

Fred M final_2-3-2023

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SPEAKERS

Tony Chvala-Smith, Josh Mangelson, Lach Mackay, Karin Peter

Josh Mangelson 00:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

Karin Peter 00:34

Welcome to *Project Zion Podcast*. This is "Cuppa Joe", where we explore Restoration history with our historical guides and theological guides here, Lach Mackay and Tony Chvala-Smith. I'm your host, Karin Peter. I'm along for the ride, and it's always interesting in these conversations. So, in this series, we're following the development of the Church, as it was known as the RLDS Church, or The Reorganization, and into our journey as Community of Christ, and we're looking at important Church events in their historical and cultural contexts, and we're also looking at corresponding theological developments during those times and how they impacted the Church, some of which we can still feel and see today. So, I'm excited that today we're talking about an interesting fellow in the history of the Church, in church leadership, and that is Fred M. Smith. We refer to him as Fred M. when we're talking about him. I don't know how he might have felt about that, but that's how we do. So, let's talk about that. I think we're gonna start with Lach. You're gonna give us some historical context and a little bit of information about Fred M. Smith. So please begin.

Lach Mackay 01:46

So, I'm going to be drawing on the work of Paul Edwards in *Our Legacy of Faith*, Richard Howard and his *The Church Through the Years*, and Mark Sherer's second volume of *The Journey of a People*. Frederick Madison Smith was born in 1872 to Joseph Smith III and Bertha Madison Smith in Plano, Illinois, and was Joseph's oldest surviving son. He was extremely bright and well educated with a thirst for knowledge, and a love of science. Graceland's first graduate, Fred went on to study at the Iowa City Academy, University of Missouri, University of Kansas, and finally Clark University in Worcester, Mass, where he earned a PhD in Sociology and Organizational Psychology under the direction of G. Stanley Hall. Fred became a counselor to his father in 1902 and had considerable exposure to the pragmatic leadership provided by his father. But Fred had a very different philosophy on leadership, which he began to introduce following his ordination as Prophet-President in 1915. As a result, the first 10 years or so of Fred's tenure as president would be defined by what Dick Howard describes as the struggle to find the boundary between theocratic rule and common consent. Fred's leadership style, as well as his

vision for the building of Zion, central element of his presidency, was certainly influenced by his time in Massachusetts. Fred M.'s biographer, Larry Hunt, helps to place Fred in context by exploring the Mugwump wing of the Republican Party. Due in part to their opposition to slavery, Joseph III was a Republican for much of his life, and Fred shared his father's views. Mugwumps, though, as explained by Mark Sherer, placed less emphasis on party loyalty, and would swing to the Democrats on occasion. Mark explains that they took the progressive view that good character was more important to social change than anything else. They emphasized social harmony with Victorian morality as their highest priority and, as a political movement, they saw the primacy of efficiency, order, honesty, professionalism, and expertise in government service in society, as the engine of progress. Looking at the Church through this lens, Fred believed the pragmatic approach of his father was too inefficient, and that centralized authority and decision making would accelerate the building of Zion. As we shall see, though, his view clashed significantly with some of the Council of Twelve, the Presiding Bishopric and a significant minority of the members leading to a decade or more of conflict and contention. Paul Edwards describes Fred M., his grandfather, as follows: "Fred was a man known for his complexities. He was often warm and sensitive, yet sometimes gruff and disagreeable. He'd be charming and personable, but on occasion curt and short tempered. He was always the student, teacher, scholar and president." So, my grandmother used to tell me stories of Fred M., she was Lois Smith Larsen, Fred M.'s daughter, about how people perceived Fred as gruff and I think he was at times. But she explained that part of the problem was also that he couldn't see well enough to recognize people often. So, he would pass them and not say "Hello," not realizing he knew them well. It might just be a daughter's defense of her father. I don't know. Fred demanded, Paul says, "...a great deal from the people, sometimes more than they had to give." The General Conference of 1919 saw open conflict between Fred M. and members of the Council of Twelve. The Twelve thought that they should be *the* church authority in their fields. Fred M. thought this level of decentralization was too inefficient. He wanted the Twelve to function as they had under his grandfather, Joseph Smith Jr., being sent to wherever in the world there was a need, versus being assigned to a specific field to rule over, as had been the system under Joseph Smith III. He wanted the Twelve to function as a "second presidency". Forcing the issue with the 1919 conference, Fred resigned as Church president. The conference delegates refused to accept this resignation, and something of a compromise was worked out with the work of the Twelve placed directly under the First Presidency. That, as one historian put it, "The crisis was over, but the conflict was not." I would say it was just beginning. 1920, there was a huge centennial general conference, celebrating 100 years in the life of the church. That conference spilled out well beyond the walls of the Stone Church, and the decision, which had been contemplated for a number of years, to build the conference Auditorium in Independence was made, although construction would not begin for six years. Fred M. went on an extended missionary trip in 1920 and '21 to Europe and Palestine. While on this trip, he encountered F. Henry Edwards, a young Englishman and conscientious objector during World War I. Fred hired him as a secretary and F. Henry eventually made his way to the States where he ended up an apostle, member of the First Presidency and Fred's son-in-law, after marrying his daughter Alice. With decades in leadership, F. Henry would become one of the most influential Church leaders of the 20th century. By 1922, the Twelve were loudly complaining about F.M.'s expenses. I've got a pamphlet where they're just blasting him for spending too much. In the margin he wrote a note, it says, "I can account for every penny and will leave the church a pauper." I don't think his defense swayed a lot of people though. He did keep meticulous notes on his expenses, and again, that year and a half long missionary trip had to be very expensive. He kept meticulous notes, as I think almost all church leaders did. But he was spending significantly more than other church ministers. Conflict with

