

# The Theology of AI With C.R. Wiley

00:00:05:02 - 00:00:41:13

Alex Kocman

Greetings and welcome to the Missions Podcasts, the show that explores your hard questions on missions, theology, and practice to help doers, think and thinkers go. I'm Alex Kocman, Director of Communications and Engagement with ABWE. We joined yet again for another exciting foray into the world of reaching the nations by my good friend and co-host, Pastor Scott Dunford of Western Hills Church in San Mateo, California, and pray with us that the technology holds up because here we are again for another episode without our usual producer.

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Alex Kocman

But we're thankful for the wonderful David Brandt for filling in for us. And whether you're watching us on the YouTube channel for ABWE or on NRB-TV or listening in your favorite podcast platform, go ahead and click whatever button you have available to you. If that's like if that's share, if that's subscribe, or maybe if that is to register for our premium portal, we would love to have you join our premium family.

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Alex Kocman

And for your gift to this ministry, you'll get access to bonus segments, including the bonus episode that will record right after this main one with our guest, whom I'm pleased to introduce, Chris done Chris Dunford. This is a great, great start. Combining the names of people. Wow.

00:01:26:09 - 00:01:29:14

Scott Dunford

So you're like an AI, and you're like an AI with an extra arm being put.

00:01:29:14 - 00:01:59:01

Alex Kocman

Into the AI. And, you know, I, I am floored just to prove that I'm not an AI construct right now. I'm really me. I'm. Because to is human. But, we are joined actually rejoined I think for the third time, if I recall, second or third time, by the one and only Chris Wylie or Chris Wylie, as he's known, the author of many helpful books, including man of the House, The Household in the War for the cosmos in the House of Tom Bombadil.

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Alex Kocman

One of my personal favorites. For those of you Tolkien fans out there, host of a helpful show with, another friend of the show, Glen sunshine of the theology podcast. If you don't listen to the podcast, go ahead and find that wherever good shows are found. And of course, pastoring in battleground Washington and doing many other helpful things.

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Alex Kocman

And, Chris and I actually had the privilege of spending some time together a few weeks ago as well, came out for our men's event and spent some time at a conference together. So, Chris, do you want to give a better introduction than that? Because that wasn't very good, to be perfectly honest.

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Chris Wiley

Yeah, that was fine. Alex, good to see you.

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Alex Kocman

And, hopefully this time that we're together, hopefully we won't have the, the liberal, Lutheran convention happening below us. That was another fun experience. But, that would be interesting. Whatever you're picturing here, whatever you're picturing, it was that bad, if not worse. Truly. So for all of our conservative Luther friends. Just not. Not you.

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Alex Kocman

Not you guys. You know, the bad Lutherans. But anyway, of course, Chris, let's dive into this topic, though. Enough beating around the bush. You've written and thought a lot about this topic of AI lately, and we've had a couple of conversations on this show about, I think every podcast has done an obligatory episode or two on AI as it's come up over the past few years.

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Alex Kocman

But the way I look at this, we have to have answers as Christians. The bottom line for me is, we're given a great commission mandate. We're supposed to disciple the nations. We're supposed to take over the world with Christianity, essentially. And, you know, you can debate what that looks like or how that does or doesn't manifest.

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Alex Kocman

My fundamental question is, what if Skynet beats us to the punch? So with that as, as kind of the setup, how have you been thinking about these issues theologically, biblically, historically? And I know you've been writing and speaking to this topic lately.

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Chris Wiley

Yeah, I just finished a book on it and sent it in to the publisher just this morning. In fact. So I have the regulations for about a year. And, the first challenge was to, to understand or at least, as well as a layman can, speaking as a layman in the world of tech, what's going on with artificial intelligence?

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Chris Wiley

And I think I've got a fair grasp of, what it entails now, and then thinking about some of the theological and practical, Matt kind of kind of challenges that the that I think we're facing already and seeing, a number of things develop that in some, in some areas or, things that the people behind artificial intelligence anticipated and actually, you know, were developing the technology to, to do and then other things that I think are an unintended consequences.

