

BIBLE STUDY AT THE SALVATION ARMY

I left TC around 5:15 and walked to the SA church on 138th street and Lenox by way of 125th, Powell, and 135th. After seeing two white young blond women running down Amsterdam and 124th as if they owned it, I thought that this was a sign that Harlem has changed indeed—at least for some Whites. {I also wondered as to the potentiality for a “colonial” situation: not being afraid does not quite mean integration but this remains to be thought through} Actually, after this I did not see another White until I got to the SA and in the subway, waiting on the platform with at least three other young whites, and riding in the car with four more, in the midst of more numerous Blacks.

I reached the SA at 5:50. The door to the sanctuary was locked (though I could see it was lit up) and I got in through the other entrance. I asked the secretary in the office to the right that I had been invited by Captain Glasco to the Bible Study group. She told me to sit in the waiting area and she left towards the sanctuary through the door with the “do not enter” sign (“religious area” in these notes).

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The area was quite busy with people, mostly adolescents, going out of or back in the area marked by the sign-in/sign-out desk behind which sat a man (the service area in these notes). When I came in there were two NYPD officers. They looked relaxed and were chatting. I did not notice them leave. An older man with an apron was chatting with desk man who asked kids to sign in and others to sign out. A young tall black man comes out of the religious area, looks at me, “how are you sir?” pleasantly “very well, thank you” I answer, pleasantly too.

After at least five minutes desk man and I make eye contact {I can’t remember who initiated}, I say something about the Bible study group and the invitation. He (or apron man who got involved in the conversation) tells me that “you have come to the right place”—pleasant, amused? We go separate. A young man with a goatee like beard and two small wooden crosses around his desk comes out with four @ ten year old (fourth and fifth graders) who start jostling as two sit by me on the bench and two stand:

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C1 “you are stupid” C2 “no I am not” YM: “do not say anything if you can’t say anything nice” C “how much is a gazillion plus a trillion? You don’t know!” “I play the piano and the guitar and the violin!” “Me too!” YM says that he plays all these instruments too {music teacher to an afterschool program? I find out later that this Brother Soan who is White—though this does not jump at me when I first see him}.

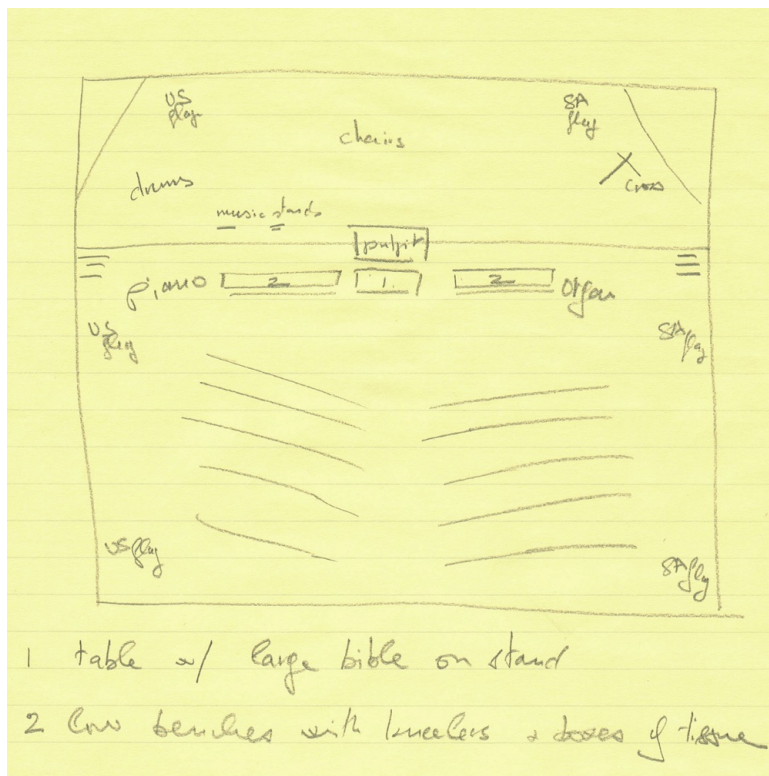
This lasts about 5 minutes. One young quite dark Black woman comes in. “Here’s your

mother.” She looks at one of the children, goes into the service area, comes back out and departs with two of the children. More people come in and out. One of them is a late middle aged White man (I find out later that this is “Brother Frank”) who walks straight into the service area without signing in and, a few minutes later, comes out and walks into the religious area. He seems fully at ease and I do not notice any interaction with the other adults.

