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UNIVERSAL CHURCH OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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UNIVERSAL CHURCH OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

My first glimpse of the *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God -- UCKG) came in 1988. We had recently arrived in Brazil as missionaries, and this nominally “evangelical” church had rented a large warehouse near our home in our middle-class neighborhood. Though this particular church never seemed to attract a large crowd, others of its kind were experiencing phenomenal growth around Brazil. Its doors were always open, and whatever went on inside was usually very loud and strange with people yelling, crying, and speaking in what was definitely not Portuguese. When this church closed its doors after a few months, word around the neighborhood was that the pastor had not been able to meet the financial goals set by the denominational leaders.

My next glimpse of the UCKG was in 1989 when the church promoted a crusade in Rio de Janeiro. One of the largest sports stadiums in the world, the *Maracanã*, was packed to overflowing with spectators who came to watch the “dual between God and Satan,” as pastors from the UCKG exorcised demons from the thousands who stood in line for this spiritual experience. As we watched this event broadcast over national news, we could see church workers collecting offerings from the multitudes and carrying gunny sacks full of cash from the platform to nearby armored vehicles.

Since then the UCKG has expanded rapidly into all corners of Brazil, making its health and wealth gospel and power evangelism synonymous to the “evangelical” faith in the minds of many Brazilians. I have personally dealt with several disillusioned former members who have left the UCKG, not having received the promised benefits in exchange for the substantial offerings which they were encouraged to give to God as a testimony of their faith.

Because the UCKG is a phenomenon which cannot be ignored by any missionary who plans to minister in Brazil, I have attempted to research the past, principles, practices, and problems of this church, which is a significant player in the third wave of Pentecostalism.

Surprisingly, very little has been published about the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. The only books I found on the church is the auto-biography of the church's founder, Edir Macedo, and a few books written by former pastors who left the church; the latter make astonishing accusations of vice, corruption, and greed among the church leadership. An internet search reveals a church repeatedly maligned by disgruntled former pastors and deceived parishioners. On the other hand, UCKG has attractive web pages presenting its ministries in various nations. Interestingly, the church presents itself differently in each nation, at times even changing its doctrinal statement. Yet the UCKG thrives today as one of the fastest-growing, wealthiest churches in the world. It now boasts 9,600 pastors and 4,700 temples in 172 different countries. In Brazil alone it claims to have eight million members.¹ For lack of more substantial sources, I have had to rely heavily on newspaper reports, magazine articles, and the internet for my research on the UCKG. These sources do present a wealth of data, much of which presents the UCKG as a fraud, but some of which presents it as God's answer to man's problems.

In 2003, Martin Kaste, reporting for National Public Radio, said the following:

“The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God is an all-Brazilian success story. Less than 30 years after it was founded in a Rio funeral home, it has grown into an empire. It has millions of members, a national TV network and churches throughout Latin America, Africa, Europe and even the United States.”²

For anybody who has even the smallest knowledge about the UCKG, it is difficult to remain emotionally neutral towards it. And it is impossible to ignore, because with its impressive growth, it very well might be the next church to move into your neighborhood.

II. PAST

Edir Macedo was born in 1945 into what at the time was a very typical impoverished Brazilian family. His aunt remembers that out of 33 pregnancies, her sister delivered fifteen live babies; and of these only seven survived childhood. With these odds of survival, Macedo's first "miracle" was merely making it to adulthood.³

At the age of seventeen, Macedo took a low-level job working for the State Lottery, a job which he quit fifteen years later in order to establish the UCKG church. Though he was a Roman Catholic by birth and family tradition, at the age of seventeen he joined a spiritist cult called Umbanda, a form of Afro-Brazilian Spiritism similar to the voodoo in Haiti.⁴ It is quite common for Brazilians to mix Catholicism and Spiritism, creating a syncretistic faith. Operation World describes it this way:

"Not only is Brazil the largest Catholic country, but also the largest spiritist country in the world.... A majority of Brazilians are involved [in spiritism] – most still claiming to be Christian."⁵

In 1965 Macedo was converted during revival meetings held by Bishop Robert McAlister, a Canadian missionary in the Pentecostal tradition who had founded the *Igreja Vida Nova* (New Life Church) in Brazil. Macedo remained in McAlister's church for ten years but eventually left, accusing the church of elitism. From there he joined the *Casa da Bênção* (Blessing House), where he was encouraged to start his own religious movement, which he did in 1977.⁶ Macedo began holding services in parks and other public places "to reach out to the needy, less privileged people who were often excluded by established religions".⁷ Due to the popularity of his services, he soon opened his first church in his native city, Rio de Janeiro, renting an abandoned furniture factory, according to the official church web site in Brazil.⁸ Interestingly, the American UCKG web site says that this first church rented a funeral parlor.⁹

This is just one of many conflicting stories in the reported history of the UCKG. What we do know is that from this beginning the UCKG has grown into a global religious empire, all under the watchful micro-management of its founder Edir Macedo.

Macedo, the self-proclaimed head bishop, or pope, of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, is revered by the millions who flock to the UCKG temples around the world. Evidence of this respect, almost to the point of veneration, is seen in the way his pastors imitate his preaching style, gestures, dress, and even his accent. To mention some comical examples, Macedo grew up in Rio de Janeiro where the local accent adds a strange guttural roll to the “r”. His pastors will mimic this accent, though they may come from other parts of Brazil where this accent is not known. Again, Macedo has underdeveloped fingers due to a congenital defect. As a result he produces some very unique hand gestures while he preaches. These same gestures are faithfully reproduced by his pastors, even though they have perfectly normal fingers.¹⁰

The UCKG could be seen as the “Prosperity Gospel gone bad,” manipulated for the benefit of unscrupulous pastors. Using the Prosperity Gospel as a platform, Macedo adeptly incorporated the evangelistic fervor, emphasis on the Holy Spirit, and healing from the Pentecostal movement, mystic and financial practices common to the Afro-Brazilian spiritism, and a hierarchical structure similar to that of the Roman Catholic Church.¹¹ All of this, with his incredible business savvy, has produced today’s Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. Besides the thousands of temples around the world, the UCKG boasts ownership of television and radio networks, a university, and even a strong representation in Brazil’s congress and other key government positions.