the Twelve continued at the 1922 conference, where Fred M. released four members of the Twelve and called much younger men, in their 20s and 30s, into the quorum. He also bypassed the senior member to name James Gillen as president. Despite protestations from the Twelve, the conference supported Fred M.'s actions. The next several years would be spent debating the relationship between the First Presidency, the Council of Twelve, the Presiding Bishopric, and the Seventy, and what would become known as the Supreme Directional Control controversy. The bishopric sided with the Twelve, fearing that Supreme Directional Control could lead to the removal of checks and balances on the finances of the Church. If ultimate authority all rested in the presidency, we might lose the checks and balances. The Church had an operating deficit in the early 1920s, in part due to the conflict, and the debate continued about who was ultimately responsible for Church finances. The 1925 conference supported Fred M.'s position, and the Presiding Bishopric asked to be released, which Fred M. did. The First Presidency solidified their position by getting conference support for their editorial control of Church publications as well. A schism followed this conference with some members affiliating with the Church of Christ Temple lot, others leaving the movement, some creating a protest movement. Not leaving, but not supportive of Fred's position, was Marietta Walker, who donated land in Lamoni for the establishment of Graceland, and played a very significant role in church life through her work editing Church publications, among other things. Construction finally began on the Auditorium in 1926, and the expense, along with the financial turmoil following the 1929 economic crash, crippled the Church for over a decade. The Church responded to financial shortfalls in the early 1920s with significant layoffs and other budget reductions, and by the mid '20s, by borrowing of funds donated for Auditorium construction to fund operations. This meant that these dollars were not available once construction on the Auditorium actually began. The Depression made it extremely difficult to repay these loans. It was not until 1942 that the debts accumulated during this period were finally retired. Oh, the Supreme Directional Control controversy, Auditorium construction, and financial crisis consumed much of Fred M.'s energy. His passion was for the cause of Zion. Paul Edwards describes his grandfather's understanding of the concept as, "...as a place where the saints were free and safe to pursue their love of God, as well as a people characterized by their purity in heart, and by their intelligence and spirituality." With private ownership of property and the donation of surplus to benefit the community, Zion, in Fred's mind, was a perfect society where economic and social justice prevailed. It was to this cause that Fred M. was devoted. His vision included a thoughtful and careful gathering to the center place, and the official establishment of Independence as Church headquarters in 1920. It involved the recruiting of talented business people who could drive economic growth. As the years passed, his focus seems to have evolved from the industrial nature of Zion, to the spiritual condition of the people. Two world wars, and the Great Depression slowed or blocked the implementation of much of Fred's vision for the Church, but he certainly left his mark on the church and its people.

Karin Peter 12:23

There's so much in there, Lach, and so many tangents that went through my head that we could delve into. I did make a couple of notes. Tony, I'm not sure where in there you're gonna go, so I'm really interested in that. Let's hear from you and then we'll have some discussion about the theology and the historical context of Fred M.'s time.

Tony Chvala-Smith 12:42

Sure, Fred M. Smith is a absolutely fascinating figure to me, and he's theologically very important to the Church. A lot of things we're talking about today, I think were first floated in, well, let's say his radio

