

Questions about Church “Eras”

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Some critics believe Mr. Herbert Armstrong taught that Church eras were successive, but the LCG teaches that today several Church eras exist side by side or contemporaneously. Some also assume that the idea that LCG is a remnant of the Philadelphia Church in the Laodicean era contradicts Mr. Armstrong’s statement that the Laodicean Church would only appear after the Philadelphia Church was taken to a place of safety-which means the Philadelphia Church would be the only era in existence prior to the Tribulation. This issue generates questions due to a confusion of terms. The Bible indicates (Revelation 2-3) that Church eras are successive-this is what LCG believes. An “era” is the period of time that a particular Church would be predominant in the history of God’s Church. The Ephesian era covered the time of the apostles and possibly their immediate successors-from about 30-120 AD.

The Thyatira era appears to extend from about 1000 to 1600 AD. The Sardis era covers a period from about 1600 to 1900 AD. The Philadelphia era is understood to have begun with the ministry of Herbert Armstrong in the 1930s and the era (but not the Church organization) appears to have ended at his death in 1986. Dr. Herman Hoeh felt the Laodicean era began shortly after Mr. Armstrong died, and it does seem with the appearance of hundreds of spin off groups from the WCG-where many are now following their own doctrinal ideas-that we are living in the Laodicean era (see Revelation 3:14-22).

Although Church eras are successive in a historical sense, confusion arises when we see Church organizations continue beyond their eras. Waldensian churches that originated in the Thyatira era still exist today. While early Waldensian churches appear to have kept the Sabbath, Holy Days, dietary laws and other biblical doctrines, many modern Waldensian churches have adopted Protestant doctrines-Sunday worship, Christmas, Easter, etc. In other words, their era representing the Church of God is over, but the Church organization still exists.

However, by changing fundamental doctrines, these churches no longer represent the historical teachings of the biblical Church of God. The same situation exists for Church organizations from the Sardis era that continued to exist during the Philadelphia era and still exist today.

Mr. Armstrong felt and said that the Sardis churches he came into contact with were God’s people-yet their era was over. While Revelation 3:1-6 refers to Sardis as a “dead” Church, the knowledge of the Sabbath and other doctrines was preserved during this era, and God said He had a “few” in Sardis who would receive a final reward in the Kingdom.

The Philadelphia Church (not the era) is promised protection during the Tribulation because it would “persevere” in preaching the Gospel and in doing the Work (Revelation 3:7-11). This implies that it would continue doing its job even after its era had passed-thus it would be a remnant of the Philadelphia Church in a Laodicean era. While we now appear to be in the Laodicean era-where many are laid back and lukewarm about doctrine and other religious practices-the actual identity of the Laodicean Church as an organization may not become obvious until the Philadelphians are taken to a place of safety. This seems to be essentially what Mr. Armstrong was saying over 25 years ago. An important key to understanding this issue is that Church eras and Church organizations are not necessarily synonymous and they are not always contemporaneous.