



The Making of the New Apostolic Church (5)

Apostles seeking further light on their mission

Twelve men have had faith to accept their mission to serve as Apostles of the Lord. For the time being they minister to a comparatively small number of believers. While waiting to be sent out, they seek further light on God's will concerning the church's future course.

The spiritual gifts in Scotland and England paved the way for a course of events starting in 1832 when the first Apostle took up his office. More Apostles were called and on 14 July 1832 the Twelve were "separated" as Apostles of the Lord. After that date they retired to Albury. In doing so they gave up their professions, left the accustomed surroundings and, together with their families, moved into vacant cottages originally built for agricultural labourers on Henry Drummond's estate.

Prophets to open up the Bible

It was a time of preparation for their future task. Seven Prophets had been ordained to help them understand God's will, Edward Oliver Taplin holding a prominent place among them as their "Pillar". The Apostles believed that by these means God would reveal great secrets still hidden in the words of the Bible. So they met in Drummond's library on 1 January 1836 seeking "light" on the first chapter of Genesis and then turned their attention to the next chapter.

They were convinced that God acted according to a fixed pattern – in creation, in the way he revealed himself to the patriarchs and to the people of Israel. And they felt sure that he would direct their activities according to the same pattern.

Apostles to lead out of Babylon

In the course of this prophetic interpretation of the Bible they developed a magnificent image of the church as it would once be. All prophecies were founded on the idea that Babylon was a cipher standing for Christianity in a state of division and confusion. The Apostles were to lead Christians out of Babylon and lay the foundations for the rebuilding of Jerusalem. They interpreted this to mean that after the fall of spiritual Babylon large numbers of Christians would be gathered into a unified work headed by Apostles.

Congregations containing 3,000 members expected

The candlestick with a stem and six branches prescribed to be placed in the Mosaic tabernacle was taken to symbolize the ministry of a local “church” or congregation. This meant that a fully developed local church was to have an Angel and six Elders, and each of them was to have a “Help”. In addition there were to be 36 Priests – adding up to 50 ministers acting in a priestly capacity – one for at least 50 communicants or adult members. So a fully developed church was to consist of at least 2,500 communicants, but 3,000 were expected to be the normal number. In addition, each Angel of a church was to preside over four “horns”. These were taken to be congregations of a similar size as the mother churches.

A rough estimate of the expected membership of the Seven Churches of London and four “horns” each adds up to about 100,000 communicants. This was equal to about one tenth of London’s inhabitants at that time. Similar percentages were expected everywhere else in the country.

One of ten Christians a follower of the Apostles

The huge dimensions of the future work corresponded with their interpretation of the eleventh chapter of the Revelation given to John. The churches (meaning the various local congregations of the “universal church”) were understood to correspond to the Two Witnesses whose ministry is described there. As they saw it, those Two Witnesses had been “slain” after the first apostolic time and now, after 1260 years in which the true church had remained invisible, the time of their resurrection had arrived. Soon the day would come when (according to Revelation 11:13) a great earthquake would happen and the tenth part of the great city, the spiritual Babylon, would fall. At that time they understood this to mean that ten per cent of all Christians would unite in a church led by Apostles. They felt that they had to get ready for that time.

Twelve Apostles and their helpers

From the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 and the ensuing account of the confusion of languages as a consequence of building the Tower of Babel they concluded that there are twelve tribes and seventy nations among Christians. An Apostle was to be sent to each of those “tribes”. Since they expected the work to take large dimensions the Apostles (whose number was to be limited to twelve at a time) were to be assisted by 70 “Apostles’ delegates”. The Seventy were taken to mean men authorized by the Apostles. They considered Timothy and Titus such men exercising authority delegated to them by Paul who, they thought, had commissioned them to seal, ordain and “rule” the church. What they did was only valid because the Apostle had delegated those apostolic functions to them. In a way they were “apostle helpers” who could not act without specific instructions given by the Apostle in charge of the “tribe”.

In their ministry in the “universal church” the Apostles were to be assisted by sixty “Evangelists to the Nations”, twelve Prophets, twelve Evangelists and twelve Pastors (Shepherds). The Angels of the Seven Churches in London were also directly responsible to the college of Apostles. In future twelve Angels in each of the twelve “tribes” were to be added, and those 144 Angels, jointly with the apostles, were to form the “Council of Jerusalem”.

Christians to make up their minds

For the time being, however, there were only very few ministers of the “universal church” to support the twelve Apostles in their work for the universal church. But this state of affairs was considered temporary since the Apostles saw themselves in a state of getting ready for the day when they would be sent out. When that day arrived all true Christians and the faithful clergy would had to answer the call to leave the spiritual Babylon.

They also stated this view in a long printed “Testimony” completed in 1836. This will be discussed more fully in the next article of this series.

Translation or the fire of tribulation

The Apostles and those who supported their work held conservative views both in ecclesiastical affairs and in politics. They themselves did not want to destroy the ecclesiastical and social order), but they considered those “ordinances” once established by God as institutions that were doomed to perish as a consequence of the sins of the men in authority. In the great French Revolution of 1789 to 1815 the agents of revolution had already brought about the fall of many monarchs and ecclesiastical dignitaries. More or less parallel to the Apostles being sent in the full power of their ministry those agents of revolution would grow stronger and destroy everything that tied people to the old order of things. Then there would be a short period in which the faithful remnant of Christians would join with the Apostles. After that the Antichrist would rule the world in the time of the Great Tribulation.

Those sealed by Apostles would be the firstfruits of God’s harvest, protected from that tribulation. Others, who had been unable to accept the Apostles, would be refined by the fire of tribulation. After the judgment on the Antichrist they would be gathered as the great harvest. By the Mosaic Law the firstfruits of the harvest were to be offered up to the Lord before it was permitted to reap the harvest of grain. In this they saw the distinction “foreshadowed” which they found in Revelation (chapters 7 and 14) where the 144,000 sealed firstfruits precede the uncountable number of those who have come out of the great tribulation.