addresses, and sermons, and things he wrote, and I'll get to that in a minute. So, the theologian, when viewing someone from the past, always needs the historian first to help with context. And so, Lach's given us a very good sense here of the setting, the context, in which we want to understand Fred M. And always in the present, we have to be careful of presentism that is trying to overlay our values, and mores, and our wishes, and hopes on a person whose primary ministry is now 100 years behind us. So that's just important to know. But theology is always related to its context, right? These two things are like the two foci on an ellipse, and so you don't get one without the other. Fred M. was trying to help the Church enter the modern age. When theologians and philosophers and historians talk about modernity, typically they mean a period of time starting roughly in the early 1600s, and then it arcs into the 20th century. It is an open question whether we are in late modernity right now, or post modernity, and I'll leave that question aside for the moment. But the modern age was characterized by the discoveries of modern science. It was characterized by a kind of reticence to let tradition have the final word on stuff. And right now, I'm relying on a book by Darrel Jodock. He has a great summary of what the modern mentality really is about, and I'm just simply relying on Jodock's book. I think it's quite helpful. Modernity, especially from the Enlightenment period on, had a kind of built in optimism. Human beings are able, morally and intellectually, to solve all of our problems. The more we learn, the more we'll know, and we'll just make the world into a Shangri La, as we get smarter and better. This is the era of deep belief in progress, and these modern values were deeply important in shaping the ethos of white America from the post-colonial period on. And yet, modernity also includes new ways of thinking about reality, religion, spirituality, that created lots of struggle for people of more traditional mindsets. So what Fred M. is doing is recognizing that the Church of the 20th century has to live in the 20th century, has to be credible in the 20th century. That's a good theological instinct. It's our instinct today, as we're trying to figure out how can, in a post-ecclesiastical or post-ecclesial world that many of us now live in, how can we talk credibly about church, and Christianity, and spirituality? That's kind of our struggle today. 100 years ago, it was how can devoted Christians talk credibly about God, about Jesus, about resurrection, about miracles, etc., about all that stuff, in a world in which there's rapid scientific understanding of things that was never there before, rapid advances in medicine, rapid advances in education, psychology, sociology. These are almost like new disciplines now, and they're beginning to stamp everything. So, Fred M. is trying to say, as I step back, and look, what I see is Fred M. as a very sophisticated, educated person. He's trying to say, how can this church, which I'm sure he still believed was the one true church, I mean, we'll get to that in a minute, I, he's still, was very much deeply influenced by the old Reorganization theology in lots of ways, but he's trying to say, how can we bring this church into the 20th century in a coherent and unified way, so we can address the world we live in, not the world we came from? Lach mentioned Paul Edward's *One Volume History*, and in that chapter on Fred M., Paul makes a great differentiation. He says, "Joseph Smith III was an old world person. Fred M. Smith was a new world person." In other words, Joseph III grew up in the era of horse and buggy, and industry would have been smallish industry, and a very rural country, nothing like radio. Yeah, Fred M. grows up and comes of age in a country that is now connected very well by rail, a country in which there is now the possibility of radio addresses, and he gave lots of them, lots of radio sermons, a country in which industry is rapidly becoming huge. And it's quite interesting that Supreme Directional Control, as a model for organizing and running the Church, sounds strangely similar to me to how perhaps the Ford Motor Company, circa 1925, might have organized itself. There's somebody at the top, and the buck kind of stops there. And then there's these subcategories under the person at the top, and all kind of authority flows down. So, if you took Fred M.'s ideal organizational chart, and laid it alongside a Ford Motor Company chart, a General Motors chart, they would have looked very similar,

and that's because he's thinking in modern terms of efficiency, productivity, control of message, and not necessarily in a bad way, but in terms of, how do we be consistent, right? So, he inherits a church that has an underlying theology that goes back to the preaching charts, which Charmaine and I did a podcast on that a few years ago. We walked through one of those preaching charts, a 1912 one, which though was created in 1912, the theology on it is 1870s, '80s. It goes all the way back. That was sort of the underlying theme of the Reorganization. And that is the kind of theology that would have shaped Fred M. growing up. But Fred M., as an inquisitive, modern person who wants to learn stuff, who knows that science now teaches us new things, he's stuck trying to, you know, how do you assimilate these two things together? In my view, that's his personal, spiritual struggle. How do you do that? But he also inherits a church in which Apostle So and So over in this area, might be focusing on this theme, right, might be focusing on preaching about the afterlife, while Apostle So and So over here might be solving local pastoral problems, and Apostle So and So over here might be talking about Zion, and about how I sure hope we'll gather at Independence someday soon. So, in other words, he inherits a church in which there's a lot of local autonomy in terms of message. And his view of the Church is that the Church needs to be a powerful socializing force. You can't do that, you can't be socially influential, if you've got 14 different messages, each member of the Council Twelve, and the Presiding Bishopric, and then the Presidency. You've got basically 14 churches, as different historians have pointed out, and you can't, in Fred M.'s Social Gospel terms, you can't Christianize society if you've got 14 different messages. So, this is kind of the theological context in which he's working. And one of the most interesting things about Fred M. is that he clearly understands and has read some of the Protestant Social Gospel theology that's available in that time. Now, this is always tricky, because it's not until F. Henry Edwards, and sometimes Arthur Oakman, but then even later, where you have church leaders who are willing to footnote and quote where they're getting stuff from. At some point, in my future, I'm gonna be doing a deep dive into Fred M.'s material in the archives. I want to see if he actually footnotes Walter Rauschenbusch, the great Social Gospel theorist, but I don't actually need to see that he did, because I know enough Rauschenbusch to know that I can spot Rauschenbusch quotes, or phrases, or ideas on various pages of Fred M.'s printed sermons. Let me give you an example. Fred M. preached a sermon in 1924, and the title of the sermon was "Christianizing Society", January 6, 1924. It's a radio sermon. So, one of Walter Rauschenbusch's great theological books was *Christianizing the Social Order*. Right there in the title of the sermon, my professor's pen comes out and says, can you footnote this title? Where are you getting this title? But then, the sermon is fascinating, and you can find themes like this in a number of Fred M. sermons. I'm actually looking at *Volume I Theology and Philosophy, the Writings of President Frederick M. Smith*, compiled by Norman D. Ruoff. These are great for getting at his theology. But listen to this. Fred M. says, "The social dynamic of today...", 1924, "...being self-serving interests, it is not Christian. For in a truly Christian nation of society, the dynamic will be love, not self-love, but love of neighbor based on love of God. This means a pervasive consciousness that God is, and that our fellow man stands beside us as a brother". And I'll just put in parentheses (sic), indicating this is Fred M.'s masculine language from the 1920s. We just let him be who he was in the 1920s on that. But did you hear that? I mean, he's living in an age which there's this rapid growth of huge corporations that have immense power. I mean, even before him, President Theodore Roosevelt's having to deal with the monopolies and stuff like that. But Fred M. is looking at American society and the rise of industry and the rise of business capitalism, and he's saying, there's nothing Christian about this. What guides this is self-love, self-interest, basically, you could say. But the dynamic of a Christian society would be love of neighbor. And here's that phrase that was so popular in the early 20th century, "love of God, and treating our fellow man as a brother", right. The fatherhood of

