

Josh Mangelson

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

Carla Long

Hello, and welcome to the Project, Zion. Podcast on your host, Carl Long. And we're back with two...no, with four of our favorites Percolating on Faith is a favorite. More specifically, God Shots is a favorite. And with Charmaine a favorite, and Tony a favorite. So welcome back to everything percolating on faith. God shots Charmaine and Tony Chvala-Smith. Thanks for joining me. You two.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Oh and our favorite host,

Carla Long

You know, you had to say that, right? You really did't.

Tony Chvala-Smith

You are the best host from Kansas we know.

Carla Long

Gee, thanks. And also ouch! Oh, we're back on Percolating on Faith. And more specifically, we're talking about our God Shot series where we talked about systematic theology and a since it's been, you know, maybe a while since we've had listeners listen in on what we're talking about, maybe we could just remind them what God shots is...are.. one of those two.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

So, um, this harks back to a couple of years ago when we were at reunion and um, one of the folks there came up to us and said, You know, I met a place in my life where I just need to let go off a lot of things I used to believe, and I need to start from scratch and kind of hear what is classical Christianity about? And so that kind of inspired us to say, you know, I bet there's a lot of people who are maybe some people, maybe not a lot. But some people who would like to kind of look at those pieces of Christian theology that are part of what's called a systematic theology, that kind of look at the different dimensions or aspects of Christianity and dig deeper into them to see what they have to say to us.

Tony Chvala-Smith

So you can define systematic theology as something like the methodical explication of the contents of the Christian faith and the tradition. Here goes back centuries and centuries for how to do it. And we've been following that tradition as Migliore and his textbook follows it, and the tradition goes back to preparing Greeks and Romans for baptism like in the late second, early third century and part of that preparation included walking them through step by step, the basic confession of the Christian faith that was available at the time. That particular confession in the western part of Roman Empire became what we call today the apostle's creed. And so I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven on Earth. So it started with faith and then God in creation and in Jesus Christ, etcetera. And eventually, in the creed it comes to and in the Holy Catholic Church. And so it was

meant that then was in the universal community of believers in Christ. That's what Catholic men. And so we're at that point in systematic theology, where today we're going to talk about what's called ecclesiology. That's the fancy theological word for the the ones understanding of the meaning and purpose of the church.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

And you may hear us referencing Migliore, and this is Daniel L. Migliore, And that's spelled M I G L I O R E and his book Faith Seeking Understanding, an introduction to Christian theology. And we're kind of using his chapters as the outline for the topics that were covering and we're dipping into his approach at times, but also kind of freewheeling and letting that just be our guide on the topics. So, uh, we may not say everything he would say and may not always agree with everything he would say, but it's a really good text to use as your wanting to go deeper into the elements of Christian theology, so we would highly recommend it

Tony Chvala-Smith

And and I can say about Migliore that he's retired now. But I had him for one class when I was a seminary student a long time ago. He was absolutely spectacular lecture. I loved going to his classes. And so when when Charmaine and I work through and read through the book and we use it for lots of different things, by the way, in our teaching work. But I can hear me Migliore's voice, and that's always delightful when you could do that. But it's definitely a great textbook, and what we're trying to do, along with working through the system of Christian theology, is ad where we can important Community Christ bits and pieces and flavorings.

Carla Long

I love that and I do want to be clear, though, when we talk about the church. So I said My whole life, I have mostly been in the Midwest, right? So and when I, or working for community of Christ, when I talk about the church, I'm really talking about community of Christ. When I moved to Utah and people started talking about the church, they were talking about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But when you're talking about the church and this podcast, you will not be talking about either of those. You'll be talking about something different. Correct?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Right. And sometimes it's referred to as the big C church, meaning all of Christianity. The the universal church. Yeah, and sometimes if we need to make a differentiation, we might say little C church meaning denomination, our denomination or others and or Big C church. The whole scope is Christianity,

Tony Chvala-Smith

And just so we're clear right from the start, community of Christ does not believe that it is the totality of the church. We we have actually canonized a statement that says that it's in, uh, Doctrine and Covenants 161 says claim your unique and sacred place within the circle of those who call upon Jesus Christ And so that's that wider circle is actually what the creed was talking about. The Holy Catholic

Church and we had community Christ have a unique in sacred place within the circle. And our church also believes it's important to be in constant conversation and ministry and fellowship with the wider circles. So that's kind of a unique aspect of Community of Christ.

