



BART CAMPOLO: SECULAR HUMANISM

(Begin audio)

Joshua Holo: Welcome to the College Commons Bully Pulpit Podcast, Torah with a Point of View. Produced by the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, America's first Jewish institution of higher learning. My name is Joshua Holo, your host and dean of the Jack H. Skirball campus in Los Angeles.

I'm really pleased to introduce to you my new friend, Bart Campolo, who is the humanist chaplain at the University of Southern California. After many years as a prominent evangelical Christian minister, Bart gradually transitioned from Christianity to secular humanism. Most recently he's worked with the Abraham Path Initiative and Telos Group educating American faith leaders about the causes of and the potential remedies for the modern Israeli Palestinian conflict among other ministerial work that he's been doing. Bart, thank you for joining us. It's a pleasure to have you on.

Bart Campolo: I'm really glad to be here.

Joshua Holo: So, bring us on board with your story. Tell us what your ministry looked like when you were a Christian and how it changed as you became a humanist.

Bart Campolo: My story is well-documented. So, if anybody who listens to your podcast wants to find it, you just Google my name and it's all over the place. But the short version is I grew up outside of Philadelphia. My father was a college professor at an evangelical Christian school, and he was a Baptist minister before that, and he became one of the world's prominent evangelical Christian preachers. So, like he's a cool guy in that world. I grew up in that family, but I didn't believe in God until I was in high school and I got converted by a kid in my high school who brought me to a youth group with 300 kids. Nicest people I'd ever met and they were enveloping and making space for kids who were really on the outskirts of high school life. I was a nice kid and this looked like a club for nice people and I wanted to join.

I knew all the language from growing up in evangelical Christianity so I played along. I just went along with the group because I wanted to be part of the community. It wasn't the doctrines that attracted me, it was the community. But eventually in our year on a high school youth retreat, there's 300 of you, you got candles, you're all singing, "God is amazing. God is wonderful," and you feel something. So, when I had, what I guess you would call a transcendent moment, it validated the whole thing. I mean I'm sure if I had been in a synagogue or at a Jewish summer camp they would have ...

Joshua Holo: Had the context been right, yeah.

Bart Campolo: Right, it would have validated that. But it validated Christianity for me. And that was it for me. I was in and I was so into following Jesus that the first thing anybody asked me to do was to run a summer camp in a ghetto called Camden, New Jersey, which was near Philadelphia. I went and then I was just blown away by urban poverty and I spent the next 30 years as an evangelical Christian inner-city missionary.

The short version of that story is that over time, I became more and more committed to social justice, and more and more committed to loving relationships, and to tribe in the community. I became less and less able to believe the supernatural story around which our whole thing was built. So about six, seven years ago, I was living in Cincinnati and I was part of an inner-city community working with poor people directly. I had a bike crash. By this time, I have passed through every stage of evangelical heresy. Like I'm marrying gay people. I'm a universalist. I believe everybody's going to heaven.

Joshua Holo: So, you're practically there.

Bart Campolo: I'm super progressive, yes. But I had this bike crash and I almost died. I'm concussed and I'm out of touch for about a month. When I come back and when I get my consciousness back, I just think to myself, "You know what, A, my identity is in my brain, because if you smash into a tree at 40 miles an hour it changes. And B, I'm going to die, and when I die, this identity is going to be no more." I know for many Jews this is not a radical thought.

Joshua Holo: Right. Indeed.

Bart Campolo: But for evangelical Christian, or even somebody who's passed through evangelical Christianity, you go, "Oh, this life is really all I have."

Joshua Holo: With the irony being that this near-death experience is often the inverse story, one way or the other.

Bart Campolo: Yeah, they really do. They really do. The weird thing is, is that it wasn't like ... My dad sort of like, "If you'd been wearing a better helmet you'd still be a Christian." But I mean the truth is, I had already done all the intellectual work. I didn't think the Bible was authentic anymore. It was just a matter of - I sat down with my wife and just said, "You know what? This is all there is." She says, "I'm with you on that." She said, "You want to stop being a professional Christian. You don't believe any of this stuff. I think we should live out our lives authentically being what we are just as if there is a good and loving God who has the world's best interests at heart."

That has implications. If this life is all that there is, that has implications, and how do you make the most of this life? What's interesting is, is that what I came to conclude was the way to make the most of this life looks very similar to being an Orthodox Jew or to being a really good evangelical Christian. It's loving relationships. It's doing work that makes a difference for other people. It's called having a sense of gratitude.

Joshua Holo: You don't need any of these religions or the more esoteric qualities, too, right? This includes ...

