



# Precursors of the “Great Testimony”

## The Testimonies to King William IV. and the heads of the Anglican Church

When speaking of the “Testimony” of the British Apostles, most people have the “Great Testimony” of 1837 in mind, in which the apostles addressed the heads of all Christian denominations and states. However, in 1836 they had addressed a “Testimony” to the king of Great Britain and another one to the clergy of the Church of England and Ireland. In this article, the reader will be introduced to those testimonies.<sup>1</sup>

Patience is required of those who attempt to read the testimonies. In print, the “Great Testimony” consists of 89 quarto pages, the document addressed to the leaders of the Anglican Church covers 71 pages of the same size, and that addressed to the king 45. The discussion of themes of permanent interest is mixed up with comments on questions of church policy that were discussed by contemporaries in Parliament and in print. If we want to get a right understanding of what the British apostles wrote, we must not neglect the circumstances of those times.

### The Testimony to King William IV. and his Privy Council

Apostle Spencer Perceval (1795-1859) was the eldest son of a Conservative Prime Minister bearing the same name.<sup>2</sup> He addressed a testimony to the British king and his Privy Council, which he was able to present to William IV on 19 January 1836. Prophecies had pointed out that he should address politicians in the kind of words they were accustomed to.<sup>3</sup> Since his papers were handed over to the British Library we know several drafts of his text.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 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 accuracy and style.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Seraphim Newman-Norton, “A Biographical Index of Those Associated with the Lord’s Work,” London 1971, p. 87.

<sup>3</sup> British Library [henceforth: B.L.], Additional Manuscripts [henceforth: Add. MSS.] 49192, fos.17-18 [read: sheet (folio) 17 and the following sheet], Drummond to Perceval, 2 June 1835. After a reference to two prophecies which, as can be concluded from the context, were interpreted as meaning that Spencer Perceval as a “Prophet to England” was to write to the king, Drummond explains his position as follows: “I have been long grieving at seeing the downfall of every thing, & no testimony gone forth to our rulers, our priests, our princes, & our judges: it is useless testifying to the old women at Albury & Chepstow; & now it appears it is the Lords [sic] time for sending a witness to them: how this is to be done is a matter for you to consider.” Neither apostles nor prophets had a commission to testify to the king. One rather needed “a special messenger; a State Prophet; not a man to speak with supernatural utterance, nor in a supernatural manner, but one to take the light brought to him in the Church, & deal it out to Statesmen in the ordinary language, & with the ordinary means of statesmen.” Concerning the concept of a “Prophet to England” cf. Harold Bernard



In the House of Commons, Perceval had drawn attention to himself in 1832 when he moved that Parliament should decree a national day of humiliation in order to avert God's judgments,<sup>5</sup> and his testimony begins with a warning of impending judgement: "The handwriting of God is upon the wall; every eye has beheld it, but there has been no interpreter" – an obvious allusion to God's warning addressed to Belshazzar (Daniel 5). The French Revolution with the beheading of the king, the atheistic "reign of terror" and the threat posed to the whole of Europe by Napoleon, "the man of the people" had been "the *first act of the great tragedy*" which the future held in store (pp. 22-3<sup>6</sup>).

The Testimony can roughly be divided into two parts. In the first part (pp. 1 to 27) the author laments contemporary events that to his mind show that all ecclesiastical and civil institutions are in a state of rapid decline. Perceval criticizes all recent attempts at reform and warns against any further reform. God had given special grace to Britain when he had not only granted her a maritime empire but also victory over the whole of Europe that had come under Napoleon's rule. But when the British apostatized from God's laws he himself had given the nation a sign of his displeasure by devouring the Houses of Parliament by fire (in 1834), thus "teaching the nation that that was gone, over which He had long watched, in his mercy ... ; that the ancient honour and glory of the kingdom were departed that there had been sin against Him found in those the high places of the land." (p. 5) Before the reforms Britain had been "a church state, a Christian kingdom". At present, however, it held true that "God is rejected by us as our king, as literally as by the Israelites of old" (p. 6).

For Perceval, who in this is apparently influenced by Calvinism<sup>7</sup>, it is sin to keep religion and politics apart (pp. 24-5). In Perceval's opinion responsible government acting upon just principles has become impossible because the rulers neglect God's sanction of their rule and seek the people's favour instead – and that favour changes as the sea. Satan proclaims "that great lie, that the people are the source of legitimate power" and consequently "no man is found standing in his place, under Christ ..., acknowledging Him as the only head and fountain of all authority" (p. 7, cf. p. 20).