Carla Long

All right, so now that we have that, how the way you talked about Big C versus Little c, let's let's go ahead and define the word ecclesiology. It's a little bit of a scary word, I think. But it does not have a scary definition.

Tony Chvala-Smith

No, no. I mean, when you say the word, it almost sounds like a ah, very bad medical procedure.

Carla Long

Yeah, I'm going in for my ecclesiology

Tony Chvala-Smith

So, actually, actually, uh, the the word is two words in Greek, And the first word is ecclesia, which is the New Testament standard word in Greek for the assembled body of followers of Jesus, the ecclesia. The word in Greek literally means those who are called out or summoned. So the term church in the New Testament never refers to a place or a building. It always refers to a people so ecclesiology, then is logos, careful reflection, thoughtful, logical reflection on the nature of the ecclesia of the community that is shaped by and committed to Jesus Christ. Does that help Carla?

Carla Long

It does. I mean, I like it when we talk about this self awareness. You know, I think about the meta thinking like thinking about your thinking. It's kind of like that, right? Like you are aware that you're part of an organization. Is that right?

Tony Chvala-Smith

Yeah. I mean, it's like all of the branches of theology. It's thinking about what we believe. It's faith. Seeking understanding is in this case, it's thinking about our every week we say we, Charmaine and I had this past Sunday we preached a congregation, Uh, local congregation and ecclesiology would be us standing back and thinking about what were the dynamics of that congregation. What does its leadership look like? What is its mission it's self identity ecclesiology is yeah, that that self reflective cavitation about the nature of the church.

Carla Long

Well, that's not so scary. I mean, it's not as scary as the doctor equipment I alluded to.

Tony Chvala-Smith

We're glad it's not a scary, is that Carla?

Carla Long

No it's not. So let's talk a little bit more about it. So So we were talking a little bit earlier about this, and we talked about how Christianity is not necessarily unique, how we've had to do this kind of work. The self awareness works in the beginning, right? Can we talk a little bit more about that?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Sure. I mean ecclesiology. If it was an individual, you would be talking about self awareness. Um, but as with an institution, it's it's the church looking at itself. And it's kind of an interesting history because, uh, as the Christian Church developed, it was part of Judaism. It was, Ah, little sect within Judaism for the first few decades that the church existed. And so, But even then, this group of people who saw themselves as believers that the Messiah had come and followers of Christ already were identifying that they were, there was some differences between them and most other Jews, and as Christianity then was kind of pushed, pushed out of the nest of Judaism and became its own thing. It was constantly having to identify. Who are we? How is this different from, um, from the faith that that bore us and pretty quickly, very quickly. Immediately, as Christianity was no longer part of Judaism in the late eighties, early nineties, the first century, um, they had to justify themselves to the Romans, who are really suspicious of new religions. Judaism was an old religion. And so while Christians were there, they were they were safe. But as they became their own group, their own faith, they had to name for themselves what this emerging thing was the church. But they also had to justify to the Romans who they were and what they weren't. And you know they would, and you'll see this in the New Testament, the gospel writers are showing that this is, in a way, a continuation of Judaism because that would have also given them safety, uh, within the Roman Empire. But but they're they're having to be very nuanced about how they're different from and and yet connected. And so this self awareness self definition has really been a part of the Christian church from its very beginning.

Tony Chvala-Smith

So, um, in that first generation, we have Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, which is the I would say, it's the most I use this term. It please ecclesiocentric of the New Testament books. It's focused on the nature of the church, and I think, if if you want, if you want a really good lesson in ecclesiology start by reading First Corinthians and what you'll what you'll find right away is a certain paradox of the nature of the church. So on the one hand, this community in Corinth is is marvelously multi, multi cultural inclusive. It's it's the kind of Kingdom of God community Paul was planting around the Eastern Roman Empire in the mid first century, and he refers to them as saints. That doesn't mean that they're holy. It means that they have been set apart, called by God to reflect the Kingdom of God in Corinth. On the other hand, when you read through first quickly and you find out, this is the thing. If you feel bad about your own congregation, read first Corinthians and you'll quickly discover one of the most dysfunctional Christian communities that has ever existed. And so it's kind of this paradox on the one hand, they are the baht body of Christ in Corinth. On the other hand, they're pretty messed up. And so that that paradox of the church as the representation of Christ in the world and, uh, a human community that's always struggling with human flaws and faults those two things together

