



Speaking My Mind: The Radical Evangelical Prophet Tackles the Tough Issues Christians Are Afraid to Face

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Fifteen years ago, Tony Campolo's *20 Hot Potatoes That Christians Are Afraid to Touch* pushed, pulled, and prodded Christians into serious consideration of controversial but critical issues related to the Christian life. Campolo challenged his more than 150,000 readers to re-think their convictions (and prejudices) and to do something about them!

Dubbed by *Christianity Today* as "the positive prophet" and "a ferocious critic of Christians left and right," Campolo lives up to his reputation in this latest book examining some of today's toughest questions and issues:

- * Is evangelical Christianity anti-feminist?
- * Is our affluent lifestyle at odds with our faith?
- * Is America really in moral decline?
- * Is Islam really an evil religion?
- * Should Christian parents pull their kids out of public schools?
- * Was the war with Iraq a "just" war?

Speaking My Mind... Tony Campolo at his best.

Speaking My Mind: The Radical Evangelical Prophet Tackles the Tough Issues Christians Are Afraid to Face Details

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Don Incognito says

Other reviews have discussed the content of this book and discussed Tony Campolo. I would just like to mention a few things:

This book does not rehash Dr. Campolo's much earlier Christian current-issues book, 20 Hot Potatoes Christians are afraid to touch. The thread constantly running through Speaking My Mind is criticism of the evangelical community. 20 Hot Potatoes is just as valuable, but is a scattershot discussion of issues.

If you don't know what dispensationalism is and why it is important in both evangelical theology and how evangelicals relate to the world, the chapter "Is Evangelicalism Headed For a Split?" will explain. I'm relatively ignorant in theology, so I didn't know what dispensationalism is, and appreciated the information. Dr. Campolo opposes dispensationalist theology. After learning what it is, I can't say I believe in it either.

Both Speaking My Mind and 20 Hot Potatoes trumpet that Dr. Campolo is some sort of rebel (in that he's a politically liberal Christian evangelist, and the most prominent evangelists tend to be conservative), and the jacket of Speaking My Mind even claims the book "one of the biggest risks of Tony Campolo's ministry." He makes too much of his perceived rebel and "radical" status, as though his views will enrage conservative evangelists so that they'll be out to get him. I don't think so.

Sarah says

I found this book highly relevant, and though I read it quickly (because I could not put it down; not because the material was not weighty) I will be rereading it more thoroughly and with more care. I read it in the span of a day and a half. I originally checked it out of my library solely for two of the chapters, "Are Evangelicals Handling the Gay Issue All Wrong?" and "Is Evangelicalism Sexist?" For anyone not familiar with Campolo, I do not suggest you dive into his work immediately, but begin at the beginning so as to not take him out of context. I am not a critic of his, but an ally, but even so were I to want to cite him would make certain to begin at the beginning and read at least this work in its entirety once more with moderate pacing to make sure I followed him as he meant to present his case.

I thought his arguments (I hate to even call them that, but lack a better word here) reasonable, well-presented and even-handed. He speaks a clarion call about America in the eyes of the world in the chapter "Do We Understand Why So Many People Throughout The World Hate America?" that people of all faiths and philosophies, certainly not only Evangelicals, and not even Christians would do well to consider. However, the most appealing thing to me is that it is not a hopeless message that one is left with, but there is thoughtful consideration to what has been done right; what good continues to be done, and what should continue to be done, with Campolo not speaking in generalities but citing specific and reachable examples.

I would highly recommend this book, especially to someone that feels at a loss for what to do; that feels that we now have a chance for hope but knows not what to do with that hope with the inauguration of it.

Rebecca says

I agreed to read this one in connection with a preaching group of which I am part. Not being an Evangelical, I do not wrestle with the issues focused on here - not in the same way at least. I quickly tired of the method, style and discussion. Perhaps it would have been more meaningful for me when originally published. At 14 years old, it's just dated.

Corrie says

I love how outspoken this man is! Not surprisingly, my favorite chapter is #4) Is Evangelicalism Sexist? That chapter alone might convince many reticent egalitarians!

But I was also deeply challenged by chapter #8) Can We Help the Poor Without Making Matters Worse? I'd just come off my first mission trip experience (building a house in Mexico over Memorial Day weekend), and I was full of questions about the way we do ministry. I could feel the "us: Heroes / them: Wretched & Poor" attitude among some of our church members (thankfully not anybody on my team!), and it makes me feel nauseated just thinking about it! In spite of our best intentions, we often rush in to help, before discerning how we can best empower the local people. Campolo is involved in Haiti with a ministry called Beyond Borders, which models this different way of doing ministry beautifully.

Beth Olson shultz says

Though this book was published 10 years ago, it is still relevant today. Some changes have occurred. Many people think Tony and the rest of Red Letter Christians are not Christians. Even if you think that, you should read this book or his more current books. God is LOVE!!!! And not condemning other people!!!!

Michael says

Diappointing.