God, the brotherhood of man, that became a sort of tag in various forms of Protestant Liberal theology. And in lots of ways, when you read Fred M.'s stuff, at least what I see, is I see connectors to the prevailing Protestant Liberal theology. The term Liberal here is with a capital L. It is a particular brand of Christian theology, primarily Protestant, in the late 19th, early 20th century, that sought to accommodate and update Christian beliefs and values to fit a modern mentality. And it is still with us in lots of ways when we teach modern critical exegesis of the Bible. That is an inheritance from the Liberal tradition. So, I mention this because, unfortunately, in American public discourse, the term liberal has become pretty much like a four-letter word, which is really, really sad. But this was the tradition that was partly shaping Fred M. Smith. So, he goes on in this sermon and says, "Admit, then, that we are socially and industrially activating on a wrong basis," right? Our society is being built on self-love and self-interest. That's the wrong basis. What is the remedy? He says, the answer is obvious, "Christianize the social order." That phrase just tastes and smells and feels of Walter Rauschenbusch's theology, but how? Obviously again, "...by Christianizing industry. For society today seems to be based on industry, and rightly so. If by this we can understand that persons should be producers or conservers of goods or wealth, contributors to the common weal. Is it possible to Christianize industry?" He says, "Yes, when professing Christians will live their religion," right. So, when you start reading your way through some of Fred's M.'s sermons, Christianizing society, the gospel is about this world, not the other world, abundant life, that's Jesus talking about, how we live life now, not some eschatological future. The Church should be concerned about the labor movement and helping labor and management figure things out. The Church should be concerned about "the working man". My, my sense here is that Fred M. had inherited all these Zion traditions from the Reorganization, and he sees points of contact between our Zion language and the Social Gospel Movement, which was a larger movement among progressive Protestants in American society, and somewhat in Canadian society as well, too. So, you can see places where it's quite clear, at least to me, that Walter Rauschenbusch, the great theorist and preacher of the Social Gospel theology, that his stuff has influenced Fred M. in some way. For those who are interested in Walter Rauschenbusch, his three classic books, his first one is *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, which is 1907. And the second one is *Christianizing, the Social Order*, 1912. And then his *Theology for the Social Gospel* is 1970, and that's his magnum opus, in which he lays out, what would a theology of the Social Gospel Movement look like? And these are all powerful, magnificent works. You can tell they're from the early 20th century, but also when you read them today, you think, I think he's speaking to some of our stuff, too, right. So, Fred M. lives in that realm. I suspect I don't know, but I suspect as a PhD student, he read widely and it would be interesting to know who got him on to Walter Rauschenbusch, whether he just picked him up on his own, or whether one of his professors encouraged him to read Rauschenbusch, or somebody in the Church encouraged him. It would be an interesting thing to know. So, Rauschenbusch's idea is, in our modern industrial world, telling people to wait until they die and go to heaven and things will be better, is tantamount to just simply abandoning the Christian faith, and just letting all kinds of vile demonic powers in society just run things, and that can't be right. So, Rauschenbusch goes back primarily to the teachings of Jesus, and the message of the Hebrew prophets, and says, look, all this stuff has to do with here and now. If we're going to talk about salvation, we've got to talk about social salvation. We can't just let people die of disease in tenements, and we can't just let workers labor for 18 hours a day for virtually no pay, while the owners of factories and corporations just trample on them. That's totally un-Christian. He wants to apply the principles of love and justice and mercy, as they're found in the Prophets, and in the message of Jesus, to, to his social world. And his theology is still, I think, quite, quite worth engaging and reading. And so, you know, Fred M., I think, is very much influenced by it. And this is important,

