

Blessed are the Peacemakers

By Tony Campolo

When I was on Harvard University's campus, I had the opportunity to speak to Peter Gomes, professor of ethics and chaplain of the university. I asked him a very important question: "Why do evangelical Christians get treated with such negativism on this campus? Anybody else can come to Harvard and be greeted with respect—a Muslim professor, somebody speaking on Native American religion or on anything except evangelical Christianity. Why does the evangelical have such a hard time at Harvard?"

He replied, "Set yourself in your own mind on the commons. You're at lunch and there are three other persons at the table. There's an ardent feminist; across from her is the head of the Gay Liberation Task Force. Also at the table is an angry, militant African-American neo-Marxist. And you say, 'Let's play a word game. Give me whatever comes to mind when I throw out a word.' And the first word you throw out is the word *evangelical*. What will be the responses?"

"Well, you don't have to press that. I know what the responses are going to be—*neo-fascist, homophobic, antifeminist, male chauvinist, capitalistic pig*."

He said, "Now, the second word you throw out is the name *Jesus*. What reactions will you get?"

I stopped and said, "I think those same people would say words like *compassionate, forgiving, full of grace, understanding*."

"Tony, does it bother you that the name *Jesus* elicits a completely opposite response from the word *evangelical*? Does it bother you that those two words elicit completely opposite reactions?" he said.

I said, "It does."

He said, "What I'm trying to tell you is that on this campus Jesus has a very good reputation. It's evangelicals that don't."

I have thought about that conversation a great deal since then, and I really see the need for us to get back to Jesus. Evangelicals say they're into Jesus, but I'm going to raise some questions about that.

First of all, Jesus was into grace. Evangelicals are often into legalism.

Bono of U2 was asked on the "Larry King Live Show," "Can you differentiate between Christianity and the other religions of the world?"

"Well, all the other religions of the world in one way or another teach karma."

You know karma, that eastern religious concept where whatever evil you do gets attached to your soul, and as you transmigrate from one

existence to another you carry the weight and the agony and the pain of former sins with you. Karma is taught by all the other religions of the world, in that you can never get rid of your sin, you have to work it off somehow. You have to get punished for it in some way.

"All the other religions of the world teach karma. Only Jesus teaches grace," he said.

I thought, "That's terrific, that's really a great statement. Jesus does teach grace."

And then Bono added, "Unfortunately, in most instances, even Christianity teaches karma."

In reality, we often are legalists and somehow think that salvation is something that we earn through good works, when it is really the gift of God. It is something



that is offered to us.

Please, that is not to say that we are to shy away from a life of obedience to Christ, but our lives of obedience must always be our grateful response to a gift, not a means of earning salvation. And that has to be articulated with great clarity.

My wife loves to tell the story of Peter and Paul having a great discussion in heaven. They're confused because Paul's in charge of administering the heavenly place and Peter's in charge of admitting people through the gate, and as they check their numbers they find that there are more people in heaven than Peter has allowed in through the gate. They can't figure why there is this disparity.

Then one day, Paul comes running up to Peter and says, "Peter, Peter, I've figured out what the problem

is. It's Jesus! He keeps sneaking people over the wall!" And that, indeed, is our Jesus, is it not? When we, in our legalism, would say, "You can't come in!" Jesus says, "Whosoever will may come." We have in Jesus a grace that I often fail to see in the legalistic attitudes of so much of the church.

A friend of mind who lives next door to a Seventh-day Adventist describes cutting his grass on Saturday morning. The Adventist woman came out, looked at him, and said, "You're cutting your grass, and it's the Sabbath!"

And the guy said, "Well, Jesus picked corn on the Sabbath."

She said, "Two wrongs don't make a right!"

Now that, friends, is legalism.

I love the story that one of my pastor friends tells about a woman who came to his office for counseling. He found out that she was really messed up. She had messed up her family; she had messed up her marriage; everything was in a shambles. He tried to get at the core of her problem.

Lo and behold, among the things that had traumatized her as a child was something that happened when she was in the fourth grade. She had a teacher who despised her. To say that things did not go well is an understatement.

She came in one day late for class, knocked over a vase, and it fell to the floor. Water and flowers splashed, and the vase was broken. The teacher screamed at her, "Sarah, you've done it again. Do you realize that no one in this class likes you?"

