



"Who's Out There? A New Testament" Episode 1: The Primary Sensations of Life with host Chris Jordan and guest Prof Christo Lombaard

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"Who's Out There? A New Testament" - Episode 3: The Jesus Agenda

Welcome to the 2nd season of Who's Out There, a podcast series on the individualistic quest in spiritual warfare. Theological paradigms are amongst the most progressive and most justifiably volatile sects of progressive growth within our global civilization. In season 2, aptly named A New Testament, I sit down with academics, leaders, influencers, and, well, a new era of religious journalists

that share intrinsic complexities of how they are currently interpreting a shifting spiritual worldview. In this episode, I sit down with a theologian in practical theology and historical mission studies, Professor Christou Lombard, as we chat about building religious construct on what might be interpreted as sometimes somewhat broken foundations.

Episode 3

Chris Jordan

Just in terms of what you had said there at the time period, we do know that it was constructive for a long period of time. It does, we forget that it goes from 100 of years to 100 of years and 100 of years, etcetera. And then I saw something again just because it was so interesting when they tried to represent it graphically, in terms of and I don't know about the number and its credibility, but they said there was something like 65,000, kind of cross pollinations between books to books and verses to verses around the bible. Is that because is that what you're saying about how it was revisited and maybe reargued and is that is that it?

Christo Lombaard

The number of 65,000, I don't know.

And to calculate it would be extremely difficult because what do you count? But here's an you're exactly right on what you say, though. Yeah. Here's an example. We know that the book of this of Psalms, the 150 Psalms.

Which is part of the core readings, especially the oldest of it is not that popular in Christianity, but the Psalms always have been. Yeah. And those 150 Psalms are therefore well known. The moment you study them carefully, you realize all kinds of things that happened. These were often loose standing either individual sounds or small collections Yeah.

Which were then placed together? And they weren't placed together in some kind of random order. There was some logic to it. Already canonized by then, already understood in in ancient Judaic society

was that, the first five books of the Old Testament are more authoritative.

So it's called the Torah that you mentioned earlier. Yes, sir. Or in, in academic terms called the Pentateuch, which means the writings of the 5, the first five writings. Right. The editors of the Psalms followed that model.

So if you read the Psalms, you can see here are Psalms related to Genesis theology, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. You can see those collections. Sure. So which doesn't mean it's something magical. This was deliberately done by one or maybe 5 editors.

We're not quite sure who Yes. Forming. Yeah. Deliberately put this together in order to mimic or to honor or to replicate insights and ideas from the Torah. Now you have that.

And then in the theological debate, especially in the post exilic Israel, the idea of the Torah became more and more important. In other words, the Mosaic tradition in ancient Israel, which places Moses and Decalogue at 10 commandments primarily, they won the day. And one of the ways in which it was done is that the first song was created and placed right at the beginning of the Psalms. Okay. So that it re-characterizes the whole collection of Psalms.

It wasn't a 150 yet to, re-characterize the whole nature of the of the Psalms, the whole character of the Psalms as in fact expressions of the Torah. So if you follow the word of the god, of the lord, that means if you follow the Torah, then things will go well with you. If you don't, things will go badly with you. Quite naive Theology. Yeah.

But that's a kind of a casting of the rest of the Psalms where very clearly some people have tough times and some people have unfairly good times. We can see all of that here in in this in the Psalms. So it's not a naive characterization, but to characterize the whole of this, then you have Psalm 1 and all also Psalm 19 and also Psalm 119, the old the oldest, the longest song in in the bible. And here and there, 2 or maybe 3 other songs have reflections of this Torah

theology. So there you see very active work on the text with a very strong theological framework purposely done.

So there's no chaos in this. At first encounter, oh, this is chaotic. I thought, David joked all on different designs. Yeah. Then you realize, no.

It's something else. It's something, in fact, much bigger. Yeah. So there's an example of how these theological strings, the diversity Mhmm. In fact, ensure the survival of the ancient Judaic or Israelite faith.

The same with Christianity. Right. It was precisely because of these fierce debates. You find that already with the early understanding of Jesus. In the early church, Paul understood Jesus differently than Matthew, Mark, Luke Yes.

