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**THE CHURCH: ITS MISSION,
ITS MYSTERY, ITS MAJESTY**

Recently, the Washington Post published the findings of a survey of religious beliefs and practices. In the Poll, which contacted over one thousand adults, 54% said that they attended church every week or almost every week. The church is still a prominent institution in our society.

In the black community the church is highly regarded. It is the one institution that we own and completely control. Richard Wright once wrote in *Twelve Million Voices*: "Our churches are where we dip our tired bodies in cool springs of hope, where we retain our wholeness and humanity, despite the blows from the bosses."

God has always had a meeting place for His people. During the times of Israel's sojourn, it was first the Ark of the Covenant; and later Moses fashioned the Tabernacle in the Wilderness. Later in the period of the Monarchy, Solomon dedicated the magnificent Temple. At its dedication, King Solomon said, ". . . behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built" (II Chron. 6: 18).

The Psalms are full of passages, which indicate the believer's delight in being in God's house. "A day in thy courts is better than a thousand," says Psalm 84. "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord," says Psalms 122. Psalm 84 asserts, "O Lord of hosts how amiable are thy tabernacles. "

In the New Testament, God meets His people gathered in the Ecclesia, a Greek word that indicates "the called-out ones." The word for church appears 79 times in the New Testament and an additional 35 times in its plural form.

Paul teaches us in the Ephesians letter that the church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." The church, then, is not bricks and mortar, stained glass windows and booming organs. Rather, the church is men and women, boys and girls, who are linked inseparably to the living God, under the lordship of Jesus Christ. It is not my church; it is the church of Jesus Christ! The realization of this fact should make all the difference in our conception of our role as church members. If we are to understand who we are as the church, we must begin by affirming our identity as Christ's Body. The church has a mission, a mystery, and a majesty.

THINK ON THIS!

Its Mission

The foremost mission of the church is to represent Christ in the world, in short, to be a witness. The saints of Philippi and those at Corinth were saints at their respective geographic sites, but they were in Christ. As such, their mission was to represent Christ in their respective communities and to go into all the world and make disciples.

Its Mystery

The mystery of the church is embodied in the fact that it is not physical, but spiritual. This poses a problem for the natural man even though he splits atoms and harnesses electricity when he cannot see the current. The mystery of the church is further intensified by the realization that by a sincere profession of faith I become a member—no dues, no password, and no initiation rites. By this profession, an indissoluble bond is created between the believer and his Lord and no man can pluck the believer out of the hand of the Master. By this profession, I become linked with my brother and sister of “like precious faith”; therefore, when my brother weeps, I weep. When my sister rejoices, I rejoice. We are all members of the Household of Faith. Also, by this profession, I become linked with the saints of old. Hebrews tells us “they without us should not be made perfect” (Hebrews 11: 40).

Its Majesty

Finally, the church has a majesty all its own. When we speak of the majesty of the church some would conjure up visions of great cathedrals, majestic temples, and stately edifices. Some think of learned ministers and great choirs. Others think of money and real estate and swelling offerings that must be carted away in Brinks trucks.

There is a majesty that is not contemporary, but future; not present, but eschatological. A part of the majesty of the church is seen in the fact that God interrupted His divine plan for Israel to visit the Gentiles and to take out a people for Himself. This interruption is called the Church Age—the Age of Grace. You and I are the beneficiaries of the Church Age, which will conclude with the rapture of the translation of the church. Following the church’s translation. The New Testament church becomes the Bride of Christ. Revelation Chapter 19 describes the Bride clothed in fine linen and attended by other saints. We are also told blessed are those who are invited to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

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John Wesley caught the beauty of the church's final destiny in the great hymn when he wrote:

*Mid toil and tribulation
And tumult of her wars,
She waits the consummation
Of peace forevermore;
Till with the vision glorious
Her longing eyes are blest,
And the great church victorious
Shall be the church at rest.*

THINK ON THIS!

JUNE 1986
THE AFTERMATH

It has been said that hindsight is always 20/20 vision, meaning that in retrospect we often see events and occurrences in a clearer light than we would have before they occurred. This phenomenon may be true of us as we look over the Centennial Celebration, just concluded last month.

Did we as a church distill from the Centennial Celebration as much as we should have? Did we endow the celebration with as much historical significance as we should have? Did we plan the 100th Anniversary as well as we might have? These are some questions, which raise themselves in the aftermath of the Centennial Celebration. To raise these questions is not to imply criticism of the Centennial Committee. Rather, they are raised to stimulate thought.

Centennial celebrations are for the most part a once in a lifetime event. Consequently, we approach such a celebration with a keen sense of anticipation. When it is over, we wonder if all the effort expended was worth it. Our sense is that the true sense of historical significance was lacking in our Centennial Convocation. True, there were reminiscences from those who served in bygone years, but one did not get a sense that these were more than impromptu. Something of a sense of history was communicated by the publication of Dr. Gregory's history of the church—the first