really make up the nature of the church from the first century on there, there wasn't there wasn't a magical point where the church, the church up to that point had been all full of pure, wonderful people. Then all of a sudden it fell away. You just kind of dropped that idea completely. The church has always been made up of frail, flawed, finite people. For example, Peter, all you have to do is read the Gospel stories. By the way, it's also important to know that in the New Testament, Christianity from its star is intrinsically communal. There's not, there's not an option for a private Christianity, and then a communal one of the New Testament's all communal. The message of Jesus survives in and through the community, even in its messed upness, and so that, that is, that is the story of the the big C Christian Church in a nutshell. Really? Uh, always trying to represent and and make room for encounter with Christ and at the same time, uh, completely, completely made up of human beings who are full of their own stuff. They're their own self love and ego and miss misguided apprehension of things and self righteousness and and in our time, sadly, racism and nationalism in so many church bodies, it's like So anyway, that's kind of Ah, we just gave you a quick a quick pit of historical over you of the nature Christianity.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

An ecclesiascopy.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

That's a new word! Charmaine has just coined a new term. An ecclesiascopy.

Carla Long

I 100% do not not want one of those.

Tony Chvala-Smith

I neither. However, we're happy. We're happy to perform one. That's what we're going to do today.

Carla Long

That's right. Everyone who's listening get prepared. Uh, so I love I just want to be state this again. Tony, I think something you said is just so so important. I'm worth a restate that you have to have Christianity in community. You cannot do Christianity all by yourself. That's impossible.

Tony Chvala-Smith

It's It really is impossible. And even in the monastic traditions where there is a calling to be a hermit, which is to live a life of solitude. That hermit is connected always to a community always responsible to community shaped by the You know, for example, in the Benedictine traditional hermit would be shaped by the rule of ST Benedict and is responsible to an Abbott and a community and so on. So,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

And would partake of sacraments in community.

Tony Chvala-Smith

Absolutely. And so, um, Jesus Jesus did not create a religion of soloists. Jesus, Jesus, is the start of a what, you know me there. It

calls the new community the new humanity. And we belong together in it. In spite of how difficult that can be. It's it's easy to say I love everybody wouldn't when there aren't irritating people around you, right? It's much harder when you're working when you're when you're worshipping and making, you know, congregational business, meeting decisions and trying to figure out missions. So it's much harder when you're surrounded by people who are equally as committed as you but have different points of view on different experiences. That's that's complicated, but it's supposed to be that's community.
Carla Long

Well, I just I do want to go back to one more thing. You said It's very easy to love everyone in your church when you're the only one there much, much, much more difficult to love everyone in your church when there are challenging people. So I appreciate that very much. Thank you for saying that. Um, we're also talking earlier about four different models of and I think that this is really important to talk about, especially where I live here, out here in Utah, when people have may have left their the church, they have grown up in their own entire life, and it is one model of church, and they they find themselves yearning for something else. And there's a lot of guilt and shame and hurt and pain that has heaped upon them and that that and also that they that comes from themselves, that they are even yearning for something else. And so let's I just I think it be really cool. If we could put a name on some of those models of churches so that we could say, Hey, you know, you're not alone people. yearn for this kind of stuff all the time.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Yeah, and actually, uh, I was thinking earlier about the journey of seekers that I've known who come from various traditions and sometimes come to this church and state, and sometimes a moved on to other places. But I thought about how, for many of them there was almost this feeling of being a little bit maybe not living up to their own initial convictions because their initial convictions were I am done with the church. You know, I I see its weaknesses. I see how it's been used for power, or I've seen how it's hurt people, depending on you know what what kind of situation they found themselves in. And, you know, they said, I am donewith the church. Um, but then they find themselves being drawn back to church. Some another church, typically and and they almost feel like they're being untrue to their conviction that they can cut this off. You know that that can be done with it.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Walk away from this thing that has maybe hurt them or or um told them that they they are not loved or that they are not of worse before God or control them in ways that diminished them as individuals. Uh, so one of things I was thinking about was how it might be helpful for people to know that there's several different models. And miliary does a nice job of both describing these models and then showing what the dangers of them are, but of these different models, and I'll just go through them briefly, um, kind of feed different parts of who we are. And so the idea that we might want to leave church one of these models