Cardinal Lorscheider, one of Brazil’s most respected Catholic archbishops, expressed great concern: “The growth of the Universal Church is worrisome because it is

exploiting the faith of the least-informed individuals.” Caio Fábio, President of the Brazilian Evangelical Association agrees: “He [Macedo] wants to establish a Macedonian theocracy where he will be the Khomeini of the nation.”¹²

The UCKG planted its first church on foreign soil in New York City. There is some doubt as to the exact year because of another variance in its historical accounts. The church’s Brazilian web site says the first church in America was established in 1980. The American web site says that it was established in 1986. Nevertheless, the UCKG has seen substantial growth, mostly among immigrant communities of the United States. It has also made serious inroads onto the religious scene in Great Britain, South Africa, Mexico, Portugal and France, to name just a few nations where it exists.¹³ Normally it moves into a community by buying an old theater or church building and investing heavily in local radio and television broadcasts. Some examples of these include a theater on Broadway in New York City, the former St. Mary Star of the Sea Parish in Boston, and The Astoria theater in London.

Besides the thousands of temples and millions of followers, under Macedo’s direction the UCKG has built up an incredible financial empire. In December of 2007 the *Folha*, a reputable daily newspaper in São Paulo, published an investigative journal article titled, “The Universal Church Turns Thirty with a Business Empire.” According to the article, among the acquisitions of the church in Brazil alone were twenty three television stations, forty radio stations, two major daily newspapers, a real estate agency, a health insurance company, and an airline. This is remarkable for a church with a short history of only thirty years.¹⁴

III. PRINCIPLES

As for the doctrines of the UCKG, it is only fair to begin with what the church has published. Most modern-day churches do not declare their doctrinal positions, including the *Vida Nova* and *Casa da Benção* churches where Macedo was converted and discipled. The UCKG, however, gives a prominent place to what it believes on each of its web pages.

A problem is discovered when visiting the different web sites of the UCKG in different countries. The doctrinal statements are not the same. One might expect variants among churches from a denomination that values the autonomy of the local church; but this is certainly not the case with the UCKG, which follows an Episcopalian system under the central headship of Macedo. One might even accept the fact that the UCKG is attempting to present the same doctrinal principles in ways unique and more acceptable to each country. But even if the various doctrinal presentations were not always the same in that one might be silent on a particular issue, the statements certainly should not disagree.

Because my language ability is limited to Portuguese, English, and Spanish, I have performed a brief comparison of three of the doctrinal statements taken from the official web sites of the UCKG in Brazil, United States, and Argentina. Several other sites for countries which use the English language, such as Great Britain, South Africa, and Uganda, have posted the same statement that is on the United States' page. The Mozambique page posts the same Portuguese statement that is on Brazil's page. However, while Portugal's page copies much of Brazil's doctrinal statement, some key statements on God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, the Church, and tongues speaking are omitted. To make it simpler for the readers to understand the doctrines of the UCKG, I will follow the order which we would normally use; at the end I'll include those doctrines which may not be in our doctrinal statements. To avoid excessive endnotes, I will include copies of these three doctrinal statements in the appendix to this paper.

BIBLIOLOGY The UCKG takes a very orthodox position on the Bible, affirming divine inspiration, inerrancy, and authority. As to continual revelation, Brazil's statement rejects present-day prophecies, Argentina's statement allows for prophecies, and the English page remains silent on this issue.

THEOLOGY PROPER The UCKG presents a very fundamental definition for God, almost verbatim from the Westminster catechism. The Portuguese and Spanish statements have God the Father revealing the Law and the Commandments in the Old Testament, while the English says nothing about the Father other than His being a part of the Trinity.

CHRISTOLOGY The UCKG English statement on the person and work of Jesus Christ could easily fit into any Baptist confession of faith. Both Brazil's and Argentina's statements reveal the basis for their health and wealth gospel by adding to the results of Christ's death on the cross the power to "free us from all of our suffering."

PNEUMATOLOGY The UCKG doctrines concerning the Holy Spirit reveal more clearly its Pentecostal roots. The Brazilian and Argentinean statements are much more complete, presenting an orthodox position on the work of the Holy Spirit at the time of man's salvation and a Pentecostal position on the baptism of the Spirit as a second act of God's grace "performed by the Lord Jesus Himself." These two statements also acknowledge all nine gifts of the Spirit from 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 as available for today, though Brazil's statement seriously limits the gift of prophecy as already mentioned. The English page is silent on the works and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

ANTHROPOLOGY According to its English statement, the UCKG believes that man was made in God's image, and that because of sin man incurred the penalty of both spiritual and physical death. This brief assertion is not a part of the Brazilian or Argentinean statements.

ANGELOLOGY Though none of the UCKG statements have anything to say about angels, angels are assumed to exist. This assumption is seen in the church's mission which, according to the Portuguese and Spanish doctrinal statements is to "cure the sick and expel demons." The English statement says nothing about exorcism. In UCKG temples it is common to see art work depicting angels and even models of the arc of the covenant with the cherubs standing over it.