And John. And for instance, how did Jesus become God? If you read the section that I used while, playing the hung, the opening verses of the gospel of John, Jesus was God from all the way to, always always.

So the idea of the trinity, you can deduce from that, and it and that has been done. If, however, you read the other three gospels, then Jesus becomes God. So Jesus is a human being that becomes God. He's adopted by God usually, related to when the when Jesus is baptized and the symbol of the dove, etcetera. So already in early Christianity, you have consensus.

Jesus is the son of God. But how Jesus became the son of God, you don't have consensus. And it's precisely because of these differences that played out through the centuries that people debated fiercely the nature of Jesus, which sounds like a stupid debate. No.

But it is because, my earlier point, Jesus is important. So how did Jesus become God? How is Jesus part of God the father and the holy spirit? Those things are extremely important. So there's another example of the diversity already in the new testament on the nature

of Jesus and how Jesus is God to each other, which shows the importance, not the alternative.

That it's unimportant. They couldn't even agree, so why should we believe it? It's precisely because they couldn't agree Oh. That there's importance. The nature of Jesus as human and as God illustrates something else as well, which we've been speaking about.

When we now speak about the 2 natures of God, of I mean, the 2 natures of Jesus, fully human and fully divine, then and you speak to rational society, I mean, scientific society, outside of church circles, then there's no problem with accepting the human nature of god. It's no it's no problem because we have extra biblical attestations that there was this figure called Jesus Yes. Who was crucified as a kind of a terrorist by the Roman authorities? We have that from outside biblical text and text and these texts were not influenced by the bible text nor do they influence each other. So you have 2 or 3 witnesses that are not in any way collaborating.

They develop independently showing that there was the speaker of Jesus. Yeah. So for modern rationalist thought to accept the human being, Jesus, no problem. However, for a rationalist thought to accept the godliness of Jesus, I mean, the divinity of Jesus Yeah. That is the problem because this is something that you cannot prove.

So exactly that rational impulse, you have to do an experiment, you prove something, and then it is true. In the ancient world, it was exactly the opposite. When the early church debated the two natures of Jesus, the problem was not that Jesus was God. That was easy in their culture to accept that. Already, in in all ancient cultures, you have the idea that God or gods send special people, and in different cultures, this is constituted differently.

Some regard them as gods themselves or simply holy beings or prophets, etcetera. But the idea that god said something somebody special, no problem. And now Jesus fits that category, and therefore, Jesus is holy in the Christian understanding. But the idea of Jesus as fully human being, that was the problem of the early church because they worked with the ancient Greek split Yes. That we still have in our idea of body and soul when we regard in that way that he has described it.

They believe that, that the body is bad and the soul or the spirit is good. And how could Jesus be anything bad if he had a body, a physical body? Yeah. Then, he couldn't have been free of sins, or how can you rid the world of its sins, which is fair.

That is the understanding, and they and they believed that. They didn't make it up. They really believed this, fervently. So which is why some of the people proposed the solution. Jesus looked like he had a body.

But in fact, he wasn't really it was almost like a little ghost, but very concrete. You could touch him, etcetera. Almost like can I say, like, the way that he did appear to many people including the disciples afterwards? Precisely. So this illustration of how in the modern world, easy to accept humanity of Jesus, impossible to accept the divinity of Jesus outside of church circles.

The exact opposite in the ancient world. Easy to accept the divinity of Jesus. Almost impossible to accept the humanity of Jesus. So why the transition besides the obvious? Precisely what I want to get us to.

That the rise of rationalism from the 1700s, a little bit earlier as well. I mean, there are all of these earlier impulses, makes that only the things that we can really see is valid, is true, that we can measure, that we can touch. Therefore, the "Bod"-liness of Jesus, easy. The divinity of Jesus, impossible in that rational frame of reference.

So the move from the bigger picture, a a more full understanding of reality where the divine is present in humanity in all respects. That disappeared. That was collapsed. The world was made smaller by the by the rational approach. That these things just become simply impossible.

You cannot prove it, doesn't exist. That is the reflex logic. Stated in somewhat extreme terms, but to make the point. If I wrote this in a book, I would write it in much more nuanced terms. But Sure.

