

# Why I Stood For The Defense in Orlando



Bishop Charles Blake

## How Long This Madness?

*"WE MUST NOW DECIDE WHICH  
DIRECTION WE WILL GO IN THE  
FUTURE. SHALL WE LINGER IN THE  
SHALLOWS OF TRIVIALITY? OR,  
SHALL WE JOIN HANDS AND RISE TO  
NEW AND REVOLUTIONARY HEIGHTS OF  
UNITY AND ACCOMPLISHMENT?"*

*Bishop Charles E. Blake*

There is much discussion regarding the recent events which have transpired in Orlando, Florida. Many views have been expressed, which were based on the information available. I desire now to share the reasons why I went to Orlando to defend a brother in Christ, and to defend the Constitution of the Church of God in Christ.

## **A Local Church Growing And At Peace**

Elder Derrick Hutchins became pastor of the Orlando Institutional Church three years ago. Since that time, the congregation has grown to four times the size that it was when he became pastor. Under his leadership the congregation has invested more than \$250,000.00 in the refurbishing of the church property. A host of programs have been introduced for the good of the congregation and community. Prior to becoming pastor of Orlando Institutional, Supt Hutchins pastored two churches, one in Tennessee, and one in South Carolina. In private discussion, Supt. Hutchins and Bishop Owens agreed that Supt. Hutchins would release one 'of the churches, so that he could more effectively serve the Orlando Church. Supt. Hutchins released the congregation in Tennessee to Bishop Harold Bell, his jurisdictional bishop in Tennessee. Bishop Bell subsequently appointed another minister as pastor. He retained the congregation in South Carolina. The financial support from that church enabled him to serve the Orlando, Florida church without compensation for a year or more.

On the night of Elder Hutchins' appointment, Bishop Owens publicly revised the terms, and indicated that Elder Hutchins should release both of the churches, in order to become pastor of the Orlando church. Because this conflicted with their prior agreement, Superintendent Hutchins was very careful regarding his answer. . He stated that he would divest himself of "...whatever was necessary

for the good" of the church in Orlando. Subsequent conversations with the Presiding Bishop, and the tremendous growth and good of the 'Orlando church, caused the Presiding Bishop to reinstate "the terms of their original agreement (rather than his public revision of those terms). The entire congregation of the Orlando church, and its Board of Trustees, fully and totally supported this agreement. In the Church of God in Christ, it is not uncommon for a man to pastor more than one church. This mutually acceptable arrangement continued for three years until the Presiding Bishop was angered by a routine and legitimate General Board election endorsement

made by Supt. Hutchins. It was then that these overt actions to deprive him of the rights extended to him by the Constitution of the Church of God in Christ began.

## Unconstitutional Acts

On Sunday, June 27, 1999, the Presiding Bishop, accompanied by a large group of people, went to the church in Orlando. Supt. Hutchins and the congregation had not been formally notified that they were coming. No member of the local congregation had filed any complaint against the pastor or the church. Because no service was scheduled, the property was locked and secured. They were not admitted. Outside individuals had been informed that the objective of his visit was either to remove Supt. Hutchins as pastor of the Orlando church, or to obtain his resignation as pastor of the South Carolina church.

On July 6, a court order was issued granting the Presiding Bishop reasonable access to enter the property, and encouraging mediation between the parties. No mediation took place. Attorneys representing the Presiding Bishop notified Supt. Hutchins representatives of their intention to come to the church on that following Saturday, July 10. They were informed that a funeral had already been scheduled for the very time of their proposed visit. They were offered the use of the 350-seat fellowship hall. They refused.

While an open casket was before the altar; at that solemn moment, the Presiding Bishop and his companions entered the church, announced the removal of Supt. Hutchins as pastor, and in his place appointed Bishop Harold Bell. Members of the bereaved family, and members of the church, were devastated.

That evening, the Presiding Bishop's lawyers went, I understand, to a judge's home and obtained an Emergency Restraining Order, prohibiting Supt. Hutchins, the Board of Trustees, their attorneys, or any members from interfering with the activities of the church or with the removal of Pastor Hutchins from his position as pastor.

On that same day, a letter from the Presiding Bishop to Supt. Hutchins indicated that his pastorate at the Orlando church was "RESCINDED, CANCELLED AND TERMINATED." In that letter, Supt. Hutchins also was prohibited from, establishing, pastoring, or organizing a Church of God in Christ, place of worship, or

Preaching / teaching or conducting revivals as a Minister in the Church of God in Christ within the State of Florida.”

On July 22, the Presiding Bishop and his attorneys attempted in court to have the temporary injunction made permanent. After a day of court proceedings, it was apparent that they might be successful. When I learned that this was the case, I voluntarily made emergency arrangements to travel from California to Florida that night, to testify for the defense. I did this knowing that I would be criticized by many for doing so.

### **The Presiding Bishop's Testimony**

According to my sources, Bishop Owens had said, under oath, that the Church of God in Christ was like the Catholic Church, and that he was like the Pope in ecclesiastical authority and power. He said that Supt, Hutchins had broken no law of the Church of God in Christ, or of the United States. He stated that he did not have to do so to be removed, because the Presiding Bishop had the authority to summarily and unilaterally remove him, even if he had not broken a law of the church or of the land. Bishop Owens testified that the Church of God in Christ was a strict hierarchy, in which the power flowed down from God to the Presiding Bishop, and then to the bishops and pastors. He indicated, under oath, that local church property was the property of the National Church, and that the authority of the National Church transcended the rights of the congregation and pastor to control and dispense with their property and their business affairs.