but still seek a different model mean, means that the church can look a lot of different ways and understanding those different kind of understood those different names. Those different ways of constructing church might be helpful for people who who are seeking or who have found a place and and are afraid to commit to it because it's still church that makes sense. So so the models he talks about the 1st 1 is the institution of salvation, and this is kind of institutional is, um this is where our rightness with God comes from being in the right institution, having the right officers having the right structure, having the right sacraments, having, um, the right Rules keeping the right rules. Um, And for some people, this is this is, ah, a very effective way of living out their their spiritual life. Uh, but because it can because things were structured, they can, um, help make God be part of all the parts of their life. Uh, but the problem with that, of course, is I think we can already see some of the possible problems. Is that because it's concerned about structure, it can become very hierarchical and then depending on the culture, very patriarchal. If that's the power system in that culture, um and it can, then it couldn't be more about the rules and keeping the rules or looking like you're keeping the rules than it is about connecting with God. Um, so that's that ISS one system that probably all of us are one model of the church that probably all of us have seen it can kind of relate to. Another one is called Community of the Spirit, and this one tends to be more about, it tends to be more focused on small groups, sometimes more informal. Um, think think charismatic and Pentecostal groups whose um goal is experiencing Christ or or denominations that are more more involved in spiritually formation and, uh, awareness of God connection with the spirit, self awareness, personal growth. And one of the things that really nurtures people in this model is the idea that they have a safe place, a place where they're known, ah, place where their journey with goddess valuable valued and they are valued, and that's encouraging them to grow. The next one is sacrament of salvation, and in this model, the sacraments, those, um, the sacraments themselves or the church's sacraments is seen as the way to connect with Christ, um, to go deeper into the meaning of the sacraments, to let them be those meeting places between us and God, Um, and and the danger there is, Then we can become to rule based around how of what the sacraments must mean at how we must do the sacraments. But at another level, it's letting the sacraments, which are symbols, take us deeper into our understanding of God and our experience with God. And you see this in parts of the Catholic Church over the last several decades. But you see it in other denominations as well. Uh, a 4t one is herald of good news. And these would be primarily churches or denominations for where preaching the good news, doing missionary work, converting people, baptizing people would be the primary thing, and everything else should kind of bend towards that. So there might be a lot of sacrifice expected of people. Um, personally, but it's about proclaiming the good news there. There might not be as much work on personal self awareness and recognition of Brokenness. It's more about preaching the good news of Jesus. The

problem was danger with that one is that it can be, uh the good news about Jesus can get filtered down to particular persons have a view of who Jesus is, and so the the the message can become narrow and, um, and not not inclusive. Um, the other problem with it is that how how we share it, how we share the good news? Um, and the structure around that can overshadow um, riel, creating real relationship with God or with Christ soaking the focus can get too much on the manner of delivery of the message rather than who it points to. And the invitation got gives us to be in relationship can be about ideas. The and then there's 1/5 1 The 5th 1 is servant of the servant lord. And here the focus is more on, um, serving those things that, um, are connected to how Jesus served the people around him when he was here. And so, working with the poor, uh, with the oppressed with, uh those who are unjustly incarcerated Um, those who are the victims off, uh, national governments that are unfair and oppressive. Racism, sexism. Uh, and the idea here is that you're working. These groups would be focused on doing the works of the Kingdom of God and that Jesus spoke about and that Jesus demonstrated in his own life. And the danger here is that, um, you could become an agent of social improvement and leave behind what is the message of who Jesus is and what God is doing in the world and that the church is something different from a social service group that's a dangerous that you can begin. The two can begin to look the same, and and the recognition that the Kingdom of God is something we can only partially experience here on earth. The God brings the fulfillment can get lost. So those were five different things. Five different aspects, all of them. I have some really rich things to bring to the big C church identity. But any one of them too narrowly, Um, that implemented can really be deadening to the overall development of a Christian disciple. And so, you know, for those who might find themselves leaving an institutional message of yeah, a model. Sorry I said, Method, um, you might actually be longing for a small group where you can explore where you can ask questions where you can discover that God loves you even if you have questions or even though, uh, you're not doing things the way you were told you must as you were growing up. Or you might be looking for some place where people are living out peace and justice in the name of Christ. And so, you know, if you're finding yourself in a seeking place, you might take a look at those models and see, you know, is one of them in particular drawing you, Um, is there, uh, dimension of the church that, uh, you're you're still looking for and need to be fed by as you grow as you keep seeking God, Um, and tow tow. Let it be an adventure and not a failure of any kind. Yeah, I don't know if that helps, but I thought that it was an intriguing way toe to start looking at people's journeys and the shifts and changes that we make throughout our lives.

