

# The Once and Future Church, by Loren Mede (pub. 1991)

Over the past two thousand years, the Christian Church in the West (Western Europe and North America) has experienced three (3) major changes.

- 1. The Apostolic Age (30-313 A.D.)**
- 2. The Age of Christendom (313-1945)**
- 3. The Transitional Age (1945-present)**

All three historic periods can be understood through *the mission of the church* at that time.

## **1. The Apostolic Age (30-313 A.D.)**

- a. This period of the Church was a hands-on, face-to-face missionary effort where all congregational members were witnesses to Christ to the world around them (the Greek word “witness” also means “martyr”). The mission of the church was to be involved directly in, to, with and for the world, but not be “of the world”. The local church offered a different way of living than the world of the Roman Empire. The world, especially the powers of the Roman Empire, were often extremely hostile to the Apostolic Church.
- b. There were many functional positions in the local churches (evangelist, pastor, prophet, administrator, deacon etc), but no formalized power structure or leadership. There was no professionalized or formalized clergy.
- c. The church of the Apostolic Age was a “bottom up” movement of Christians with many points of views in terms of faith, ethics, politics, theology etc. Each Christian and each congregation had its own style and way of interacting with the world around it. Uniformity was not a hallmark of this period, though a fully committed Christ-centered life was the hallmark of Christians (after all, it was often a life and death matter).

## **2. The Age of Christendom (313-1945 A.D.)**

- a. The Roman Emperor Constantine becomes a Christian and he declares his empire to be Christian. In this one act, the State and the Church become one and wholly intertwined (for example, the Queen of England is the official and legal head of the Anglican Church today). To this day, the most established churches can often be found very near city hall. This is not accidental but a sign of the veracity of the Age of Christendom model. This tight relationship between nation and Church meant that Unity and Uniformity became critically

important. We hear many people grieving the passing of this model and the desire to bring it back to life once again.

- b. Christian mission no longer means witnessing of one's faith to one's neighbors (because being Roman citizens *they are already Christians!*). Since the nation is Christian, that means mission will go beyond the nation's boundaries to other nations. The idea of foreign missions is born and so missionaries are now sent to convert those who live in "*non-Christian lands*".
- c. Clergy are now professionalized and are seen as key members of the state (in many European nations, clergy are paid as state employees today!). Because they are connected so closely to the State, clergy become rulers during the age of Christendom; they serve God and the Emperor. The clergy determine the ministry and the laity support it (the Dutch call their ministers "*Domini*" meaning "*Lord*"-*the sign on the door of the minister at Rhinebeck Reformed Church still says it- "DOMINI'S OFFICE!*").
- d. The laity are no longer on the front lines of mission, but take on a more ancillary role. Professional clergy and foreign missionaries will tell the story of Christ for them. The laity lose their voice, power and the immediacy of their witness. Obedience is the thing required of the laity-obedience to the Church; obedience to the State (observe the laws/pay your taxes, go to church and you'll be a good Christian American, Brit. Hollander, Frenchman, Italian...etc.).

### **3. The Time-Between Church (1945-?)**

- a. The role of foreign mission is confused, occluded and breaking down.
- b. Denominations double-down on efforts to resuscitate their churches-but they are collapsing and closing at a rapid rate.
- c. The world around us is no longer "Christian" but "Secular".
- d. The idea of a Christian Nation is eroding or vanished.
- e. The dominance of the Church is losing appeal, power, influence with the State.
- f. Face-to-Face servant outreach is again being experienced (mostly by the Evangelical Churches). Lay persons are rediscovering their voices and the importance of their own experience, strength and hope. Non-church persons are drawn to it.
- g. Inclusivity and hospitality become hallmarks of the Church.
- h. A Christ-Centered Church (different than a Bible-Centered Church) is gaining strength. This is Fiet's idea (and Lyall's).
- i. There is a need for a new Catechumenate structure so Christians, established and new, can discover, name and articulate the basics of the faith in their own voice, and to then become witnesses to God in their directly known world-their neighbors, friends, families, colleagues.

# Where is Lyall Heading as a Congregation?

At Lyall Church, the “Now What?” has been unfolding for many years. We are in an enviable place as a congregation. Here’s why...

1. At Lyall, we focus on the *person of Christ*. The teachings, hospitality, ministry, death and resurrection of Christ is how we understand our own ministry here at Lyall. Christ is our template, our icon, our style that informs who we are as a congregation. Our unity is found in Christ-the heart, courage, compassion of Jesus-we try to follow in this way (a huge challenge to attempt to do so).
2. At Lyall, we have a history of face-to-face ministry with our direct neighbors. We commit many persons and much treasure to promote care to, for and with our neighbors. We try to use our own hurt and hope to inform our outreach-we listen to our bones.
3. At Lyall, we have a tolerance, even an encouragement to find our own ways of expressing our faith in Christ. We have unity in Christ, but not uniformity. Indeed we come from many backgrounds, traditions and world views and welcome them into the tapestry which is Lyall Church.
4. The idea of immediate bold mission to our neighbors is already a deep and deepening tradition at Lyall. We stand on the shoulders of incredible Christians here at Lyall.
5. Administration is taking a larger role in undergirding the members and their many ministries.