



# The “Great Testimony“

## A crucial document of the Catholic Apostolic Church

### (Part 2)

In this article we continue our survey of some important statements contained in the “Great Testimony“. We summarize what the British apostles taught there about water baptism and the dispensing of the Holy Spirit, the apostle ministry and other ministries of the church as well as the future they expected. Finally, we look at what they had to say on politics.<sup>1</sup>

### **Water Baptism and the dispensing of the Spirit**

The authors of the Testimony followed the Protestant tradition in which they had grown up in assuming that there are two sacraments in the Christian church: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. In addition, they wrote about a laying on of hands by apostles as something expected in the future (paragraph 114). The “laying-on of apostles’ hands” or “sealing“, as it was called, was first dispensed in 1847, ten years after the Testimony had been made public.<sup>2</sup>

As the British apostles see it, the sacrament in which re-birth or regeneration is given is baptism with water. It says in paragraph 25, that the sacrament of baptism is “the washing of regeneration, whereby God of His great mercy saveth us (Titus, iii. 5.); for we who were dead in trespasses and sins (Ephes. ii. 1. 5.), are therein born again of the Holy Ghost (John, iii. 5); the sons of God, ... and by the communication of that life we become verily and indeed members of the risen Lord Jesus Christ (Ephes. v. 30.) ...” Against this background we can understand the statement that in all the centuries in which apostles were not active, “multitudes of the race of man have been regenerated unto God” (paragraph 65).

One of the tasks of apostles is “to bestow the Holy Ghost by the laying on of their hands, whether for sealing all who believe, or for ordaining the Ministers of the House of God” (paragraph 37). The laying on of hands for “sealing and confirming the saints“ contains in it the “imparting the gifts of the Holy Ghost as the Spirit willeth to divide them to every man severally” (paragraph 37). The sealing of the firstfruits is interpreted as a complement and “confirmation“ of water baptism.

### **The apostles’ commission**

To start with, we have to point out that in the Catholic Apostolic Church apostles were not ordained. For proof, Galatians 1.1 was regularly quoted where St. Paul says of himself that he is “an apostle, neither of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father” (cf. paragraph 49). We find repeated what could already be read in the Testimony to the Anglican clergy, “that the Apostleship was Twelfefold“, but “that the number of those who should *successively* stand in the office” was not limited, “for all Scripture and the undisputed traditions of the Church do plainly shew, that more than twelve men in the first ages laboured

---

<sup>1</sup> Once again, the authors would like to thank Dr. Tim Grass of Horsham, West Sussex, for his help in checking the English version of this article for linguistic and stylistic accuracy.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *int. al.* [F. V. Woodhouse], *A Narrative of Events Affecting the Position and Prospects of the Whole Christian Church*, London <sup>2</sup>1885 (and reprints), pp. 120 ff, Karl Born, *Das Werk des Herrn unter Aposteln*, Bremen 1974, p. 39.



as apostles” (paragraph 42). And in the next paragraph we read: “The baptized have God's word and covenant that they shall receive the Holy Ghost, and therefore, that Apostles, through whom He is ministered, shall be a standing ordinance, a perpetual ministry” (paragraph 43).

Later developments show that Catholic Apostolic office bearers in Germany interpreted this passage as a clear statement that God had meant the apostle ministry to continue until the return of Christ whereas Apostle Woodhouse in 1863 considered the re-erection of the apostle ministry to be an unrepeatable end-time event which would take place shortly before the return of Christ.<sup>3</sup> And we do find statements in the Great Testimony that can be interpreted as supporting Apostle Woodhouse's view. We read there of a time when apostles and other ministries will once again be given, a time when, as promised, “God will appear again in the mighty presence of His Spirit” (paragraph 101) and “the Apostles, being sent forth in the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ, may lay their hands on all the people, bestowing the Gift of the Holy Ghost” (paragraph 112).

### The doctrine of the four-fold ministry

In its essence, the Catholic Apostolic doctrine of the four-fold ministry is based on a certain interpretation of the teachings in the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians. According to it, the statement that Christ gave gifts to men does not refer to abstract gifts, but refers to the ministries mentioned in the same chapter, that is to say, to apostles, prophets and evangelists as well as pastors and teachers (paragraph 31). This view is based on treating the above passage as of controlling significance and it implies that a different enumeration of ministries or gifted members in 1 Corinthians 12.28, which placed the gifts in hierarchical order, was neglected when the order of the ministry was established. In order to arrive at a fourfold ministry, “pastors and teachers” had to be taken as one ministry, whereas they had been taken to be two different offices in earlier stages in the development of the distinctive Catholic Apostolic doctrine.<sup>4</sup> In this way the need for a literal realization of biblical symbols in the worship of the Catholic Apostolic Church could be put into practice, for now it was possible to take each of the four living creatures in Ezekiel 1.10 and Revelation 4.7 as a symbolical representation of one of the ministries. Applying the principle of typological interpretation, it became possible to brush aside all objections that might be based on a different interpretation of the Bible, and to consider the fourfold ministry an indispensable divine ordinance.