because sometimes, you know, Church members today will say, you know, all this justice talk and peace talk, this is new stuff, isn't it? No, it's not new stuff. Certainly, social justice taught in our denomination is over 100 years old, and you can find it all over the place in Fred M.'s sermons. This is another quote. This is a 1937 quote in a sermon he calls, "Some Social Aspects of the Christian Religion." He quotes Jesus, "'I am come that ye might have life and have it more abundantly,' is a statement of Jesus, pregnant in social promise. The promise of increased joy in living was intended to apply to this life. It really has social, rather than eschatological, meaning." I'm trying to imagine who's saying that from the Stone Church pulpit in 1937. Here's another one. I love this one about the Lord's Prayer. He says, "The Lord's Prayer is everywhere in Christendom, quoted and repeated, but too often its social import is unrecognized. The very first word of that prayer socializes it. Our, not my, Father, but our Father. We are to hallow and revere his name with our brothers," early 20th century language. "So, in our petitions to deity, we are to include others. The purpose of the Christian religion, that which should be the aim and determination of all Christian followers, is also indicated in that prayer, 'Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven.' That kingdom is a social order functioning from a religious dynamic." It's very interesting that in books, sometimes an author will have a frontispiece, like a page that has a single quote on it as you get into the book. And I believe it's in *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, Rauschenbusch's first great book, when you open the book, you find "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth." Fred M. very much fits in this context of progressive Protestants trying to figure out how to apply Christian principles to the complexities of the modern world, and how to, how to find within Christianity resources to deal with the problems that plague early modern society, especially industrial society. Fred M.'s all over that. The Church generally was picking up on this. Once upon a time, the former archivist at Church headquarters, Ron Romig, found a flyer in the archives. It was dated from the 1920s or '30s. It was hard to know where it came from, but I'm looking at a copy of the text on the flyer. This was something that in some place, Reorganization missionaries were handing out, and it says this, "The Latter Day Saint Program: social reform by individual regeneration, every man having opportunity to be his best, to do his best for the good of all, love the dynamic, righteousness the principle, justice the basis of social relationship, to organize such men and women into the kingdom of God, to provide all with suitable means which with their talents become their stewardships, each one being brought to the task he is able best to perform, the product to be distributed so that none has less than is needed, and no one has more than he can use." That was a flyer that Reorganization preachers were handing out somewhere in the 1920s, and it obviously shows some of the same influences you see in Fred M.'s stuff. But gracious, if you pass out that flyer at church today, somebody would surely say, "Oh, my God, that's socialism. We can't have that." And, well, sure enough, lots of Reorganization members were attracted to political socialism in the early 20th century, because it connected to their beliefs about Zion and whatever they knew of the then current Social Gospel theology. I think that is so cool. Now, just one final thing about Fred M. that I'll mention now, and we can jump into conversation about him. So, this is a human phenomenon. All of us deal with this all the time, that is, we have our best intellectual insights and there's what we actually do. On the one hand, our best intellectual moral insights, and then what we actually did today. There's always a tension between those. And so, Fred M., especially the earlier Fred M., to me, intellectually, theologically, this is some pretty progressive, powerful, socially transformative stuff he's articulating in his role as president of the Church. It's really very much early 20th century, progressive Protestant theology that's coming from his mouth there, with some Reorganization twists. He's saying that publicly, and yet, we know that, by the time World War II came around, he's a deeply entrenched American nationalist, and in his own inner framework, the old RLDS, "one true church" preaching chart theology,