Carla Long

So that I do find that very helpful for a lot of people who walk through the doors, at least in the Salt Lake congregation and in all churches here in Utah that I'm a part of. I mean, I will say that here in Utah, a lot of people come in and never come back. And so I you know, it doesn't make me feel bad cause I know that they're on this

journey and they're trying to figure out where they belong. But it helped me to realize that these four or five different models of the church that maybe they're just not looking for our type of model of the church. And so I really appreciate hearing that as a pastor,
Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Yeah, that you know what we have to offer, which typically I would say fits maybe in community of the spirit and maybe servant of the servant Lord isn't is, um is to free wheeling or not structured enough for some people to have the confidence that to just recognize where God may be at work or where the spirit is. And that's okay. You know, maybe people are, I think all of us on our spiritual journey. It is. It is a journey of discovery. But it is also, um, a journey of kind of ruling out what we need. You know, it's like, Oh, no, this isn't it. It is kind of like, Oh, no, this is what this might be It And, um and so to just have Babel to name the maybe the part of us that is is needing a church community. What? What kind of model will feed the dry places in us or the wounded places in us? Um, yeah. I think it can be helpful way so that, you know, ideas of loyalty don't surface. You know that? Well, you know, I went to this church for a while, and and now I don't and oh, I feel bad that I've, you know, gone away or deserted them. Or, UM, but it's It's a simple recognition that there are wherever you are, that there are some barriers to a growing relationship with God, with Christ or in community, and that you might not be really needing or wanting to ditch Christianity completely. But you might need a way to have a a safer place. Ah, more nurturing place. Maybe for some, um, or intellectual place, um, to to explore that

Tony Chvala-Smith

I think Migliore makes a really good statement at the end of that section, where he says that no single model of the church is adequate to capture the whole rich, a unique variety of Christian community. And so there is not one true model of the church. There's multiple models, and military is five. He was borrowing from Catholic theologian named Avery Dulles, who who wrote an older but called models of the church, then nearly always doing kind of isn't riffs on them. But that older book by every Dallas is still worth worth reading, simply called models of the church. But I love the idea that the nature of Christian community is so rich and multifaceted that there is not one way to capture it in a communal model, and so there's a large variety of communal ways to live it out. I think the key thing, though, is that one way or another, um, following Jesus takes community has to be done with other people, or it loses. It loses its its center. It loses its its power. I'm not the 1st 1 who said this, I think in our own church Fred M Smith said. This and I think he got it from Walter Roshan Bush, the great social gospel preacher. But when Jesus was teaching his disciples to pray, he did not teach them to pray. My father who art in heaven, he taught them to pray, our father said that The Lord's Prayer, which is the quintessential Christian prayer, is a prayer of community. It's a prayer about us, but how we how we, uh, how we put together the us'es into a community. There's many, many ways to do

it so.