Bart Campolo: People came to these conclusions and they developed codes or ways of being, ways to live together, tribal identities. All due respect, like anthropologically they invented religions to codify the values that they already had. You know, it isn't any of these religions that invented the idea that you should love your neighbor. It was the idea that you should love your neighbor that said, "We should come up with a story for that."

Joshua Holo: By the way, one of the most blinding narratives that keeps us from understanding the anthropological truth of what you speak is not necessarily the Jewish story, per se, but the monotheistic story, the notion that a certain kind of ethical behavior, a way of walking through this world with baseline decency, was somehow introduced by monotheism. I think it has been a terrible disservice to understanding the human condition as if monotheism and its ethical baggage were innovative, when in fact, they were iterative. That's a shame for understanding the-

Bart Campolo: That monotheism gets a bad rap?

Joshua Holo: No, it's an unduly ... It gets too much credit for introducing ethics. I said it clumsily, but fundamentally you can walk through this world, especially as a Jew, where Muslims and Christians will, on some level, identify with you as a villain monotheist.

Bart Campolo: Absolutely.

Joshua Holo: There's a neutrally affirming and blinkered shared story about how monotheism brought ethics to the world and that is a disservice to the human story.

Bart Campolo: When you step out of any of those traditions, like if I had become a Jew, if I had become a Muslim even, my family would have ...they would've been like, "Oh, you got the branding wrong, but we're okay with you." The first thing that happens when somebody sort of approaches you as a formerly believing person, is they say, "Gosh, on what are you going to base your ethics? Like how do you know what's right and wrong now?"

Joshua Holo: It's very troubling. It's a troubling question.

Bart Campolo: How can you be good without God?

Joshua Holo: I've encountered it many many times and I am a believer. And nevertheless, I'm deeply troubled by that because I don't associate a belief in God with any necessarily higher ethic.

Bart Campolo: The point is even in your lived experience; can you really judge the quality of a person's character by their religious identification or by their theology? And the answer is ...

Joshua Holo: By the absence or presence thereof.

Bart Campolo: Yeah, you just can't.

Joshua Holo: Yeah, that's right. So, I have a quick question, but then I want to get into ideas with you. I want to ask you a question about your career when you go from a deeply religious evangelical context to a humanist context. Is your tribe in your profession and your livelihood? I noticed that on your website you refer to yourself as a community builder, counselor, conveyor of hope. I wondered if, as accurate as that title might be, you might nevertheless, sometimes pine for a more convenient point of reference that other people understand, such as guru, rabbi, priest? Just for convenience and showing people who you are. Or, if on the contrary, the roundabout quality of the way you describe yourself and the lack of an easy category to describe what you do actually is your opportunity to open conversations.

Bart Campolo: I would trade all those opportunities for just a nice simple clear identity. I mean, I'm the humanist chaplain at USC, and that's as close as I come to having a title that people understand. They go, "Oh, you provide pastoral care for college students," and I do.

Joshua Holo: Right. So that works.

Bart Campolo: Yet the difficulty is that in a lot of the language, it's not Christian people or Jewish people or Muslim people that constrict me, it's hardcore atheists who I don't really identify with. You know, kind of the anti-atheist thing. So, if somebody says to me, "What are you at root?" I'll go like, "I'm a minister." There's a minister of agriculture in England, right?

Joshua Holo: Right.

Bart Campolo: And they tend to the needs of people agriculturally speaking. I'm a religious leader. I try to help people answer life's ultimate questions like every good rabbi I know. I'm a minister. I minister to people's spiritual and social and emotional needs. But that word, minister, people lump that in with supernaturalism and they say, "Well, I know you're selling some kind of woo-woo." I go like, "No, no, no. I'm just trying to meet people's needs."

Joshua Holo: You're ministering to them to be open to serve them.

Bart Campolo: The other thing, you talk about what I gave up, is if I was a Jewish minister at USC, I can work for Hillel House and the whole Jewish community would support me to do that work, and I would have a salary. If I was a Catholic minister, I could work across the street from you here at the Catholic Center. As a secular humanist minister, there's no community to support what I do.

Joshua Holo: There is no social structure, there is no economy.

Bart Campolo: Yeah, I can't raise money easily to do this kind of work, and yet half that campus is secular and those kids are sometimes literally dying, but figuratively, they are starving for somebody to help them make meaning.

Joshua Holo: There's no herd, I don't mean herd in a herd mentality way. I mean there's no way to pool the human resources of people who share this ideology because there's no social structure for it.

Bart Campolo: And they need a narrative. They need the story that says, "Because the world is this way, we're going to act this way."