---

<sup>3</sup> We plan to enlarge on this subject at a later date.

<sup>4</sup> [Anon.], “No Gifts No Perfect Church,” *The Morning Watch*, vol. 5 (March 1832), pp 132-145, especially pp. 132-134; John Hardman, *An Exposition of Chapters XII. XIII. and XIV. of 1 Corinthians with Observations on the Present State of the Church*, Dublin and London 1834, pp. 21, 86, 89. (In the second edition, Dublin, Edinburgh and London 1835, the references are on pp. 19, 63 and 65.) The copy of the first edition in the library of the North German regional church of the NAC in Hamburg contains handwritten comments by the former owner, Henry Thomas Burne (1799-1865), who acquired it on Feb. 9, 1835. The MS comment on p. 86 reads: “The Expositor in reckoning these as 5 orders is in error: in Eph. iv.11 the division is made by the word ‘some’ – ‘Some, Apostles; & some, Prophets; & some, Evangelists; & some, Pastors & Teachers[.]’ – etc. Making the Orders four – Pastors & Teachers being of the same order, though different classes of it. This is not a mere critical remark, but one of great importance, as, to make y<sup>e</sup> [= the] ministry five-fold instead of four-fold completely mars some beautiful types of it in scripture – such as, y<sup>e</sup> 4 cherubim in Ezek. i & x. – y<sup>e</sup> 4 Carpenters, Zech. 1.10. [recte 1.20] – y<sup>e</sup> 4 living creatures, Rev. iv.6 &c.”



### **Ministries without apostolic leadership**

The doctrine of the unbroken existence of the church led to an acknowledgement of the genuineness of ecclesiastical offices during the times when there were no apostles (paragraphs 3, 5, 41). The authors of the Great Testimony argued that even by means of imperfect ordinances God had granted a limited measure of grace and truth. He had been able to do that because, firstly, all ministries had always been contained in Christ as the church's heavenly head, even when they were missing on earth, and, secondly, because he could treat his fallen church leniently, seeing that he had already decreed the re-erection of the true church (paragraph 56). This was taken to be particularly true regarding denominations in which ministers were placed into office "from above" through bishops, who claimed to act as successors to the apostles (paragraph 113).

The authors of the Testimony opened up a perspective to ministers of all denominations that in the future they could all exercise their offices under apostles. Only for a short period of transition did the apostles envisage a situation in which there were true servants of Christ who did not submit to them (paragraph 121). Very soon ministers and people would have to decide if they wanted to follow Christ and, consequently, his apostles, or Antichrist and his "ministers". This leads us to a discussion of the eschatology contained in the Great Testimony.

### **The future glory of the church and the revelation of Antichrist**

The authors start by contrasting the pitiable state of the visible church (defined as the aggregate of the baptized) with St. Paul's assertion that Christ has cleansed the church "that he may present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5.27). They conclude that these words refer to "the future glory of the Church" as it will be revealed at the marriage of the Lamb (Revelation 19.6,7). "It shall be accomplished in His gathered people." Thus it is the "highest duty" of the church "to seek to be prepared to meet her Lord, her Spouse; to long for His appearing" (paragraph 21). If the church had remained what it should have been, it would have partaken of the translation exemplified by Enoch and outlined in 1 Corinthians 15.51,52 and 1 Thessalonians 4.16, 17. (paragraph 51). Such a church, ready to be translated, is missing because the church lacks the apostle ministry (paragraph 52).

With a reference to 2 Thessalonians 2 the revelation of the man of sin is described, "who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped". The state of the nations leads the authors to declare that "the time foretold in God's word rapidly approaches, when the Son of Man shall come in the clouds of heaven to judge the nations, and to set up that kingdom which shall never be destroyed". From 2 Thessalonians 2.8 they conclude that at his coming "that lawless one stands already revealed" (paragraph 98) and they call this "the hour of temptation, which cometh upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." according to Revelation 3.10. They interpret Revelations 13.11 and 17.8ff as meaning that "nothing can hinder the Priests of God's Church from ranging themselves under the 'false Prophet which rises out of the earth', nor preserve the kings of Christendom from giving their kingdom to the Beast which ascends out of the bottomless pit, and from gathering together under him to make war with the Lamb" if they do not take warning from the Testimony. That would end in their destruction (paragraph 99).



### **The hundred and forty-four thousand and the great harvest**

Paragraph 101 of the Great Testimony contains important statements concerning the course of latter-day events.

