

LANGSTON HUGHES

Simple Talks On Kneel-Ins

"IF I WAS to want to go to church at all," said Simple, "the last church I would want to go to would be a white church."

"Why do you say that?" I asked.

"Why would I want to go into a nest of devils to worship God?" asked Simple. "They be not Christians in their hearts when they bar me out of church."

"A church is supposed to be a public place open to everyone, at least in theory," I said, "so you should have the right to go to anyone you wish. I ask again why would you not want to go to what you call white church?"

"They are too dull," said Simple.

"What do you mean, dull?" I asked.

READ SERMONS

WHITE MINISTERS reads their sermons. They even reads their prayers," said Simple. "If you do not have prayer in your heart and cannot say your prayers to God without notes and a speech-paper, what kind of prayer is that? Also if a minister cannot praise God and preach a sermon without typing it all down first, what kind of spirit has he got? I do not like no paper reading ministers and written down prayers. I like the kind of preachers who pray from the heart and preach from the soul. I also do not like no slow dragging old hymns, neither anthems, nor arrangements. I like swing and swaying hallelujah singing, and gospel songs, and tambourines. I have not heard tell of a white church yet with tambourines."

"The Salvation Army," I said.

"They is not a church," said Simple. "They stands on corners and sings and prays, and do not read their prayers neither. I like the Salvation Army. They are out doors and integrated, also believes in Santa Claus. I am talking about fine churches with pipe organs and no soul, jasper pulpits and Jim Crow, to whose altar I do not wish to go. I am all for the Freedom Riders, but the last place I would want to ride would be to a white church. I am for every kind of sit-ins but a church-in."

REVEAL HYPOCRISY

"KNEEL-INS, I believe they call them," I said. "And I suppose colored folks who participate in kneel-ins do not so much desire to attend white churches as they do to reveal the hypocrisy of those congregations that will not permit black Christians to share God's worship with them. It is the right to attend the church of one's choice, not necessarily the actual attending that counts."

"Why would anyone's choice be a white church," asked Simple, "when colored churches are so much livelier?"

"True temples are neither white nor black," I said.

"They are down South — except Catholics — and I am not talking about them," said Simple, "I am talking about Baptists, Methodists, and such like, segregated one from another, North and South."

"The Bahais are not segregated. The Christian Scientists in many areas are not segregated. Community Churches are not segregated. Father Divine's is not segregated," I said. "All churches should pattern after Father's where anybody may worship and pray."

"O. K.," said Simple. "But a man also can pray at home. Why any black man would want to go to a white church to pray, I do not know, when he is liable to be jerked up off his knees and put out. I could not keep my mind on God in a white church. Besides, if I was to join a white church, it would take me a hundred years to get to be a Deacon, two hundred to arrive at Presiding Elder, and three hundred years to be a Bishop. I doubt if in most white churches a black man could even take up collection or be on the Usher Board. You know, the Black Nationalists say Jesus was a black man. If Jesus was, and came back to earth today, He would sure be Jim Crowed on Sunday morning."

ENJOYS SINGING

"THAT SORT of Jim Crow Christianity is just what the kneel-in adherents are trying to change. They would like Christ, black or not black, to be able to get into His own church."

"Christ could come to Abyssinian Baptist in Harlem and have no trouble," said Simple. "I don't think Christ would enjoy a white church, anyhow, praying prayers off of a paper and preaching sermons pulled out of a typewriter. Sleepy as I am on Sunday morning, at least I would want a lively sermon, not a typewritten one."

"You seldom go to church anyway," I said.

"Only when my wife drags me," said Simple, "or if Clara Ward, the Gay Sisters, or maybe the Swan Silvertones are singing. Oh, yes, I would also go to church to hear the Gospel All-Stars."

"Amen!" I said.