Joshua Holo: So I want to play a game with you. This is a new interviewing technique I'm developing here. I want to-

Bart Campolo: Have you played this game with other people?

Joshua Holo: No.

Bart Campolo: I'm the first one.

Joshua Holo: You're the guinea pig. So, here's the game. I'm going to sound off ideas about the religious universe that are part of your universe. I'm going to tell you something that troubles me or a definition I want you to balance back with me on it, see how it lands with you, or doesn't land with you, and how it shaped your universe.

Bart Campolo: So it's like an intellectual Rorschach test.

Joshua Holo: Yeah. Yeah, sure. All right. So, the first word we're going to share is 'ideology' and here's the frame for it. In 2008, when the world was collapsing in the housing industry, Alan Greenspan was confronted by Henry Waxman, who is a representative here from Southern California, L.A., about ...

Bart Campolo: Alan Greenspan at the time was in charge of?

Joshua Holo: He was the outgoing chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank. Waxman says, "Do you think that this means that your ideology, implicitly or capitalist ideology, is mistaken?" And here's what Greenspan's response is in part. He says, "What an ideology is, is a conceptual framework for the way people deal with reality. Everyone has one. You have to. To exist you need an ideology." The question is whether it is accurate or not.

Bart Campolo: All right. First of all, I think he's right about everybody has one. You grow up in family, you grow up in a culture.

Joshua Holo: You live in one.

Bart Campolo: Yeah, and there is no such thing as a human being without an ideology. The question is not is it accurate, as much as, is it useful? If you ever talked to somebody who's used hallucinogenic drugs, your perspective on reality is just that. It's one perspective and it can be altered. The question is, "Which is real?" And the answer is, neither of them is real. Because I'll tell you something about your eyes, if your eyes didn't give you a kind of information that enabled you to gather food, people with eyes like you would cease to exist

on this planet. Natural selection would take care of them. Ideologies are similar, there are ideologies that cause people in groups to thrive, and there are ideologies that don't work. The Shakers ...

Joshua Holo: Right there, they-

Bart Campolo: They had a great ideology.

Joshua Holo: There's one or two left, I think.

Bart Campolo: Yeah, because part of their ideology was that God doesn't want you to have sex. Well, you know what, that meme is not likely to catch on and to persist. Richard Dawkins has that notion of memes, which are ideas that propagate, they're self-propagating the way genes propagate. The question is, how did they help you move through the world? I would say that the deeper question is your ideology and your values are going to be related to each other, but they're often not exactly the same thing. So that some people value loving relationships, but they believe in free market capitalism. I think that sometimes, as in 2008, your experience of reality is such that goes like, "I need to re-evaluate the relationship between my ideology and my values."

Joshua Holo: So, I get what you're saying. I certainly agree with it, but it even raises the possibility that how useful it is, is also irrelevant insofar as usefulness is going to also be radically subjective.

Bart Campolo: It's useful to get you there.

Joshua Holo: Right and how, and at whose expense? Your flourishing can come, and indeed, inevitably will come with flourishing for those around you, ideally, but someone's going to pay for that outside your circle. Or your flourishing will come at the expense of someone else, essentially.

Bart Campolo: Do you believe that? Do you believe that every form of flourishing necessarily harms somebody else?

Joshua Holo: I believe it's possible, and I believe that it's certainly true that your flourishing can do that, often does. And I do believe this, I do believe that in this radical subjectivity, which you articulate, that it will be perceived that way. And if it's perceived that way, it might as well be.

Bart Campolo: Let me stop you for a second.

Joshua Holo: Yeah.

Bart Campolo: Because what I'm going to say is, I would say that one of the most characteristic things of the ideologies I see around me is growth. That you're always trying to maximize profits, that you're always trying to squeeze more in or get more out of things. We

live on a finite planet with finite resources, where ideologies always come into conflict, or where somebody is flourishing ...

Joshua Holo: And it diminishes at the expense of someone else.

Bart Campolo: ... is always in an atmosphere of limited resources. If you could introduce into the ideology one concept, which would be the concept of enough, we have enough people. So, what we're going to do is, we're going to try to maintain a static population. I think then you could find that people could flourish.

Joshua Holo: Do you believe in progress?

Bart Campolo: Are you talking about moral progress? Or are you talking about technological progress?

Joshua Holo: Either, or.

Bart Campolo: I mean we live very differently now than we did 10,000 years ago. The change is happening at an exponential rate. Has social media fundamentally changed the way that young people relate to each other? Of course, it has.

Joshua Holo: Fundamentally?