Through apostles, Zion is to be restored in accordance with the original ordinances of the church. “God will appear again in the mighty presence of His Spirit” and then the seal of God will be given “before the four winds of heaven let loose the elements of destruction on the earth and on the sea”. Then “the followers of the Lamb, the undefiled, in whose mouth shall be no guile, without fault before the throne of God, shall stand with the Lamb on mount Zion, the manifested first-fruits unto God and the Lamb, the earnest of that glorious harvest, when the Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and shall gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other”. This can be interpreted as meaning that the church led by apostles is the place of refuge, that Mount Zion on which the hundred and forty-four thousand are seen. Their refuge is in the tabernacle of God (cf. paragraphs 16 and 104).

In addition to those seen on Mount Zion there is the “glorious harvest”, which is here equated with the elect who are gathered “from the four winds”. The hundred and forty-four thousand are not the harvest, but only “the earnest of that glorious harvest” which will take place after the firstfruits have become manifest on Mount Zion together with the Lamb. The bold combination of texts from Matthew 24.51 and Revelation 7.1-3 suggests that the great mass of the elect, the “glorious harvest”, do not receive the seal, but are gathered from among those who are exposed to the winds of destruction let loose. The German translation made by Rossteuscher changes the text quoted from Luther’s German translation of the Bible in such a way that this interpretation seems the only possible one. The English original and the other translations follow the received translations of the Bible and make it possible to hold that the elect are simply gathered from the four points of the compass.

In paragraph 102 the bishops are called upon to “are called upon to present” their “flocks unto Him, an holy people, who shall be able to abide the judgment”. The princes are asked to turn to God who can save them and their people “from the floods of ungodliness”. It is possible to interpret this as meaning that the groups mentioned here are to be saved from amongst the tribulation of the last days. Thus the bishops’ task for the preservation of their flocks would be different from the work done by “Apostles, sent forth not of man, neither by man” and “Prophets, Evangelists, and Pastors and Teachers, ordained by apostles” who “shall work the work of God in His Church”. This would mean that some Christians have already been gathered into a rightly appointed church when the tribulation of the latter days begins. When all existing ordinances come under attack from the Antichristian powers, leaders in church and state would have the choice between leading their flocks into that church or becoming servants of Antichrist themselves.

Further developments within the Catholic Apostolic Church show us that there were various possible ways of interpreting the words of the Great Testimony and that dormant differences in doctrine entertained by some of the apostles could thus remain undetected for a time. This holds particularly true regarding their eschatological expectations and their view of the role appointed to the apostles and the church headed by them within the Christian community.

### **The duty of obedience towards magistrates who are doomed to destruction**

The comments on politics must be seen against the background of the future the apostles expected. Referring to the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of the epistle to the Romans, the apostles enjoin obe-



dience towards all existing authorities, for “the resurrection is not passed already, nor are the kingdoms of this world yet subverted, but loyalty and allegiance are due to the powers that be, in the matters of this world” (paragraph 71). In return Christian magistrates are called upon to protect the church, to fulfil their duties, to call into their service “honest and faithful and God-fearing men”, not to carry the sword in vain, to resist evil-doers and to support the expected work of God against the dangers of the last days with all the means at their command. “In spiritual things” they are asked to submit “to those who are over you, as over all others of the baptized, in the Lord” (paragraph 122).

The authorities are warned that the end of their rule is imminent. However, it will not be Christians who will be the instruments of their downfall, but the Antichrist of the last days. Against this background of intense eschatological expectation political activity does not seem to make much sense: “And so far as your lawful power, influence, and example extend, be helpful that God's work may be fulfilled, and His blessing find undisturbed passage to His Church - for this is the only way of escape for you or your people. There is no refuge in any human defences from that storm which is ready to burst upon you. - The only escape is, in being taken from the evil to come; in ascending to the Hill of God; in seeking for, and hasting unto the Coming of the Lord, for which this work of GOD is the only preparation” (paragraph 122). The right or duty of resistance against unrighteous authorities begins when Antichrist rules.

The authors draw a dark picture of contemporary politics for, wherever they look, the rulers make concessions to the idea of the sovereignty of the people, “the universal cry” that “is echoing round the world, that power is from the people, and they the legitimate source thereof” (paragraph 10). Thus they deviate from the ideal of a Christian state in which “power must be exercised on a principle of strict duty and responsibility to God, and not in compliance with the wayward passions of the subject: – for the source of it is God, and not the people” (paragraph 14). Censorship of the press is considered necessary whenever the press is “employed in the corruption of morals, or the propagation of open sedition” (paragraph 10). Obedience is to govern the relationships between people on all levels of society. In the state all subjects obey the king, and in a household, the wife, children and servants obey the father (paragraph 113).