

THE THRONE OF THE THIRD HEAVEN OF THE NATIONS MILLENIUM GENERAL ASSEMBLY

by

JAMES HAMPTON (1909-1964)

James Hampton was born on April 8, 1909 in Elloree, South Carolina. One of four children, he was the son of James Hampton, a black Baptist minister, and Sarah Johnson. Nothing else is known about his childhood or family background. Around 1928, Hampton came to Washington, D.C. to live with his older brother Lee. He worked as a cook in several local cafes from 1939 to 1942. Inducted into the army in 1942, he served in the 385th aviation squadron as a private first class until his honorable discharge in 1945. During this three-year period, Hampton was stationed in Honolulu, Guam, Saipan, and Seattle, Washington. After the war he returned to Washington, D.C., where he worked as a laborer for the General Services Administration from 1946 until 1964. James Hampton died of cancer on November 4, 1964, and is buried in Warren Chapel Cemetery in Orangeburg, South Carolina.

Described by acquaintances as a small, quiet man, Hampton never married, and led a very private life, which ordinarily would appear to have been uneventful. But at some point in his early life, James Hampton believed that God had come to him in a vision. The date, circumstances and details of this vision are unknown, but he continued to receive visions until his death. Inspired by these experiences, Hampton dedicated himself to building what he called "The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millenium General Assembly." He believed that God came to him every night to guide him step by step in constructing the vast array of glittering, intricate objects which he worked on in an unheated garage at 1133 7th Street, N.W. Although a small piece marked "Made on Guam April 14, 1945" is included among the approximately 250 pieces involved, the exact time at which Hampton began his work has not been established. However, it is known that he rented the garage from around 1950 to 1964. During those years he diligently gathered used furniture, cardboard, desk blotters, plastic, aluminum and gold foil, and burnt out light bulbs. With these discarded materials, Hampton fashioned objects which suggest many traditional church appointments: a throne chair, pulpits, standards, and offertory tables. The purpose of other pieces is not known.

Untrained, Hampton nonetheless possessed a remarkable sense of design and symmetry. Each piece is one of a pair; each has its place. From labels found on the objects, the basic scheme is readily discernible. To the left of the central throne, the pieces refer to the New Testament, and stress Jesus Christ and his grace, while to the right, the system is based on the Old Testament, and Moses and his law. Also attached to individual objects are tags recording specific visions. References to A.J. Tyler, a popular local minister who died in 1936, are found scattered throughout the ensemble, but the reason for Hampton's interest in the man has not been determined.

Crowning the throne are the words "Fear Not." Tacked to his bulletin board was the inscription "Where there is no vision, the People Perish." No orderly, accurate explication of Hampton's religious beliefs can be stated with certainty. Intensely involved in religious ideas, Hampton did not force his beliefs on anyone, and apparently did not record any outline of such. In addition to building the Throne, he produced a personal, cabalistic script which has not been deciphered. Perhaps the explanation for his ideas are contained in this writing. From one source it is known that Hampton concentrated on the Book of Revelations, and believed in the Second Coming of Christ. Originally from a Baptist background, he felt that there was no need for the different faiths because there is only one God. Although uneducated, Hampton was clearly well acquainted with the Bible. The references chosen and adapted to his purpose indicate a sensitive understanding of certain theological concepts.

Much remains unknown about James Hampton and the steady impulse which moved him to create "The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millenium General Assembly." Particularly mystifying is the end toward which he was aiming. Did he intend it for public display, or was it to remain a personal experience? Interrupted by his death, the work is probably unfinished, but it is dazzling testimony to the inspiration and dedication which dominated the life of James Hampton.

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