



The Making of the New Apostolic Church (6)

The Testimony – Admonition and invitation

The Testimony of the British Apostles has often been mentioned. In 1871 the Catholic Apostolic theologian Ernst Adolf Rossteuscher called it “the most important piece of all the church documents that were produced after the last piece included in the New Testament.” However, in 1847 Apostle Woodhouse had written that he only considered it a document reflecting “the state of things” in 1836 “so far as God gave His servants discernment thereof”.

A message to all Christian authorities

The *Testimony* was published in 1837. It did not carry a title, but began with an address: “To the Patriarchs, Archbishops, Bishops, and others in places of chief rule over the Church of Christ throughout the earth, and to the Emperors, Kings, Sovereign Princes, and Chief Governors over the nations of the baptised”. It had come into existence because the prophets called for “a testimony against Babylon”. “Babylon”, that was the term used to describe a state of disorder which, as the authors thought, prevailed not only in the churches, but also in the states that were no longer ruled in conformity to Christian principles.

All ecclesiastical ministries approved?

The Apostles had already addressed a “lesser” *Testimony* to the Anglican clergy before they wrote down the “catholic” or “great” *Testimony*. The “lesser” *Testimony* had already contained much that was later included in the “catholic” *Testimony*. The testimony addressed to the Anglican clergy had been officially approved on Christmas Day 1835, and from January 1836 the Evangelists knocked at the doors of the vicarages in London and other parts of England. They wanted to open the clerics’ minds to the idea that they and their flocks were to follow the Apostles. Many remained indifferent. One however, George Bellet, became angry. The same persons, he said, who were now knocking at his door, had only lately spread the message that he and his fellow pastors were not properly ordained because only Apostles, not Bishops, could ordain ministers. And now they declared that God did not want to pass him and his ordination by.

Bellet doubted the sincerity of what those messengers told him. Their message seemed too contradictory. But a close reading of the Testimonies will resolve the apparent contradiction. We find the explanation that Christians had sought for a substitute for apostolic ordination when the Apostle ministry had ceased. They had then decided that Bishops could ordain ministers. That had not really been God's will, the British Apostles wrote in their Testimonies, but God had permitted it—and had also acted through those ministers, though in a reduced manner.

Now, they said, there were Apostles again, but they had not yet been sent and could therefore not act in the full power of their ministry and so prove their divine commission. Soon, however, they would be sent, and then every minister would have to make up his mind if he would follow the Apostles and thus protect his flock from the divine judgement in the end-time.

Impurity of the Church – healing or demolishing

The Apostles did not really expect that their message to the Christian nations would avert the judgment over “Babylon”. Christendom was not the “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church” of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, but rather consisted of a variety of “sects”. The Apostles believed that the church structure formed by those “sects” was to be treated according to the rules found in Leviticus chapter 14 on the treatment of the leprous plague in a house. There it says that one must first try to heal the leprosy and save the building. That was the reason for publishing the Testimony. If one failed to heal the leprosy, the house had to be pulled down and the materials taken to “an unclean place”.

Apostle Cardale commented on this: “We would have healed Babylon, but she would not be healed” (cf. Jeremiah 51: 9). Apostle Woodhouse stressed Jeremiah's conclusion: “Forsake her, and let us go every one into his own country!” Members of the Albury Circle had already linked this Scripture with the summons in Revelation: “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues” (Revelation 18: 4). The Apostles published their Testimony as an appeal to leave the ecclesiastical Babylon when the time was ripe. They had already come to the conclusion that the ecclesiastical “Babylon” would not be healed before they had written down the Catholic Testimony. They just had to prove that “this work [under Apostles] has been hitherto no undermining ... of those in authority”, as Apostle Woodhouse wrote ten years later.

No new sect, but God's own work

The work led by Apostles, they declared, “is not a new sect; it is God's work for imparting his blessing to the whole of Christendom, the baptised world.” (Section 113) They pointed out a difference between the apostolic congregations, whose ministers, they felt sure, had been

given by God, and other fellowships whom they considered “synagogues of Antichrist, presided over by heads chosen of the people.” (Section 113)

One may feel this to be contrary to the definition of “church” which is given at the beginning of the *Testimony*: “The Church of Christ is the company of all who are baptised in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, without distinction of age or country, and separated by their baptism from all other men.”

This apparent contradiction can be resolved if we see these words as defining the ideal view of “church”, which is in turn compared to the church as it had actually become in the course of its history—a church which is not one body, but composed of “sects”. Under Apostles the true church had once again become visible, they thought. They did not expect that all the baptised would follow the Apostles. They thought that about ten per cent of the Christians living would make up a “faithful remnant” and join the work of deliverance from the latter day judgments, which was led by Apostles. Those people would be gathered not so much by miracles, but mainly through the word of God: “By the words of truth and life He is separating the spiritual remnant from the mass of profession throughout Christendom.” (Section 116)

Baptism demands responsibility

The Apostles did not think of themselves as founders of a new denomination, but as restorers of the church as it was constituted at Pentecost. They called upon the members of all other denominations to enter into this reconstituted church. This is how they argued:

“To have poured out the Holy Ghost on any one of the various sects, would have been to vindicate that one, when all had failed; to have poured out the Holy Ghost on all, would have been to confirm each in its separateness and self-complacency. But God’s purpose hath been to raise up Apostles and Prophets, laying again the ancient foundations; to rebuild thereon His spiritual temple; from thence to send His messengers; thither to invite, and there to bless all His children.” (Section 118)

If one had been baptised one was not permitted to remain neutral towards the Apostles’ call. “If the Lord be again sending forth Apostles and Prophets to His Church, and the baptised reject and persecute them, they thereby proclaim themselves apostate. And thus the light shall make manifest the darkness.” (Section 120)

Lasting or temporary importance?

Why was the Catholic Testimony considered the expression of a past state of affairs in 1847, but referred to as a declaration of lasting importance a quarter of a century later?

Developments in the history of the Apostolic Work help to explain this change. The twelve-fold Apostle unity was lost in 1841 and could not be restored in the years that followed. So the *Testimony* was the only published document authorised by all twelve Apostles. By 1871

there had been controversies in which both sides referred to this document—and both had found passages to support their views. Manfred Henke

Note:

The text of the Testimonies and further information can be found online under

<http://www.nak.org/en/news/publications/article/14355/>

<http://www.nak.org/en/news/publications/article/14439/>

<http://www.nak.org/en/news/publications/article/14501/>