Bart Campolo: Fundamentally.

Joshua Holo: You really believe that?

Bart Campolo: Yeah, yeah. We always worried about what other people think. But if you're worried about what other people think 24/7, and if it dominates your decision making ...what I'm trying to say is, I believe that there was a time when supernatural mythology was the best way for a society to promote goodness among its people. I think I look at the world around me today and I go like, I'm not sure that those things haven't outlived their usefulness, that as we've come to better stories and a better understanding of where we come from and how the world works, that the idea that people get sick because God did something; ultimately religions either reshape themselves or they become irrelevant because when people come up with better stories, they're not able to buy those old stories. A lot of my secular friends think that religion is a bad thing. They say religion poisons everything. Religion was the best thing. There would be no civilization without it.

Joshua Holo: Was it all that?

Bart Campolo: It was the best thing we had at the time.

Joshua Holo: No, I'm asking. Really?

Bart Campolo: Yeah, you would have no polio vaccine without religion. You would have no university without religion.

Joshua Holo: Yeah, I probably wouldn't have had my people being slaughtered by the thousands.

Bart Campolo: There are some downsides ...

Joshua Holo: With religion? As you said, the best organizing principle to do anything. Forget progress or regress. Just to exist in the moment. I mean that strikes me as a hard thing to argue. I can understand why you would say it had its costs and its benefits, and maybe it was a wash. I can understand..

Bart Campolo: Here's what I would really say: it depends on who you were.

Joshua Holo: Yeah, right. So you agree with me it all comes and someone's gotta pay the price. It depends on who you were. If you're on the short end of the stick...

Bart Campolo: And here's the question I've got for you.

Joshua Holo: Yeah.

Bart Campolo: Can you imagine a time at which people become aware enough of their history and in touch enough with their values that they begin to engineer a society that works better for more people? I'm just asking you. So, you don't believe in that. There is no such thing as moral progress.

Joshua Holo: No, I do not believe in moral progress. I believe that every generation has to relearn the core lessons. That's why we still read Aristotle and Plato and the Bible. Because if we had just learned it, we could learn it, but surely, we look around the world and say, as a species, we have not. One cannot reasonably say, "We have learned these things." In fact, we can even agree on what we want to learn. I'm not talking about which religion is best. I'm saying we can't even agree on which fundamental moral principles we're going to prioritize. I don't think religion deserves such a great rap as having done such a good service in the first place. I think that we, as a species, are coded to have proportions of raw enmity and aggression and ...

Bart Campolo: Raw cooperation.

Joshua Holo: Yeah, cooperation and empathy, the capacity to look in each other's eyes and feel each other's emotions without actually touching each other is an amazing thing.

Bart Campolo: I don't have an answer to the question I posed to you.

Joshua Holo: I just act like I have an answer.

Bart Campolo: No, no. It's a good answer. What I would say is this is what's interesting to me is that evolution, natural selection, all of that stuff, if you study it, you understand where the

competition and the cooperation come from. It's impossible from an evolutionary perspective to imagine ...

Joshua Holo: There are two sides of the same coin.

Bart Campolo: There are two sides of the same coin.

Joshua Holo: You agree with me.

Bart Campolo: What's never happened before is you've never had a species that was aware enough of that process to mess with it.

Joshua Holo: And we may not be that species.

Bart Campolo: And we may or may not be that species.

Joshua Holo: Yeah, yeah. Well, I guess we'll find out.

Bart Campolo: This is a terrible game you're playing because we were supposed to play multiple rounds and you have one word.

Advertising break

Joshua Holo: Okay, moving on. Moving on, all right ... Before we returned to the Bully Pulpit, we want to tell you about other programs on the college commons platform for digital learning. Beyond this podcast, which is available to the public at large, synagogue subscriptions offer in-depth learning including online courses, live interviews, and a new program called the teaching podcast, selected episodes from the Bully Pulpit enhanced with texts and teaching tools. We look forward to meeting you at collegecommons.huc.edu. Now, back to ... Oh, one more thing. Help us out and rate us on iTunes, and whatever you do, do not give us five stars, unless we deserve it. Now, back to our podcast.

Joshua Holo: Agnosticism. On your website, you say that technically I am indeed agnostic. I like the fact that you say that I like agnosticism because to me agnosticism is the only scientific way to approach religion. Atheism is, in fact, to me, a religious proposition because atheism asserts an unprovable thing as if it were fact.

Bart Campolo: Right. Intellectually, that's the only credible position to take.

Joshua Holo: Any enlightenment scientific model is the only credible position to take. Atheists present themselves as if they're sort of rationalists, but in fact, it's a religious position to be an atheist, isn't it?

