

September 10, 2003

Dear Fellow Ministers of the South Texas District,

I have received a number of inquiries regarding a letter that was recently mailed to all UPCI ministers. Since there is some confusion about the facts, I want to give you accurate information about some matters in which I have personal knowledge. My purpose in writing is not to tell you who to vote for at General Conference or what position to take on ministerial policies. Rather, it is to answer some questions and to discuss some important principles.

According to the letter, the main issue is a doctrine that is taught in Ethiopia, namely, that the flesh of Jesus was a special creation of God in the womb of Mary instead of coming through the human lineage of Mary. Two years ago, the former general superintendent chaired a committee to investigate this matter, and I served on the committee. The committee met with three leaders from Ethiopia and unanimously concluded that this doctrine was unbiblical and contrary to the position of the UPCI. Therefore, to refute this view, four articles were published in the *Forward*, and a presentation was given at General Conference. At the same time, the brethren from Ethiopia affirmed the salvation of the members of the UPCI in North America, and they agreed not to propagate their views about the flesh of Christ outside Ethiopia. The committee concluded that this was a good first step, with the understanding that we would continue to work on the problem.

Since this doctrine continues to circulate in North America and to cause confusion, in May 2003 the Executive Board voted to refer the matter to the Commission on the Unity of the Faith, which our current general superintendent appointed last year in order to handle problems of this nature. I am a member of this commission. The commission met in July 2003 to study the "divine flesh" doctrine, and we interviewed a number of witnesses including the three leaders from Ethiopia and the author of the recent letter. Our general superintendent asked the commission to give a thorough report with recommendations to the General Board in Toronto prior to the General Conference, and he asked that the report be kept confidential until that time. Therefore, only the commission members know the findings and recommendations; even the general superintendent will not be informed of them until the report is given. Nevertheless, as you can see, the "divine flesh" doctrine has been confronted, and it will be handled by the General Board this month.

Let me give you some background on the recent letter that you received, because many of you have no prior knowledge of the situation. The author first sent a letter and an audiotape to the General Board. The tape named several leaders, strongly criticized them on various points, and cited some second-hand reports about things they allegedly said. Many of these reports have been denied and refuted. Because of the unusual personal nature of the criticism, our former district superintendent felt compelled to write a response for those who received the original letter and tape. Since that time, a new letter has come from the original author, and this new letter considerably broadens the controversy, because it has apparently been mailed to all the ministers of the UPCI.

As your district superintendent, let me enunciate some general principles that we should follow in situations such as this and that apply to both sides of any controversy.

- Doctrinal deviations are properly handled by thorough investigation followed by careful consideration and action by those in spiritual authority.
- Concerns about leadership are properly handled by personal dialogue, board discussion if necessary, and ultimately the electoral process as specified in our Manual.
- In neither case is it appropriate to resort to political campaigns or inflammatory rhetoric.
- In times of disagreement, we should focus our attention and deliberation on principles, rather than personalities, personal feelings, or personal hurts. We must always handle differences according to ministerial ethics; it is never right to violate those ethics. The Bible, our Manual, and *Robert's Rules of Order* all provide guidance on the appropriate way to speak about issues rather than personalities. Even Michael the archangel did not bring "a railing accusation" against the devil himself, but simply said, "The Lord rebuke thee" (Jude 9).
- Holiness involves outward standards such as the way we use technology, but it also involves inward standards such as the way we use the tongue and pen and the way we treat other people, especially our spiritual leaders. This is true in the local church, and it is true in the international church.
- We should judge a matter carefully, obtaining full information and considering both sides. We should not be quick to believe hearsay reports, especially if they are detrimental to those who have a proven character and ministry among us.
- We owe courtesy and respect to each other as fellow Christians and ministers of the gospel, especially to those who have labored faithfully in gospel work for many years and to those the brethren have chosen as leaders. We have the right to express our opinions, to disagree, and to cast our votes, but always in humility and love.
- We all need to pray that God will help our movement to maintain biblical doctrine, holiness (inward and outward), brotherly love, ministerial ethics, and unity of faith and Spirit.
- If at all possible, we need to attend the General Conference to participate in the decision-making process so that all decisions reflect the true consensus and spirit of our fellowship.

In conclusion, all of us have pledged to uphold our Fundamental Doctrine, which expresses our firm adherence to the biblical standard of salvation as found in Acts 2:38. The same Fundamental Doctrine also states, "We shall endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit until we all come into the unity of the faith, at the same time admonishing all brethren that they shall not contend for their different views to the disunity of the body." May we never fall under the condemnation of Proverbs 6:16-19 in any way: "These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren." Rather, let us fulfill Colossians 3:14-15: "And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful."

Sincerely in Christ Jesus,
 David K. Bernard
 Superintendent, South Texas District