But, whereas in ancient world, divinity of Jesus, the existence of gods, very easy. In fact, one of the oldest writings we had, we don't even have the original, is quoted by Plato. Everything is filled with gods. Yes. That understanding of the whole world, there's nothing that you can approach, that you can see, sense, think about, which is not related to, in neutral terms, metaphysics, in other words, to God or gods.

That understanding is reappearing in our world. Okay. This idea that God is not involved in physics simply doesn't work. That is that God is not involved in politics or shouldn't be that God is not involved in economics and shouldn't be.

It turns out "Why?" We were wrong. Why? We misunderstood all of this. I'll give you an example.

Chris Jordan

Is it because, like I say, is it because it's a brick wall and it's become too complicated for others outside, I suppose, theological path or whatever it may be, that it's just become far too much. Certainly, that too. But also the dominance of rationalism that I spoke about, that it collapses all the possibilities. But then why is it so incredibly popular? Like you said, there, it is, we do live in a predominantly spiritual or religious world, but what's being advocated, and I understand that this question has been asked many times, but because we're here now with you, why does then the opposite of that, why is that propagated as more popular and is being filtered down further and further, not in terms of only just generations, but the way that you want to be able to instil a mind-set into human beings.

Christo Lombaard

That it is popular? Certainly because it works and it seems logical and therefore we buy into it. Like an evolution thing. That does that really Not necessarily.

Evolution is part of it but a very small part of all of this. So science? What I mean is science. And here's an example from what we

are doing at the moment, journalism. When I studied journalism in the early days, of my studies, it was, it was clear that ODDD, the going thought was objectivity.

Objectivity, if you practice journalists journalism objectively, then it is good journalism, which means you remove yourself as the human agent from the news event. You give no comment on what you do. You simply describe things as they are. Ah, but I because I can contribute to this. It is.

But every person has an ulterior motive driving them, so they will only focus on one angle of a story that they are. And not in an ulterior motive, completely natural. The classic example is there's a car accident. 3 of us see the car accident.

Me from left, you from the right, the other person from the front. That's it. We see different accidents. Accidents. It's the same accident.

Now me as the journalist comes and I interview these 3 people and I get Yeah. Different stories. And I have to conflate it, but then I can say, person so and so, age 37 and at times wearing black t shirt and blue denim, I don't know why that is included in some aspects of journalism, but it is, stated this and the other one stated this and the other one stated this. Me as a journalist cannot conflate these views. I have to write a story.

I simply state these are the different things and that is the journalistic story. Yeah. It within those ideals of objectivity. Sure. It turns out it was a false misunderstanding.

It was a lie to ourselves that objectivity is simply not humanly possible. It's a false positive. It's that's a very good expression. It's false positive. Not with any evil intent, but this was pure self-misunderstanding.

Yeah. And these days, the news no newspaper would claim objectivity. They would say, these are the political, economic, etcetera views. I may be capitalist. I may be rationalist.

Right. I may be a liberal democrat. And from these, perspectives, we write about political news Sure. Economic events, natural calamities, etcetera. So objectivity doesn't exist.

Even though for decades, all of us believed it and wanted to believe it for noble intent. The exact same thing with the idea it's called the secular, but the secular expectations Sure. That God doesn't either doesn't exist or shouldn't exist in politics, in economics, in art, in history, in music. It turns out none of that is valid.

I'll give an example of 2, or 2. Economics. If you are a capitalist, you are a Calvinist. What I mean by that is, historically speaking, this is not my insight, Max Weber, the one of the fathers of the discipline of sociology, and this is one of the longest standing understandings of how our society at present has come around. Capitalism originated from early Dutch Calvinism, which meant those that small group of people highly influential in American economy, in our economy, in all capitalist society for these reasons.

If you live not because you earn your grace, they're Calvinists. They already have been given God's grace, so they already are saved in such language. Then you work hard to prove your gratitude for this. If you work hard to prove your gratitude towards God, then you make money. What do you do with the money?

After a while, there's no more space under the mattress, so you give it to an institution for safekeeping. Yeah. The bank. The bank has to survive somehow financially. It cannot survive simply from these donations and to grow the number of donations or or, holding this money because that's a pyramid scheme.