Bart Campolo: I'm a religious agnostic, but the question is, do you live your life according to your best guess?

Joshua Holo: So, you're a functional atheist, but a philosophical agnostic.

Bart Campolo: Exactly.

Joshua Holo: Because you asked me that.

Bart Campolo: Have you made any decisions for years on the basis of the idea that there's a personal God in the universe that actually will judge your behavior? Oh, no that hasn't entered into my mind for years.

Joshua Holo: When you gave a dollar for charity, it wasn't in your supernatural bank account and that they're going to withdraw...

Bart Campolo: I'm storing up no treasures in heaven.

Joshua Holo: Okay, so let's talk about the difference between spirituality and numinousness.

Bart Campolo: Oh, man, now you've got to describe numinousness for me.

Joshua Holo: Okay, so numinousness is sort of like deism. It's a way of acknowledging that there is an organizing power to the universe. Spirituality seems to me the belief in connective tissue that is perceptible emotionally but not by the senses.

Bart Campolo: The way I hear you talking about it is, that spirituality could not be talked about or cannot be apprehended except by sentient beings, that by definition you need have something that's experiencing spirituality in order for spirituality to exist, that something between us.

Joshua Holo: But the connection doesn't exist if one side of the connectors isn't connecting.

Bart Campolo: Spirituality is between us. Morality is between us.

Joshua Holo: Do you use the words spirituality in describing your own-

Bart Campolo: Yeah, I think of myself as a minister and I'm trying to cultivate the secular spirituality of people because the question is, do I believe in transcendence? I go like, "Yes, I do." Do I believe it was supernatural? Oh, no I don't believe in anything energy and matter. And you say like, "But you're saying that when you put 5000 people in a room together and they're all singing, 'Love is what matters. Love is what matters,'" that something happens in that room that a sociologist might call collective effervescence, where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

If you don't believe in transcendence, you haven't been to the right rock concert. You didn't use the right drugs. You don't have sex with the right partner. Of course, I believe in transcendence where something emerges between us that is bigger than just you and me in a room together. Something happens when people are together and you say like do you believe in it. Believe in it - I cultivate it, like I organize dinners, and I put certain kinds of questions on the tables, and sometimes I dim the lights and light candles, and I say, "Look, I'm trying to manipulate you guys into feeling closer to each other than you normally would."

And we sing a song at the end because singing a song ... And we hold hands, and you go, "Wait, what are you-" I'm trying to make something spiritual happen. And you say like, "But you're doing it in such a scientific way," and I go like, "Oh, yeah. It's all happening in people's brains."

Joshua Holo: Do you think that in engaging with people who are suspicious of atheists, atheists and like the last Pew Research...

Bart Campolo: The least trusted people.

Joshua Holo: The least trusted people which is sobering. There's all kinds of concerns going on there, the sociological and cultural. I'm concerned about the invisible aggressiveness of the rationalist camp, which is the following. By the way, aggressiveness, and it's invisible because it's unintended. It's invisible because it doesn't come from a place of aggression, it comes from a place of good will, which is why it's so complicated and it's so dangerous.

I think that exponents of rationalism often substitute reasonableness for rationalism. And when you substitute reasonableness for rationalism as an ideology, it's a system. It's an ideology. It's a way of organizing the world. Reasonableness, reason, rationality, those words can often have overlapping spheres of meaning. But when we say reasonableness, we mean rationalism, what we're really saying is be reasonable, dude.

Bart Campolo: When you say, be reasonable, what do you mean?

Joshua Holo: So, if you do something that I think is uncool, also it's unreasonable. It wasn't reasonable of you to kick me in the shin right now just because you wanted to get a word in edgewise. You could have just asked me. It wasn't reasonable. Now, what happens is when we speak of rationalism, I think that rationalists of which among whom I count myself, rationalists often project what is their ideology, as if it were, in fact, reasonable, and when you're saying reasonable, what you're really saying is the other person should be meeting you halfway.

Bart Campolo: When I think, was it reasonable, I say, "Do you mean do I have a reason for it? Do I have evidence? Like did I reason my way to that thing?" But when most of us say, "Be reasonable," what we're saying is be nice, be open minded, be willing to engage a position other than your own.

Joshua Holo: Yeah, but on shared terms.

Bart Campolo: Be tolerant.

Joshua Holo: Be fair-minded.

Bart Campolo: Yeah, yeah.

Joshua Holo: I think that when you pose your ideology as fair-minded, what you are doing is imposing in a kind of colonial way, my way is fair-minded so you should be playing in my sandbox.