I find it hard to believe that this could be done by a fourth grade teacher, but the pastor assures me that this happened. The teacher had this girl come and sit on the front row, and then said to the other students. "Would each of you come to the blackboard and write on the blackboard things that you find wrong with Sarah?"

One by one, her fellow students came and wrote terrible things on the blackboard as the fourth grade girl sat there trembling and crying. It so traumatized her that her life was a mess after that.

The pastor said, "Sarah, are you sure that everybody came to the blackboard?"

She replied, "I think so."

"Close your eyes, Sarah. Look at that class again, because in the back there's one last person in that classroom. It's Jesus. He gets up; he comes to the front of the room. He picks up the board eraser and wipes



away all the dirty, ugly, mean things that are written there, then picks up the chalk and writes, "Sarah, you're wonderful, and I love you."

Grace. Grace. We've got to articulate the grace of Jesus. We cannot let people see judgmental, condemning attitudes. Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world but that the world through him might be saved.

The second thing we must do is get back to the values of Jesus. That's difficult today, especially today. Here are the values of Jesus:

Blessed are the poor

In Matthew, it says "pure in spirit." But in Luke it says, "Blessed are the poor." Period.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in interpreting the Sermon on the Mount, says Jesus is not talking about those who are victimized by political and economic structures that have caused the poor to suffer. He's talking about those who are willing to become poor as they respond to the needs of the oppressed of the world.

Søren Kirkegaard said, "It's one thing to love humanity so much that you're willing to die for humanity. It's quite another to expect to earn \$60,000 a year describing a man who died for humanity."

The reality is that Jesus Christ calls us to sacrifice for the needs of the poor and the oppressed. There are over two thousand verses of Scripture that call upon us to respond to the needs of the poor and the oppressed.

I find it disgraceful that those of us who are Christians living in this nation of ours are willing to tolerate a political economic system that leaves 44 million Americans uninsured when it comes to medical care. Please, I understand the conservative compassion that pervades this school, as it pervades the Republican Party. But let me just say, being compassionate on the individual level is of crucial significance, but it is also of crucial significance that we work against the principalities and powers and the rulers of this age to see that justice is brought to the poor and the oppressed of this land and of this world. We've got to remember that.

It's not enough to call upon faith-based programs to do it. I've given my life to creating faith-based programs, but the federal government talks about faith-based programs and all the money they're going to give while they're cutting back. You know why they're cutting back? Because they're going to war in Iraq, and—hey—we can't do it all, can we?

The truth of the matter is that we need faith-based

programs and we need a Christian community that calls upon the rulers of this age to do righteousness, even as the prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures called upon their governments to do righteousness.

Blessed are they that mourn

This is a value of Jesus. Hey, don't get me wrong; I'm into laughter and joy and all of that, but people of God, listen to me: We're not really Christians until our hearts are broken by the things that break the heart of Jesus. When there's an opportunity to be among the poor and to serve them in the name of Christ, we should respond.

I head up a missionary organization that recruits people for a year, or just for the summer months if that's all they can give, but a year is preferable. We put people together in Christian community, they live in neighborhoods that are impoverished, and there they become neighbors to the poor.

They go door to door, meet people, and talk to people. They just don't come in, do guerrilla spiritual warfare, and move on, but they live there for a year and get to know the folks. They share in their lives and do missionary work.

If you volunteer, your heart will be broken by what you find going on around you.

Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth

Blessed are the meek. I spend a great deal of my time overseas, and I've got to tell you that the goodwill we had as a nation after September 11, 2001, has been squandered. The world does not look at us as a meek group of people; it sees America as the epitome of arrogance. We don't care what the rest of the world thinks about this or that or anything. We're going to do it our way.

George Bernard Shaw once said, "God created us in his image, and we decided to return the favor." And in a real sense we have turned God into an American. Our Jesus does not incarnate Jehovah: he incarnates what we are about and our values. When we march off to war, we can be sure that God is on our side. Why? Because we have made him into one of us.

In reality, the Jesus of Scripture calls to us and says, "I refuse to become what you are. I call upon you to become what I am." That, in fact, is the call to meekness. I call you as a people to become such

as Jesus was, as Paul describes Jesus in Philippians 2: "He who thought it not robbery to be equal with God, emptied himself, took upon himself the form of a slave and made himself of no reputation and humbled himself even unto death, even unto the death of the cross." That was the meekness of Jesus.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness

I've got to tell you this. I'm a friend of the Adventist community, so I can tell you this as a friend. We have become so pro-Israel that we have forgotten justice for the Palestinian people, and it's about time that we wake up. Please people, I am pro-Israel, but that doesn't mean you have to be anti-Palestinian if you are pro-

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Israel. Please stop to think about this.