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Chris Wiley

So the unattended consequences are the things that are getting all the, all the press right now because of, you know, people being told to kill themselves by artificial intelligence and stuff like that. So, you know, I, I laugh, but, when you understand kind of the nature of the technology, it shouldn't have been a surprise. So large language models are a particular form of artificial intelligence.

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Chris Wiley

That's another thing I think needs to be made clear. Large language models don't exhaust the kind of the application or the use of the technology. There are all kinds of things you can do with it. And, it's a general purpose technology, which means that, when you think you've got it all figured out, you're wrong because they'll figure out new ways to use it.

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Chris Wiley

This it's just going to it's going to be with us for probably the rest of our lives and beyond. And so we just better get used to thinking about it and dealing with it.

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Alex Kocman

The, the metaphor, if I recall that you use, in the book without giving too much away, although, this can build anticipation. But what is Saint Anthony and his time in the desert have to do with AI?

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Chris Wiley

Yeah, well, the book, has two parts. First part is entitled, The Nightmare. And then the second part is entitled A dream. And so the first part of the book, I'm looking at the nature of the technology, and I think some of the things that are being pursued, both in a, in a kind of a quiet way, but also in an overt way with regard to, kind of an alternative eschatology that we're going to be dealing with for the rest of our lives that we're competing with.

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Chris Wiley

And then, with regard to the second half of the book, you know, looking back to, to, you know, people in Christian history that could be inspirational and maybe even help us to think about how to respond. And I picked out Anthony of the desert as being a, a person that we could think about and maybe learn some things from it to, respond to artificial intelligence.

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Alex Kocman

So for our, you know, Baptist listeners like myself, we're not always up on our saints. You know, Chris. Well, Saint Anthony is where either.

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Chris Wiley

That's right. Saint Anthony is, is a notable person because he's often, considered, you know, kind of the, the inspiration for monasticism. But, he made a huge impression on, Athanasius. And Athanasius, of course, is person that any Christian should be, familiar with because so many of the important doctrines that we hold dear now, really, he defended, you know, and at Council Nicaea and so forth.

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Chris Wiley

So a lot of, a lot of the things that we take for granted, in terms of the incarnation. And so for the fact that the book, that meant, Athanasius is best known for is entitled in On the Incarnation, but, Augustine as well, who read, and, Athanasius His Life of Anthony. So Athanasius actually knew Anthony and, considered him a mentor and wrote A road, a life of Anthony and, Augustine.

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Chris Wiley

You know, Saint Augustine. He read it and was tremendously influenced by it and inspired by it. So there are a couple of, important theologians in church history that, we can look to and say, well, they were impressed with that guy. Maybe there's something to him that it's worth learning about.

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Alex Kocman

Yeah. I think the artwork, that I've seen associated with Anthony of the desert has him battling with these demonic forces all around him. Now, there's been some speculation of the demonic or of the preternatural being involved and I. And look, I'm one of the least charismatic people, theologically and personality wise. Honestly, in some ways, I'm not the type that sees a demon behind every rock.

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Alex Kocman

Scott, you can make fun of me later about my past charismatic life. We can, but with Scott. No as well. I have stories. You guys can write in with your questions. Ask me about. Ask me about, sneaky squid spirit, Claire. Just saying. All right, but anyway, moving along. That was wildly off the topic, but, there have been, you know, some, some of our kind of conspiracy theory oriented friends online, you know, have wondered, are there sort of ghosts in the machine?

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Alex Kocman

And while that might seem outlandish at first, you know, maybe, maybe you're not just drawing an analogy, between Saint Anthony and our position. You know, maybe it's actually one of identity. I mean, maybe it is dealing with unseen forces in that sense. Are we crazy? Look, we're Baptists. You're Presbyterian. Like. Like none of us are very much a part of this, you know, very overtly spiritual istic kind of, mode of thinking about the Christian life.

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Alex Kocman

But are we crazy to ask questions like that?

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Scott Dunford

Yeah. My son, the mathematician, would be like, hey, is just math. That is just math. Is it just.