is still there as kind of a template. So, he's got these two things that are really hard to assimilate into each other. You've got: the Church was restored in 1830, been in apostasy for 1,260 years, and the real priesthood came back, and blah, blah, blah, all this stuff, "one true" everything came back, and we are the ones who have it in the Reorganization, and all other churches are just the churches of men, all that stuff. That's part of the, if we gave Fred M. some kind of inkblot test, one of the ink blots will look like a preaching chart, probably, right. And yet, he's reading stuff that is very contemporary, that touches something deeply true in his Reorganization experience, and it gives him language to articulate that experience in a way that has an ecumenical feel to it. Notice he's giving radio dresses and he's using, Christian this, Christian that, Christianizing this. He's not saying Reorganized this, Reorganized that, and he speaks of Christianity generally and not simply the restored gospel only. Yet he's got both things in him. And these, I think, these sit like oil and water. They're really hard to blend. You'll see this in Arthur Oakman, a generation later, who on the one hand can articulate very profoundly, classically Trinitarian, Orthodox Christian theology, and then turn right around and in the same address talk about the boy prophet who restored real Christianity. It's like, how do you do this? You've got both of these things going on in your head at once. They did not yet have a means by which to bring these into a creative synthesis in some way, and a creative synthesis that would have included critique of some of the old Reorganization themes they'd inherited. Now, in order not to be just critical of them, but critical of ourselves, we all do this too. I am deeply shaped by and committed to feminism and feminist theology, and yet, if you ask my partner, Charmaine, does he always come through really well on that? She would say, "Sometimes the old white, male, paternalism comes out of Tony", right. In other words, I have deep commitments to things that I believe are true, and yet, in my practice sometimes, they don't come out. I haven't fully internalized, assimilated, transformed myself by them. I think that's true theologically. We can hold very, very incredibly thoughtful, profound, critical theological views that we believe are true, and yet there may be aspects of our life in which that truth, that truth has not yet had a chance to sink in, and we may not know how it works to sink in. I think that's Fred M.'s situation. He is the prophet of the one true church. He's a grandson of Joseph Smith, the prophet. On the other hand, he has a PhD, and he's read widely, and he's obviously influenced by contemporary, progressive Protestant theology of the Social Gospel type, and he likes it and uses it. We human beings have got lots of ambiguity surrounding us and that's okay. That's what being human is about. But I just want to point that out. So anyway, I think we're quite beholden to him in lots of good ways that we haven't fully articulated yet. Our justice themes today, if we want to draw lines, we can draw them back that far for sure. My sense is that the lines got a bit hatched, a bit cut up during the Israel A. period, but that's a story for another time.

Karin Peter 35:53

That's a story for the next episode, actually, when we go there. I did want to continue on that thought for just a moment, Tony, because when we looked at our current theological discussions, and compare them to congregational discussions, we're still seeing that oil and water kind of thing. We talk about Zion, we have understandings and firm beliefs and dreams of Zion, and yet, we still have a hard time congregationally figuring out what to do in our own neighborhood. So, I think this isn't a new conflict congregations are facing. This as a long-term Christian conflict we can go back into it and see the same conversation that's happening?

Tony Chvala-Smith 36:32

Absolutely. And I think one of the dilemmas Fred M. is facing is that modernity has, as one of its values, individualism, right, the autonomy of the individual self. And so, he's a modern person, and he accepts that. At the same time, he's trying to form a church that offers a united theological front. Well, how do you do that? We're still talking about unity in diversity, and the diversity part, we kind of have, the unity part less so sometimes. When we use the word community, two thirds of that word is unity, and we have trouble with that because of the individualistic ethos that shapes the cultures of lots of places the Church is. And so that's going on today. I have to tell you, it grieves me sometimes when I hear a sermon from a congregation on Zoom, and, and somebody talks about the scriptures in a way that has nothing to do with Community of Christ's scripture statement, but sounds pretty much like they got it off an evangelical website. And this is a perfect example of, here's our public theology, it's really good, but it kind of seeps in slowly, in some places, so.

Karin Peter 37:38

So, Lach, I wanna come back to you and ask if you have some thoughts or comments, based on what we heard from Tony. Before I do, I want to say something in defense of Church leaders who didn't cite sources. Contextually, the populace of the Church, the body of the Church, didn't want to hear sources at that period of time. They wanted to believe everything was coming out of their prophetic leader. We still have a remnant of that in the life of the church. So, I just want to defend that in a true Community of Christ way. So, Lach, what came to the forefront for you as you listened to Tony's comments?

Lach Mackay 38:15

As I listened to Tony and as I dug into the F.M. story, I just kept getting drawn back to, and keep getting drawn back to a Faulkner quote, "The past is never dead. It's not even past." and it is stunning to me, how similar the times are right now, to the period we are discussing, from the financial crisis with a number of the same causes. You know, it took us a long time, but we eventually forgot the lessons of the 1920s; from the move to have one U.S. field with multiple apostles, which we implemented for a month or two, and then had to step back from for financial reasons, who, now, let me preface this. I need to say this carefully. I don't think Steve Veazey has one authoritarian bone in his body, that I'm not sure there has been a time since Joseph Smith Jr., there has been more authority resting with the presidency, with the Presiding Bishop as a counselor in the presidency, and the Director of Field ministries moved from the Council of Twelve to the presidency. It is just stunning to me.

Tony Chvala-Smith 39:40

Oh my gosh, I love the Faulkner quote. And then, I don't know if people heard that, but, Lach just said it's just like Groundhog Day.

Karin Peter 39:46

It is. It very much is.