They have to pay their salaries and pay for the building in some ways, so they invest the money. They make more money than they can use, so some of this invested money, they return to you who gave them the money. Originally, you stashed your money in their in their, safes, and in their sellers, etcetera. And there you have capitalism. You have money, put it in the bank, the institution invests it, the money grows, there's a return on investment, you reinvest the money, and across the world, we have capitalism because of those early Dutch Calvinist, examples.

So the theological culture. It did not happen in Roman Catholic countries. It did not happen in Hindu countries or in Buddhist countries. This was all part of Max Weber's investigation. Why did capitalism happen amongst this group?

So this is simply historical explanation. There's no theology in it Except it is full of theology. There's no way that you can understand this without the theological, understanding. That these people understood themselves as saved.

That they understood that part of their calling in life is that you work hard to demonstrate your gratitude towards god that you are saved. So from that impulse, the whole capitalist enterprise, developed. It is very unpopular in western and western style democracies, often called liberal democracies, but then liberal means something specific. It's not a swear word. To to say that the economy is free of religion.

If you work in a company, don't bring your your your faith to work. Yeah. Yet when somebody arrives early, works hard, leaves late, puts in extra hours, doesn't demand extra money, you call that the Calvinist work ethic. We still have retained that idea somehow Yeah. In our cultural memory of what, where all of this comes from.

And that's exactly the kind of thing that carries capitalism. There has to be a hard work. There has to be no theft or as little theft as possible. Sure. So this kind of living out of the economic impulses that we see in all societies touched by capitalism is in fact Calvinist.

So you can say, I'm not the Calvinist. It's possible for you to say that. It's not possible for you to say that you live free of Calvinist impulses. Even if you are a staunch, communist, but you read Marx and you believe Christianity is bad and Calvinism is bad, then you constantly react against this.

Yeah. You're not free from it. This is a little bit like somebody who goes to a psychologist and you speak about your mother the whole

time, all time. Right. You you've never escaped or about your father.

Of course, it could be either. So we're bringing this back to an atheist? Exactly the opposite. Oh, okay. Hey.

That part of the post secular realization, that means after modernism, after post modernism Yeah. That we realize that all aspects of economy have been drained in theology the whole time. We've just not been seeing it. The churches have not been seeing it. The church leaders have not seen it.

Most philosophers have not been seeing it. Religious people have not been seeing it. They have this idea of, oh, it's we cannot serve God and mammon. You know that text. And so money is somehow bad.

Yet somehow we work for money and we use it and we put it to good use, sometimes too bad use, but we cannot live without it. So we live with this contradiction whereas we should realize this is simply part of religion. They work hard, you get money in business. Yeah. You could say because God blesses you but then it's that is not some kind of automatic kind of thing.

If I do this, then God will reward me. It's not that. Yeah. You in fact, you can take, for the moment, you can take God out of this picture and say it's simply religious impulses. So the religious capital of hard work, of helping each other, of working together, of saving, of trusting each other, of investing in people who do the same, who will do the same, so you have expect success and return, etcetera.

All of that is simply sociologically the expressions of these Calvinist sentiments. But isn't that morality? Of course, it is morality because morality is everywhere. The same as theology is everywhere. And that is part of the post secular, after modernism and post modernism, realization that we're dawning more and more and more that it is in fact impossible to live without religion.

Here's an extreme example. I'll I'll give 2 more examples. Okay. An extreme example.

If you are an atheist, you can say religion means nothing. Then I ask then I ask can I ask you what do you mean you're an atheist? And usually the response that you get is "Yes". I don't believe in God. So there you have a verb, believe "No".

I and you have God. Yes. Absolutely. There's atheism acknowledging. Relationship to the divine.

Maybe you deny its existence. But it is fine, simply, philosophically speaking, it's fine to deny the existence of God, but then at least you have to acknowledge that you are denying Yes. The existence of God. Okay. But here's to religious rule of things.

Chris Jordan

Okay. But here's my thing. So for example, I do understand that, but I spoke to a Satanist who doesn't believe in the devil. Right. Which I'm sure you I know.

So, it goes under the handle of that. Doesn't believe there is a devil, doesn't believe there is a God, isn't an atheist, but banners under... Yeah.

