



What is the Purpose of a Convocation?

Leonard Lovett, Ph. D

Numbers 29:1 *“In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a holy convocation...”* It is a tradition in the

Church of God in Christ to convene annual Convocations within a State Jurisdiction (usually during late Spring and Summer), and the late Fall (November) for our International meeting). My path to **COGIC** was through an Annual Jurisdictional Convocation held in Miami at **Cohen Temple COGIC**. There was something attractive about the **Sanctified Church** that got my attention at age twelve. The late Mother Laura Barber Hall from **Black’s Memorial COGIC** would talk to us as neighborhood children and invite us to worship at the **Sanctified Church**. On special days the women wore white and looked sanctified (cleansed and purified). With permission I soon left **Big Bethel AME** and made the mistake of hanging out with people from the **Sanctified Church**. There was the usual precaution from the haters to *“be careful those people may put goober dust on you and you may come under their spell.”* But at the **Convocation** as a lad, I noticed that the meetings were dominated by focused worship and a deep sense of spirituality and purpose.

Children were not wandering alone as people entered the meetings with a sense of elation as they literally rushed for seats. They were filled with expectation and hope. In those days we were rarely disappointed as various Districts were in charge and the Word of God was preached as though the end times were near.

My first **National Convocation** attended was eventful due to an unplanned incident. I was driving Dr. Arenia C. Mallory, then President of Saints Jr. College, to catch a train in Durant, Mississippi bound for Memphis. The train was leaving as we were arriving. I tried to outrun the train as far as Grenada on Highway 51, but to no avail. In a no non-sense, way Dr. Mallory said, *“keep driving.”* I ended up in Memphis with the casual clothes I was wearing. Supt. and Mother Harris from Flint Michigan spotted me and sneaked downtown Memphis and bought me a suit with all the accessories. Wow, I was ready for the **Convocation**. But I noticed people were not dressed in flamboyant style. In fact they were dressed in simple fashion and focused on fasting and praying for the first few days. When Bishop Mason stood and lifted his hands in praise, there was spiritual chaos enshrined in *“Shekinah glory.”* I was spell bound by the worship event as people fell at the altar to receive salvation and blessings. There were no *“rob us now without a gun offerings.”* There was no time wasted *“giving honor to everybody”* and lengthy domination of the service. Etched in my mind was a deep sense of high spirituality and seeing people who looked like Saints.

The term Con-vo-cation in modern usage deals with the act of convoking; a group of people gathered to answer to a summons; assembly. The biblical authority to convene a **Convocation** is cited In the Old Testament book of **Numbers 29: 1** (KJV) *“In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, ye shall have a holy convocation,”* *“a solemn assembly,”* (LBV) *“a sacred meeting,”* (MLV); *“and because of that you must refrain from all strenuous labor; the day has been set aside for you for the blowing of the trumpets; you are to offer sacrifices to the Lord without blemish.”* The **Festival of Trumpets, The Feast of Tabernacles** and **The Day of Atonement**, were the three leading spiritual holidays placed on Israel’s calendar by God. The primary purpose was to *“refresh the mind and body and to renew one’s commitment to God.”* The primary purpose for a Convocation in ancient Israel were as follows:

1. **The people gathered together to worship and celebrate God;**
2. **No hard labor was to be performed during this period;**
3. **The people gave God something of value;**
4. **The people left their normal routine in order to engage their memory of God’s deeds toward them, which was a symbol of their dedication and commitment.**

Being reductionist it is reasonable to conclude that the primary purpose of a Con-vo-cation was:

1. Worship and Celebration of God.
2. A Sabbath of rest
3. Special sacrifice to God.
4. A time of special reflection.

Fast forward to modern religious **Convocations**. As an apologist of the faith I am compelled to raise difficult questions.

1. From the **Jurisdictional Convocations** to the International, do we really come together to worship and celebrate God? Do we come together to display the latest fashions in suits, dresses, hats and shoes.? I know a prominent leader when he speaks to me he never gives me eye contact for looking at the brand of shoes I am wearing. I know a lady who rents a van annually to shuttle her hat boxes to the **Convocation** for special display. I know leaders who change suits two and three times a day during the **Convocation**. The writer of **Ecclesiastes 1: 1v.** (KJV) simply said *“Vanity of vanity...all is vanity.”* **The First Commandment in Exodus 20:1v** continues even in modern times to thunder from Mt Sinai *“Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”*
2. Do we use our Convocation as a time of rest to re-create energy to serve God’s purpose in the world? At **Convocations** I meet people who are *“tired of being tired”* and will nod while holding a conversation from making all the mid- night musicals and *“honk for Jesus”* celebrations that we have artfully contrived in the name of spiritual celebration.

3. What do we give God of value at our Convocations? Are people admonished to literally tie their wallets down in order to get back home because of the undue emphasis on money? When we use pressure tactics to coerce people to give it is no longer biblical stewardship. Is a form of greed as idolatry, a topic I intend to address in the near future.. When people are admonished to give something of value to God, it should never be through coercion. It must be **sacrificial** and **voluntary**.
4. Are we appropriating the Convocation as a time of reflection about God's mighty deeds on our behalf? Meaningful reflection requires quality time. Can we shut down our cell phones and leave Facebook and Twitter long enough to engage our memory in deep reflection upon the things of God?

We might need to critically examine what we have conveniently borrowed from other people is just another untested non-biblical junk fad? After doing our thirty (30) second praise break do not be surprised if the Almighty say with a clarion voice, **Amos 6:21ff (LBV)** *"I hate your show and pretense...your hypocrisy of "honoring" me with your religious feasts and solemn assemblies "Take thou away from me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your musical instruments...Away with your hymns of praise...they are mere noise to my ears. I will not listen to your music, no matter how lovely it is."* I radically believe with strong conviction that God is sick of our play and pretense in religious gatherings. If we keep defiantly pretending in spite of warnings, do not be surprised if God says ICHABOD (the glory has departed) to the whole body.

Dr. Leonard Lovett, Chief Editor

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