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Copinger, "Annals of the Lord's Work" [typewritten manuscript with additions in the author's handwriting, kept up to date until a few weeks before the author's death on 11 Oct. 1951], p. 55 and Charles William Boase, *The Elijah Ministry to the Christian Church [Supplement]*, Edinburgh 1868, p. 821. This supplement "was left unfinished and not revised", as Copinger notes, "A Bibliography by H.B. Copinger (Begun Easter 1908)" [typewritten manuscript], p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> B.L., Add. MSS. 49192, fos. 28-31 (fragmentary draft), 32-46 (another draft), 47-58 (another draft), 59-62 (Version ready to be printed with instruction for the printer on first page, contains text as printed down to p. 8 of the finished document), 63-70 (another draft), 71-72 (last part of a fragmentary draft), 73-75 (largely another version of 63-70).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. John Wolfe, *The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain 1829-1860*, Oxford 1991, p. 72.

<sup>6</sup> The page references refer to the printed text which is made available on this website.

<sup>7</sup> As opposed to Calvin, Luther and the classic Puritans taught that after the Fall the law of nature or the reason given by God even to the unregenerate, sufficed to regulate relationships within a commonwealth. Cf. François Wendel, *Calvin, the Origin and Development of his Religious Thought*, London 1963, pp. 308-310; Carl Andresen & Adolf Martin Ritter, eds., *Handbuch der Dogmen- und Theologiegeschichte*, vol. 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition Göttingen 1998, p. 30; William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism*, Philadelphia 1972, chap. 10; Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*, Boston 1961, chap. 14.



It would be too simplistic to interpret this document as nothing but an appeal to repent and return to the concept of a Christian state led by a monarch who reigns by the grace of God, for in the second part Perceval attempts to demonstrate that the rulers, even if they obeyed God's appeal for repentance, would not be able to avert his judgements. All existing institutions will be destroyed, and the personal Antichrist will rule until he is defeated by Christ. The leaders in church and state can, however, be saved from the terrors of the time of the end if they seek refuge in the ark of the new covenant. The members of the old elite (who had been originally invested with power by God) can only live up to their special responsibilities if they set a good example to their subjects by showing them the way to salvation (pp. 35-6). As in earlier times of apostasy from God's ordinances, only a faithful remnant will escape the impending judgement (p. 44).

The provision of refuge consists in a completely new church with a new ministry. Seeing that the old ministry failed to recognize the signs of the times, God had had to reject it (p. 29). Led by the original ministries of the Church – apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors – the baptized of all nations will, if they accept those ministries, be gathered into one, not into “a new sect”, but into a church reconstituted according to the original pattern (pp. 30-1) “In this land,” Perceval proclaims, “has God called His Apostles, and given Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers,” in all other lands he would, through the apostles' laying on of hands, give “Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers” (p. 32). Perceval expects that the work thus begun will make rapid progress: “In London He has set His SEVEN CHURCHES, wherein He will shew forth the pattern of the completeness of the universal Church – one, holy, Apostolical.” (p. 33)

It is worthy of note that Perceval at that stage does not regard the reconstituted apostle ministry as a permanent institution for guiding the Christian community, but as a foundation ministry for a church that has to be re-founded as a refuge from the judgments of the last days.<sup>8</sup> The apostles' laying on of hands to him simply serves to ordain a new ministry; as far as we can see from this testimony he does not envisage a sealing of the baptized through it<sup>9</sup>. In this respect his view of the apostle ministry differs from that of other apostles.

### **The Testimony to the clergy of the Church of England**

The Testimony to the clergy of the Church of England had been compiled by Apostle Cardale from September 1835. According to Catholic Apostolic tradition, he made use of contributions handed in by all apostles. It was the answer to prophecies calling for “a testimony against Babylon”.<sup>10</sup> Babylon stood for Christendom.<sup>11</sup> From the text (pp. 83-4.<sup>12</sup>) it becomes

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<sup>8</sup> The teaching that a new ministry might be necessary appears in December 1831 in an article in the periodical *Morning Watch*. It would receive its approval by the gifts of the Spirit amongst the churches in which they served (Anon., “On the Unity of the Church,” *Morning Watch*, vol. 4, pp. 327-340, especially p. 331). In the Testimony to the king it is ordination by new apostles rather than the gifts of the Spirit that give legitimacy to those new ministers. We would like to emphasize that a simple comparison with the Testimony to the Anglican ministers, in which contradictions become visible, makes it quite clear that at that time the development of doctrine was far from final.

<sup>9</sup> On p. 36 of this testimony Perceval envisages a pouring out of the Spirit which will „seal“ and sanctify the newly gathered people of God.

