



"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 4: Global Religious Paradigms

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.

Chris Jordan

Where are paradigms aggressively colliding currently in theology.

Christo Lombaard

There's no reformation on the go at the moment. And no church split in 10/54 when Orthodox and Roman Catholic tradition splits. Okay. So nothing that strong. At the moment across the world, though, very few churches are untouched by the debates around homosexuality Yeah.

And around the, the newer understanding of genders and along with that pronouns, etcetera. Yes. Like, that one's etcetera. The last one is not a serious seriously, but especially around homosexuality and the and whether gay people could be accepted into the church, that's one debate, could be accepted into special services or offices in the church as elder or as deacon, could be accepted as minister, pastor, priest. That is, across the world, maybe the the one debate that you find in, I think, most churches.

So what is happening around there? Because, again, no church has resolved it without conflict. There are threats of splits in churches. In my own church, nominate denomination, the Dutch Reform Church, there's the possibility of a split. It was averted once or twice, most recently by a senate decision of the free state senate, just a few days ago, maybe 10 maybe 2 weeks ago, which shows how serious a matter this is.

Once again, it's not a matter that is frivolous. People really understand this seriously. And people would say, in all of these cases, it's not really about the gay issue. It is. But it's about hermeneutics.

That means the understanding of the bible. That means, really, how do you make the bible relevant or valid for our times today. So that broader debate on how what does the bible says? Now you have these 6 texts in the bible. It's called the 6 gun.

Chris Jordan

Yes. I'm familiar.

Again, against homosexuality. What do you do with that? Do you take that literally and therefore gay people out of the church, no church office, no calling, nothing alike?

Or do you say, do you contextualize it in the way that it originated? Or how do you handle this? Of course, I have strong views on this but I'm describing for the moment that you paid. It goes exactly along with the idea of the economy that I described earlier, the Calvinist impulses in, capitalism. Okay.

That in following capitalism, we are ignoring 5 or 6 verses in the Bible, openly ignoring those bible verses that you may not ask interest. The Bible verses are there, very clear. You may not ask and you may earn somebody money, but they give it back to you the same amount. We are ignoring those verses completely. Islamic banking doesn't.

So there's an example of a whole banking system that that takes that idea of no interest, which you find in the old system and new system and the Quran, which they take it very seriously. So it's possible Yeah. For institutions to survive without taking interest, so they make their money, in other words, and to provide banking services. Yet, the whole of the western and westernized capitalist stream, even though we're colonist and almost all colonist ignore those biogenesis. So there's a nice parallel that we run an entire civilization, the capitalist civilization stream, by ignoring some verses, but when we get to the homosexuality one, then we say, no.

But these verses, we must take seriousness. So what? So In all liberal democracies, that mean all modern western and westernized democracies, we have the idea that that, politics is secular. By that, it is mean religion free. It's not.

That it is not. In fact, the same with the objectivity ideals in journalism, this is a false under self-understanding which is slowly dawning across the world. The theoreticians, political studies, economics, theology, philosophy, social, etcetera, are realizing anthropology are realizing this normal. But in broader society, the ideas Can I just quickly precursor just before you do make that commentary? Is it generally, genuinely because and this comes from in preparation of this, but also it's it really is interesting for me.

Chris Jordan

I've watched a bunch of theologians in a room having long winded conversations that are incredibly complex, and it's very impressive. I really it's very interesting to me. Man only has a limited capacity of, I would even say, a claim to godliness with its small g. Do you understand? About an authority on something, on life, on this, on that.

And at some or other point, we have to realize that we are, we need it we need to take lead. Even if it's subconsciously led, like, for example, here, you know.

Christo Lombaard

With politics. Yes. And it doesn't mean that I'm trying to convert people to any religious point of view.

What I'm doing, I'm analyzing the situation as it is. In other words, the grand term is phenomenologically I'm describing. Right. So this is not theological wishful thinking, and I want to convert people.

This is simply describing things how they are. Yes. That all of these western democracies have the idea that it's secular. So we run the society free of religion. But we don't.

Chris Jordan

Yeah. But I'm saying is, like, for example, European cultures like to make that claim specifically, But at the base of it doesn't work.

