

Syllabus
Dissident Discipleship within the American Empire: Cultivating and Modeling
Truly Alternative Ways of Being

Summer Session 2010

Instructors

Nichola Torbett: ntorbett@seminaryofthestreet.org or 510-225-8561

Guest Presenters:

Dr. J. Webb Mealy: webb@selftest.net or 510-444-8511, ext. 21

Rev. Lynice Pinkard: pinkpreacher@firstoakland.org or 510-444-8511, ext. 11

Course Description

The term “spiritual activism” has become increasingly popular in recent years, but what does it mean? Does it designate anything other than engaging in secular activist practices as a faith community or as an interfaith coalition? Seminary of the Street contends that the missing element in spiritual activism as it is currently practiced is this: Spiritual activists need to look honestly at the ways in which they are implicated in the very systems and structures they indict in their activism, thus participating in our own oppression and the oppression of countless others. So many of us hunger for more aliveness, more love, and deeper connections and yet find ourselves succumbing again and again, consciously and unconsciously, to the coercive demands and seductive compensations of the dominant culture. How can we cultivate our capacity, and the capacity of others in our communities, to be dissident, in other words, to resist participation in oppressive systems and instead develop an alternative way of living? In this class, we’ll explore disciples and practices toward that end.

Learning Objectives

After successfully completing this course, students will be able to

- explain the term “empire systems” and discuss some of the ways these systems operate both inside us and outside in the world
- describe some of the ways the church often colludes with empire systems
- explain the term “dissident discipleship” and understand how the Bible, the Christian tradition, and the long history of church practice constitute a peculiar, distinctive, clear, but flexible script according to which life in the world may be lived out differently
- evaluate the degree to which they themselves are becoming dissident disciples and identify areas for celebration and growth
- identify multiple disciplines and practices that foster the capacity for dissident discipleship
- begin to develop a dissident discipleship program for themselves and/or their communities

Requirements

Students taking this class for credit will be expected to do the following:

1. Attendance and participation: Because this is such a brief course, attendance of all sessions is essential to achieving the learning objectives. Missing more than an hour of class will impact your grade. In addition, you are encouraged to monitor your participation level, making sure you are contributing your voice and ideas to the conversation without dominating it.

2. Self-assessment: Students will be asked to assess their own dissident discipleship capacity, identifying areas for celebration and growth. This assessment is due in class on Thursday.

3. Final project: The culminating activity of this course, to be completed no later than Friday, August 13, 2010, is the development of a dissident discipleship program for the student him- or herself or (better) some community of which she or he is a part, whether that is a congregation, a family, a social justice organization, or some other collective. This program should be described in no fewer than three pages and no more than eight pages, double spaced. Students will receive feedback on their programs and will have the opportunity to share programs with other members of the class. Final projects should be emailed or mailed to Nichola on or before the due date. For the sake of ecological ethics and responsibility, it is perfectly acceptable and even preferred to print on the clean side of previously used paper.

Plagiarism Policy

Sources must be referenced accurately and according to standard academic practice; plagiarism is a serious academic offense and will result in a failing grade for the paper. If you have any questions about adequate citation or how to avoid plagiarism, don't hesitate to speak to the instructor *before* submitting a paper. See <http://www.psr.edu/plagiarism-policy> for PSR's plagiarism policy.

Required Reading

Reader available from Copy Central, 2483 Hearst Ave.

Suggested Supplemental Reading

Dissident Discipleship: A Spirituality of Self-Surrender, Love of God, and Love of Neighbor by David Augsburg

Mere Discipleship: Radical Christianity in a Rebellious World by Lee C. Camp

Learning to Be White: Money, Race and God in America by Thandeka

Call to Commitment: An Attempt to Embody the Essence of the Church by Elizabeth O'Connor

The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical by Shane Claiborne

Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World by
John Howard Yoder

Incomplete Policy

PSR's incomplete policy may be found at <http://www.psr.edu/extensions-lapsed-time-rule>.

English as Second Language (ESL) Policy

Upon request by the ESL student to one of the instructors, we will extend the deadline for papers one week to allow time for editing.