Rick says

Campolo has a straight-forward, no-holds-barred way with words as he tackles the hard hitting issues many Christians shy away from.

Scott Holstad says

I was pretty disappointed with this book and that's a pity. I've seen Campolo's name bandied about in liberal Christian books and by liberal Christian authors for some time now, but this is his first book I've read. I felt really lucky when I stumbled across it in a used bookstore this week. And the table of contents seemed very promising: "Do Evangelicals Have an Image Problem? Is Evangelicalism Sexist? Are Evangelicals Handling the Gay Issue All Wrong?" and so on. Very promising. So I bought the book and sat down to read. And was thoroughly disappointed. I don't know who labeled Tony Campolo a liberal Christian, but he's most definitely a conservative evangelical who happens to be somewhat liberal politically and socially. But he's a conservative Christian. And since that's what I've just escaped after being trapped as a lifelong dissatisfied evangelical for the past 45 years, that's the last thing I wanted to read.

For instance, in tackling the gay issue, Campolo acknowledges that Christians need to reach out to gays in the church and the community -- provided they live completely celibate lives!!! He's not sure if gays are born that way or become that way (they're born that way, dingbat!), but we need to love them -- provided they don't act out on their preferences and keep the behavior pure. WTF? That's not realistic! He even notes that "although Jesus was silent about homosexuality, He did specifically condemn the remarriage of divorced people unless adultery was the cause of the divorce." He starts out by appearing to be open, by talking about the "dilemma," and then holds up his shining example of a man who died apparently a homosexual virgin, because he thought it was such an abominable sin, so he never gave in. Huh. Homosexuality is mentioned less than 10 times in the Bible, yet being kind to the poor is mentioned hundreds of times and adultery is mentioned numerous times again. So again I say to you, WTF?

Tony starts out with sexism and never really clearly answers that little question, conveniently enough. He admits that there's a yin yang type of thing going on with the sexes and that's about it. Nice. He can write a few decent things at times though. In his later chapter on whether there's a second chance for people who die without Christ, he discusses universalist theology briefly. He ends that section by writing

"One universalist theologian carried me through his progression of thought with the following argument: 'If there is a God, then there is a God, whether people believe it or not. If God is their Creator, that also is true, whether they believe it or not. If the Bible is an infallible message from God, that fact, too, is not dependent on their believing it. So, if Jesus died for their sins and is their Savior, isn't that fact also true, whether they believe it or not?'"

An interesting thought. Campolo does an interesting job on the science chapter, with some good ideas about God/Jesus being in the HERE at all times. He made it seem real. He also introduced me to a new concept that Seventh-Day Adventists, apparently, believe -- "soul sleep." When we die, we lie in the ground until the Second Coming, basically asleep until God raises everyone from the dead at the same time. I've never quite gotten a handle on what happens to a person's soul upon death in the Christian tradition. This was an interesting explanation.

Campolo delves into my old Calvinist roots in his discussion on predestination, a topic I truly hate. Here he gets a little iffy though. On page 121, he writes

"I do not understand how reasonable people can believe that God is in total control of everything right now when there is so much evil and injustice in the world. I grant that this may be a failure on my part, but if I believed that God controlled everything that goes on in the universe these days, I would not know how to explain why innocent children in Africa get AIDS, or why godly people die of cancer, or why there was ever

an Auschwitz or a Hiroshima...."

His answer leaves one wondering, though:

"To those who ask, 'How could a loving God allow horrendous diseases to afflict good people, permit insane wars to kill the innocent, and let a man like Hitler create such widespread suffering?' I answer, 'God is doing the best He can....'"

Seriously? That's the best you've got, you "liberal" Christian??? What a wussy way out of things.

Campolo also contradicts himself in this book. He goes on in the chapter about the poor about how Jesus spoke about the poor and how important it is to help them. Then he has a section called, "The Disastrous Welfare System," where he sounds like a bitter right wing Republican in writing that the system "generated cheating and deceptions so that eventually hundreds of thousands of people were on the welfare rolls, collecting unjustified handouts, even though they were quite capable of getting jobs and properly supporting themselves and their families." Excuse me? Did I just hear that out of a so-called "liberal" Christian??? The welfare system has been abused by some, yes, but it's the only safety net millions of people have, and don't you think, while we're talking about it, that lots of "good" things like sub-prime mortgages and hedge funds have been abused too??? Hypocrite!

While I'm at it, even though this book was published in 2004, it seems woefully dated. For example, in talking about whether America is in moral decline, he writes "all kinds of wonderful things are happening in our world, in spite of all that is evil and demonic. Across America, churches are being born and reaching out to huge numbers of previously unchurched people. A revitalized commitment to the poor and the oppressed is emerging among American Christians." Really? Tell that to the Republican Party, aka, the Religious Right, aka the Christians, all doing their best to eliminate every possible safety net poor people in this country have, all the while working to make their rich masters richer. What did Jesus say about the rich entering Heaven like a camel through the eye of a needle? Seems most Republicans/Christians haven't read their Bibles lately. Hypocrites! Also, stats show that church membership is declining, most especially within the 18 - 29 year old set. Evangelicals are turning people off to God, Tony. Time to face up.