Bart Campolo: Yeah. You're saying play by my rules. A lot of times when people say be reasonable, what they're really meaning is play by my rules.

Joshua Holo: Right, and the problem is that the word reason in the word reasonable overlaps with the word rational. And so the opposite of rational, sounds like irrational. Don't be irrational, don't be unreasonable and the interchanging of these words, I think, is of violence. It's a violence that rationalism imposes on the world because what it's really saying is if you don't adopt rationalism as a way of apprehending reality, you're being unreasonable.

Bart Campolo: What is rationalism as a way of apprehension?

Joshua Holo: What's irrational is, we have enlightenment project of the scientific method and it overlaps with humanism, but it's not synonymous with humanism. It says that I can grasp reality more accurately through ...

Bart Campolo: Empirical.

Joshua Holo: Yeah, what I'm calling the scientific method for sure.

Bart Campolo: Human nature. Sure.

Joshua Holo: Then you can buy your religious or numinous lens. Okay, for example, the other day on a TED talk, I heard a person talking about inner and outer realities. She talked about why you should have vaccines and all kinds of stuff. And so, she's saying, "You can have your internal reality," and internal reality sounded a whole lot like code for your idiosyncratic parochial blinkered way.

Bart Campolo: Yeah. Don't bring it into the public sphere.

Joshua Holo: We should really talk about the reality, reality. The external reality implicitly, the true reality, which is the rationalist argument she was posing. That subtle hierarchizing of ideologies.

Bart Campolo: Yeah, I don't know how you can avoid that.

Joshua Holo: So, you're just another religion.

Bart Campolo: When it comes to a discussion about polio or data compression all over the world, everybody speaks one language. It's the language of science. That's how everybody makes those decisions all over the world.

Joshua Holo: They speak the same language, but they're not all saying the same things. Scientists disagree all the time. And then a scientist would say, "Yes, that's the beauty of

science. It's precisely the flexibility." They're just going to, in an ideological way, articulate why the lack of uniformity is in fact its strength. Don't get me wrong, I actually am grateful for the polio vaccine. I believe in the theory of evolution, I mean I'm not arguing against it-

Bart Campolo: No, no, no. I forget who it was who said like there are different spheres of you know, that science takes place in this one sphere.

Joshua Holo: Stephen Jay Gould.

Bart Campolo: Yeah...

Joshua Holo: A non-overlapping magistrate.

Bart Campolo: There you go. I think that when you're a scientist, mission creep. Like it's very hard not to see that as a way of understanding everything.

Joshua Holo: Because it's your ideology, and you're blinkered to the ... I mean truly, you, of all people, know that religions do the same thing. The minute you think you have a religion that has the golden key

Bart Campolo: The magic key.

Joshua Holo: The key is to God, and God is the most creepy of all the creepers. You know, I mean the idea that most colonizes every other idea. So, what you're doing is you're just butting heads.

Bart Campolo: Exactly, because it's the nature of human beings to become religious about things. Maybe the best thing we can do is rather than trying to convince other people and ourselves to not be universalizers in our adoption of a world view is to try to convince other people and ourselves that every world view ought to be reasonable in the kindest sense, ought to be compassionate. You say out loud. I'm not trying to convert you to my way of thinking, but you know that if you were put on an accurate lie detector and they said, "Do you wish that person would think like you?" You go like, "Yeah, I wish everybody would think like me." Just admit, you wish everybody thought like you.

Joshua Holo: That's the tragedy. That is a painful, painful tragedy speaking as a Jew who is committed to a particular vision of the world whereby we affirm that we do not want the world to be Jewish, to think Jewish, but we have been the object of other people's attempts.

Bart Campolo: Sure, but you tell me you don't want everybody to think like you. You may not want them to be Jewish. You may not want them to have all the rights and privileges, that we don't all get to go on the trip. But even the Muslim, you want that Muslim to look at Judaism in an accurate, fair, reasonable way, which is to say, the way you see it.

Joshua Holo: No. No, I want to advance my interests. The minute I say the same thing you just said my way, which is I want to advance my interests, I acknowledge that everything I see is merely an interest, a self-serving direction and orientation.

Bart Campolo: And you're like I celebrate that. I want everybody out for themselves.

Joshua Holo: I know, I don't want it. I see it as a fact regardless, and it's irrelevant what I want.

Bart Campolo: No, no, no. That's where you're wrong. It's not irrelevant what you want because that universalizing quality of human beings is all about desire. That's why we do it.

Joshua Holo: I'm divorcing myself from that universalist impulses.