Christo Lombaard

Yes. So I forget to if you speak to any politician's politician or few politicians about politics, so put people in political studies, etcetera. They will say, we have a secular democracy.

No. We don't. No. Not here. No.

But we don't. No. And not in any practical terms. Because, for instance, how does the national anthem start?

Chris Jordan

Yes. Yes. Of course, I love that. Look. I'm very happy with that.

Christo Lombaard

There's nothing religion free about this. Yeah. Or be preambled to put the constitution. We have their religion. When the state president is inaugurated, every time you have a Rabbi.

A Christian priest or minister, minister past the priest, we have an imam Yeah. A practitioner of African traditional religion blessing the state president. Yes. What is religious free about this? No.

Broader society in South Africa is extremely religious, even though it doesn't seem so from the crime corruption issue. No. We really are.

Extremely religious. It used to be around 83%. Some years ago with one of the census, exercises in the country.

The newest household census of few years ago with all the problems. There are all kinds of problems Yeah. In gaining the data, but the statisticians have compensated for that. We are approaching 86% of this year in South Africa. So it's rising with Islam and Judaism, remaining more or less constant, African traditional religions

declining, except in KwaZulu Natal province, and atheism declining, and that is across the world.

So South Africa fits this pattern directly that we're becoming more religious and more conservative religious. The aspect of atheism, we also always have to speak about that, because it's such a dominant part of politics, economics, that we place it on a pedestal, which it does not deserve. That when I say these things, I'm not trying to say that atheists should now convert to any form of religion. It is simply that atheism is itself a position of faith on faith. It is a religious orientation.

So that is number 1. Number 2, across the world, in absolute numbers, the number of atheists are rising. But in relative numbers, declining. So the people who believe who are not atheists, have different religious orientations, they are increasing more either through childbirth or through conversion, which means the proportion of atheists in the world is declining.

Which is why as a whole, the world is becoming more religious and more conservative religious. In a way, that makes my people like me makes our lives difficult to for theologians to debate with atheists, with rationalists, etcetera. We have all the tools, and it's a nice rational debate that you have, saying the kind of things that I do, that I did. That you can speak about demography and, about modernism collapsing the broader understanding of broader worldview or frame of freedom. It's a nice rational debate to have.

If you have to deal with people who are conservatively religious, this is different. Then, for instance, the debate on homosexuality in the church, it's not going to go away. It's becoming going to become fiercer because the world is becoming more conservatively.

To debate on, for instance, creation versus evolution, that debate is not going to go away, and all the versions of that, is not going to go away. It's going to increase. And that debate is for people like me, a more difficult debate but, they're making than with rationalists, atheists, and etcetera. Because there's there are the emotional existential commitments are different. It comes out in emotive language and suspicions.

Oh, this guy is a statue. He cannot be a true Christian.

Chris Jordan

Yeah. So just in terms of the fact that we do have a number of very strong vocal pieces represented by certain people that have a lot of influence, and again, when I say a lot of influence, it's not global influence. Everyone is so marginalized anyway.

It doesn't matter. But it's part of the narrative where we have very selective, again, kind of like self-cultivated approaches to theology that say, well, in part of the conversation, because you when I do watch these things, I do listen to these things, read, or whatever it is I hardly read. I'm lying. But it must be audio. Otherwise, I can't I can't consume it.

But the thing is that I I would hear these, like, these small, like, expressions of what you know, we refer to some kind of evolution, 20, 30, 40000 years ago and then, an element of creationism that comes in from a human aspect 4, 5, 7000 years ago. Kind of almost uneven tickets to please people, but to please their understanding of being able to then, very, because that foundation is very crooked. To be able to make very large statements about that are very impressive. And they are. They are very impressive because it's so incredibly intellectual that you are captivated by that, which is why I say, right now, it becomes so very difficult to, man, where it like, to say one thing is one thing is one thing is another.

And I do understand that you said that everyone must agree to a certain extent because we're working to a certain objective. But these holes are becoming a little bit more Right. Yeah. Easy to understand to recognize.

Christo Lombaard

You used the term hybridity.