### **The Constitution And The Structure Of The C.O.G.I.C.**

Upon my arrival, I testified that the Constitutional Assembly of the Church of God in Christ, in 1972, clearly stated that the General Assembly was to be "the supreme legislative and judicial authority of the Church of God in Christ" (Official Manual, Section B, page 8). I testified that the Presiding Bishop was not like the Pope, because the Pope is elected for life, and the Presiding Bishop is elected every four years. The Pope when he speaks "ex cathedra", is considered to be indisputable and authoritative; the Presiding Bishop is elected from the General Board, and his actions are subject to the approval of the members of the General Board, whose actions are subject to the approval of the General Assembly (see the Official Manual, Section A pages 4-5).

I further testified that the Church of God in Christ was a hierarchy in that the Presiding Bishop, and the Bishops of the church had substantial authority to appoint bishops and pastors. But, I also stated that the Constitution very carefully and elaborately protected those appointed from inappropriate interference and expulsion from their office without due process. A bishop, a pastor, or an official elected by a constitutional body of the church cannot be removed from office except by the processes outlined in the Constitution of the Church of God in Christ.

Thus, the structure is not a pure hierarchy; it is a "hybrid structure" in which power flows both upwards and downwards. Power flows upwards (not downwards like a hierarchy) from the delegates of the General Assembly to the General Board and Presiding Bishop. And then it flows downwards (as in a hierarchy) to the bishops and to those under their charge. It is episcopal in that it affirms the authority of the bishops who are those above. At the same time, it is governed by a constitution, and thus the constitutional rights of the pastors and congregations, who are those who are below, must not be abused or alienated from them.

Based on my testimony, the judge decided that the Constitution, which our Presiding Bishop was elected to enforce, had not been followed when he summarily removed Supt. Hutchins from his office as pastor. He further decided that Elder Hutchins was entitled to the protection of the court, until the required constitutional procedures had been followed. He immediately directed that Supt. Hutchins be restored to his office as pastor, and that the keys to the facilities of the church be turned over to him. Praise God!

## **How Long This Madness?**

We face one of the most critical challenges to the well being of the Church of God in Christ that I have seen in my more than forty years of ministry. The one responsible for upholding the constitution of the church is the foremost transgressor thereof. The one responsible for providing protection of the various constitutional entities of the church is the greatest threat to their existence and well being.

Local churches and, pastors are leaving the Church of God in Christ. They are leaving because they see no benefit in laboring to develop a strong congregation whose assets are vulnerable to the intrusion

of those who have contributed nothing to its well being, or establishment. Can we validly insist on authority without any investment, withdrawals without any deposits?

We cannot allow a reign of terror to plague the Church of God in Christ. Pastors walk in fear. Bishops walk in fear. Leaders fail to function in their constitutional prerogatives because the present Presiding Bishop and his staff, assume dictatorial control over every branch of the life of the church. By intimidation, ridicule, and emotional brutality they seek to batter down every trace of independent thinking and every attempt by others to obtain or exercise their right under the Constitution of the Church of God in Christ

The Constitution called for an election of a new Presiding Bishop at the death of Bishop L. H. Ford. A forceful drive was launched, contrary to the Constitution, so that Bishop Owens could immediately take office without an election, Bishop O. T. Jones, Jr., others, and myself pressed for an election to fill the office vacated by the death of Bishop L. H. Ford. We were publicly ostracized and criticized during the National Convocation on Official Sunday and during the Communion Service, merely because we wished to exercise that Constitutional right. Thus, the election provided for by the Constitution, upon the death of a Presiding Bishop, did not take place.

Elder Solomon Williams, who was the elected Chairman of the National Elder's Council, was also summarily removed, without due process, from his office by this same person.

The National Judicial Committee, was created by constitutional amendment in 1991. Since that time, the Committee has actually heard only two cases. The Chief Executives of the church have refused to allow this "court of final appeal" to function.

This Presiding Bishop has frequently not permitted the General Board to exercise the oversight and governance of the Church stipulated by the Constitution/Time and time again, he makes decisions and implements them without consulting with, or receiving the approval of, the General Board. He goes about exercising dictatorial powers, and rushing into areas that the Constitution of the church has reserved for others. Due notice of the date, time and location of General Board Meetings is seldom if ever given.

The General Assembly, and its Chairman, are frequently considered to be adversaries, rather than sources of collaboration, support, guidance, and counsel. The supreme body of the Church, and its chairman, are subordinate to no other entity in the church. The Presiding Bishop should highly respect this body, and assist its effective operation.

How is it that men are more concerned about personal power and prestige than they are about the kingdom of God? More concerned about politics than about souls? Many people are willing to disrupt the spiritual program of the church that they may exercise their personal whims and power. What church can afford to drive men away rather than draw them? So many are willing to cause men to leave the church, rather than to see them thrive and flourish amid an atmosphere of freedom and justice.

"The Church of God in Christ" does not belong to leaders. On the contrary, leaders are given to, and belong to the Church. They exist for the "perfecting of the saints", and for the "edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-12). If these offices exist for the saints, then the saints cannot exist for, or belong to, those in these positions. Jesus said to Peter, "If you love me, feed my sheep." Sheep do not exist for shepherds. Shepherds exist for the well being of the sheep.

Since this is the case, from whence come this arrogant use of power and this obsession with wealth? Where does this abuse of people, and this disregard of their wishes come from? Why do men wish to lord over that upon which they have bestowed no labor?

All of us have made tremendous investments in our local churches and in the national church. We must allow no one to claim personal ownership, or dictatorial power over God's Church. It belongs to Him, it belongs to all of us. We have a right to feel safe, secure, and respected in our church. We will accept nothing less.

"The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." (KJ) 1 Pet. 5:1-4





West Angeles Church of God in Christ  
3045 Crenshaw Blvd.  
Los Angeles, CA 90016