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At about 6:15, desk man and I make eye contact again and he tells me that I could go and wait in the chapel. There is an implication that I could have done that a while ago, but, without a recording, I cannot be sure. But I did get the feeling that I was doing something amusingly wrong. I was being instructed that, next time, I could just have walked into the chapel area and I would not have been stopped in spite of the sign.

As I get to the chapel, I see MAWM sitting outside. **Very** loud music/singing is coming from the chapel. I sit in the last row on the right. The man who had been guarding the young children is playing the piano (later he sings while playing) with another man singing from the main pulpit. They seem to be practicing (“the feedback comes from you” “I thought you were singing harmony”). One of the hymn is “It’s all about you Jesus.”



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Around 6:30, the singer comes picks up a few bibles and comes to me. He introduces himself, asks for my name even before I have a chance to do so, leans to listen (the singer is going on loud!). I say my name which he clearly does not get. I say something about it being French and he responds “you’ve got to teach me some French sometimes!.” Very pleasant. He walks out.

Brother Frank and a middle aged Black woman come in and sit on the last and next to last rows on the left (thus across from me). They lean towards each other and engage in a conversation also struggling against the singing.

Looking out, I see Glasco coming out of his office. I stand up to greet him. He says something like “Oh, so you came, glad to see you, I am sorry I did not respond to you but I was quite sick last week.” I make my spiel about being just a visitor and thank him. I tell him I would be glad to introduce myself. He tells me that there are not too many people tonight because of the weather. Three more women come in and sit on the last two rows. Glasco places himself in the fourth row from the back, faces the 5 people there and starts with an announcement that there would be a ecumenical service on Palm Sunday with St. Marks the Evangelist on 138th street {and Union Congregational?}. They would process together to affirm their Christian presence in the neighborhood. He said he likes to think of their three churches as the “138th churches.”

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{this sounded very similar to what he told us during the interview. When taking pictures on Feb. 15th, I realized that he is not mentioning the most famous of the 138th street churches: Abyssinian... Perhaps it is because it is on the other side of the avenue?

I did have a feeling at times that he was speaking taking me into account, but there was no sense that the other people present felt there was anything different to what he was saying. Altogether, I think I made so difference—except to the extent that I was ignored by contrast to everybody else whom he addressed at least once during the evening, asking them to read or to comment.}

He continued that this was time for Lenten reflection. He asked us to open our Bible to John 1, chapter 2, verse 12 to 14. He asked two different people to read each of the verses. There is some confusion “some of you are using the King James version and it is somewhat different.” But everyone gets on the page. The pattern of the event is

1. brief lecture by Glasco (explanation rather than exhortation),
2. questions to the audience in general,
3. one person answer,
4. he asks for another answer,
5. another person answer (may be repeated two or three more times)

He develops the lecture or shifts to another point. {this more of a seminar than a classroom. No answer is marked as wrong: no failure here}

The first comments are about children, their innocence, “the role of Satan is to steal a child’s innocence ... pedophilia as making a child lose his innocence”

How we expect children to be.

How children get saved: “when did you make Christ your savior?”

One woman appears to challenge something he says about children and gives a mini-lecture with illustration from her childhood. He develops her example.

He tells us to read Langston Hughes (“you know him, right? A great poet”) poem “Salvation” and then goes on to give a long dramatic rendering of its main narrative: Hughes being forced to “accept Jesus” whom he had been told he would “see” but he does not see Jesus, and after being worn into saying that he has accepted Jesus says that he never went into a church ever again. Glasco develops this to say that you cannot force a child.

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People comment about how literal children are, how they learn. One person gives the hot stove version of the need for children to test what they are told.