SOTERIOLOGY The UCKG presents a confusing plan of salvation, which at times appears to be by faith alone apart from any works, and at other times includes works as performed through the church. For example, the Portuguese and Spanish doctrinal statements say that water baptism "is by immersion, and is not an exclusive means for salvation, but is a part of it." The UCKG also presents the necessity for the believer to "persevere to the end" in order to be prepared to meet the Lord Jesus. Though it is not entirely clear, this indicates the possibility that the one who does not persevere will lose his salvation. The English statement does present the Pentecostal view of maintaining salvation, when it says, "we believe that without holiness no man can see God."

ECCLESIOLOGY The Portuguese doctrinal statements give a brief yet acceptable definition for the Universal Church. The English statement adds that the local church should be comprised of those who have been born again. All of the doctrinal statements affirm the two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism should be by immersion. The Spanish statement would suggest consubstantiation in the elements of the Lord's Supper. As to the church officers, only the English statement says something about them. It accepts the "divinely ordained ministries of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher."

ESCHATOLOGY Though little is said about future events, the UCKG does affirm that Christians should desire the personal return of the Lord Jesus as soon as possible, and the

Portuguese and Spanish declarations add that His return will be unexpected. The English page alone speaks to the resurrection “of the just and the unjust, the eternal blessings of the redeemed, and the eternal banishment of those who have rejected salvation.” By “banishment,” it is not clear whether this means eternal suffering or annihilation. The UCKG takes no position on the Tribulation, the Millennium, or the Eternal Kingdom.

TITHES AND OFFERINGS The Brazilian doctrinal statement includes an interesting paragraph on tithes and offerings which appears to be the driving force behind the UCKG:

“The tithes and offerings are as sacred and holy as the Word of God. The tithes signify our faithfulness and the offerings our love for the Lord.... the tithes and offerings represent the blood of those who have been saved in favor of those who need to be saved.”

It is interesting that the English statement is totally silent on this subject, while the Portugal statement adds an exhaustive list of 24 biblical reasons why a believer must pay the tithe.

DIVINE HEALING As would be expected from its origins, the UCKG also includes a statement on the signs and wonders, normally demonstrated through healing and exorcism. The Portuguese and Spanish state:

“The Lord Jesus gave spiritual authority to His followers, not only to cure the sick and expel demons, but, overall, to take His Word, with the Holy Spirit’s power, to all the world.”

The English statement reads: “We believe that divine healing seen in the Old and the New Testament is an integral part of the Gospel.”

PROSPERITY GOSPEL The Brazilian statement says that “all Christians have the right to the abundant life, according to the words of the Lord Jesus in John 10:10.” The Portuguese statement expands on this statement by giving a five paragraph explanation on how and why Christians should ask for whatever they wish in order to enjoy the “abundant life.”

IV. PRACTICES

The UCKG owes its worldwide success to its ability to mutate into whatever shape best fits its local environment, even when that means altering its doctrinal statement or methods of operation. The church very easily adapts itself to whatever local needs and religious traditions will best help it gain the greatest number of followers. Perhaps the best term to describe this characteristic would be religious syncretism. One UCKG pastor put it this way: “We start from the faith, principles and religious practice of the people. The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God is the daughter of the people.”¹⁵ This quality of the UCKG makes the church difficult to define because of its shifting façade yet also makes it easy for one to identify the true impetus behind its existence. All one has to do is identify the features that are common to all of the UCKG churches wherever they can be found in the world. I will point out some of the most prominent points.

JESUS IS LORD No matter which country, in every UCKG temple across the world one will find the words “Jesus is Lord” emblazoned in large bold letters at the front and rear of the auditorium.¹⁶ This feature is what best makes the UCKG appear to be a Christian religion. Love for Jesus is a central part of the preaching, though this is always followed by a plea for money. According to the Brazilian and Argentinean doctrinal statements, giving offerings is the most sure way to show love for Jesus.

MONEY The UCKG has been heavily criticized for the way it gets money. Pastors are encouraged to use the most creative ways to get the people to give as much as possible to the church. Ex-pastor Mario Justino said that during a decade of preaching for the Universal Church in Brazil, Portugal, and Brooklyn, his superiors instructed him to “tell the people, ‘if you don’t give, God does not look at your problems.’”¹⁷ A pastor in São Paulo preached:

“There is war inside each of us. God wants you to give, but the devil is there holding on to your wallet. Come, come now. Tomorrow you might be dead. If you don’t pay God, you are paying the devil.”¹⁸

The UCKG also strongly emphasizes the tithe. Macedo, the founder, wrote:

“When we pay God the tithe, He has the obligation to keep His word, reproaching the devouring spirits which disgrace man’s life.... If we want a better salary, we have to tell God, ‘Lord, I’d like a salary of x dollars a month,’ and then tithe accordingly.”¹⁹

It is not only offerings and tithes that bring money into the church. A deacon at one of the churches I started in Brazil first heard the gospel on a UCKG radio program. His wife convinced him to take her to that church, but they only went once. The pastor sold my friend’s wife some sacred powder which, when put in her husband’s shoes, would ensure that he would not have wayward feet. Because this looked to him like what he had previously seen in spiritism, he never returned to that church. The UCKG sells everything from holy water from the Jordan to anointing oil from the Mount of Olives. Twice each year pastors take prayer requests to the Holy Land. Each request, depending on the desired blessing, has a suggested offering which should accompany it. Some pastors have even given diplomas to the faithful tithers, signed by Jesus himself. A former UCKG member in Texas who claims to have given \$60,000 over three years but never received the promised blessings said, “It’s about the money. Wake up! New York people, please! I don’t want to happen to them what happened to me.”²⁰