That's fantastic term. Yeah. There's no religious expression anywhere in the history of the world up to to this to to today that is free of hybridity. In other words, is a pure expression of only the single thing, and no outside influences or, if you want to use a bad word, contamination. That doesn't exist.

Maybe it's possible to create one that I create my own religion so I decide so. It's all but then it will always be with all kinds of influences, and I have many examples of that. Let's use the example of Christianity. It's impossible for us to imagine modern Christianity without the Christmas tree. Whether you are Christian or not, the Christmas tree plays a role.

If you go to the 2 more most not only a religious, but in fact, slightly anti-religious countries in Europe, Estonia and the Czech Republic. If you go there, they do Christmas markets rather well. The Christmas tree is everywhere. You can say it's simply for economic terms people want to make money out of the world.

It's funny if you say that. Yeah. But the idea is this time of year, 25 December, you put up some trees and there's a baby in a crib and you sell stuff. So even if you do that, you acknowledge the importance of the Christian of the Christmas tree.

In most streams of Christianity, there are one or two exceptions. The Christmas tree is incorporated. We know very well that the Christmas tree has nothing to do with Jesus. Yes. With the birth of Jesus.

Neither does 25th December. We know this was a missionary strategy. Yes. Of amongst the Germanic tribes, that means my forefathers. That's okay, so you have this pagan ritual on 25 December that you put up a tree.

You know what? The tree looks a little bit like the cross. If you use your imagination a little bit, so what if we use this and we put gifts on and it's in fact the gift of the birth of Jesus and the Germanic tribes bought it and from there across the world Okay. We have the idea.

There's nothing purely Christian about this. It's part of the missionary activity. So there's this it's in other words the hybridity of Christianity. Here's another example which I experienced personally, much smaller scale.

I worked at a small college in the south of Johannesburg some years ago and, there was a new secretary appointed a recent convert from Hinduism into Christianity. I walked down the passageway where she called me in. She asked me, are you Christian? I said, yes. She said, I remember from a Hindu perspective, since that's how she grew up, she says, what's the bunny in Christianity?

I say nothing. She says yes the Easter bunny I didn't even realize how the incorporation within Christianity of the Easter bunny and still think for children and hide their eggs. From outside it looks like, the bunny is some holy animal or some special significance whereas we know not in the biblical text anywhere certainly no Christian practice the bunny is anything special. It's just a little bit for the kids. For the kids, something light.

Yet we do it at Easter, and the idea of rebirth, so we add to it all kinds of Christian theological interpretations, the rebirth of the egg.

Chris Jordan

The egg does mean something. There's something out on that because we do it. You know how we do it. Precisely.

Yeah. And the reason why we dye the egg and the reason why we break the egg, etcetera, etcetera.

Christo Lombaard

So we could use all of this. Yeah. This these Christian interpretations that we put on something that from outside looks like a core part of Christianity.

They do this every year. Sure. So and always in this specific year, and it has something to do with the death of Jesus. So something, in other words, with the death of God and the salvation of humanity. Yeah.

So from outside, it looks like something which from inside we we know it is not. No religion is free of this. I used the example of the Psalms earlier. We know some of the Psalms in the Old Testament came from other religions. It was songs used, to praise other deities, other gods, and then the tunes were known and then were brought into the, the domestic faith, and now there are songs in favor of God.

We do the same the whole time. Many of the songs, the popular church songs, were bar songs. Some of them, true, more modern type were rock songs brought into the church, given new words and new meaning. Sometimes keeping the same words, but now we understand different meaning exactly the same. So the idea of hybridity doesn't mean therefore false or impure religion.

It simply means this is the realism of religion, of all faiths. It's the realism of Christianity as well. So the idea of religious realism acknowledges as much these influences of the Christian faith as it acknowledges the influences of the Christian faith, bible, theology, etcetera, in economics, politics, arts, economics, you know, the political enterprise, arts, music, etcetera, that even if you do not recognize it, it is there the whole time. Here's an example.

You may decide either one or both of your parents you want nothing to do with them. And, therefore, you may think of them sometimes, but in a negative terms, etcetera, but you want you want to live free of them. Then at the very least, you have to acknowledge that there was one egg cell and one little sperm, and these were the 2 people who gave it, who made you. You cannot escape from that. That fact that you cannot escape from this heritage, this thing that you have, it made you.