Bart Campolo: Oh, I see. You've transcended your own desires.

Joshua Holo: No, I'm saying that my desires-

Bart Campolo: Congratulations, you're a Buddhist.

Joshua Holo: I have not transcended them, I've circumscribed them. I've looked at the world and I say I have no expectation or desire that the KKK racist, whatever, should somehow ...

Bart Campolo: Change his mind about me.

Joshua Holo: Right.

Bart Campolo: He has no desire for that.

Joshua Holo: I'll tell you what I have a desire to have a desire for.

Bart Campolo: Come on.

Joshua Holo: I have a desire to imagine it.

Bart Campolo: No, I don't buy that. I have half a second.

Joshua Holo: You know why I don't desire it? I don't see any way to it.

Bart Campolo: Well, then you lack imagination because I know KKK people who have changed.

Joshua Holo: I'm sure they can. I'm sure you do. We can all name examples, but that doesn't mean...

Bart Campolo: What I'm saying is if it is possible and if it is desirable, I desire it.

Joshua Holo: But it's in my interest, not because I think my ideas are better. I do think they're better, but I know that I only think they're better because they're just mine not because they're better. I don't actually have anybody's...

Bart Campolo: But embrace that. Embrace that. I think they're better ... I know that it's because they're mine-

Joshua Holo: Wait, wait. The minute you're talking to yourself, All I'm doing is talking to myself is like American exceptionalism. Americans have the best kids in the world, blah, blah, blah. Well sure, you can say it all you want, but the minute you start saying that, all you really do is talking to yourself into something who becomes at least very on interest. The more interesting thing to say is that we have intractable differences. Where's the beauty in the difference? Where can I celebrate the difference? And when that difference becomes conflicted rather than convenient side by side living, like it's great for us to talk about the difference between the Mexicans and the Americans because we're two countries in peace, we have a lot of interchange. It's great. I love it. But when-

Bart Campolo: Believe me, I understand ... As soon as you put the word intractable, because I spent four years working in Israel in the occupied territory, so like as soon as you put out the word intractable, oh, I see. I know where you're coming from.

Joshua Holo: You think I'm a fatalist?

Bart Campolo: You have a life experience with intractability.

Joshua Holo: I have a sense that I can change things. But if I'm going to do it, I'm not going to do it because it's better. I'm going to do it either because it's better for me and I'm just going to own it that it's better for me, or I'm going to say-

Bart Campolo: On a finite planet, eventually you will come to a place that on some level what is good for other people is good for you.

Joshua Holo: Help me define what that is. Do you really think you have some kind of insight into that? I mean think of compassion, right? Who would want - No one is going to say compassion is a bad thing. Wealthy is ... Well, what happens when compassion is conflict? Competing goods?

Bart Campolo: Look, look, look. What I'm going to tell you is if I chart my understanding of the idea that what the interconnectedness of human behavior, the question is, do I, as an educated human being in 2017, have access to, and maybe even have imbibed, a greater sense of the interconnectedness of human relationships than somebody in the 1800's, and I would say, "Yes."

Joshua Holo: Oh, you're breaking my heart. Really.

Bart Campolo: Yeah, I have access to greater knowledge. I know more about the way in which the pollutants that I pump into the atmosphere here get into the Gulf Stream and end up somewhere else. Acid rain, just acid rain. I know more about that.

Joshua Holo: You can tell someone who lives next to an open sewer about that kind of interconnectedness just because you happen to understand molecules. Whereas they actually live it, they know that they can't have their kids walking barefoot. I grew up in Los Angeles, in the San Fernando Valley, walking barefoot. Why? Why? That was a luxury of pavement, that it's like a carnivore who eats their meat blandly and unworried about it. I had this luxury of not worrying about it because only a couple of generations before parents would tell their students to wear shoes ... Their kids, I'm sorry, to wear shoes because there was a real risk. That risk had been paved over literally, for me.

Bart Campolo: You know, you're probably right.

Joshua Holo: No, no, don't concede.

Bart Campolo: No, no. You're probably right. You're probably right. At the risk of losing the thread here, I think what I'm trying to communicate to you is, my earnest belief, that it may just be a hope, but my earnest belief that people who see the world differently can get along better if they're educated to the point where they can at least understand why they see the world differently, and why people see the world the way they do.

One of my favorite books over the last few years was Jonathan Haidt's book, *The Righteous Mind*, and it was a scientific analysis of where people get their moral inclinations from. At the end of the book, Haidt's not saying like, "And you can use this information to change the mind of the guy next door." What he's saying is you can't change the mind of the guy next door, but understanding why he thinks the way he does is going to help you relate to him in a more positive way.