MIRACLES “Come to the Universal Church, where miracles are the natural thing.” This one-liner is repeated over and over on hundreds of radio stations and programs operated by the UCKG around the world. Because the UCKG purportedly offers the Kingdom of God on earth to the poor, this offer is naturally accompanied by what the poor most need and expect from God’s Kingdom: health, prosperity, and happiness, right now.²¹ In some places the UCKG is actually called by another phrase which has been popularized by the church: “*pare de sofrer*,” or “stop suffering.” For many of the poor in this world it would take a miracle to relieve their suffering; and the church offers these miracles. Most UCKG services include witnesses speaking of blessings and miracles: families reunited, addicts recovered, work found, tumors disappeared. Of course, closely connected to the miracles are the constant pleas for money. When somebody

does not receive the expected miracle, naturally God cannot be blamed; neither can the church. Either the person did not have enough faith or he did not give as big an offering as he should have.

EXORCISM In an interview with the New York Times Bishop Macedo stated, “If a man loses his job or a woman fights with her husband, if anything goes wrong, it’s all the fault of the Devil.”²² Spiritual warfare is basic to the practices of the UCKG. Since the church represents the forces of good in this world it has a responsibility to engage the spiritual forces of evil in battle. The ultimate victory of good over evil is supposedly when a demon is expelled from a human body. Therefore exorcism is a regular practice in the services of the UCKG churches. It is common for pastors to “interview” demons, allowing the demon to speak to the audience before the pastor proceeds to cast him out. In London, in a magazine advertisement, the church had claimed that “headaches, depression, insomnia, bad luck and disease were caused by demons. The UK Advertising Standards Authority decided such claims could exploit vulnerable people.”²³

POLITICS While other churches in Brazil have chosen to not get involved in politics, the UCKG has actively promoted candidates to public offices, from city councilmen to national congress and president. A slogan created and often spoken by the church is, “Brothers vote for brothers.”²⁴ In this way the UCKG has been successful at gaining legislation favorable to its interests and concessions to many coveted radio and television stations. Though the UCKG does not yet have its own political party in Brazil, it has one in Portugal called the “*Partido da Gente,*” or “People’s Party”; and it does have a strong and vocal minority in Brazil’s congress. The UCKG sees it as fair play to use the power it has over its membership to promote what it believes to be the expansion of God’s Kingdom on earth, even in the political arena; God’s Kingdom, of course, is presented as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God.

V. PROBLEMS

The UCKG has had its share of problems due to its aggressive attacks on other religions and the way it exploits the needy in society by offering hope in exchange for what little they might have. It is, however, adept at defending itself, often hiring the best lawyers and making the necessary changes to become acceptable. Usually the most serious criticisms have been when the church first establishes itself in a community or country. After it is established and survives the initial onslaught of attacks, it becomes a more permanent part of the community.

MONEY PROBLEMS Naturally financial issues have been the greatest sources of problems faced by the UCKG. In its first two decades in Brazil, the church faced repeated accusations of charlatanism, quackery, money laundering, and tax evasion. In 1992 Bishop Macedo spent a few days in jail, which he turned to his favor by declaring himself a victim of religious intolerance.²⁵ In the face of these problems the church portrays itself as the victim, facing satanic attacks against the success of the church. Concerns in Europe prompted a report given to the Belgium Parliament by an independent research committee, which concluded:

“The church’s activities in Belgium, subsidized by the Brazilian organization, could be a cover for illegal activities. The presence of the UCKG in Luxembourg could be an indication that the organization also is involved in whitewashing money....”²⁶

Recent problems have arisen in Africa. A group of UCKG pastors has spoken out:

“They have turned us into their moneymakers... In the beginning it was a church for saving souls, but things changed. They used to be concerned with the number of people we recruited, but now they are concerned with the amount of money we bring in.... When they build cathedrals, it is simply to make more money. The sad part is that this money comes from our poor people.... If we don’t make money, they put us aside. We have been brainwashed.”²⁷

In spite of these problems, the UCKG continues to grow and prosper. In every country it has contracted the best lawyers and defended itself behind the guise of religious freedom.

MORAL PROBLEMS The UCKG has also been charged with a host of moral and ethical lapses. According to Mario Justino, a former pastor who wrote a book titled *Nos Bastadores do Reino* (*Behind the Scenes in the Kingdom*),²⁸ adultery and homosexuality are pervasive among the pastors and bishops of the church. Justino claims there is little concern for this rampant immorality as long as the pastor is successful at meeting financial quotas. The only time action is taken against a pastor is when the sin becomes public; and even then, if the pastor is a good fund-raiser he will be transferred to another field or country. Usually the pastors get away with their licentious behavior because the hierarchical structure of the church gives them much freedom without any close accountability.

Other ethical problems of the UCKG are the lying and deceitful practices employed to get more money from the faithful. Though many frustrated donors have sued the church to have offerings returned, few have been successful. One successful plaintiff was the mother of Edson Luiz, a mildly retarded man. Edson Luiz was encouraged to give to God in order to be healed of his mental problems. After he had given all that was in his bank account, he sold a piece of land and gave the proceeds to the church. Encouraged to show more faith by giving more, Edson Luiz took out bank loans to give to the church. When his mother discovered what was happening, all Edson Luiz had to show for his generosity was a diploma signed by “Jesus Christ” saying that he was a tither.²⁹ In Uganda a parishioner who had contracted AIDS was promised healing if she had faith, demonstrated by her giving. She gave all she had, including her car. When her condition did not improve, she made her complaints public, asking that the church return her car. The church has sued her for defamation.³⁰

In Brazil, Macedo still faces charges of swindling, quackery and charlatanism dating back to 1991. Because of Brazil’s lethargic judicial system, the UCKG influence in government, and good lawyers, it is doubtful whether these charges will ever come to trial.³¹ On the international scene, Brazil’s Federal Police has requested that Interpol investigate the church

in the U.S. and seven other countries. However, an employee at Interpol in Washington D.C. noted that the agency's constitution prohibits it from investigating religious organizations.³² The church has repeatedly been accused of transporting large amounts of money across international borders without the appropriate declarations.

MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS Up until now Bishop Macedo has been able to keep a tight grip on the leadership of his religious empire. Life is not easy for those who choose a career in his religious organization. The pastors are recruited from the lower class and are offered a standard of living higher than they would otherwise have. In exchange for this comfort, the church demands from them blind loyalty. The pastors are subject to transfers from one church to another, sometimes even to other states or countries with no prior notice.³³ Though there have been many dissident pastors, most of these have been silenced either through financial payouts or legal threats. The few who insist on speaking out are outnumbered by the many pastors who will defend the church's practices.

Perhaps the most serious problem faced by the UCKG was when Sergio Von Helde, a UCKG pastor, desecrated an image of Brazil's patron saint on October 12, 1995, the patron saint's day. On a midnight television program, Von Helde slapped and kicked the statue of Our Lady of the Appearance, a black likeness of the Virgin Mary. Few people saw the actual program, but another network sympathetic with the Catholic Church raised national ire by replaying the scene throughout the following day. UCKG churches were attacked and stoned. Church members and pastors were threatened. Bishop Macedo went onto national TV to ask forgiveness for his pastor's act and to say that the pastor had been removed from his position.³⁴ Though what the pastor did was in line with the fiery message Bishop Macedo himself preaches against the Catholic church, he was removed to protect the church's public image. This illustrates the disposable way the UCKG treats its clergy, maintaining them as long as they are useful to the "Kingdom," then disposing of them.

CONCLUSION

The Christian Century summarizes well the phenomena called the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God:

“No doubt many view Bishop Edir Macedo as the leader of an army of unsavory con men. Nonetheless, he has displayed brilliance in marketing his religion and winning adherents. He has discovered an effective combination of emotion, culture and social empowerment and matched these to people’s deepest fears and aspirations.”³⁵

We must be prepared to warn those who might be sympathetic to or involved with the UCKG. From a purely secular and humanistic view, Hector Avalos, a former Pentecostal faith healer who teaches religion at Iowa State University, gives the following warning:

“Worshippers of any faith should be on guard when: 1) their church uses threats or promises to get donations; 2) the minister or church leader is wealthy; 3) the church does no charitable work.”³⁶

But even of greater value, we have God’s Word that teaches us all about the church, sound doctrine, and godly leadership. One does not have to look far to discover various points where the UCKG misinterprets, misrepresents, or simply ignores biblical teaching. But the greatest offense, which is also the most likely to be understood by a person not well-versed in Scripture, is the UCKG’s greed for money. The most effective warning for a person involved with the UCKG would be to show what God’s Word says to church leaders about financial matters. 1 Timothy 6:6-11 is a strong warning for pastors concerning the temptations of riches, love of money, and covetousness:

“⁶Now godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. ⁸And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. ⁹But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. ¹¹But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.”

To the most candid observer, the leadership of the UCKG fails miserably at the test of having the proper attitude towards money.

Furthermore, Ezekiel 34 gives a solemn warning to the pastors of Israel who fed and clothed themselves from the flock of God over which they should have had the care, but they did not care for the needs of the flock. God says, “Woe to the shepherds” (vs. 2), and “I am against the shepherds” (vs. 10). Though many who are a part of the UCKG would not be a part of God’s people, the false shepherds of this church operate in the name of Jesus. And God will hold them accountable.

May God help us to be faithful and to “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” 2 Timothy 2:15.

ENDNOTES

¹Official web site for the *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* in Brazil:
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⁴Alan Riding, "A Spirited Holy War in an Easygoing Land," *New York Times* (Dec. 31, 1988).

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⁸ <http://www.igrejauniversal.org.br/histiurd-mundo.jsp>: internet; accessed on 4/20/2009

⁹<http://www.uckg.org/>: Internet; accessed 4/24/2009.

¹⁰"Com Fé, Dinheiro e Fiéis."

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“Buscar-me-eis, e me achareis, quando me buscardes de todo o vosso coração.”
(Jeremias 29:13)

Em que cremos

Há um só Deus, que subsiste em três Pessoas distintas:

Pai, Filho e Espírito Santo

1 – Há um só Deus, Vivo, Verdadeiro e Eterno, de infinito poder e sabedoria. O Criador e Conservador de todas as coisas visíveis e invisíveis, que, na unidade de Sua divindade, majestade, poder e mistério, subsiste em três Pessoas distintas, de existência eterna, iguais em santidade, poder e majestade. A saber: o Pai, o Filho e o Espírito Santo.

2 – O Deus-Pai foi o primeiro a Se manifestar ao homem, desde Adão até o nascimento do Senhor Jesus Cristo, para trazer a Lei e os Mandamentos.

3 – O Filho, o Senhor Jesus Cristo, que foi o segundo a Se manifestar ao homem, quando veio ao mundo em forma humana, nasceu do ventre da virgem Maria, por obra e graça do Espírito Santo. Ele, que é a Palavra encarnada do Pai, tomou a natureza humana, reunindo assim duas naturezas inteiras e perfeitas – a Divina e a humana – para ser conhecido como verdadeiro Deus e verdadeiro homem. Sofreu, foi crucificado, morto e sepultado, reconciliado-nos, assim, como Pai, fazendo a expiação pelos nossos pecados e nos garantindo a salvação e a libertação de todos os nossos sofrimentos.