Glasco then shifts to the next verse about “fathers.” “In Hebrew, the word conotated maturity. What does the word make you think of?” People respond. He addresses directly one woman who had come in late and sat in front of me, thus quite to his side. She answers very articulately even as she gives me the sense that she is tired and does not have a pleasant job.

Again

Question

Answer

What else?

Answer

Illustration

Glasco returns to lecturing about the importance of having a banner {?}. He gives, enthusiastically, an example from Barak Obama’s campaign “change!”, he makes fun of Hillary Clinton saying “me too!” (With hand gestures, as she were a kid in class). After a fumble (afterthought?) he quotes John McCain but cannot quite come with a quick sentence.

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“Each one have something they hold up” “What is *your* banner?” “For example, Brother Frank writes a lot” “I read what you contributed to the newsletter while I was sick last week and it really made an impression.... your humility...” “Sister Joy {Jay?”

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This leads to various statement of what sounded like testimonials from several of the people:
testimonial

testimonial

testimonial

That's right!

CG: I like this concept

Things get almost emotional/evangelical. One woman raises her right hand, palm to the ceiling as I have seen it done elsewhere.

From some reason, this leads to a discussion of mature people trying too hard to remake what God has made. Glasco mentions cloning, trans-fats, "eat only what God has made."

This leads to a long segment on the problems with church people who interfere with other people, judge, pressure. Everyone gets into this with testimonials and exemplary narratives, some quite long "my cousin is an evangelist..." Glasco "I was at a party and had some water in a wine glass; a picture was taken and was shown to my superior who showed it to me. I was not in trouble because he knew what was happening but..."

At 7:20 another woman comes in and Brother Soan brings her a Bible, though she had already picked up one.

Glasco: let's shift to John 1, 1, 9 and talks about the importance of confessing one's sin. There are now 8 people in the audience, 6 women and 2 men, plus me). He distinguishes between people placing guilt on people. "God is not into guilt. Jesus already died for our sins" but we must confess. He tells a story of how he attended earlier that month some event in Texas relating to Black History month, how there were racial tensions, how people were told to say they were sorry, how whites started apologizing for slavery and segregation, apologizing to American Indians, how by the following day race had become invisible, "it didn't matter whether you were green, blue..." "I don't go around saying 'Brother Soan is White'" "It feels good to give and receive forgiveness."

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"We have a generation of children who do not want to talk about racism. They do not think it is real because they have not experienced it" {I cannot reconstruct how Glasco went there.}

"As I conclude"

"How many of you did what I ask you to do the last time: look at yourself in the mirror and see a 'breadth-taking reflection of God'?" This leads him to say that, while flipping through the channels he had seen Tina Turner performing at the Grammy's. "68! this is not the same woman who was beaten up." One woman takes out of her purse a page from a newspaper with the photo of Tina Turner performing.

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“Next week. I am giving you a bit of research to do: where in the Bible is the story of the donkey who was too loose? If you go on the internet you can find it by going to the concordance site and checking under ‘colt’. We have computers here and Brother Soan can help you. If you are here on Sunday, I will also tell you how to use a book concordance.”

“OK we are going home”

Glasco summarizes also what he will do in two weeks: talk about the Shofar (the ram’s horn used by the ancient Jews).

“Amen. Sister Joy give her the closing prayer!”

Sister Joy improvises a prayer

“We also need to pray for Sister [very heavy set Black woman] who has lost her grand-father”
Everyone stands, some join hands, Glasco stands behind her and places both his hands on her shoulders as he improvises a prayer.”

Amen

Everyone takes a ‘it’s finished’ positioning and start chatting, gathering their coats, etc.

Glasco turns to me and asks what I thought. I thank him and use the word “interesting” which he picks up “interesting?” {it did not seem to be the word he wanted to hear...} and then someone else comes to him and they walk to his office. I walk out towards the exit with Brother Soan who also ask me what I think. I use words like “uplifting, Glasco is a powerful speaker.” This works well. Just as I was going to ask him whether we could talk to him, another person comes to him and appears to ask him a question about the computer concordance. Brother Soan says that he could show him right then and both walk into the service area.

{I will try to get in touch with him for an interview and perhaps observations of his other work}