Carla Long

Well I love that. That's what we're talking about here. I think, like I said before, when people leave their, perhaps their denomination that they've had since birth, there's a lot of guilt and shame that has heaped upon them for doing that. And this just makes me feel like there's, um kind of this is the math major part of my brain, a logical reason for leaving and a logical reason for looking for something else. So I think it's really cool that there's a lot of different models of church, and I have no idea which one of those models Community of Christ fits most in, and we're probably spread across the board. But I do think it's interesting to think about.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Yeah, I was just thinking of a a simpler way to see what each of the models is offering? Each has an avenue or a path to God. The first is the institution. One is the church's structure as away as a path to God. The 2nd 1 community of the spirit is this idea of community, of being in community and experiencing what it means to be loved, to be forgiven and to be reminded of that, to go deeper into that, the 3rd one sacrament of salvation is is the sacraments as an avenues, ways, paths to God. Uh, and then the herald of good news. It's the message. It's that's about the message being an avenue to God and they're probably didn't mention it really would be those who are who had value Scripture, probably more than some of the other methods. And then the last one servant of the servant Lord is action. Action is the avenue to relationship with God. So, you know, having structure, having community, having sacrament, a message in action as different elements, probably that we need all of them. But we may need them in different in different intensities, in different doses, from person to person, or depending on what your life journey has been. This for far. There might be a great big deficit in one or two of these areas, and so you're longing to grow with God and a new setting. It might be based on that, so it's kind of a fun way to look at it.

Carla Long

It really is, actually, So I love talking about the models of the church. I think that that is a super important point. And thank you for making that point for for me specifically as a pastor. I don't care about anybody else right now. It was really important for me but yeah, so I do wanna go jump back in 2019. As pastor of Salt Lake Congregation, we have named that year to be the year of relationships because we think relationships are like the most important part of what it means to be church. And it sounds like Tony, you're agreeing because the church is intrinsically communal, as you have said, and I wondered if there was just a little bit more to that that we could talk about.

Tony Chvala-Smith

Sure. Uh, MIGliore is very helpful here, and I can think of other theologians who tack with him on this, too. He refers to the church as use of the phrase imago trinitatis, in the image of the Trinity. And if you think back to our earlier discussions and earlier podcast about

God as Trinity, God is triune, essentially the doctor, the trinity, among them. Many things it's trying to explicate is that when we say God is love, we say that God is in essence, communal. That is, to use the traditional language. Father, son and spirit are three ways God eternally has got self in. These three ways of being are in a kind of a dance in in kind of a mutual reciprocal interchange and dance with each other. And so community is written into the very fabric of creation because the whole creation reflects its creator. And so human beings are created in the image of God, which is the image of the Trinity were created for relationships. It's it's it's not good for me to be left by myself for a very long, Carla.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Do not leave him unattended

Tony Chvala-Smith

I think if we're honest, that's true of all of us that we we we find ourselves most fully in relationship with other people, as as my minus bumps up against your Eunice and and we come to understand ourselves and each other better. That's that's kind of that's That's the nature of human relationships. And so, not surprisingly, Jesus creates a fellowship, a community of women and men in his historic life that continues after his death and resurrection, in which relationship is central us. In the New Testament, you know the word agape, that that's a self uninterested love of the other is so central to Cristian community. And so um, relation relationship is what the church is about And I think sometimes that's what people gravitate from, say, an institutional model to some of the other models, because sometimes in the institutional model, it's really hard to find intimate relationships with others who are trying to journey the way you're journeying to. And so, um, that doesn't mean that institutional model is incapable of relationships. It's just that something, I think sometimes people have trouble finding that there. So, um in the New Testament uses this great word Koinonia, which you may, but it's the word is used to be translated fellowship. I think quite knots in Greek means common. And so Koinonia is the commonality or community. And so when Paul ends one of his letters, he says, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the koinonia of the Holy Spirit be with you. Also quickly that that unique bond across a group of people that makes them into a new a new whole, a new a new entity that's that's relationship at its highest. And so, um yeah, relationship every year should be the year of relationship it in church. It's also difficult, isn't it, because relationships are always going to be between broken, selfish, irritating, self centered people like the three of us, right?

Carla Long

Well, yes, Tony, I do just want to bring up another perhaps medical word you brought up. You just said my me-ness and new u-ness. You I

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Yeah, I was thinking about that. What? What is the equivalent.

Tony Chvala-Smith

I know the me-ness and your you-ness. Yeah, right. The the the

uniqueness of me and the uniqueness of you. Oh,

Carla Long

I liked it your you-ness.