Do we even pay any attention to how the state of Israel was created? That ought to solve the problem right there. You know what happened, don't you? At the end of World War I, Britain was given control of the area known as Palestine, and then Jewish people trying to escape from anti-Semitism—which was largely the result of our prejudices—began acts of terrorism against the Palestinians.

Please, don't think that the Arabs invented terrorism. Every one of the prime ministers of Israel, save for Golda Meier, had a background as a terrorist. Certainly, Ariel Sharon, whom they just elected again, was responsible for one of the most massive massacres of men and women and children in recent history. He would be up for war crimes in The Hague if it were not for the protection of the United States.

The reality is that the British wanted out of Palestine, so a group of politicians from other nations, meeting in New York at the United Nations, decided that a piece of land hitherto occupied by a people for more than a thousand years wasn't going to be theirs anymore, and they gave away something that wasn't theirs. And then the people who lived there rose up.

Please, I am not justifying their terrorism and violence. I am just saying those who do not speak out for the Palestinians are not hungering and thirsting for righteousness. I know this is tough, but it's about

time we Americans marched to the beat of a distant drummer instead of the drums that come out of Washington, D.C. These things have to be said.

Blessed are the merciful

If I were to take a survey in the evangelical community, I know how it would come out on the issue of capital punishment, which intrigues me. How can you be for capital punishment when Jesus says only the merciful can expect mercy? You say, "Well we've got to do this. It's an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." And Jesus said, "That's the way it used to be. I give to you a new commandment."

I don't want to be nasty about it, but when Jesus says it's a new commandment, I think he means it's a new commandment. And the new commandment isn't

an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

A student of mine by the name of Bryan Stevenson graduated from Eastern University near the top of his class. He went on to Harvard Law School and graduated at the top of the class. From there he went to Montgomery, Alabama. This African American from Harvard Law School could be making half a million dollars a year.

Do you know what he's doing? Every day he gets up and goes down to the jailhouse and defends people on death row. This guy is living very simply in an apartment in Montgomery, Alabama. I asked him about capital punishment, and he said, "How could you possibly believe in capital punishment, not only in light of Scripture, which says, 'Blessed are the merciful,' but how could you do it in a society where there are two kinds of justice—one kind of justice for rich people and another kind of justice for poor people?"

"People go to the electric chair not because they're guilty, but because they're poor, because the poor have no one really good to speak for them. Except in Montgomery, Alabama, because in Montgomery, Alabama, Doc, I speak for the poor. I defend the poor."

Then Bryan smiled at me as he said, "And, Doc, I'm good, I'm really good."

And I thought to myself, "Bryan, you don't know



how good you are. You understand the Beatitudes. You understand the values of Jesus. You understand!"

Recently, when Bryan returned to Eastern University to speak, one of the students asked him, "Why would you do this with your life?"

He looked back at the student, smiled, and replied, "Why would you want to do anything with your life except to live out the values of Jesus in this world?"

Blessed are the peacemakers

Do you think we're going to get rid of terrorism by killing terrorists? I mean do you really think that? You're not going to get rid of terrorism by killing terrorists any more than you're going to get rid of malaria by killing mosquitoes. You get rid of malaria, not by killing mosquitoes, but by getting rid of the swamps that breed those mosquitoes, right? You don't get rid of terrorism by killing terrorists; you get rid of terrorism by dealing with the humiliation that Arab peoples have had to deal with at our hands.

You may say to me, "Do you realize how they have behaved, those Arabs?"

Well, look how Christians have behaved. I mean look at what we've done to Native Americans, or what the Conquistadors did in Latin America. Of course there are extremists in the Muslim community. But I wouldn't want to judge the Muslim religion by its extremists any more than I would want Christianity to be judged by groups like the Aryan Nation or the Ku Klux Klan, which claim to be Christian. Amen? We're better than that. And most Muslims are better than those terrorists who did that horrendous thing.

