



The making of the New Apostolic Church (8)

New horizons in northern Germany

While the crisis of the church gathered under Apostles lasted, the number of active members on the British Isles declined sharply. An upward trend began in 1847. In that year work started in other countries – and the greatest successes were visible in the north of Germany. The crisis had started in 1841 when two Apostles refused to cooperate with the others. Conflicts among the remaining ten had intensified it. In 1846 the quarrels were patched up by a compromise: From then on each Apostle was to work in his “tribe” – the region he was responsible for – as he saw fit. Thus it became possible to start the work of sealing the faithful members.

Revival after the crisis

The effects of the crisis were particularly obvious in England. In 1840 there had been thirty congregations there, fifteen were closed in 1843. Ten of those could be reopened after 1848, but 40 per cent of the former members of all congregations stayed away for good, and another 20 per cent gradually returned. From 1847 to 1852 Apostle Cardale sealed about 2,300 adult members.

In Scotland Apostle Drummond sealed 215 believers, Apostle Armstrong sealed 140 members in Ireland.

On the European continent there was some success in Switzerland where about 300 persons could be sealed between 1850 and 1852. In France there were nearly 250 sealings, in Belgium 20 and another 232 in Canada and the USA.

Against this background Apostle Carlyle was remarkably successful in northern Germany. He only started gathering congregations in 1848 and sealed 1,004 members during the first five years.

Limited toleration by the state

Prussia was the largest German state, and there the formation of Catholic Apostolic congregations was favoured by a relatively tolerant religious policy. In a “Patent concerning the formation of new religious societies”, dated 30 March 1847, King Frederick William IV. asserted his resolve to “unabatedly uphold liberty of faith and conscience”. In the same document he permitted his subjects to resign their membership of the privileged Protestant and Catholic churches and to found new “religious societies”. The privileged churches had been plagued by rationalist “dissenters”. They disagreed with the accepted teachings and the king encouraged them to leave the established churches, hoping thereby to restore peace there.

The regulations of March 1847 seemed to guarantee a high degree of religious freedom, but their implementation was fraught with difficulties. The clergy acted as agents of the state when they baptised children, solemnised marriages or conducted

funerals and entered those acts into the church registers. Only in 1874 the registration of births, marriages and deaths was delegated to the local authorities. In 1847 the king had envisaged a system of registration for dissenters from the national church, but no provision had been made for its implementation. For the time being even persons who had declared their secession from the state church were expected to have “ecclesiastical acts” involving the civil sphere – such as baptisms, marriages and funerals – performed by a minister of the state church, “if such a one be willing to do so”. Those ministers did not only register the rite, but also performed it. Consequently a marriage was first solemnized in a Protestant church and after the Protestant blessing another blessing was performed by a Catholic Apostolic Priest.

Practical problems

Carl Hennig was a former journeyman tailor “who called himself a Priest of the apostolic church”. In Buchwäldchen, a little place in Silesia (now belonging to Poland), he had founded an apostolic congregation. He wanted to get married towards the end of the summer of 1851, but was then told that a Protestant wedding ceremony was only possible – as he wrote – “if I renounce my error and my mission as an Irvingite Priest, or if I refuse I must also outwardly separate from the state church”. Hennig objected, arguing that he believed “in gathering, not in separation” and had consequently not renounced his membership of the Protestant state church because it also belonged to the “mystical body of Christ”.

Hennig’s marriage was delayed by one year, but in the end the church authorities had to give in and the local pastor solemnized his marriage. When local ministers hesitated to baptize the children of apostolic parents the proceedings led to similar results.

Friends and foes

Officials of the Protestant state church were divided in their attitudes towards Catholic Apostolic evangelisation, realising that the Evangelists hoped to gain “at least the pious and believing members” of their own church to join those who believed in the “more perfect apostolic constitution of the church”. Some of them made it obvious in their reports that they were as critical of the state of the established church as the Catholic Apostolics. In principle, however, they asserted “that the evangelical church possesses all means of grace which are needed for salvation and does not need to wait for new Apostles and Prophets”.