<sup>10</sup> Copinger, “Annals of the Lord's Work“, p. 55; C. W. Boase, *Elijah Ministry*, p. 821.



clear that the authors wanted to plead with, or bring charges against, the Church of England as their spiritual mother “that she put away her whoredoms out of her sight ... lest I ... make her as a wilderness ...” (Hosea 2, 2.3). It is noteworthy that only Cardale and seven other apostles were “children” of the Church of England.<sup>13</sup> In 1854 Carlyle brought similar charges, based on a prophecy uttered in July 1853, against the Church of Scotland.<sup>14</sup> So the question arises, how much those four apostles who had not been Anglicans really contributed to this testimony. Unfortunately, any documents showing the process of composition are inaccessible to us.

In the first part this testimony, too, refers to contemporary events. Its bias can be demonstrated from the fact that it is only addressed to the heads of the established church and not at all to those of the dissenting churches. In fact, the dissenting churches are severely criticized. Their members, we read, had joined with unbelievers and papists “in unholy union” systematically to attack the alliance between throne and altar in order finally to destroy “both Church and Monarchy”. Just as it was the duty of the church to bless the state like a father, it was up to the state to protect the church like a dutiful son (pp. 10-11) Instead, the state had weakened the established church in Ireland and was preparing to take away the church’s income from tithes in England (pp. 11-12).

The Anglican Church receives praise as a church that, unlike other reformed churches, has maintained “the Apostolic forms and ordinances of the primitive church”. These, of course, include its being led by bishops who are at the same time seen as bishops of the universal

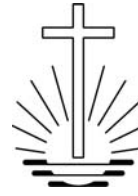
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<sup>11</sup> Cf. [Francis V. Woodhouse], *A Narrative of Events Affecting the Position and Prospects of the Whole Christian Church*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. London 1847, p. 75; C. W. Boase, *Elijah Ministry*, pp. 820-1; George Bellett, *Reasons for refusing a message lately sent to the Ministers of the Church of England, on the authority of some who call themselves “Prophets of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Two Sermons Preached in St. Leonard’s Church, Bridgnorth*, Bridgnorth 1836, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> The page references refer to the text of the octavo edition made available on this website.

<sup>13</sup> The following apostles had been Anglicans (listed in the order in which they were called): John Bate Cardale, Henry Drummond, Spencer Perceval, Nicholas Armstrong, Francis Valentine Woodhouse, Henry Dalton, John Owen Tudor and Francis Sitwell. Henry John King [Church] had been a Congregationalist (“Independent”), Thomas Carlyle, William Dow und Duncan MacKenzie had been members of the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian). Cf. the table compiled by Günter Knobloch and Reinhard Ruttorf in *Neue Apostelgeschichte/ New Acts of the Apostles*, Frankfurt/M. 1985, pp. 102, 104. The “Church of Ireland” was the Anglican Church on Irish territory.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Thomas Carlyle, *Pleadings with my Mother: the Church in Scotland. The Substance of Four Lectures delivered in Edinburgh, May 1854*, Edinburgh 1854. Cf. as a possible impulse a prophecy of 17 July 1853 on Hosea 2: There will yet be a pleading with [charge brought against] your mother, which you have not seen. There will yet be a pleading with her because she is not His wife. She cannot return, for she has built a wall so that she cannot find the path. She does not know how to return, but there will be a pleading with her. Ye are not yet ready for the pleading, the three times seven have not been completed and ye are not yet prepared for the pleading that ye have not yet seen, not yet felt. The word of the Lord will be fulfilled before ye descend into the valley and the door will be opened that will never be shut again. Oh, ye do not yet know the greatness of her whoredom. She cannot return. She will run after her lovers that they may help her on the day of the Lord’s judgements, but they will not save her from His hand, for they, together with her, shall be overtaken by His judgement. But the remnant of the Israel of God shall be saved.” (“Report from Albury no. xc.” of the October 1853 Record, re-translated from the German translation made by Thiersch, dated 14 January 1854 and sent to the Angels in lithographed form, pp. 27-8.)



church – which they call “Christ’s Catholic Church” (pp. 3-4), a view similar to that of the Tractarian (later Anglo-Catholic party within the Church of England. It has also preserved purer doctrine than any other Christian denomination. According to this document the Greek Church is afflicted by mediocrity in doctrine, the Roman Church by pagan superstition, perversion of truth and decline of the papacy, and Protestants on the European continent by new theological systems and heresies. Everywhere rationalist thinkers cast doubt on the miraculous character of the truths of Christianity, and religion is replaced by ethics (pp. 5-6).