4 – A manifestação da terceira Pessoa da Santíssima Trindade, o Espírito Santo, é feita no coração humano, para convencê-lo do pecado, da justiça e do juízo. Quando cometemos algum pecado, Ele logo mostra, através da nossa consciência, que pecamos, permitindo nosso arrependimento.

5 – A Bíblia, que é a Palavra de Deus, foi escrita por homens divinamente inspirados. Ela é o padrão infalível pelo qual a conduta humana e as opiniões devem ser julgadas: “Toda a Escritura é inspirada por Deus e útil para o ensino, para a repreensão, para a correção, para a educação na justiça, a fim de que o homem de Deus seja perfeito e perfeitamente habilitado para toda boa obra.” (2 Timóteo 3.16,17).

6 – A justificação do homem somente se realiza pela fé no Senhor Jesus Cristo, como está escrito: “Todavia, o meu justo viverá pela fé, e, se retroceder, nele não se compraz a minha alma.” (Hebreus 10.38). Significa que as obras assistenciais, embora sejam muito importantes dentro do cristianismo, jamais poderão conduzir o homem à salvação.

7 – O batismo com o Espírito Santo é um ato da graça de Deus. É uma experiência que se adquire pela fé apropriadora da parte daquele que deseja purificação e santidade em sua vida. Esse batismo é realizado pessoalmente pelo Senhor Jesus e tem como real evidência a transformação do caráter de Deus, além da fala em línguas estranhas.

8 – O batismo nas águas é realizado por imersão, em nome do Pai, do Filho e do Espírito Santo, não como meio exclusivo de salvação, mas como parte dela. É um ato público de profissão de fé, com vistas ao sepultamento do corpo do pecado ou da natureza pecaminosa, para se viver em novidade de vida. Após o batismo nas águas, tem de acontecer uma mudança de vida, ou seja, jamais podem ser mantidos os hábitos errados que existiam antes, tais como vícios, gênio ruim, egoísmo, etc.

9 – Todos os nove dons do Espírito Santo também nos são acessíveis nos dias atuais, como partes integrantes da obra expiatória do Senhor Jesus Cristo. Com respeito ao dom de profecia, temos visto o grande engano que o diabo e seus demônios têm espalhado entre os cristãos sinceros e desavisados. Muitas pessoas têm perdido até a salvação por terem sido iludidas por “profecias” que jamais saíram da boca de Deus; casamentos têm sido feitos e desfeitos na base de “profecias”. Daí, a Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus adota o sistema de fundamentar a sua fé exclusivamente na Palavra de Deus escrita, isto é, a Bíblia Sagrada.

<http://www.igrejauniversal.org.br/doutrinas.jsp>

4/20/2009



“Buscar-me-eis, e me achareis, quando me buscardes de todo o vosso coração.”
(Jeremias 29:13)

10 – A Santa Ceia é a cerimônia mais importante dentro do cristianismo; ela não é apenas um símbolo da participação do corpo e do sangue do Senhor, ela realmente é uma participação física de um Senhor espiritual com a finalidade de fortalecer a Igreja física e espiritualmente, lembrando a morte do Senhor até que Ele venha. Além disso, ela serve para uma renovação dos votos de aliança com Deus através do sangue do Senhor Jesus.

11 – Os dízimos e as ofertas são tão sagrados e tão santos quanto a Palavra de Deus. Os dízimos significam fidelidade, e as ofertas, o amor do servo para com o Senhor. Não se pode dissociar os dízimos e as ofertas, o amor do servo para com o Senhor Jesus, uma vez que eles significam, na verdade, o sangue daqueles que foram salvos em favor daqueles que precisam ser salvos.

12 – A Igreja visível do Senhor Jesus é a reunião de todos os cristãos fiéis, unidos uns aos outros na fé e na comunhão do Evangelho, observando os mandamentos do Senhor, governados pelo Seu Espírito, pela Sua palavra e pelo Seu nome.

13 – O Senhor Jesus Cristo concedeu autoridade espiritual aos Seus seguidores, não somente para curar os enfermos e expulsar os demônios, mas, sobretudo, para levar a Sua Palavra, com poder do Espírito Santo, a todo o mundo e fazer discípulos.

14 – Todos os cristãos têm o direito à vida abundante, conforme as Palavras do Senhor Jesus: “...eu vim para que tenham vida e a tenham em abundância.” (João 10.10)

15 - Todos os cristãos devem desejar a volta do Senhor Jesus o mais breve possível. A Sua vinda será pessoal e inesperada, significando que todos os cristãos devem sempre estar preparados para recebê-Lo nas nuvens, conforme está escrito em Mateus 24.30 e Apocalipse 1.17.

16 – O objetivo final de um relacionamento permanente com o Senhor Jesus pela fé é a vida eterna, a qual Ele prometeu a todos os que perseveram até o fim. “Quanto, porém, aos covardes, aos incrédulos, aos abomináveis, aos assassinos, aos impuros, aos feiticeiros, aos idólatras e a todos os mentirosos, a parte que lhes cabe será no lago que arde com fogo e enxofre, a saber, a segunda morte.” (Apocalipse 21.8)

What we believe



We believe in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments in their original writings as fully inspired by God and accept them as the Supreme and Final Authority for faith and life.

We believe in one God, eternally existing in three persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We believe that Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born by the Virgin Mary and is true God and true Man.

We believe that God created man in His own image; that man sinned and thereby incurred the penalty of death, physical and spiritual; that all human beings inherit a sinful nature which causes actual transgression involving personal guilt.

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins, a substitution sacrifice according to the Scriptures and that all who believe in Him are justified on the ground of His shed blood.

