

BIBLE STUDY AND SPEECH AT WESTCHESTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
(in the Bronx)

[given the delay, these are little more than transcriptions of my scratch notes]

During some of our conversations earlier in the semester, John Nelson had mentioned that he had been teaching a form of Bible Study somewhere in the Bronx. It was not quite clear to me what this entailed, though I got the feeling that it was a group of men, meeting in a basement. He told me something to the effect that he was using the “colloquium model” (as in the anthropology colloquium at TC). I had asked him whether I could attend once. He had agreed, and after, many weeks, we made an arrangement that I would visit this May 14<sup>th</sup>. He would pick me in his car and we would drive to the church.

126P

On the basis of my misunderstanding, I decided to dress somewhat “down” and, in particular, not to wear a tie. As I got into the car, he noticed this and, indirectly at first, and then quite directly, he told me I need to put on a tie. I found soon found out as we drove (I started to tape-record after 15 minutes, and for the following 30-45 minutes) that this was “a big event” for the church “a White Professor from Columbia!”, that the visit had been advertised in the Sunday bulletin, and that I would have to make a speech of some sort.

714  
639

We first drove to the Macy’s in Yonkers where I bought a tie (later I realized that this meant a long detour). Finally, we arrived (7:05 pm) at the Westchester United Methodist Church, at 2547 East Tremont Avenue, Rev. Johnnie Johnson, Pastor. It is a modest, plain, building. A plaque said that it had been the seat of a white congregation which moved further into Westchester Co.

As I walked I asked JN whether I should use “Black” or “African-American.” He said they preferred the latter, but “they are not combative.” As we walked into the building, a gospel choir was rehearsing.

221

{while the building is clearly quite worn out, the office, entrance ways, etc., did not give me quite the sense of almost ruin that some parts of Salem gave me. Perhaps this has to do with the fact that the building and sanctuary is so much less grand than Salem.}

I am ushered into the pastor’s office (small, full of paper, etc.). I am left mostly alone until

7:25 when I am taken into the church proper and made to sit in the third row. At 7:30 there are about 10 people, including 3 men. By the end there were more than 30, with quite a few men.

At @7:32, John Nelson goes to the pulpit "OK folks.... Welcome." A prayer, and then JN introduces me "in the first half, HV wants to observe ... teaching..."

JN: "in anthropology, what we do ..." JN works from his own notes

{lecture mode}

Several persons take notes.

JN works from his own notes, mostly lecturing, sometimes proceeding through questions:

- . Any body knows who Luke was? A physician! .... a man science
- . Greek ... two races ... Jews and Gentiles
- . Friend of Paul
- . Other book her wrote? Acts!
- . Good! Written to whom? Theophilous!
- . meaning of names
- . Maps
- . Who are the people?

Several people in the audience name them

JN lists.

Someone: "can you repeat this please?"

- . We must memorize all this so that you can explain.
  
- . Mary of Bethany ... who can tell me? Don't be shy ... time to share

A man comes in

- . "Come right in brother!"
- . Luke was a scientist, doing research ... ethnography ... hypothesis
- . For example: why are some people poor?

Answers from the audience

- . Lack of education
- . Opportunity
- . Prejudice
- . Economics

a woman adds:

not only for Blacks for also poor Whites .... if people have access, everything gets better.

JN: "It is not a mental problem."

A man : "Sometimes it is"

JN: This is what we need to know about Like to understand what he wrote.

Who was John Wesley? JN asks a woman who starts to answer to stand up to develop the answers.

Wesleyan quadrilateral:

- scripture
- experience
- tradition
- reason

8:25 "This is running short:

JN introduces me.

I speak for about 20 minutes, I believe. The audience seems receptive. The question following are to the point. Only one stand out as I am challenged "what can a white professor tell us?"

The pastor closes the questions by asking me to promise that I would come back to talk about my findings. We are then invited to say for refreshments.

Actually, this is a full potluck dinner with plenty of fried chicken, etc. A few people thank me.

Around 9:30 JN drives me back to the subway.