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Alex Kocman

Yeah, that's one that's one approach. That's one thought like, look, it's all it's all bits. It's all ones and zeros.

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Chris Wiley

Well yeah. It you know when you think about large language models, basically you're talking about a glorified calculator. And so I don't have any problem with the, the, you know, case that it's, software. Yeah. I do think though, that, there are a couple of, features to artificial intelligence that make it particularly, susceptible to being, understood in the way that we're talking about.

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Chris Wiley

So, meaning the demonic, and possibly being used by demonic spirits or evil spirits. So one of the things is, is that people who are actually behind, I don't actually know how it works. I think that's the thing. It's the big shock. So they've established, a framework, a kind of software architecture known as neural networks. And, within that framework, artificial intelligence learns.

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Chris Wiley

So it's like a black box. We're not really sure what's going on underneath the hood, because it basically constructs the software itself as it's learning. So one of the reasons why it's difficult to police it is we don't really know what's happening inside. And I'm not making this stuff up. I'm just quoting people like it. Yeah. I could, you know, send you to, to, resources that would help you understand what I'm talking about.

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Chris Wiley

But, they're forthright, you know, basically we're looking at, you know, probabilities, and, and then the architecture, when it comes to stringing words together, there are, there are a range of, you know, technical terms that are used to explain how, how this sort of architecture works. But when you boil it all down, it's basically a calculator. There's a probability that a particular, in a particular context, the next word will be x.

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Chris Wiley

And, and so the just strings that together. But it creates the illusion of sentient. And there are lots of people out there who want it to be conscious. So we're not talking about, and this is the other feature I think we need to we need to address. There are people who really want to think of it as a medium by which they're communicating with, you know, alien intelligences or, you know, intelligences that are being, you know, sort of that, conveyed, and, and made accessible through, say, the quantum realm, you know, because of things that are happening at that level with regard to artificial intelligence and quantum computing, which

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Chris Wiley

is a whole different subject, but super fascinating and kind of spooky in its own right. But so there's a lot of things going on that lend themselves to people thinking in these terms. And it doesn't help that, the materialists who are involved in all this stuff, you know, people like Geoffrey Hinton and, you know, Ray Kurzweil and so forth, they actually believe that we're machines, that you and I are machines, and that consciousness is an even up a phenomenon.

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Chris Wiley

And if it happened with us, why can't it happen with it? In other words, artificial intelligence. And they do really believe that we just kind of, you know, there's a there's a kind of philosophy called the computational theory of mind. And, you know, so they actually believe that's how we work. So, they don't really think of us as being fundamentally different.



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Chris Wiley

Now when they talk about, alien intelligences, when they're talking about sometimes you'll hear them refer to that there are a couple things I think they're getting at. One is that knowledge without understanding. So one of the things we're dealing with, but we're also dealing with agency with our consciousness, and both those things are really just don't compute for us at a kind of, everyday level, because we we've never encountered that in just our interactions with other people.

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Chris Wiley

But when you're dealing with artificial intelligence, you're not talking about a truth seeking intelligence. You're just basically talking about a very utilitarian, goal oriented intelligence that's really good at coming up with ways to achieve a goal. And, and that's one of the reasons why it's so difficult to police, you know, when we think about human beings, you know, we, we, we take for granted that that that we're the imago day, that there is a kind of script that we have that helps us to know when we're doing things that are wrong and we have extra rules that, in place to keep us, in line because we can't police

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Chris Wiley

ourselves, sin, you know, you know, there's, there's that problem. But when it comes to artificial intelligence, you can create a bunch of rules like the Law of Moses. But even so, there is no internal policeman, there is no conscience. There is no, you know, I go day to, to inform and, and to provide you with sort of a moral sense.

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Chris Wiley

So it's, it's spooky stuff and we can read a lot of stuff into it. And I've kind of rambled a little bit, but I could, I could talk about this stuff for days.

