

Minister Says "Satchmo" Saved Sacred Song By Swinging It

Maestro Revives "When The Saints Go Marching In"

Editor, Journal and Guide: In the last few weeks much criticism has been hurled at the great "maestro," Louis Armstrong, all because of one song, "When the Saints Go Marching." Both pulpit and press have denounced Prof. Armstrong for "swinging" this old praise and song of devotion. A good Rev. Mr. Harvey raised a howl as though Prof. Armstrong had kicked over one of the sacred altars of our ancestors. This writer questions the procedure and the reasoning of the church in its harsh criticism.

This writer is not defending the swinging of sacred songs nor would we wisely condemn the "maestro." The Church needs to consider well before a word be spoken. The present precarious position of the Church compels it not to criticize but advise well.

The song under consideration was practically dead in the Church. Our Fathers sang it because they were moved to song. It was an expression of the hearts emotion. The words of the song are words of depression. Chattel slavery was easier when it was sung. The economic experience of the present Church is not conducive to the creation of a song like "When the Saints Go Marching In." Its social structure will not tolerate even the old praises of a Doctor Wyatt as sung fifty years ago.

The Church should adjust itself in a changing civilization, for if the Church does not color this age, modern culture will whitewash the Church and the singing in short and long meters will be forgotten. The world will find consolation in "swing" music.

Mr. Armstrong really pulled the skeleton out of the closet. In fact the song has only been dressed up in a modern attire and made attractive. Most Christians will admit that they love the song. Those of the old school love it for its words



LOUIS ARMSTRONG

and its meaning, and the young set love it for its rhythm, meaning, and reviving power. Which is the lesser of the two evils? The moral value of the song is not damaged and it touches the soul of this generation for a good purpose.

Prof. Armstrong has done the Church and his race a great service. He has revived an old song, giving us new hope. He has done a deed that the Church could not have possibly done. He caused the non-Church folk to sing a song of Zion.

The present day Church is hanging on the fringes of religious consciousness. We are not in the main stream of spiritual life. Therefore confidence in the Church as a saving institution has fled. The whole program is in serious need of revision. If "swinging" a few songs will do it, so well: the end will justify the means.

If the Church does not like "swinging" of "When the Saints Go Marching In" let it offer a substitute for swing. If we have nothing better let's not be too critical. After all is said and done "swing" music had its origin in the Church. So did the "blues" and jazz. But the world took them and changed the words and the Church frowned on it.

The Church is in the midst of a great Renaissance, a change from the old order to a new mode of life. There is a more liberal concept in existence which holds more for the moral betterment of humanity. This democratic concept is taking

form in liberal religious thought as expressed in "swinging" of sacred songs.

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