Joshua Holo: So maybe we're agreeing because that doesn't feel like a disagreement to me about where I am. It just acknowledges that rather than attributing an absolute good to certain attributes, qualities of compassion, or respect or whatever, all I'm asking is that we understand that that which in this person's experience may indeed be an expression of respect. That same act may be the opposite for us for any number of rational and reasonable reasons.

Bart Campolo: Yes. Jonathan Haidt will tell you like you have evolved to have seven core desires: purity, safety, compassion, these things, they evolutionarily emerge, but they get expressed differently in different cultures, which is why your act of respect in a different culture would seem like an act of disrespect. And so, we're going to be in conflict over that.

Joshua Holo: Right, potentially.

Bart Campolo: Okay, potentially. Or at least misunderstanding, unless we both read a book like Jonathan Haidt's book, and we get to the place where we're like oh, that's how he came to that. When people understand the root of the difference between them-

Joshua Holo: Yes.

Bart Campolo: It doesn't erase that difference, but I'll tell you, I think that it would be really interesting for people who have differences but who had a common understanding of where those differences came from. I wonder how that would change their interaction over generations. We have not experienced that. We've experienced people coming in, encountering people that think very differently than they have, but not that had a kind of a rational, scientific understanding of why that person believes as they do, why they feel as they do, why they want what they want.

Joshua Holo: Or it could be non-rational. It could be a purely emotional understanding.

Bart Campolo: That's what I'm saying. When people have a rational understanding of where their irrational impulses come from, I think that they will interact with each other differently, and that may actually ultimately lead to a greater commonality of the actual impulses.

Joshua Holo: I get that.

Bart Campolo: And that's ridiculously hopeful.

Joshua Holo: No, but why engage in anything less than hopefulness? I'm game for the hopefulness. I just wouldn't want us to bank on it. I think we all experience that on one-on-one where we've achieved that with differences that we've overcome, or conflict that we've been able to negotiate successfully because, it's a truism that you know, when you get to know your adversary, it's a different thing. I get that.

Bart Campolo: This is a different level, but yeah.

Joshua Holo: But yes, it grows out of that same thing. I am always reminded though of how cautious we have to be about the stories. This maybe is completely apocryphal, but the stories of the opening days of the Civil War, when the gentleman soldiers would cross the lines and shake each other's hands on the assumption that both of them are thinking that this would pass, that they respected each other, and there was this a priori actually already kind of being there at least open to being there, which then led to the most devastating war the nation has ever experienced. I just want to respect the possibility of what you're saying going in the wrong direction even though temperamentally, and in my rational mind, I actually agree with you. I'm with you. I want to spend my time realizing that hope as much as you do.

Bart Campolo: I'm going to ask you one question. You just used a really interesting thing, like you said. I'm not going to bank on that, which meant that's an interesting idea, but I'm not going to stake myself on it. So, it raises the obvious question, what are you going to bank on?

Joshua Holo: You're right to have heard it that way, but that's not what I meant.

Bart Campolo: Okay.

Joshua Holo: What I meant was I imagine myself to, in fact, do those things. It may be self-congratulatory, but I try. When I said don't bank on it, what I mean to say is I'm not going to assume that for all of my efforts that it will pay off. I don't see anything better to invest in. But that doesn't mean that I'm not going to be skeptical.

Bart Campolo: I'm going to do it even though I'm not sure it's going to work. And that's one definition of faith.

Joshua Holo: Right, which is you know ...

Bart Campolo: And so if somebody says, "Bart, do you live by faith?" I would go like, "By that definition, I certainly do because I'm agnostic." I don't know what will work. What I do know is this, is that living for love, whether or not it works for anybody else in the future, whether or not it works for our species, whether or not it wins, it works better for me now. I go across the street to those students and I try to evangelize them to live by love, to pursue relationships over material wealth. And you go like, "Do you think that will really work? Do you think ..." I mean like I don't know. But what I do know is, is that I love that kid sitting in front of me. I believe that his best chance or her best chance of flourishing is to adopt this value system, this way of life. And that's why I'm selling it.

Joshua Holo: All right. Bart, thank you for a terribly stimulating conversation. I had lots of fun and really a pleasure to get to know you.

Bart Campolo: It was a joy to be with you. Thanks so much for having me.

Joshua Holo: Until next time.

Bart Campolo: All right.

Joshua Holo: You've been listening to the College Commons Bully Pulpit Podcast produced by the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. We hope you enjoyed this podcast. And please join us again at collegecommon.huc.edu.

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