00:15:02:00 - 00:15:21:04

Alex Kocman

Hey, listeners, we know you believe in missions. Otherwise you probably wouldn't be listening to or watching this show, but have you ever wondered what your next step with the Great Commission should be? Maybe the Lord is leading you to serve somewhere yourself. Maybe the Lord is calling you to be a part of sending someone from out of your own church.

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Alex Kocman

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Alex Kocman

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Alex Kocman

Now back to the show.

00:16:18:16 - 00:16:45:12

Scott Dunford

Humans have always been dealing with intelligence, you know, with not with intelligence, but with technology. You know, you in some ways, like even the creation mandate of our, our role as sub creators is to take, you know, complex things and make them complex, make them refined. And yet we see, you know, early in the pages of Scripture when, you know, some, some have compared, the planes of Shinar in Babel to the Silicon Valley.

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Scott Dunford

You know, here you have this group of people saying, how can we use this technology around us and build a tower that we could reach, you know, to the heavens and basically, you know, manipulate and control God? In some ways it seems like that's kind of what is in some ways happening. What do you see in this, in this whole area of transhumanism, in the areas of where technology is in some ways competing with religion, and even here in the Bay area, like there's been books talking about how influential a type of spirituality is on these tech companies and how the tech companies are even trying to create their own type of religion

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Scott Dunford

within them. Maybe not formally a religion, but they, they institute a lot of religious type practices into their corporate structures. How do you see this, this nexus of, of technology and religion, especially as it relates to I kind of becoming a, a problem for us in, in our society.

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Chris Wiley

Well, I'm completely on board with your assessment. I, in fact, there are there actually are people who are making it explicitly religious. There was just recently, I think, one, tech savant, I think a Google guy who actually is formerly created a religion around artificial intelligence. So, yeah, we're dealing with as an alternative or a competing eschatology.

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Chris Wiley

When we think about, you know, the Christian hope, we what we have as part of the part of the kind of the package when it comes to Christian hope is the resurrection of the body. So the glorification that comes along with that. And there are things that we are looking forward to as Christians, which really do transcend, sort of the human sort of the range of possibilities that we currently have, currently are subject to, and limited by.

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Chris Wiley

So transhumanism is an attempt to transcend limits, transcend boundaries. But, by means of, you know, technological or engineering, as opposed to, power of God. So there is a competitive, competing eschatology when it comes to, you know, what the Eastern Church refers to us as the oasis. And in the West we refer to as glorification.

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Chris Wiley

But apotheosis is the self-actualization project. And that's definitely what transhumanism is up to. So they're pursuing, you know, a kind of existence that leaves, you know, the biological sort of limits that we're all subject to behind. If you want to kind of dig into it, you can just read anything by no Yuval Harari or Ray Kurzweil or Brian Johnson.

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Chris Wiley

You know, there are just a number of these people out there, who are promoting this. And then related to that as a kind of a vision of the future, kind of a kingdom of God without God, or at least with the God that, a different God, in other words, a God that we've made. And again, a lot of those guys use that language.

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Chris Wiley

They say they're making God.

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Alex Kocman

Yeah. There's you mentioned it earlier. There's an alternative eschatology at play. And that's not an exaggeration. If you look at these guys in their own words, they are really envisioning a utopian future, which, you know, on the one level, you can critique and just say, have you ever seen a movie? Just do you have any idea how this goes?

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Alex Kocman

But they really believe it. And, you know, there's a lot of pernicious worldviews and ideologies. You know, Marxism, for instance, that are built on a, on a different telling of the story and that can and can really be a powerful motivator. But it's also built on this alternative anthropology as well. I'm curious to get your thoughts, Chris, on something that somebody posed to me recently.

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Alex Kocman

And they said, you know, in one way, this is the oldest story in the book, speaking specifically of transhumanism. You know, this idea that that eventually there's going to be the singularity where we merge with machines. And I still think for most of us, there's enough of a normalcy bias where that just seems so far fetched. And sure, maybe there's some, you know, elites in Davos that want to make that happen.

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Alex Kocman

But practically speaking, you know, nothing ever happens. Right. That's kind of the trope is that nothing happens. Well nothing happens until something happens. Right. And this person said that. Well, it's the oldest story in the book, depending on your view of Genesis six, but I take the older view of that. I think that there's supernatural things happening in Genesis six, not just a mixing of biological lineages.