Campolo does show he's not 100% conservative in his discussion on dispensationalism. He states his opposition of it and nearly goes so far as to label it a danger to this country and the world. That's bold. He does a good job with this section. Oddly, however, he says that the charismatic movement is the greatest opposition to dispensationalism and is Christianity's best chance in the twenty first century. Huh? Speaking in tongues? Really? He ends his book by writing, "As progressive evangelicalism increasingly emerges out of fundamentalism over the next fifty years, the rest of the world will encounter Christians who are more than ready to struggle with the tough issues that await us, and to do so with open minds and open hearts." Really Tony? Telling your gay friends to be celibate if they want to go to Heaven? That kind of open heart? Sorry, I'm not buying it. He tries to come across as open minded, but when the chips are down, it seems to me that Campolo goes crawling down the nearest conservative evangelical fox hole and hides out -- and it sickens me.

Valerie Dykstra says

There was a good portion of the book that I didn't really "get" the importance of the issue. Excusing those sections, I think I'm about 60/40 with Tony -- meaning I agree with

him about 60% and disagree with 40%.

I was mildly traumatized by his theology in the Science chapter, namely his take on God not being in control and God "doing all He can possibly do..."

He has a blunt way that often made me uncomfortable, but in most cases I appreciated what I thought he was trying to convey. I appreciated his admitted lack of answers and understanding on certain subjects. Also I thought he was pretty fair in showing both "takes" on subjects. Frankly, the ability to show both sides lends credibility to his efforts to me.

My question remains, where would Jesus be on this issue? I want to be on His side even if a majority of Christians are on the opposite side, the side they think Jesus is on. We all have to follow the Jesus we know, the Jesus we believe the Bible reveals. I don't think that Jesus changes with the culture, but I do think it's possible that we all misinterpret Jesus' desires and will for us from time to time.

Out of a possible 5 stars I give the book 3. Not a book I want for my personal library, but definitely one that sparked some healthy questions. By AW Tozer's definition of a good book, one that makes you want to put it down and think for yourself, I'd consider it a good book.

Mark says

Tony Campolo, Professor Emeritus of Sociology at Eastern University outside of Philadelphia, has long been a favorite Christian author. This book, published in 2004, reveals his thoughtful approach, solidly built on a scriptural foundation, to many of the problems facing Evangelicals in this modern world. I do not always agree with his conclusions (I am even more liberal in my take) but I always find that he challenges me anew. This book, maybe more than some of his others, suffers from an optimism that was probably bred during the "feel-good" early years of the Bush presidency, before the economic crash and the subsequent acrimonious religio-political debate of the last four years. Tony's hope that the various streams of conservative and liberal thought might be able to begin to seek common ground has proven somewhat naive. We are probably further apart now than when these chapters were written. And that is truly heart-breaking. But, still there is a lot to digest here. And it was an interesting perspective and opened my eyes in a couple of areas, making me aware of just how differently we all approach certain issues.

Chuck Powell says

A manifesto of progressive Christian thought...the prophet, the preacher...a voice American Christianity needs to listen to in this culture of Christianity that is increasingly hostile towards even our own Christian brothers and sisters.

Richard Brand says

I have always admired and enjoyed listening to Tony Campolo. I would like to think that he represents something of the Christian faith that I respect. His positions on the issues in this book are not very far from my own so naturally I think he is a very clever and intelligent Christian. This book was published in 2004 and so I was ten years late in coming to it. Much has changed but much has been proven to be correct in what he wrote. The Evangelical community has moved even further to the right with the Republican party and I do not hear much of the split that he has predicted. There has been a splinter group of moderate Baptist that has formed. I got a little weary in the whole discussion of dispensationalism but his critic of that doctrine was good. This is a doctrine that has been imposed on the scriptures that has caused immense harm.

Mark says

Tony's points about the way we deal with issues are well-taken... but his "proof" is often borrowed wholesale from other thinkers & seems to be (in places) contrary just for the sake of being contrary. I've got better things to do with my time.

OTOH, it's probably a pretty good book - Tony is usually a very good writer.

Derek says

Much as he did in his early *Twenty Hot Potatoes Christians are Afraid to Touch*, Campolo explores a number of contemporary issues from an evangelical perspective. But he first casts aside many of the assumptions held by the conservative Christianity which dominates the political discussion, basing his examination strictly on the Bible and rational thought. In doing so, he ends up with a series of positions much more consistent with liberal ideology. Among the issues he explores are feminism, poverty, the conquest and occupation of Iraq, the War on Terror, Islam, and the conservative complaint about U.S. moral decline. Campolo writes with clarity and reason.

Rps2 Seawright says

Campolo looks at a number of difficult issues for Christians that seem to divide them - gays, poverty, Islam, war and peace - and challenges the Conservative/Evangelical wing to think, instead of feel. He speaks with wisdom and compassion. I like him.

