



The Making of the New Apostolic Church (11)

Hopes raised and dashed

On 20 May 1858, on the Thursday before Pentecost, some men gathered for a very special conference. After 22 years the Apostles had once again invited Prophets to Albury. Watched over by the Apostles the Prophets were to continue the prophetic interpretation of Scripture that had been abandoned in 1836.

A conference of Prophets

Chapter by chapter the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were read out in the course of the conference. They report how Jerusalem was rebuilt after God's people of old had been released from their captivity in Babylon. A prophetic interpretation of those reports were to give further light on the perfection of the Church after it left the spiritual Babylon—meaning the church in its state of confusion.

Eight of the twelve Apostles who had attended the prophetic interpretation in 1836 were still present. Apart from Edward Oliver Taplin, the so-called Pillar of Prophets, three more of the "Seven Prophets of the Universal Church" were alive and in attendance. In addition, nine more Prophets had been invited. They had on certain occasions prophesied as assistants to an Apostle in the Universal Church. Heinrich Geyer from Germany was prominent amongst them because unlike the other eight he held the rank of Angel and had regularly travelled with the Apostles Carlyle and Woodhouse to call the ministers for the Church in Germany.

"Perfection of the ordinances"

The conference convened at Albury in 1858 was not simply meant to reveal more secret knowledge hidden in the Bible. The Apostles wanted to appraise the Prophets' gifts to find men who could later serve as "Prophets with the Apostles". Since at least 1836 there had been plans for a large group of ministers to serve the Universal Church. At last they were to be found so that the "ordinances" could be perfected. Prophecies urging the "perfecting of the ordinances" in preparation for the return of Christ had been heard for some years—and the time around 1863 had long been thought to be of special significance.

Apostle Cardale declared that for the perfection of the Church "the ordinance for the prophetic ministry in the Universal Church, namely, the Twelve Prophets, to be associated with the Twelve Apostles" was needed. Thus the Apostles considered themselves obliged "to seek that the number of prophets may be completed".

Will the great work begin?

Heinrich Geyer had not given up the hopes raised by Apostle Carlyle. Like Carlyle had done Geyer still expected that the Lord's work amongst a small number of Christians would be succeeded by a great work amongst all Christians. Apostle Carlyle had taught so when he explained the three anointings of David (cf. article 9 in this series). David stood for the Apostle ministry and Geyer prophesied in Marburg in December 1857: "His servant David is not satisfied just to have Judah. The Lord has appointed him for the whole of Israel."

When prophesying at Albury Geyer seems to have felt that in looking for twelve Prophets the Apostles wanted to initiate the "perfecting of the ordinances". The Universal Church was lacking those ministries which in the original plan were needed to add large numbers of people to the Church: The 60 Evangelists to the Nations were to be Angels supervising

Priests and Deacons engaged in the proclamation work. The “Seventy” were to be “apostolic delegates” fulfilling apostolic functions to support the Twelve. And if there were to be twelve Prophets associated with the Apostles—might one not infer from this that at last there were to be twelve Apostles again?

“The Seventy”

Geyer’s prophetic interpretations of the biblical report show that he was expecting the Sixty and the Seventy to appear soon. He imagined that the Seventy would assist the Apostles as had originally been taught, when the Seventy were also called “delegates” to the Apostles—one might call them Apostle Helpers who would ordain and seal whenever commissioned to do so by the Twelve (cf. article 5 of this series, issue No. 02/2013). This is what Geyer meant when he told the Apostles: “He knows the burden laid upon the shoulders of the Twelve. ... That is why he is gathering such as shall work by your sides. ... He will give the Seventy.” Geyer introduced the term “Archangel” as a synonym of “delegates” to refer to the Seventy “who appear with the Twelve”.

The Apostles held that they alone could pronounce valid interpretations of prophecy. To them the prophecies uttered during the 1858 conference seemed potentially divisive. So they agreed on an interpretation and sent it to the Angels before they received the actual words of prophecy. In their interpretation the Apostles pointed out that three groups had consecutively left Babylon and then completed different tasks in the rebuilding of Jerusalem. From their view of successive events in Old Testament history they concluded that the Christian church would also be rebuilt and perfected in three steps—and only the first of these would be taken in a Church governed by Apostles.

At first not all the possible consequences of this interpretation could be foreseen, but as early as 1859 Apostle Woodhouse took the view that the Seventy would not be delegates of the Apostles then active, but their successors in a future period of the work of God. The same view was taught by Apostle Cardale towards the end of 1860.

