

From Dave's Laptop

Tuesday, April 1, 2014

No foolin'!

I first encountered Tony Campolo many years ago as a provocative firebrand preacher of radical obedience to Jesus who also happened to be a Professor of Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania. And I first met Shaine Claiborne on the pages of the book, *The Gospel of Rutba: War, Peace, and the Good Samaritan Story in Iraq*, written by my friend Greg Barrett.

Shaine was one of a handful of Christian peacemakers who chose to dwell with the Iraqis during “shock and awe,” and who were badly injured in an automobile accident in Iraq’s western desert eleven years ago last Saturday. *The Gospel of Rutba* is the story of what happened after that. I don’t know if Tony and Shaine knew each other prior to Rutba, but they have become friends since, and they have co-authored the book, *Red-Letter Revolution: What if Jesus Really Meant What He Said?*

There is, in fact, something of a movement underway that has become known as “**Red-Letter Christians**,” referring to the fact that many translations of the Bible print the words of Jesus in the Gospels in **red ink**. Some of my Bible translator friends object to the idea of such “**red letters**,” contending that all of the words of the Bible should be considered equally inspired. Here is Tony’s defense of their approach, as printed in the Spring 2013 issue of *Christian Ethics Today*:

“We wanted to be known as Christians committed to living out, as much as possible, what the **red letters** of the Bible (the words of Jesus which are often highlighted in **red**) tell us to be and do. This, of necessity, would ally us with those, like the Mennonites, who represent what has been called, ‘The Radical Reformation.’

“**Red Letter Christians** are opposed to the partisan politics that have polarized our nation in such a way that civil discourse is becoming increasingly impossible. When asked if we are Democrats or Republicans, as best we can, we answer, “Please name the issue.” This is because on some issues we are with the Republicans and, on some issues, we are with the Democrats. We are not in lockstep with either party and, when it is voting time, there will be **Red Letter Christians** who will vote for one party and others for the opposite party. In each case, the voting will be done with a certain degree of ambivalence, in the recognition that neither party really represents what the **red letters** in the Bible really expect of us as individuals and as a nation.

“We believe that the Jesus revealed in the **red letters** transcends the ideologies of political parties and stands in judgment of what those ideologies represent. The fact that we are not partisan does not mean that we are not committed to political involvement. Quite the opposite. We believe that the teachings that we find in the **red letters** call us to bring the values and teachings of Christ into all political discussions.

“Our critics responded to our new name by saying, ‘You people act as though the **red letters** of the Bible are more important than the black letters.’ To that, we responded, ‘Exactly! Not only do **we** say that the **red letters** are superior to the black letters of the Bible, but *Jesus* said they were!’

“We pointed out that over and over again in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared that some of the things taught in the Hebrew Bible about such things as divorce, adultery,



capital punishment, and requisites about how money should be used had to be transcended by a higher morality. We contended that when Jesus told us, in the sixth chapter of Matthew, that He was giving us new commandments, we decided to make the point that they really were new commandments.

“Jesus taught that we should love our enemies, and from that we concluded that He probably meant that we shouldn’t kill them. This, in turn, probably raised serious questions as to whether or not Christians could participate in war. Consequently, many **Red Letter Christians** have committed themselves to non-violent resistance, refusing to be a part of the military. Several of them who already were enlisted in the military service resigned.

“We pointed out that when Jesus said to a young man that if he wanted to be one of His disciples, he must be willing to sell all that he had and to give the money to the poor (Mark 10:17-27), that Jesus obviously went way beyond the tithing concept of giving ten percent of one’s income for religious purposes—a prescription common among fundamentalists and evangelicals.



“As we read Jesus’ teachings in the Beatitudes that if we do not show mercy, we should not expect mercy, we believe this precludes for any **Red Letter Christians** support

for capital punishment (Matthew 5:7). If someone points out to us that a capital crime should be punished with capital punishment, we argue that Jesus taught that the Law of Moses that prescribed ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’ is no longer binding for those who would be His followers (Matthew 5:38-39). Jesus taught us that we must love those who hurt us and overcome evil with good (Matthew 5:43-45).

“This is not to diminish the importance of the black letters of Scripture. We **Red Letter Christians** believe that the Holy Spirit directed the writers of Scripture so that all that they wrote was inspired by God, but at the same time we believe that the teachings of Jesus represent a fuller revelation of God’s will than anything that we find in the Hebrew Scriptures. We also want to affirm that the black letters all point to the Jesus we find in the **red letters** (Hebrews 11:1-2; Colossians 2:9).

“Furthermore, we do not believe we can grasp the full meaning of the black letters until we first come to know the Jesus revealed in the **red letters**. Do any of us grasp all that is referred to in such passages as Isaiah 53 or Psalm 22 without first coming to an understanding of who Jesus was and is, and what He did and taught?

“The **Red Letter Christian** movement is growing faster than any of us could have imagined. The television show, *Red Letter Christians*, along with our radio show, *Across the Pond*, is being accessed by more and more Christians via the Internet. Our website, www.RedLetterChristians.org, which among other things has blogs from the movement’s many spokespersons, has had more than 1,100,000 unique hits during its first year online. The response to the invitation for Christians to sign up to be part of this movement shows that there is a wide audience of those who are looking for a new option for defining themselves as followers of Christ, the future of the church.”

Well, whether I completely agree or not, Tony has succeeded in challenging me once again. How about you?

Dave

The Joshua Code: Fifty-Two Verses Every Believer Should Know **O.S. Hawkins (Thomas Nelson, 2012)**

Week thirteen:

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).

Many personal salvation testimonies go something like this: “I heard the gospel of Jesus Christ; I decided to open my life to Him; I came to Jesus; I gave Him my heart; I received Him; I repented of my sins; I decided to follow Jesus.” Note the continual use of the perpendicular pronoun “I” as if it all depended upon me. When we get to heaven, we will find out how little we actually had to do with our salvation and how true our verse today is— “*He who began a good work in you.*”

Salvation is, from start to finish, from first to last, the work of God Himself in us. He sought us. He found us. He began the good work in us. He keeps us. And one day He will present us faultless before His Father’s throne. After all, it was the shepherd himself who went after the one lost sheep until he found it, and then he carried it on his shoulders safely back to the fold, rejoicing all the while (Luke 15:1–7).

THE ORIGIN OF OUR SALVATION: *He who began a good work in you*

The origin of our salvation lies not within us but with God Himself. He takes the initiative. He convicts us of sin. He convinces us of our righteousness in Him. He calls us out of darkness into His marvelous light. He redeems us for His own. Yes, He begins the good work in us.

THE OUTCOME OF SALVATION:

[He] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus

The Lord will keep and complete us “until the day of Christ Jesus.” *The day of Christ Jesus* suggests that grand and glorious day when He will come again to receive us as His own. On that day the church—the body of Christ—becomes the bride of Christ. Jesus said, “*This is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose **none** of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day*” (John 6:39). Yes, we can be confident of this fact: He will keep us “*until the day of Christ Jesus.*”

We are living now in the great “**until.**” Until . . . the day of Christ Jesus. Until then, we can trust Him and know we are secure in the now life and in the next life that is to come.