Tony Chvala-Smith

You-ness! Yes, Yes. You notice? I didn't say, Your Highness, but I said, you're you're so you could have I could have, but yeah, So I mean, um, this is a problem in Western cultures, That air so individualistic. We we think that my individuality is this this complete, intact thing that needs nothing from outside. Gracious. That's so wrong who I am as a person has been framed and shaped instead by so many other you's. So many other thous in my life and likewise back and forth. And so, uh, the old the old old saw is really true. No, no one is an island. Uh, because you'd be really messed up if you were right. It's way we need we need the uniqueness of the other Toa understand our own selfhood. And so, yeah, that's what I was getting at with the unis and the meanness, But I was trying to find good abstract words for and those may not work quite as well as I hoped. I actually think they're very memorable, so let's keep moving on it. I really like how we're attacked, what we're talking about here, although where we are running a bit short on time. So I'm gonna keep us moving because that's my, uh and you talked earlier about how the church is provisional. Can you talk a little bit more about that? What does that mean? So many are uses that term, and he doesn't say so, but he he may have borrowed it from Hendricks Berkhof a Dutch theologian kind of in the same reform tradition that Migliore's in, but but so the church is provisional in the sense that it's not ultimate. Though community is intrinsic to Christianity, the church, in whatever model it is, will always be incomplete, always be on the way, always be in pilgrimage, and therefore the church is not the ultimate. It's not the final thing. Leaving a church is not leaving God. God is the ultimate for Christian faith. And the church, though created by Christ we could say on and the pointer to the Kingdom of God, The sign of the Kingdom of God is not itself that. That when we realize that it helps us, it helps us be more circumspect in our judgments of the church, which usually are deserved. But also, um, if we're not the ultimate, then of course there's gonna be failings and flaws within the community,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Right? I mean, another way to say it or to think about it is to say, the church is not the goal. It's It's a vehicle of the religion of relationship with God, and it's the platform for relationships with others and for building community. But, um, vehicles and platforms change. You know what might have been a horse cart that carried people into relationship with God, you know, today might be a surfboard or, you know, um, you know the vehicle can change, and so the church can change. And how the church sees itself can change, because each generate each generation each decade each, uh, century has has the challenge for the church, Big C church and little c churches, um, to translate itself into the moment. And that means if there has to be some level of flexibility to see the church not as the end, but as one

of the ways in which God is at work in the world. And, you know, I think in in Community of Christ, this has been really on the forefront for us the last few years. The recognition that we are at this moment in the history, uh, of this country, yes, but also off the world as far as Christianity is concerned where the church has a new a new moment. Yes, you know, as we look at all kinds of Christian denominations in North America, we see smaller congregations. Ah, lot more white hair, uh, fewer Children. Um, church is closing all all of those kinds of things. That's not just at with one denomination or another, and and also this kind of growing resentment towards the church because it hasn't been what people felt it promised it to be. And so, you know the the misdeeds of clergy and of church leaders, Uh, the misuse of funds the, um the judging of whole parts of the population by clergy's clergy people. Um, all of these things have made Christianity at least the view at the Christianity that everyone might have been familiar with three decades and decades ago. Um, not not appealing, not actually very relevant in in the world today. And so whether it's in North America, whether it's in the Southern Hemisphere and any parts of the Northern Hemisphere, everything is changing. There's, ah, a willingness and ability to critique Christianity. But there's also a recognition of this deep longing that people have for meaning for purpose, fullness, for making a change, for being connected, something that is bigger than them and deeper than them. And so, um, church leaders in many denominations and in ours as well have said this is a moment of possibility. This is a moment to, if we're willing, if we're able to hear this is a moment in which we believe God is is asking the Church to become something not necessarily different, not necessarily new, not necessarily relevant, but something that is intricately involved in this moment with the needs of people with the spiritual needs of people today. So, um, in the reunion materials this summer was called Calling, Hope, and Possibility. And it's a set of adult lessons that we found to be very helpful. One of them describes this dynamic of our time and the possibilities that are there for us if we're willing to hear God calling us to be the church in some probably partly new ways, but probably partly ways that are already in our in our genes in our sense of ourselves. But to be open to the church, being playing a different role, a richer role in the world around us. Anyhow, it's my little plug for the this summer's reunions reunion materials, which actually would make really good Sunday school lessons to look at and talk about.