Tony Chvala-Smith 39:50

It really is, in lots of ways. And I have had conversations with people who had ancestors who were appointees during the 1920s, who were released and then they couldn't find jobs anywhere. And the pain of that has been reproduced many times in the last 20 years in the church, right? We're a church with big dreams and a small bank account. And so, we've been rather hindered at times by that. But, but yeah, it's fascinating to go back and read Fred M. and say we're sort of there too. And the social

and theological content of these sermons couldn't even be preached in some churches in the United States today because it sounds so radically, I don't know how to say this, it sounds so radically not-Republican. Follow me? It's a real critique of hyper-individualism of a culture of supra-selfishness, a culture in which corporations control every aspect of life in different ways, where corporate money can be hidden, and it just flows in the pol-. The kind of stuff that Fred M. is speaking against in 1924 is stuff we're dealing with 100 years later in American culture. And it's a little harder, I guess, for the Church to say that out loud today because of the polarized political environment that, at least in the United States, but perhaps other places too, where you see that kind of polarization happening in Europe, too. But, my goodness. I suppose we could say, what we have here is an example of how Fred M. truly was prophetic. He was, as Prophet he did what prophets do. He called out the social evils of the time and called the faithful to do something about it, and not just sit there and hope for, as in the time of the prophet Amos, no, we're just hoping for the day of the Lord to come. It'll all be better then. And Amos is like, dude, the day of the Lord, if that comes, it's not going to be happy day for you. So, "Let justice roll down like waters" now, right? And so, Fred M. is being prophetic. And sometimes, you know, when Charmaine and I are teaching Community of Christ theology classes, and we come to Fred M., there's a sort of natural reactiveness and aversion to Supreme Directional Control. Nobody likes the word supreme anymore, unless you're a Pizza Hut, I suppose. But look, how do you become a viable, socially transforming force, right? Is it by everybody going their own way, making up their own story as they go along? Or is there some need to have a cohesive center out of which we act and think and work together as a community? I mean, I sort of align with Fred M. on that. I think that's a good instinct.

Karin Peter 42:28

And it is a conversation that we're having today in the life of the church. So, there are a couple of things that came out from this time period that I'd like to hear, Lach and Tony, your reflections on. The first is two world wars. We're talking about a period of time where the world reality was everybody's at war. How did that influence the church? One of you mentioned that he became an almost rabid nationalist during World War II, but that culture of war in which the world engaged, we can't just say that the Church wasn't affected by that. We lived in that. What do we know about how the church managed through that period?

Lach Mackay 43:08

I need to do more work on it, but it had to have a profound impact, and I guess I can't imagine that it wouldn't. And of course, I haven't lived through a world war, but I am thinking of 911, and I went to a prayer service on the Wednesday following, and I walked into a room with a round table and 50 little American flags in the center. There was all kinds of folks killed, of course, in the World Trade Center. That it was all about the Americans, and just that knee jerk embrace of nationalism, it was stunning how quick it happened, and I think we're still in that. I don't think we've left that behind. So, I understand. I wish we hadn't done that.

Tony Chvala-Smith 43:56

Yeah.

Lach Mackay 43:57

But I kind of understand.

Tony Chvala-Smith 44:00

One of my areas of doctoral study was modern European theology, and World War I shattered progressive optimism in Europe. For goodness sakes, trench warfare, poison gas, literally hundreds of 1000s of casualties. A single battle, the battle of Verdun in France, that lasts for what, 10 months, with hundreds of 1000s of casualties, it's a single battle. And so, it was hard. It was hard in Europe, after 1918, to say, well, everything's getting better, and we're on the up and up. Because of geography, the United States is far removed from that. And while American veterans came back, having faced some of the horrible things in Europe, it wasn't in our front yard or backyard. And so, throughout the 1920s there was still this progressive optimism that didn't really kind of reach a wall until the Great Depression in 1929. A theologian and ethicist that is influential to me, Reinhold Niebuhr, great American thinker, he's a pastor in the 19-teens and '20s, and he's one of the first American intellectuals in that period to say, this happy go lucky American optimism, this is not square with the reality of our experience at all. But being so far removed from the actual scene of carnage, World War I didn't directly impact the psyche of the United States. Now, I suspect it did for Canadians because so many Canadian soldiers, as part of the empire, were just slaughtered in World War I. When Charmaine and I lived in Toronto for a while, and I was a student at the Toronto School of Theology for a year, I remember being on the campus of the University of Toronto, on what my Grandma and Grandpa Walworth, who were born in the 1890s, would have called Armistice Day, and this was in the mid 1980s, and everything on that campus stopped at 11 o'clock on 11/11, 11/11, 1985, when we were living there. Everything stopped. Students younger than me stopped. Geography doesn't matter so much there because of the deep losses Canada experience in World War I. They remember, but we went smilingly on our way, in some ways. And so yeah, what would it have been like being Church president, around two world wars, and then the second world war ending with the dropping of atomic bombs, and then the beginning of the Cold War, very complicated period to be Church president in.

Karin Peter 46:33

So, I hear some *Restoration Studies* papers being born out of this when we start to talk about the impact of culture, a world culture of war, and theological life of the Church.