But like all other Christian denominations the Anglican Church has added new sins to those of her fathers and refuses to repent (pp. 13-14). Against the background of their criticism of all ecclesiastical systems, the apostles as ambassadors of Christ claim to be setting out the blueprint of a church organized according to the pattern laid down in Scripture. This pattern, with few alterations, is also described in the “Great Testimony”. Once the Church is organized according to this ever-valid pattern it will be possible to prepare it as “a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing” as the Bride of the Lamb (pp. 14-15 with quotations from Ephesians 5, 27 and Revelation 19, 7). Her task, we read, is to complete the work begun by Christ during his life on earth, to gather and to glorify those who are called unto eternal glory (pp. 17-18). The Church as the Body of Christ, guided by Christ as her head and ruled by apostles, has to be ministered to by the fourfold ministry of apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors (pp. 17-24).

Again and again the importance of the apostle ministry for the church is emphasized. Apostles minister the Spirit, not only in ordaining ministers, but also through laying hands on all the baptized, and they guarantee the unity and apostolic character of the Church (pp. 24-5, 27-9, 74-5). The idea that apostles might only be a foundational ministry in the Church is expressly rejected, for it is their most important task to lead the church to her completion (pp. 30-1). In line with this view, they maintain as distinctly that while the apostle ministry is of a twelfold character, more than twelve men can successively stand in the office of apostle, as can be seen from the fact that there were more than twelve apostles in the primitive church (pp. 24-6).

Against the background of an ideal church under apostles the decline of God’s ordinances after the apostolic age is lamented; by contrast with the “Great Testimony”, developments in the British Isles are focused upon (pp. 31-59). Even the reformers only added more sects to the Babylon they had found (p. 48). The Church of England, which received such praise in the introduction, is now more severely criticized than any other denomination (pp. 48-51).

“The history of the Church”, the authors conclude, “contains a melancholy but instructive lesson. God’s purpose can only be brought to pass through God’s means.” (p. 61). These means are to be offered to all the baptized, even if, and especially because, for the most part they are “rebellious children” (p. 60). If pious Christians stay within corrupt denominations, they can indeed be saved, but, so to speak, through the fire (of divine judgements), which they will have to endure (p. 57). The bishops of the Church of England are called upon to examine whether their flocks are being led towards completion and thus prepared for the imminent return of Christ – an examination which – against the background of what has been said before – must inevitably lead to the conclusion that this is not the case (pp. 62-7).



Christ is ready to forgive sin and re-constitute his original ordinances (p. 67). To demonstrate this, the authors draw attention to the newly-erected and constantly spreading church under apostles. Those paragraphs in an updated form would also become part of the “Great Testimony” (pp. 57-78, cf. §§ 104-116 of the “Great Testimony”).

The apostles expressly declare that they have been separated for their work for “the blessing of the Catholic [universal] Church”, but “not yet sent forth”. With their separation they have received a commission to bear their testimony to the addressees as God’s “anointed priesthood” (p. 79, cf. p. 74). The old ordinances are shaken and will soon be removed, but now each one of those addressed is invited to serve in God’s rebuilt temple and to become a fellow-worker in his holy work under apostles (pp. 80-1). In fellowship with the Angels that God himself has already put in charge of his churches, they are called upon to pray that the apostles may soon be sent forth (p. 81, cf. a similar statement on p. 82). The clergy of the established church bear an awesome responsibility: “If the Lord be again sending forth Apostles and Prophets to His Church (...), and she reject and persecute them, she thereby proclaims herself apostate ...” (pp. 80-1).

We further read that a “spiritual Church” is developing, the opposite of existing “synagogues of Antichrist”; as in the times of Eli the priesthood is going to be changed (pp. 75, 81-2) The work will proceed, whether with the old priesthood, who are once again invited to join in it, or without them. “Already, because the priests have resisted God’s way ... He hath taken them that were no priests, nor prophets’ sons and set them as priests in His house, as Apostles over His Churches. But He has done so with a sorrowful heart, and with a sorrowful heart should they take that office to which He has called them” (p. 82). As a result of accepting the apostles’ testimony the ministers would have to face difficulties, but they and their flocks would soon be delivered “through the power of God in the Holy Ghost” (p. 83).

It remains to be said that messengers of the apostles knocked at the doors of the vicarages offering this Testimony to the ministers. George Bellett, who was Apostle Dalton’s successor as perpetual curate of St. Leonard’s Church in Bridgnorth, refused to accept the testimony from his hands. The opposing views of the existing ministry’s future role which our analysis of the two testimonies revealed became clear to Bellett in his contacts with those who acknowledged the work under apostles. Until then, Bellett declared, they had rejected his ordination and that of his fellow ministers as worthless, now all of a sudden the validity of their ministry was acknowledged and they were invited to co-operate.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Bellett, *Reasons for refusing a message*, pp. 3, 26-7.