

Blue Collar Resistance and the Politics of Jesus: Doing Ministry with Working Class Whites

by Tex Sample (Abingdon Press, 2006 ISBN 9780687335022)

Reviewed by Mike Mather, pastor of Broadway United Methodist Church in Indianapolis, Indiana.

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My initial reaction to this book is gratitude. Gratitude for its honesty. Gratitude that the author has decided to write on this topic. Gratitude for the publisher for agreeing to publish it – as is. It is important work. And Tex Sample has spoken important truths. But if you know him, I suppose that isn't much of a surprise.

Tex Sample has written one of the most fun books to read on ministry that you will ever come across. Weaving philosophy, theology, country western lyrics, and stories throughout the book Sample at once delights and provokes us to think about the way in which we live out church in this day and age.

At the core of this book is the notion of ministry as “pitching tent” with the people. The author challenges us to honor and respect the spirit at work in the lives of working class white folks -- in ways far beyond what is talked about in most books in this genre these days. Instead of arguing for a way to organize the congregation, or to “train the trainers,” or any other such jargon – he argues for listening and trusting the spirit in the lives of the people – and in particular people who are often not respected in our middle class

denominations.

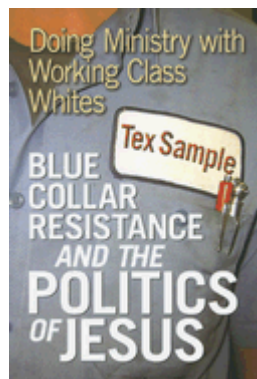
I couldn't get away from the feeling that while this book is specifically addressed to ministry with working class whites – it is an important book for ministry with any and all people.

His exploration of the idea of church as tactic – gives an alternative way of being the church in the midst of a world that has given us church as marketing. Rather than bemoaning the loss of standing of the church in our current culture and world, Sample in fact embraces the freedom that we have to offer an alternative to the dominant culture (a practice deeply rooted in the history of our faith). The church as tactic offers a resistance to the way in which the world sees people and in fact all of creation. The author's real world examples and thoughtful imaginings can help the blind eyes, that we all have, see a little more clearly.

In the section of the book on what the author calls “the craft tradition of discipleship” he challenges the church to practice its faith by being formed (apprenticed) with and for Christ.

When he does talk about skills – it is the skills that the church uniquely has to offer – skills like confession, thanksgiving, forgiveness, Eucharistic practice, and more. It is refreshing to read a teacher in the church talking about these practices as central to our life together. They are not the lessons of marketing and programming. They are the lessons of our faith.

This book will be one to return to time and again as you seek to remain focused on and formed by Jesus in our life together in the church.



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