim and Tammy Bakker and the battle over the PTL Club have had a negative impact on the image of televangelism. According to local ministers, the controversy has weakened the credibility of televangelists — but it may benefit local churches.

"I'm not just amazed, I'm abhorrent!" said Manuel Wortman, the United Methodist Campus Minister, when asked about the Bakker/Falwell televangelist controversy. "Those of us in the mainstream are amazed at the amount of money that televange-

lists bring in and expend on salaries and houses. Most of us have found that they are doing just what they have now been proved to have been doing. If we haven't said 'see, I told you so' already, we have felt that."

Robert Seymour, the minister of Olin T. Binkley, said, "I haven't had any confidence in this kind of ministry (televangelism) for a long time. It is already damaging to the televangelist movement, but people have short memories and in a few years it will be ancient history."

James O. Abrahamson, the pastor of the Chapel Hill Bible Church, said, "It is better that this

controversy, as ugly and embarrassing as it has been, be exposed now than continue. Many people have suspected what is going on for a long time."

Pastor Evans of the United Christian Fellowship of Chapel Hill said he was surprised that people have been so alarmed that an evangelist could make a mistake. "It is a shame that this controversy has been dealt with publicly and not privately by the church."

Both Evans and Abrahamson's ministries are evangelical, but neither is directly related to the televangelist movement. Neither Seymour's nor Wortman's minis-

try is associated with the evangelist movement.


Abrahamson, Seymour and Wortman believe that televangelism's lack of credibility may benefit local and community churches. Wortman believes this will not affect most mainstream churches because most of their finances come from local church members. However, this could go in favor of local churches because there is public accountability of funds, or accountability to those who contribute, he said.

"Prosperity Christianity is not what I consider Christianity to be. In my way of thinking, televangelism is not the way the church

should be. Televangelism is a form of religious entertainment — it's like Johnny Carson with a religious host. The church as I understand it is a community of faith, with a focus on people being present as people," Wortman said.

"My fear is that so many of the contributors are the poor, the emotionally unstable and the elderly, who, for whatever reason, send money without adequately informed judgments," Wortman said. "There are some people who are ideologically bound by a belief pattern that you are supposed to send money to get into heaven."

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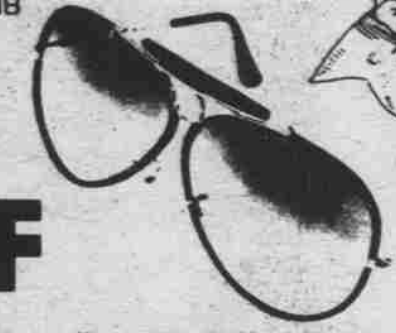
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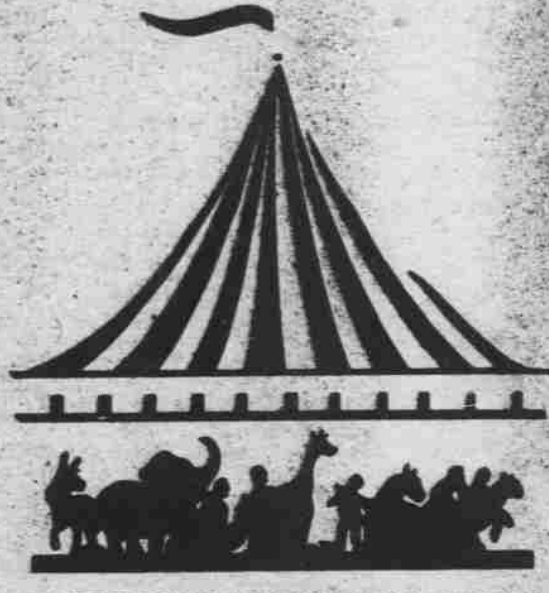
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