We believe in the body of resurrection of the Lord Jesus, His ascension into heaven and His present life as our High Priest and Advocate.

We believe in the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory.

We believe that those who repent of their sins, receive the Lord Jesus Christ by faith and hold fast to Him are born again by the Holy Spirit and become children of God.

We believe in the baptism of the Holy Spirit, empowering believers for service, with accompanying supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit and in fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

We believe in the divinely ordained ministries of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher.

We believe in the resurrection of the just and the unjust, the eternal blessings of the redeemed, and the eternal banishment of those who have rejected salvation.

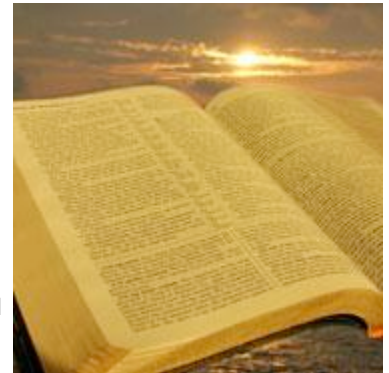
We believe that the one true Church consists of all those who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ and regenerated by the Holy Spirit; that the local church on earth should take its character from this conception of the spiritual Church and therefore new birth and personal confession of the Christ are essential for church membership.

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ appointed two ordinances: baptism in water and the Lord's Supper, to be observed as acts of obedience and as a continual witness to the facts of the Christian faith; that baptism is the immersion of the believer in water as a confession of the Lord Jesus in burial and resurrection and that the Lord's Supper is the partaking of the body and blood of our Saviour in remembrance of His sacrifice until He comes.

We believe that divine healing seen in the Old Testament and the New is an integral part of the Gospel.

We believe the Bible teaches that without holiness no man can see God.

We believe in sanctification as a definite, yet progressive work of grace, commencing at the time of the new birth and continuing until the end of one's life.





"Me buscaréis y me encontraréis,
cuando me busquéis de todo corazón."
(Jeremias 29:13)

Cada Iglesia o denominación cristiana tiene su filosofía, esto quiere decir, su manera de interpretar, entender y colocar en práctica las enseñanzas de la Biblia. La Iglesia Universal del Reino de Dios tiene los mismos principios doctrinarios de las demás Iglesias Evangélicas Pentecostales, diferenciándose sólo en algunas costumbres y dando énfasis a algunos aspectos del ministerio del Señor Jesucristo y Sus Apóstoles.

La Iglesia Universal del Reino de Dios expresa su fe, teniendo por fundamento de su predicación, las siguientes afirmaciones:

1 Hay un sólo Dios, Vivo, Verdadero y Eterno, de Infinito Poder y Sabiduría, Creador y Conservador de todas las cosas visibles e invisibles. En la Unidad de Su Divinidad, Poder y Misterio hay tres Personas distintas, de existencia Eterna, iguales en Santidad, Justicia, Sabiduría, Poder y Majestad a saber: Dios-Padre, Dios-Hijo y Dios-Espíritu Santo.

2 El Dios-Padre fue el Primero en manifestarse al hombre, desde Adán, hasta al nacimiento del Señor Jesucristo, para traer la Ley y los Mandamientos.

3 El Dios-Hijo, Señor Jesucristo, que fue el Segundo en manifestarse al hombre, nació del vientre de la virgen María, por obra y gracia del Espíritu Santo. Él que es la Palabra encarnada del Padre, tomó la naturaleza humana, reuniendo así dos naturalezas enteras y perfectas; la Divina y la humana, para ser conocido por verdadero Dios y verdadero Hombre, que sufrió, fue crucificado, muerto y sepultado, reconciliándonos así con el Dios-Padre, haciendo la expiación de nuestros pecados y garantizándonos la sanidad y la liberación de todos nuestros sufrimientos.

El Señor Jesús verdaderamente resucitó de entre los muertos, y tomó otra vez su cuerpo original, con todas las cosas pertenecientes a la perfección de la naturaleza humana y subió al cielo. Él se sentó a la derecha del Dios-Padre, de donde ha de venir a juzgar a los vivos y a los muertos. El profeta Isaías habló de Él cuando dijo: "Despreciado y rechazado entre los hombres, varón de dolores, experimentado en quebranto; y como que escondimos de él, el rostro, fue menospreciado, y no lo estimamos. Ciertamente llevó él nuestras enfermedades y sufrió nuestros dolores, y nosotros le tuvimos por azotado, por herido de Dios y abatido. Mas él herido fue por nuestras rebeliones, molido por nuestros pecados, el castigo de nuestra paz fue sobre él, y por sus llagas fuimos nosotros curados." (Isaías 53:3-5)

4 La manifestación de la Tercera Persona de la Santísima Trinidad, el Dios-Espíritu Santo, es hecha en el corazón humano para convencerlo del pecado, de la justicia y del juicio. Cuando cometemos algún desliz, entonces Él muestra por medio de nuestra conciencia que pecamos y permite nuestro arrepentimiento.

Él procede del Dios-Padre y del Dios-Hijo y lleva al ser humano a tener un encuentro real con el Señor Jesús; opera en la santificación del seguidor del Hijo, guía a la Iglesia, a las condiciones para que el cristiano tenga Su carácter y, para que él realice lo mismo y mucho más que Su Hijo hizo durante Su ministerio terreno, según las propias Palabras del Señor: "De cierto, de cierto os digo: el que en mí cree, las obras que yo hago, él también las hará, y aún mayores hará, porque yo voy al Padre" (Juan 14:12).

