

Why it's bad: They,

- * distract people from the real causes of suffering: poverty, lack of welfare services, etc.
- * divert people from seeking more practical help.
- * take from the poorest and give to the rich.
- * encourage passivity and subservience: obey the pastors, and hope in God.

Think for yourself and support each other

The UCKG are still pushing their courses, advice sessions and helplines, claiming that whatever your problem is you can sort it out by going to them and praying. Their glossy literature is scattered with testimonials from 'satisfied' customers - just like dodgy double-glazing brochures. We're pleased to report that there's growing opposition to the UCKG around London, with successful community campaigns against their activities.

We all face problems in life: hardships, crap jobs, poor health, bad housing - not to mention wars and pollution. The cause of these world-wide problems is that we're forced to live under an oppressive system based on profits and power, for the benefit of Edir Macedo and his like, rather than on people's real needs. It's up to us all to challenge this however we can, and to create a better society. Paying for praying won't help - it's only through thinking things out for ourselves, and taking collective action together with our friends, families, neighbours and workmates that we will improve our lives.

In 1997 in the UK, the Advertising Standards Authority banned a UCKG poster that said: "Constant headaches, depression, insomnia, fears, bad luck, strange diseases . . . These are just a few symptoms caused by demons." The ASA decided such claims could exploit "vulnerable people."

UCKG publications employ corporate PR tricks. A recent issue of "FiAction" pushed through letterboxes around Finsbury Park looks like a Sunday supplement. Two pages trumpet the goods donated to Oxfam, linking their name with a reputable charity to clean their image. It says the "collection was prompted by compassion for the people in Haiti". This may well be true of the people who donated their unwanted goods (not money), but there is no mention of the reports that UCKG collected money in Haiti after the disaster - and kept it for themselves!

**Haringey Solidarity Group, www.haringey.org.uk
More info: www.cultwatch.com / www.rickcross.com**

Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG)

BEWARE: RELIGIOUS RACKET



Please give generously, this Brazilian billionaire needs your money to support his lavish lifestyle.

If you go to Wood Green, Finsbury Park, or Seven Sisters you may see people shaking red and white buckets and asking for donations to 'charity'. Actually, they're probably collecting for the 'Universal Church of the Kingdom of God'. The UCKG tries to advertise itself as some kind of charity, giving expert advice on health matters, employment and personal relationships. But what is the reality?

Healing or dangerous ignorance?

The UCKG is the church that was involved in the Victoria Climbié scandal. She was the little girl from Haringey who was beaten, starved and murdered by her carers. Victoria was brought to the Finsbury Park branch of the UCKG four times in the last eight days of her life. At the inquest, a UCKG pastor outrageously said that he suspected she was being abused, but he thought Victoria was 'possessed' by the devil, and she could be 'healed' with prayers - he didn't call social services or the police. Victoria died and her carers were jailed for life.

An isolated incident? Well, the following year two more congregation members at the same branch were found to have carried out 'a campaign of cruelty' against their 9 year-old son, including branding him with hot irons, claiming that the church had advised them he was possessed by the devil. The father was jailed for 5 years.

Despite this, the UCKG organises 'Alternative Healing Days' based not on medical advice but on prayers. Local medical centres and libraries have quite rightly banned their irresponsible flyers.

Charity or Con?

According to the Observer newspaper "Edir Macedo, a former lottery shop assistant, who propounded a doctrine of intense prayer, exorcisms and financial sacrifice, founded the UCKG [in Brazil] in 1977. Members are expected to 'tithes' 10% of their gross income or benefits to the church.

In Brazil it is now a Significant political force owning TV and radio stations, a mass circulation newspaper and 20 MPs affiliated. The church's turnover is estimated at £700 million, all of it from congregants who are told donations will help smooth the path to salvation. Secret video tapes have been found of the

founder lasciviously counting donations and encouraging deputies to screw more out of congregants with the imperative if they can't pay they can get out."

UCKG target the poorer areas to set up their 'help' centres, typically buying up closed cinemas. The vast majority of Macedo's followers in Brazil are from the poorest communities. They, like the members of other churches in a country where there is no national health service, are attracted by the promise that true believers will be able to find the cure for any disease.

A Brazilian judge recently accepted prosecutors' claims that 'Bishop' Edir Macedo and nine other leaders of UCKG took advantage of their position to commit fraud against the church and its followers. Prosecutors accuse these ten of laundering more than US\$2 billion in donations from 2003 to 2008. The church allegedly used fake companies to launder the money and evade taxes, moving the assets abroad and then returning them in the form of loans used by Macedo and his accomplices to buy businesses.

In 1997 the Belgian Parliament Inquiry Committee on Cults labelled the UCKG as a dangerous cult. The report further alleged that "[The Church] claims that the Kingdom of God is down here and that it can offer a solution to every possible problem, depression, unemployment, family and financial problems. In fact, it is apparently a truly criminal association, whose only purpose is enrichment."

A separate examination of the finances of the British branch concluded: "The church's main aim seems to be accruing funds. Between 1996 and February 2001 the church's reserves rose ten-fold from £651,000 to £6,333,000. Under charitable expenditure there is no mention of any spending on schemes for helping the homeless and drug addicts, which they claim are a major part of their work. They do make donations, but all of them, bar £33 go to 'sister churches' abroad. By March 1999 they were in a position to send £900,000 straight back to Brazil. Last year nearly £2.6 million was sent abroad."

When they act:

Each year at Xmas time the UCKG send out its younger female acolytes in Santa hats (surely a contradiction for supposed Christians?) to collect donations from the unwary public. The red and white logo on their collection buckets looks suspiciously like the British Heart Foundation. They sometimes claim they are collecting for other charities, but there is no evidence of this - their financial accounts make no mention of any such charitable spending.



"Bishop" Edir Macedo's little pad. We wonder where the money came from for this then?