Christo Lombaard

So I to take that one step further, if you speak to atheists, and there are different forms of atheism, if you speak to atheists and they say, I don't believe in God.

I don't think believe God exists. They don't believe that God notionally doesn't exist. They believe that God really, really, really, There's no such thing in in the entire universe. God. There's nothing like that.

It's a realist orientation. The exact same for somebody who does believe in god, who does believe in, like I do, in Christianity and the Calvinist dream. We're not making this up. We're not thinking that notionally. Maybe, perhaps, we tie our firm existence to this idea.

We call it revelation that God has called me. Yeah. And if I say we call this, this is form, formulated slightly standing back from myself. In fact, very difficult to speak like that because you cannot help yourself that you believe this. Slightly tongue in cheek formulated.

That in this respect, the belief is like whiskey. That everybody believes their taste is the best, whether it's whiskey is awful or peaty, whisky is the realty or no, the other flavors of whisky is the realty. That people are not making this up. Okay. But it is not a notional idea which is postmodernism.

It is not the notional idea that perhaps God exists or for me god exists and therefore I cover my narrative and my life story in order to cohere with this meaning making icon. It's not that. People fervently, fervently, fervently. No. Fervently is too strong a word.

People simply really believe whether God exists or God doesn't exist, in the trinity, etcetera. And this is part of the post secular enterprise, the post secular realization over recent decades. And this is the reason why I call it why I prefer to call it religious realism, that people are not making this up. They really, really believe these things. Isn't it because it's fair that conformity is a bad thing?

Even though it's what we have based order and structures and every everything that we do is based on conformity. But a "believing-ness", like you said, there's a there's a rule for this, there's steps for that, or there's this is made of this when you make a recipe or you execute a recipe or I'm just saying, is there because there there's a there's a mister there's a guidance. If you mean by conformity, all everybody who believes the same have to believe exactly the same all the time, and you can even make rules about it. I just believe that you think is a good thing. There, of course, are expressions of that.

But that extreme form is very rare and never successful. It always backfires. Sure. If you have the idea that we have a sense of shared understanding all the while acknowledging the differences, then that works.

I mean, for instance, I'm reformed. So for me, baptizing a baby, no problem. I can understand that. Baptists do not like this at all. Okay.

And they disagree with me fervently, and they're not making this up. This is about the salvation of this individual in law. So they're not making this up, neither am I? I can see the difference, and we can still work together. Okay.

But here's my thing. Here's because it's serving our everyday understanding as opposed to, like, a divinity. So in this case, the trinity, Holy Spirit, Jesus, then, obviously, God. But you see so then I sit back and say, but hold on a second. I do want to match what I understand and what I can accept and how I can move forward, but I understand how does one relate the diversity to something like a concept of truth or what is valid?

Here's an example I use with my students. Because often the reflex, the postmodern reflexes, there are multiple truths, which is very soon means that all truths are equally valid. And that understanding, the multiple truths, multiple possibilities, that works. Or all Jews are equal and valid, that doesn't work. Here's the example.

You can call me Christoffel, that is correct. That is me. You can call me Johannes, it's my second name. So you're correct again. You could call me Stephanas.

Yeah. I have a third name too. You can call me Lombard, so you could call me 4 things, and I will respond to it. If I walk down the street and you call Pete, I'm not going to react. So the idea of that there are more than one possibility doesn't mean that the category of the erroneous or the category of the false disappears.

It doesn't mean anything goes. So there's a kind of so to bring that back to the example of a moment ago, Yeah. That I'm reformed, somebody else is Baptist, somebody else Roman Catholic, somebody else is, Orthodox. We have this shared understanding, but did most churches differ from the Orthodox Church on exactly the nature of the trinity, for instance, we have the shared understanding. We can even pray together, we can work together.

Whether we'll use the sacraments together, that's a little bit more difficult. Whether we acknowledge only 2 sacraments or more sacraments, that's difficult. So we stay away from those things. So there are core ideas on which we agree, others on which we firmly disagree, it's not frivolous. We're not making this up.

This is serious matter. It touches people's salvation, people's eternal life. The debate the the fact that these things are points of debate points out exactly their importance for us.

Chris Jordan

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