In February 1848 the ecclesiastical authorities planned to have assemblies of apostolic Christians prohibited by the police. Those plans were frustrated by a revolution. In the afternoon of Saturday 18 March heavy fighting erupted between citizens and soldiers in the centre of Berlin. The riots lasted into the early hours of Sunday 19 March. The Sunday services were cancelled – but there was one exception: In a hotel assembly room Apostle Carlyle sealed 60 persons. Those who came had climbed across the barricades erected on the previous day. In the course of the revolution the police lost some of their powers.

Occasionally provincial authorities still tried to hinder the spread of the Catholic Apostolic faith by arresting and expelling the Evangelists from certain places, but they did not succeed. Some politically and socially important persons – like the journalist and politician Hermann Wagener – embraced the Catholic Apostolic faith, and there were no really effective measures against its propagation. In more and

more places in Prussia even baptisms by Catholic Apostolic Priests – though still of doubtful legality – remained unpunished. Men in high places intervened and the laws were interpreted in favour of the offenders. Apostle Carlyle did not hesitate to encourage the Priests to baptise.

At the Apostle's side

Apostle Carlyle had first arrived in northern Germany in 1837. During two prolonged stays there he had learnt German. Two of his books had impressed members of the educated classes. Soon he worked in close co-operation with Charles J. T. Boehm who was the son of a German father and an English mother. He had been born in Copenhagen, but after his father's death he had gone to London with his mother in 1834. Now he toured the north of Germany as an Evangelist – at times together with the Apostle. In the course of those journeys contact was established with Heinrich W. J. Thiersch, a professor of theology at Marburg University. Thiersch was one of the first men sealed in Germany. After his sealing he gave up his theological chair to become rector of the newly founded Catholic Apostolic congregation at Marburg. In addition, he assisted Carlyle as "Apostle's Pastor", which meant that through him the Apostle maintained contact with the Rectors and Priests of the various congregations.

In those days it was believed that ministers had to be "called" by Prophets. It was still up to the Apostle to decide if he actually ordained the persons thus called. On his first journeys Apostle Carlyle was accompanied by one or another Prophet from among the "Seven Prophets of the Universal Church". Unlike the Apostle none of them spoke German. From 1850 Heinrich Geyer was a Prophet ranking as a Priest, from 1852 as a Bishop (or "Angel"), and since then accompanied the Apostle on his journeys. After he had embraced the Catholic Apostolic faith he had had to give up his position as a village schoolmaster in the kingdom of Hanover. He had then moved to Berlin where he eked out an existence by doing various clerical jobs.

There were also two former Protestant ministers, Carl Rothe and Albert Koeppen, who held the rank of Bishop or Angel. They were in charge of congregations. As a former village schoolmaster Geyer's social position was lower than theirs. But he accompanied the Apostle on his journeys and prophetically called all new ministers, and so he was considered of central importance among the Catholic Apostolic ministers in North Germany.

Pleading for faster progress

Apostle Carlyle clung to the original Catholic Apostolic hope of a great work among all Christians. He saw that even he could scarcely find access to Roman Catholic circles and he criticised the low level of activity among his fellow Apostles. He felt sure that he knew the reason: They had not yet been sent in the full power of their ministry. An Apostles' Conference at Pentecost 1851 was to prepare the way for the day when God would send his Apostles in great power.

Manfred Henke

Additional information:

The Catholic Apostolic Sealing

The sealing (or “laying on of hands”) was performed on adults over twenty years of age. It was taught that through the sealing believers received the fullness of the Spirit. From then on the Holy Spirit acts as a Spirit of power in the believers. This is to enable them not to live for themselves only, but serve the whole body of Christ (the Church). In addition it was taught that the sealing was a complement to baptism that was to be desired by all the baptised and that it was a prerequisite for being caught up with the hundred and forty-four thousand according to Revelation 7.

The persons who desired the sealing knelt before the altar. The Apostle then laid his hands on them and spoke the appropriate words. In preparation for that rite they had renewed their baptismal vows and given a special offering.

Only in later years an anointing was added to the laying on of hands. Some time after 1863 it became possible for the Apostle – who had become too weak in body to perform the rites – to delegate the sealing to ministers of episcopal rank.