The exact same with religion. Now some people would say, oh, well, I've heard I had this ex, this discussion a few months ago in Europe. Yes. I use the word Jesus as a swear word. The person said, yes.

It's simply a swear word, but this is this is just culture. And that is my point. It's not just culture. Yeah. The fact that your culture

gives you this single word that you for you, Jesus means nothing as as a religious figure.

But when you want to use a word that gives emotional expression to a state of anxiety or pleasure or something, then you use this word, Jesus. That means so the fact that so it's not only culture. Yeah. Jesus is so incorporated in your culture that it becomes the swear word. Here's a parallel example that illustrates this, that if somebody who is Muslim says "insallah", if God will or wills or if god wants, they can mean it as a little bit of a joke.

I've heard that. But they also mean it very seriously that, things will go well with the family if God wants, if Allah wants. The exact same thing. You can say it's only culture. Or it is religion.

Where is the distinction? It's impossible to make. It is precisely because it is so commonly accepted in Islamic culture that you can speak that way either lightly or seriously. The exact same with Jesus as a swear word for people who believe that. It shows that there's emotional recognition of something.

You may not be able to describe it, but there's emotional recognition of something. You cannot say that you live religion free because that's simply not true.

Chris Jordan

What theological models should be completely abandoned?

Look, I don't know of them. Yep. But because it's so very particular within your community, you know.

Christo Lombaard

If you mean from a scholarly view, that means an academic view. I have 1 and it's slightly controversial, but I'm happy to share.

Yes. Fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is something that we should get rid of in all religions because it's hateful. That is number 1. And number 2, it is essentially irreligious.

Fundamentalism has, at its very base, an understanding of what truth is. Namely, that truth is eternal, singular, always valid in all places for all people in one way only. So this ancient Greek philosophical idea of what constitutes truth. So something pure, elevated above human. Now you believe in God.

You're a Christian like I am, and you place that conception of truth onto Jesus. Okay. And then you even have a Bible text. Jesus said, I am the Way, The Truth.

You have it. So which, of course, is not at all what that saying meant, but now you have a bible text. Now even you put these things together.

And then you then you take the next step. You want to convert other people to this exact understanding that you have, or your group has. And if they do not follow this exact understanding, they are either wrong. Or they're going to hell Yes.

Or all kinds of other things. Yes. Bad people, so you try to convert it for their own sake to this concept.

Chris Jordan

So is a in an invitation to ignorance in the It's a little bit worse than that. Okay.

Christo Lombaard

That it places its central category of understanding. Is it greek, ancient Greek philosophical understanding of truth Yes. And not God. Right. But you have an idea of truth.

That means agnostic orientation. That you have an idea of truth that you place central, which is, which does not relate to the God of the old testament or the new testament or the church, that you place this you place centrally this ancient Greek philosophical concept of truth. And everything has to measure has to be measured on that. Whereas, the revelation of god is differently.

It works differently. It is god that is central. And, and the bible, which speaks to god bible is not more important than god. Always god is more important than the people. So god is central.

Place your trust in God, not in this concept of truth and everything changes. This whole fundamentalist dream that we have across the world and I understand very well where it come from. It was a reaction in mostly the USA, late 1800 early 1900 with a series of books called the fundamentals which reacted against German rationalism of the 1800 which was misunderstood and in the American cultural politics at that time and to this day plays a foundational role that you have this understanding of the bible or that one. So this historical stream has rendered us the possibility of either you believe this way Yeah. And only this way, which is the definition of fundamentalism, or any other way and that any other way is wrong.

And that is not that is not the gospel truth. That is not how the Bible came into being. This is not how the Bible biblical texts work. Not within the old testament, not within the New Testament. I gave the examples of the debates in fact the New Testament.

Not in the relationship between Old Testament and New Testament. There's diversity and debate there too, and not in how these two core books, it's got core libraries, Old Testament and New Testament, played a role throughout the church history, influencing not only the church, but also this broad civilizational stream in which we are across the world. The idea of there's only one way doesn't exist.

Chris Jordan

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