5 La Biblia, que es la Palabra de Dios, fue escrita por hombres divinamente inspirados. Ella es el modelo infalible por el cual la conducta humana y las opiniones deben ser juzgadas. "Toda la Escritura es inspirada por Dios y útil para enseñar, para redargüir, para corregir, para instruir en la justicia, a fin de que el hombre de Dios sea perfecto, enteramente preparado para toda buena obra" (2 Timoteo 3:16-17).

6 La justificación del hombre solamente se realiza por la fe en el Señor Jesucristo, por lo que está escrito: "Justificados, pues, por la fe, tenemos paz para con Dios por medio de nuestro Señor Jesucristo, por quien también tenemos entrada por la fe a esta gracia por la cual estamos firmes, y nos gloriamos" (Romanos 5:1-2). "Concluimos, pues, que el hombre es justificado por la fe sin las obras de la Ley" (Romanos 3:28). Significa que las obras asistenciales, aunque sean muy importantes dentro del cristianismo, jamás podrán conducir al hombre a la salvación.



"Me buscaréis y me encontraréis,
cuando me busquéis de todo corazón."
(Jeremias 29:13)

7 El bautismo con el Espíritu Santo es un acto de la gracia de Dios; es una experiencia adquirida por la fe de aquel que desea la purificación y la santidad en su vida. Ese bautismo es realizado personalmente por el Señor Jesús y tiene por real evidencia la transformación del carácter humano por el carácter de Dios además de poder hablar en lenguas extrañas.

8 El bautismo en las aguas por inmersión, en el Nombre del Padre, del Hijo, del Espíritu Santo, no es un medio exclusivo de la salvación, sino que es parte de ella. El bautismo en las aguas es un acto de profesión de fe pública con vistas a la sepultura del cuerpo del pecado o de la naturaleza pecaminosa para vivir una nueva vida. Después del bautismo en las aguas es necesario que suceda obligatoriamente un cambio en la vida, esto es: el bautizado no deberá continuar con los mismos hábitos equivocados que tenía antes, por ejemplo: los vicios, el mal genio, el egoísmo, tener placer al actuar mal, en desacuerdo con el carácter de Dios etc.

9 Los nueve dones del Espíritu Santo tienen un lugar exacto para nosotros en los días de hoy, son parte integrante de la obra expiatoria del Señor Jesucristo. Con respecto al don de profecía nosotros hemos visto el gran engaño que el diablo y sus demonios han sembrado entre los cristianos sinceros e inconstantes. Muchas personas han perdido hasta la salvación por haber sido ilusionadas por "profecías" que jamás salieron de la boca de Dios; casamientos que se han formado y matrimonios que se han deshecho por intermedio de profecías. De allí, la Iglesia Universal del Reino de Dios adopta el sistema de fundamentar su fe exclusivamente en la Palabra de Dios escrita, esto es: la Biblia Sagrada. Si acaso alguien dijera alguna profecía, entonces la persona debe ser bien investigada no sólo en la iglesia, sino sobre todo en su casa y trabajo. Además de eso, se debe esperar que aquella profecía se cumpla para entonces creer en ella. Todo esto aún no confirma que aquel cristiano es un profeta, pues los dones del Espíritu Santo sólo le pertenecen a Él; y Él usa aquellos cuyas vidas son un ejemplo dentro de sus respectivas casas, trabajos e iglesias.

Por una cuestión de celo y cuidado nosotros hemos preferido dejar que sólo el Espíritu Santo nos hable por Su Palabra y hasta hoy eso nos ha dado resultado, pues la Iglesia Universal ha crecido en todo el mundo sustentada solamente por la Biblia Sagrada.

10 La Santa Cena es la ceremonia más importante dentro del cristianismo. No es sólo un símbolo de la participación del Cuerpo y de la Sangre del Señor; es realmente una participación física de un Señor espiritual con la finalidad de fortalecer a la Iglesia tanto física como espiritualmente, recordando la muerte del Señor hasta que Él venga. Además de eso, la Santa Cena sirve para una renovación de los votos de alianza con Dios por medio de la sangre del Señor Jesús.

11 Los diezmos y las ofrendas son tan sagrados, tan santos como la Palabra de Dios. Los diezmos significan fidelidad y las ofrendas el amor del siervo hacia el Señor. No se puede dissociar los diezmos y las ofrendas de la obra redentora del Señor Jesús; significan, en verdad, la sangre de los salvos en favor de aquellos que necesitan de la salvación.

12 La Iglesia visible del Señor Jesús es la reunión de todos los cristianos fieles, unidos unos a otros en la fe y en la comunión del Evangelio, observando los mandamientos del Señor, gobernados por Su Espíritu, por Su Palabra y por Su Nombre.

13 El Señor Jesucristo concedió autoridad espiritual a Sus seguidores, no solamente para curar a los enfermos y expulsar a los demonios, pero sobretudo llevar Su Palabra con el poder del Espíritu Santo a todo el mundo y hacer discípulos.

14 Todos los cristianos tienen derecho a una vida abundante según las palabras del Señor Jesús: "... yo he venido para que tengan vida, y para que la tengan en abundancia" (Juan 10:10).

15 Todos los cristianos deben desear el regreso del Señor Jesús lo más pronto posible. La venida será en forma imprevista y eso significa, que todos los cristianos siempre deben estar preparados para recibirlo en las nubes.

16 El objetivo final de una relación permanente con el Señor Jesús por la fe es la vida eterna, la cual Él prometió a todos los que perseveren hasta el fin. "Pero los cobardes e incrédulos, los abominables y homicidas, los fornicarios y hechiceros, los idólatras y todos los mentirosos tendrán su parte en el lago que arde con fuego y azufre, que es la muerte segunda" (Apocalipsis 21:8).