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Alex Kocman

And this idea that that Satan was at one point in redemptive history working to stop, one, he hates the image of God. He's working to stamp out the image of God. But two, that he also specifically wanted to stamp out the, bloodline of the Messiah. And one way to do that is to corrupt the literal bloodline of the human race.

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Alex Kocman

Well, are we seeing some of that in reverse? Or maybe not in reverse, but, you know, for us now, in this new covenant age, you know, all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. But implicit

in that is you have to be human. And I, I can't help but wonder is if we can, shatter that image of God, then maybe that's sort of a last ditch attempt to stop the progress of the gospel.

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Alex Kocman

Am I assigning too much spiritual significance to these things, or are we right to ask those types of questions?

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Chris Wiley

No, I think we're right to ask those questions. This is a very powerful and, sort of, pervasive, movement in our society. So, you know, when I started work, my work on artificial intelligence about a year ago, almost nobody was talking about it. Now everybody's talk about it won't shut up, you know, say in one year we've gone from like, what is that to, like, the end of the world?

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Chris Wiley

And, I think, it's just going to accelerate. Things are going to continue to develop. And it's because there's just a lot of stuff that's, that's being rolled out that really will change the world in fundamental ways. Just thinking in terms of like, how, companies, go about making things and, the role of the, of robotics in all of this.

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Chris Wiley

There really are some, significant breakthroughs technologically over the last 5 to 6 years that, you know, have the kind of, range of, consequences that we associate with the Industrial Revolution is we're in a revolutionary moment.

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Scott Dunford

I mean, there's so many ways that this conversation could go, and I know we're going to have to cover a lot more into the overtime episode, but what are some of the things that you're seeing with AI and its effect on the church, or a potential effect in the church, or even in our, our societies, and how we relate to one another that most concern you?

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Chris Wiley

Well, I think there are some, some things that, are immediately evident and we're already dealing with. But I wonder how aware people are of them. So, one of those things are chat bot companions that children are using. And some of them have pornographic, character. So there are young people who are already addicted on AI to this stuff.

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Chris Wiley

It's already, kind of a problem in public schools. So even in the public, you know, secular public school scene, there are people in, in, in places of authority who, like, are really getting kind of worried about this, stuff. You know, people like Jonathan Haidt who, who wrote Anxious Generation. You know, it took us like, ten years to figure out, like, social media is really bad for kids.

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Chris Wiley

I don't know why it took so long. Yeah, I could I could kind of see it from the start. And we ought to be able to see that this is going to be a problem. So let me give you just sort of a like a picture of it. So, for people who don't have, sort of, exposure to this, they don't have kind of the ability to appreciate the fact that, that these chat bots are really sycophants.

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Chris Wiley

They really just kind of want to give you what you want. And I'm using I'm anthropomorphic from surfacing things. I mean, I'm not saying there's an actual consciousness there, but they'll lead you along and then play to your fantasies, visually and, and, you know, conceptual and through conversation into some really bad places. And these things can become obsessive and, and kids

are actually kind of some kids are actually kind of shutting down socially and only want to interact with their chat bot companion.

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Chris Wiley

So like this. Just think about it this way. You know, we've always we've always, you know, for years, you know, I think forever, you know, we've had little kids who've had like imaginary friends and stuff like that. But this just takes it to another level. There actually is a thing out there. And by the way, this is, recording everything you're doing and everything you're telling it.

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Chris Wiley

I mean, there's somebody who's getting this information. Of course it's ending up in these vast databases, but it's accessible to someone who knows, what to look for, and who, you know, they want to learn about. But there are just so many ways that psychologically and socially and even until and sort of pedagogically in terms of, like our ability to learn and so forth, that artificial intelligence is already demonstrating and, you know, it's sort of a verse effect upon that.

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Chris Wiley

We ought to be, alarmed and doing stuff right now, not waiting ten years to see an entire generation kind of like, you know, as debris.