Let me tell you people, we do not understand the solidarity of the Muslim community. We who live in the religious community in America are so divided, we do not understand that Shiites and Sunni and all those people have something we don't have. Five times a day, every Muslim in the world gets down on his knees and turns toward Mecca and prays. Now every sociologist from Emile Durkheim on has known that collective rituals tend to create intensive solidarity.

Have you any idea of the solidarity of consciousness generated by a billion people around the world at a given moment all getting down on their knees, turning to one spot on the earth, and pledging allegiance—their faith revitalized, their commitment revitalized? Those who have gone as missionaries to Muslim countries know how hard it is to convert a Muslim because of the solidarity and the unity generated in the consciousness through the collective rituals of their tribe.

And when we march off to war in Iraq, I contend, we are going to initiate something that will set mission work back a thousand years, because the rest of the Muslim world does not perceive us as simply declaring war on Iraq. Between Israel and Iraq, they see America and Christianity declaring war against the entire Muslim world, and we will have to live with the consequences.

Jesus says, there is another way. Of course there's another way! It's not the American way. If Iraq screws us up, we know what to do: we embargo. Half a million children under the age of twelve have died in Iraq in the last ten years because of the embargo. We delude ourselves into thinking that when we march into town these people, whose kids we have starved to death, are going to join us.

Come on now. Here's what Jesus says, if your enemy hungers, what do you do? Embargo? No, you feed him. If your enemy is naked, you clothe him. If he's sick, you minister to him. You don't cut off medical supplies.

You say, that's impractical. I contend it's the most practical thing in the world. What if we as a Christian people marched on the Capitol and said, "An end to war! An end to the embargo!"? Let's send massive amounts of food and medicine to the people of Iraq, so that the people in Iraq who are suffering privation right now will find deliverance in love.

Do you think that might change the attitude of the Iraqi people, not only toward America, but also toward their dictator, who has oppressed them and done such evil things against them and against others in the world?

I contend that Jesus is not an impractical person. He contends that we can overcome evil with good. I thought you had to have bombs and tanks and planes to overcome evil. Jesus says you can overcome evil with good. Here's what it means to live by faith.

"The just shall live by faith." We all love that verse. Do you have enough faith to trust the morality of Jesus in an age that is counter-Jesus? That's the question we have to raise.

Do you know why I'm upset with you Seventh-day Adventists? Because over the years you were the most countercultural group that ever came down the pike. You didn't even worship on the right day! You stood up for the righteousness of Jesus. But little by little, the affluence that has pervaded this community has seduced you into a mindset that makes me wonder whether your allegiance is more to America than to the kingdom of God.

These are questions that have to be raised. We've got to get back not only to the grace of Jesus, but also to the values of Jesus.

Blessed are those who are willing to be persecuted for righteousness' sake

If you live out the beatitudes, I guarantee that you will be persecuted, you will be opposed, you will be criticized. To live out the beatitudes is a dangerous thing.

I remember sending a young man that I led to Christ when I was on the faculty at the University of Pennsylvania to a very, very solid, biblically based evangelical church. I thought he would get nurtured there. After about two months he said to me, "You know, if you were to put together a committee and ask them to invent a religion that violated all the things that Jesus taught in the Beatitudes, you'd probably get what I am hearing on Sunday morning." That's scary to me.

You're not going to get rid of terrorism by killing terrorists any more than you're going to get rid of malaria by killing mosquitoes.

You say, "But you've made Christianity into something that is politically dangerous."

And I ask a very simple question: When did Christianity cease being politically dangerous? Because that's when it ceased being Christianity. You should know that. The Seventh-day Adventist community more than any other community is aware of how the church was seduced by Constantine into a value system that stands over and against biblical Christianity. You should understand it more than any other denomination on the face of America. But you've become just like the rest of us. You look Baptist to me.

The Spirituality of Jesus

We are called upon to get back not only to the grace of God and the grace of Jesus and the values of Jesus, but also to the spirituality of Jesus. You know how in the Protestant Reformation, in the reaction against Catholicism, we often threw out the baby with the bath water? The truth is that there was a lot of good Christianity prior to the Reformation.

When I think of Julian of Norwich, when I think of Teresa of Avila, when I think of Francis of Assisi, I see people with whom I can identify. I especially identify with their style of praying, their kind of spirituality. You see, we Protestants don't really know how to pray. Mainly we know how to petition, to ask God for stuff. We're like my little boy, who came in one night

and said, "I'm going to bed. I'm going to be praying. Anybody want anything?"