So Geyer had to accept that prophecies by which he had hoped to accelerate the great work under Apostles were used to justify another era without Apostles. He could not oppose this view because Prophets were duty bound to leave the interpretation of their pronouncements to the Apostles.

Preparations for a time without Apostles

The Seventy, now defined as Archangels, could be taken to be Archbishops if one applied the Catholic Apostolic identification of Angel and Bishop. It was now taught: As Bishops had taken over the government of the church after the first Apostles’ death, so also before the return of Christ an episcopal church would follow the Apostolic Church. Before this happened, the Apostles and those sealed by them would be translated to stay with the Lamb on Mount Zion (as they interpreted Revelations 14: 1–5). Then provision would be made for those whose faith was insufficient to accept Apostles, but who could believe in a church governed by Bishops and the use of the liturgy laid down by the Apostles. Amongst them the long-expected great outpouring of the Spirit would at last happen. That group would also be translated or raptured before the Great Tribulation started. In the final phase of Antichrist’s rule during the Great Tribulation those Christians who belonged to the “great multitude which no one could number” would become martyrs for confessing their faith in Christ (cf. Revelations 7: 9–17).

Dispensing the Spirit without Apostles

The new doctrine had become so complicated that even its proponents differed in a number of details. It was easy to comprehend, however, why those who cherished the original expectations were critical of it: It was now laid down that the church was to be perfected without Apostles. The great work they had been longing for was to take place under the successors to the Apostles (the seventy Archbishops at the head of the Christian church!). Those sealed through the laying on of Apostles' hands would remain a very small number, but many would receive the Spirit—through an “outpouring” which did not involve the action of an Apostle. Nobody explained how the effect of that “outpouring” might differ from that of the dispensing of the Spirit through the laying on of hands by an Apostle.

The Prophets now faced quite a difficult problem. They had to obey the Apostles, but did this also mean that they were only allowed to utter their prophecies – which they understood to be divinely inspired – if they agreed with the new teaching of an impending end to the Apostle ministry on earth? As they saw it, God Himself provided the answer for He made them call new Apostles.

Manfred Henke

Summary

In 1858 Prophets were summoned to a conference. The Apostles declared that they wanted to get acquainted with them to find twelve “Prophets with the Apostle”. The assembled Prophets hoped this was a first step towards completing the circle of ministers in accordance with the “great work” originally envisioned. The Prophet Geyer prophesied of the Sixty who were to head the Evangelists whose task it was to gather all Christians under the Apostles. He also stressed the urgent need to find the “Seventy” who could assist the Twelve in the great work in store for them and act as a kind of assistant Apostle.

The Apostles put a different interpretation on the prophecies. They believed that their work would soon come to an end. The Seventy would succeed them as leaders of Christianity. In their role of Archbishops they would be accepted by such Christians as could not accept the Apostles. Through an “outpouring of the Spirit” many more people would receive the Holy Spirit than had been possible before through the laying on of Apostles' hands.

A conflict ensued between the Prophets' duty to obey the Apostles and the urge of the Spirit within them to call new Apostles.

Information box: Ministries of the Universal Church

In the Catholic Apostolic hierarchy a distinction was made between ministers of the Universal Church and ministers of Particular Churches (individual congregations)

The Apostles and the ministers of the Universal Church were in principle given for all Christians. For as long as the hope was upheld that the tenth part of all Christians would accept the Apostles it made sense to wait for a completion of the perfect number of ministers in the Universal Church. This was meant when prophecies pointed to the “perfection of the ordinances”.

The complete hierarchy for the Universal Church was arrived at in the conferences of 1836 (cf. article 5 in this series). The following numbers of ministers were envisaged:

Twelve Apostles and 36 ministers with the Apostles – that is 12 Prophets, 12 Evangelists and 12 Pastors with the Apostle.

Seventy delegates who were to support the Apostles in the fulfilment of their tasks, sealing and ordaining ministers by commission of an Apostle.

Sixty Angel Evangelists who were to lead Christians into the Church Universal.

Seven Angels as heads of the Seven Churches in London. They presided over "Zion".

144 Angels in 12 "metropolitan churches" (main congregations) in each of the 12 spiritual "tribes". Once the Apostles were sent out they were to form the "Council of Jerusalem".

In the beginnings of the work some ministers had been given functions at both the universal and the particular levels. Thiersch was Pastor with the Apostle and rector of the congregation in Marburg. Geyer was a Prophet in the congregation in Berlin and also an Angel Prophet closely associated with the Apostles. Apostle Woodhouse aimed at a clear distinction between bearers of ministries in particular churches and ministers of the Universal Church.