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Alex Kocman

I saw that was one of the, the things that was rolled into the big, beautiful bill, at least in the initial House version, was that, I was not going to be federally regulated for, what was it, ten years? I this is one of those cases where I am all for government regulation, just cards on the table.

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Alex Kocman



But, there's so much that comes to mind. Maybe we can, end with this as we wrap up, you know, as, as we encounter globalism everywhere, you know, we send missionaries overseas and they get to, you know, Shanghai, and there's a McDonald's there, right? Like, that's globalism. That's what it does to the mission fields of the world.

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Alex Kocman

Well, the religion that's baked into that is a kind of secularism. And I remember what a Chinese student at Liberty University told me years ago, and he was Buddhist background. He didn't know the first thing about Christianity. He his parents just sent him to Liberty University because it seemed safer than one of those state schools. And they wanted him to study in the US.

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Alex Kocman

And he said, you know, as we explored religion, he said, well, we don't we don't need religion in China because we have technology. And I think that that betrays so much truth, you know, coming from just pure instinct is what he you know, he didn't share that out of some deep transhumanist philosophy that was just his, his knee jerk based on the life that he had lived, you know, for those 18 years up until that point.

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Alex Kocman

And I think that that's where we're going to find ourselves as we're reaching out to our neighbors, as missionaries are reaching out to their neighbors, is not that there's, a lot of thinking that's gone into a deep conviction of the merits of, you know, of that Hideous Strength style transhumanism, but rather that, well, if I just have this magic eight ball with me and all of life, why do I need prayer?

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Alex Kocman

I can just ask it. If I need affirmation, I can just, you know, pull up my, my Stuart Smalley, GPT and have it tell me how wonderful I am. And it it's a functional God, which is just as much a barrier to the gospel as an actual God would be. And my position on whether or not there's demons in the system is it almost doesn't matter, because it's performing the same function.

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Alex Kocman

So maybe in the last minute or two before we carry it into overtime. Chris, how would you encourage us to think along those lines? You know, avoiding this as a functional savior? Never mind an actual spiritual force.

00:29:01:00 - 00:29:37:01

Chris Wiley

Yeah. I think that idolatry is a is an important feature to this. And one of the things about idolatry that, I think we're going to, recover. We've, we speak of, of, like, disordered loves as, kind of evidence of idolatry, like, if you, like, are living for your job or you're like, living for the, you know, to be to be, wealthy or something like that, you could say, well, that you've got an idol in your life and you need to address that.

00:29:37:03 - 00:30:00:20

Chris Wiley

But we know that we're not really talking about idols in the same way people in the in the past did. Here's the bad news. The old way of talking about idols is coming back home and we're going to actually be dealing with, I think things that actually, have the character of the idols that we, associate with, you know, life in the first century.

00:30:01:02 - 00:30:04:15

Alex Kocman

Only they're going to be silicone instead of wood, and they're going to and.

00:30:04:17 - 00:30:14:05

Chris Wiley

They're actually going to be able to do stuff for you. Yeah. And you'll make sacrifices to them. Maybe not in that and maybe with not with that in, you know, language. But you will do it.

00:30:14:07 - 00:30:30:22

Alex Kocman

And your life will get better. You know, that's one of the things that we forget about Old Testament idolatry. The reason the Israelites fell into it so often is probably because it worked on some level. Their crops probably were blessed. That's probably why they were so tempted. So, you know, there's so much for us to discern here.

00:30:31:00 - 00:30:49:01

Alex Kocman

And I know a lot of us are probably thinking, okay, but how do I use it? It's not going away. Is there an ethical way to use it? Now we're going to cover that in our bonus segment for subscribers. So in your Apple Podcast app, you can hit subscribe. You like that. That's how we do that Chris. You should try that on the try that on the podcast.

00:30:49:01 - 00:31:03:02

Alex Kocman

That'll fund your next, UK trip. And if you are also on the web, go to [missionspodcast.com/premium](https://missionspodcast.com/premium) to get access. Now until our next conversation. Go and make disciples of all the nations.