

BIBLE STUDY AT THE SALVATION ARMY

I enter at about 6:10. The entrance hall is empty except for the man at the desk (I am quite sure it is the same that was there before). He asks me to sign in. I tell him I am coming for the Bible Study and he tells me to go to the sanctuary. When I get there one person is sitting in the pew while Brother Soan is at the piano singing and then improvising. I find him quite good.

167P

6:20 a young man and a young woman come in and stand as he instructs her about some housekeeping issue regarding the stage area of the sanctuary; they leave

174P

175P

6:25 Glasco comes in and comes directly to me {I am almost sure he came for me but not absolutely} and says “you are here? You should have called! Bible study was cancelled” We chat briefly about future events, he tells me about Linda having been here and what other events we could look at. I say something like “Linda will probably focus on the service area, and I will probably focus on the religious area.” He then mention that the youth bible study group is meeting and, upon my asking, he takes me there (in one of the classrooms on the second floor)

629

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{I wonder whether Bible Study is more of an issue that I imagined on the basis of the fact that most of the churches list it as a regular activity on their external bulleting boards. But Glasco had told last time that it was almost cancelled because of the weather and he stated that he was actually surprised that anybody had shown up. Did the event start a half-hour late because he assumed nobody was coming? Because it always start late? Because it is something that can start late? How does this relate to Br. Soan’s singing? To the man who sat in the pew throughout this evening, without moving and whom Glasco did not address as he took me to the youth group?}

6:30 Glasco briefly introduces me as a professor from Columbia, I sit at the end of the one table (the teacher is on one side, the children on the other side). No one comments.

The classroom is clean and brightly painted but clearly well-used. 3 girls and 2 boys are in attendance. I’d say they are between 13 and 15. The teacher must be 18/20 and her toddler daughter wanders around with little impact on what happens.

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{she is always handled during the off moments for any participant she approaches (I could not tell until the end whose child she was) in the BS thereby not interrupting either the BS or the child’s activity}

{ actually I feel invisible; it is as if I am a non-event; it is not that I am completely invisible as I am mentioned at least one when someone admonishes the toddler "not to dry her hands on him"; certainly no one addresses me }

Teacher to everyone: "What's next Sunday?" Answers "Easter?" ... "Good Friday?"

T shakes her head: "it is Palm Sunday"

"Daniel, read Luke 19." D. reads very haltingly. Half-way through each verse T asks vocabulary questions "what is a colt?" "Why are they using palm branches?" "Why are they spreading their coats?" D. Continues reading, he comments "I need glasses"

T.: "Tisha, pick up" Tisha reads quite fluently.

T: "what is the significance that it says that it is an *unriden* colt? ... purity ... it's wild but Jesus tames it ... if someone asked 'I want to take your car' what would they say?" "They'd shoot you!" (Shooting noises and hand gestures by the two boys)

Br. Soan comes in. Regularly, after the teacher has asked a question and is waiting for an answer, he gives the answer—I'd say almost angrily, as if it should already have been given because it is so obvious. Sister Joy (?) also comes in at some point but never says anything. She looks pleasant.

T: "they were making a carpet for Jesus" "why, he was on a horse?"

T.: "focus" she gives explanations

Daniel keeps asking questions that are both on topic but not on task "Is Good Friday the day he died? Why should they make a movie about that?" He gets interrupted and treated as an aside as T brings the lesson plan (comment on the verses as they are read). It does not seem to bother him.

T: So what is the point of Palm Sunday?

{ the kids do not seem to know much; or at least they do not display it even if they know the answer; they did stay on task without displaying much effort as doing so, or much enthusiasm either }

T: "The Sunday after next is Easter. We'll talk about this next Wednesday ... no eggs ... no bunnies" One of the boys tries to elaborate a religious explanation for bunnies but no one picks up on it.

T or Soan: "Announcements: youth Sunday on April 18; youth council on May 2-4" some discussion among the children about whether it is something they did last year and that

involves being driven somewhere with activities.

Open house next Tuesday where we introduce the community to our activities ... I want you to man the booths”

T: “who will pray out?” one of the girl does it, in the improvisational style I am starting to recognize as a speech event. She is quite fluent at it.

{(= Bible study has ended =)}

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I approach Soan with the idea of asking him for an interview. He kind of apologizes for not having called Linda back and that he intends to do it. I say that I would be interested in asking the question “what do you remember learning first?” he asks “in the Salvation Army? in New York?” I say even earlier. “In the small town in Texas where I come from?” HV: “sure” He responds “one thing is sure, I would not be here if it were not for the Army.” This ends our exchange.

{I cannot remember how this came to be the last comment in this exchange. Soan is intense but seemed willing. I also got the sense that I am going to get an amazing grace conversion story. But this is interesting too and the conversion discourse is, also, an education discourse}