I had a hard time praying publicly when I was a pastor. My problem was that when you are a Baptist (or an Adventist) you're not allowed to write your prayers. You've got to make them up on the spot. If you write them out ahead of time and read them, somebody will say, "He reads his prayers."

Which means that when we get up, we've got to kind of shoot from the hip. That's why we have that phrase "I just wanna"; it gives us time to think up the next phrase. "Lord, I just wanna. . . ." The reality is that too often our prayers are a list of non-negotiable demands that we read off to the Almighty as though God needs to be informed.

We pray, "Lord, our sister Mary is sick in the hospital."

What do you think God's saying: "Whoa! I didn't know that! Which hospital? Loma Linda?" The truth of the matter is that we should make our petitions known to God, and the truth is that intercessory prayer does have its place. But there's another kind of praying: it's contemplative praying.

Jesus says if you really want to go and pray, go into the closet and shut the door. It's interesting that he said that because I used to go to youth retreats where they would say, "Go out and sit by the lakeside. Take in the mountains. Enjoy, and pray there." I've got tell you, Jesus says to go into the closet and shut the door and be in the darkness. Why? Because nature is so beautiful that it's seductive, and the next thing we know, we're appreciating the creation instead of engaging the Creator. Go into the closet and shut the door!

Blaise Pascal did that. He went into his room, shut the door, and sat in darkness from 7 o'clock until 10:30 at night, just saying one word over and over again, "Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus," focusing down like that old Negro spiritual, "Woke up this morning with my mind staid on Jesus."

"Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus." Because as Bill Gaither wrote in his song, "There is something about that name."

You've got to drive back the darkness and create



what the Celtic Christians called the "Thin Place," where the walls between you and God are so thin that the Spirit can flow through and invade you and possess you. It's one thing in prayer to make requests to God, it's quite another to surrender and yield ourselves and—this is so hard because we're so rational in this age of enlightenment—feel Jesus flowing into our being and invading our personhood.

I've got to ask you, when was the last time that you,

be tough. I was tough and macho. I would come into church on Sunday night because my mother made me go and we would sing number 122 in the Tabernacle Hymnbook: "I come to the garden alone while the dew is still on the roses." I hated those words.

The second verse was even worse. "He speaks, and the sound of his voice is so sweet the birds hush their singing." I hated that song! But that's because I was fifteen. The older I get, the more I love to sing number

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like Blaise Pascal, sat alone in stillness and darkness and asked for nothing save for Jesus?

"I ask no dream, no prophet's ecstasy," goes the old hymn, "just take the deadness of my soul away. Oh, Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me! Invade me; flow into me." When was the last time you surrendered?

You say, "Oh I came down the aisle at a revival meeting." Sure you did. Fifty verses of "Just as I Am." You come down just as you are, and go out just as you were! What you need to do is every day go to the still place, the quiet place, to go into the dark room and there ask for nothing; simply surrender in stillness and quietude to the presence.

When I was a kid, I hated number 122 in the Tabernacle Hymnbook because I was a tough kid. Growing up on the streets of Philadelphia, you had to

122 in the Tabernacle Hymnbook, the more I love to sing, "And he walks with me and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own. And the joy we share as we tarry there none other has ever known."

And so Blaise Pascal, after spending hours in stillness and quietude, asking for nothing, but simply surrendering to God, writes in his journal, "10:30 P.M.—Fire! Fire! Fire! Fire!" Not the God of the philosophers; not the God of the mathematicians; not the God of the scientists; but the God that was alive in Abraham, Moses, and Jacob. Fire! Fire! Fire! Joy! Joy! Joy! Fire, joy! Fire, joy! Unspeakable joy!

Isn't that what you want, people? You don't just want a theology, as important as a theology is, you want to be invaded by a presence and made fully alive in the spirit.

"And Jesus, while it was yet night," it says over and over again in Scripture, goes apart from the others, surrenders to a Presence, and that same Presence, the Presence of the Holy Spirit, waits to take possession of you.

And I say this: without that Presence, you cannot live out the values of Jesus as articulated in the Beatitudes, and without that Presence, you cannot be an agent of grace.



Tony Campolo, the author of twenty-six books, is a professor of sociology at Eastern University in St. Davids, Pennsylvania. He also serves as president of the Evangelical Association for the Promotion of Education.

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