



Son of Tony Campolo Comes Out as Agnostic, Hired as Humanist Chaplain at California University

By Heather Clark

LOS ANGELES — Bart Campolo, the son of ‘progressive’ social justice activist Tony Campolo, recently took the position of humanist chaplain at the University of Southern California just under a year after coming out to his father as an agnostic.

“When people ask me when I started to ‘lose faith,’ I usually say, ‘Within about 15 minutes of becoming a Christian,’” Campolo, who once served as the youth leader at Park Avenue United Methodist Church in Minneapolis and founder of the missional organizations Mission Year and Walnut Hills Fellowship, told reporters this month.

Campolo says that he first professed to be a Christian in his teenage years, as he was attracted to the idea of having community and making the world a better place. Although he called himself a Christian, Christ, he said, was not at the center of his life.

“All the dogma and the death and resurrection of Jesus stuff was not the attraction,” Campolo stated.

Campolo’s father serves as one of the leaders at Mount Carmel Baptist Church in West Philadelphia, which is part of the National Baptist Convention USA and American Baptist Churches USA. In the 1990’s, he also served as a spiritual adviser to then-President Bill Clinton, including during the Monica Lewinsky scandal. Tony Campolo’s wife, Peggy, is a homosexual activist and believes that the Church should be accepting of same-sex “marriage.”

“I enthusiastically affirm such relationships are Christian; Tony does not,” she told reporters in 2003. “He calls Christian homosexual people to live lives of celibacy because he believes that that is what the Bible commands. It is in the first chapter of Romans that Tony and I have our deepest disagreement. He believes Paul makes it quite clear that the homosexual relationships of a physical relationship are wrong and any same-gender sexual activity is contrary to what the Bible allows.”

Bart Campolo said that while working in inner-city ministry near Philadelphia years ago, he met a girl who said that she had been gang raped when she was nine. She told Campolo that she turned away from Christianity after her Sunday school teacher told her that although God could have stopped her from being raped, He must have allowed it for a reason. Campolo then began to ponder her words and struggled with why evil is allowed in the world.

But Campolo said that he also began to lean more toward his mother’s beliefs about homosexuality after having homosexual roommates in college, and soon also became a universalist after he had difficulty coming to terms with a God that would send anyone to Hell.

“I was only interested in a God who would save everybody,” he recently told Religion News Service. “It didn’t matter that the Bible had some verses that said something different.”

Campolo continued to turn away from foundational biblical truths and quickly faced opposition when he

vocalized his thoughts.

“I started rejecting the supernatural stuff, the orthodoxy. I no longer believed God does miracles or that Jesus was raised from the dead or that other religions were false,” he said. “My Christianity had died the death of a thousand nicks and cuts.”

In 2011, following a serious bike accident, Campolo concluded “that he wasn’t a soul in a body, but rather a finite, manipulable mass of cells and neurons that would one day be entirely gone,” according to Forbes.

Last Thanksgiving, Campolo broke the news to his parents that he now identifies as an agnostic and prefers secular humanism over Christianity.

“You know me. I am not afraid you’re going to Hell because the God I believe in doesn’t send people to Hell for eternity for having the wrong theology,” his father, 79, responded. “I’m sad because Christianity is my tribe, and I liked having you in my tribe.”

Tony Campolo continues to refuse to remark on his son’s eternal destiny, although he says that he believes that Jesus is the only way to be saved.

“I leave judgments in the hands of God,” he said. “I don’t know what’s going on in Bart’s heart or mind or soul. I have faith in God and I have faith in prayer, and I have confidence that this thing is not over until it’s over.”