Tony Chvala-Smith 46:43

And Lach and I have nothing but time on our hands, Karin. So, we...

Karin Peter 46:45

I know. I know. My last question, it comes from Lach, when you were talking about the conflicts that historically happened in the first 10 years of F.M. Smith's tenure as president of the Church. We have a tradition in Community of Christ, the RLDS Restoration tradition, that the people of the Church simply do not back away from conflict. Is that a theological trait that we have? Is it a cultural trait that we have? Is it an historical trait? Is it good? Is it bad? It's who we are, but we see it every time we have one of these discussions. We see that the body of the Church, whether it's leaders, or whether it's people at conference, whether it's people in congregations, we simply do not back away from conflict. Let's talk about that. Let's talk about moving toward Jesus, the peaceful One. Why is that part of our DNA?

Lach Mackay 47:30

Here's another *Restoration Studies* paper, but I think that our relationship with conflict was profoundly changed by 1984, and ordination of women, and the schism. And it seems like prior to that, I might be,

I'm making this up, but that we were more comfortable with dissent, and loyal dissent, and that after that, there was no room for open differences of opinion. And I say no, but less, much less room, when, that, it just became very difficult to express a differing opinion, because it might lead to conflict...

Karin Peter 48:12

So, now fear of conflict.

Lach Mackay 48:14

...which would bring back all of the pain of the Restorationist schism. I've not thought this through, but I do think we have a different relationship with conflict and descent, post 1984 than pre.

Karin Peter 48:27

Okay. Tony, any thought on that?

Tony Chvala-Smith 48:29

Leading up to 1984, there were deep theological shifts happening in the church, in terms of what leadership were learning and seeing and needing to say. And in my view, there came a point where an old line, preaching chart, Restorationist mindset was simply no longer going to be compatible with a new view of the Reorganization, and subsequently Community of Christ, which tried to locate our identity, not in being a Restoration of anything, but in working to restore just relations in society, and we're not going to repeat theologies that are easily falsifiable, right. Like, there isn't an original New Testament church that had our priesthood office. After 1968, we can't say that anymore with any kind of credibility, in my view, but there were lots of people in the Church who simply couldn't go there, right? And their whole religious identity is tied up there. So yeah, we've had a hard time with theological conflict and difficulty. I would say there was a point though, at which the marriage no longer could work, if you follow me. And so, I don't necessarily see the post 1984 schism as a bad thing. It would have been a toxic marriage from that point on if we tried otherwise. That's my view.

Lach Mackay 49:47

I just think it changed how we engage in dissent and conflict.

Karin Peter 49:51

I think we can see that in different places in the church as we've gone forward in the National Conference discussions a decade ago and some other places as well. Those there are episodes yet to come on our discussions here. So, we're going to bring our conversation to a close. Before we do, I want to mention that *Project Zion Podcast* has a couple of episodes that would be tied to this conversation. One is episode 316, where Andrew Bolton talks about the relationship between Fred M. Smith and his son-in-law, F. Henry Edwards, from the perspective of non-violence. And then episode 333, which is an episode of Marietta Walker, but a big part of it is the relationship with Fred M. Smith. So, 333 and 316 on projectzionpodcast.org. So, I want to give both of you an opportunity for any last thoughts or comments on our discussion today, and then we'll close up. Any last things you want to share about Fred M. Smith, the Auditorium, the Supreme Directional Control, or maybe simply the fact that we still function in some places with that perspective of modernity and Zion in some places of the Church. What do you want to say to close up?

Tony Chvala-Smith 51:01

I forget the section of the *Doctrine and Covenants*, the Fred M. section, where he uses the phrase “religiously social reforms”. We had a prophet, once upon a time, who was a social reformer, whose social reform genes were sort of constricted by the community, as it was at the time, but he played in the sandbox as well as he could, and the language of religiously social reforms is still with us.

Karin Peter 51:23

Thanks. Lach?

Lach Mackay 51:25

Two very brief Fred M. stories; when he was called to be an elder, it was controversial. He had not been a member of the Aaronic priesthood. Fred Blair, W.W. Blair's son, was called at the same time, also not previously a member of the Aaronic priesthood, pretty controversial. Their first sermons, Fred Blair spoke for 45 minutes, Fred M. spoke for 11. I don't know why I love his conciseness. And on the day that his wife Ruth died after being hit by an automobile, his journal entry, “Ruth died today. A terrible blow.” I think I've inherited my conciseness from Fred M.

Karin Peter 52:06

Thank you, for those kind of stories humanize our past leaders in wonderful ways. So, our next episode, friends, will be the aforementioned Israel A. Smith episode, and we'll be talking about our theological and historical journey through his leadership. In the meantime, be sure to catch up on all the topics *Project Zion Podcast* have at projectzionpodcast.org. And again, we thank Lach and Tony very much. I'm Karin Peter, your host. Thanks for listening.

Josh Mangelson 52:45

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