Tony Chvala-Smith

And I say you just just following where Charmaine was going there, that that old phrase Latin phrase *semper reformanda* always being reformed, always in need of being reformed, which I think some lots and lots of people think of the church as somehow this sort of timeless, safe haven, when in fact that wasn't even true in the New Testament, the church was ever changing, ever evolving, ever responding to its new new social setting so that the church, the church, is provisional and that it's always in need of being reformed

always, it's like our own lives were all were always in need of transformation and and changing. And so is the church, the community, and so that it should take new forms, new should that it should experiment that the church should be a place where we try in new ways to restate the pretty much old central truth. God is love and you are love that that's gonna be part of our our ecclesiastical journey from this point on. Always, always changing for the sake of the coming kingdom of God.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

And that may mean letting some things fall away and picking up new responsibilities in the world. It might mean that there's not just five models. There might be six or seven models of the church because this time invites us to explore what it can mean in the circumstances of our time. For God to be revealed for Christ to be present for the spirit to guide.

Tony Chvala-Smith

So Christianity in all of its ecclesial forms is is currently facing. From one perspective, it's facing a crisis. On the other hand, it's facing. The other side of that, of course, is that it's these air profound opportunities for for church life to reconfigure itself in very creative ways to make Christ real and invisible intangible in this amazingly wonderful, complex, post modern world we live in.

Carla Long

You know, I think this is so relevant to what is happening right now in Community of Christ as well that, you know, we're a small church. And, uh, we I think that we have actually done a really good job so far in the last cup, I don't know a couple of decades. So far of trying, to do what we need to do and be where God is calling us to be. And I just wasn't the World Church Finance Board this last weekend, and President Veazey spoke to us on Sunday morning, and this will be in the January February 2020. Herald. So you'll be seeing it then, too. But President Veazey talked about how the church will be going through discernment process about how Community of Christ is structured and what it means to be church and all of these things that were just talking about Now how you know, sometimes it's really hard to, like build the firehouse when all you're doing is putting out fires. But we have said we're not just to me putting out fires, we're gonna be building this firehouse. We're gonna be saying what makes this church relevant, what makes this church important and why? Why are we a church? So there's gonna be a pretty big discernment process happening in Community of Christ, I think in the year 2020. And if you're listening to this in 2020 and it's not happening, call your Apostle and I don't know when I don't know how it's gonna look like. But I am excited and a little bit nervous, of course, about what that's gonna look like, how it's gonna be different. And, um yeah, because as you said, you know, we're always called to reform ourselves. I was thinking, here in Utah, you know, we have, like, kind of, ah, very structured church in Salt Lake City, and we have, like, these smaller house churches in Logan, Utah, and in Provo, and, um, how incredibly different those are and how incredibly different the

experiences are that I walk away from in the smaller house church, where we have a lot of discussion versus the Salt Lake congregation where we have we sit in pews and we sing hymns and we listen to a sermon a lot of times, and I wish that everyone could feel both of those different experiences. And maybe that's what's gonna happen. Maybe we will be looking at the way restructure church. Maybe it's not gonna happen on Sunday mornings anymore. Who knows? Like it could be whatever is the best way to reach people. And I really hope that we can be vulnerable and brave enough to move in that direction.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

That's exciting. I'm so glad you shared that because, um, you know, I think many, many church leaders have been saying this. This is this is a moment. This is a moment and I'm glad to hear that there's a decision to make to take action because one of the things that we actually haven't said very I think specifically is that one of the main goals of the church is to pass on the story to the next generation and there are endless ways of doing that. And, um and yet that's we're not only passing on the story, we're inviting people to be part of it. And so we have to invite people to be part of the story in the time and place where they are. And that happens to be, you know, somewhere in the 21st century where lots of things Aaron upheaval. And yet there's so many signs that people are longing for the kind of peace, that kind of joy, the kind of purposefulness that comes in relationship with God in a community making a difference in the world. So, um, need is there obviously for what the church can bring The Big C church? Um, but what will the little see churches look like if we're listening?

Tony Chvala-Smith

And Carl, this reminds me to a couple of titles to suggest to listeners. If they want to just read more about the inn ecclesiology and I can suggest to community Christ titles. If you can find them, they're out of print, but you might be able to find them in a church library. The classic book is Harold Schneebeck. We use it in seminary we use it in undergrad theology classes. Harold Schneebeck 1968 book Body of Christ, written over 50 years ago, is a blueprint, actually, for what Community of Christ is becoming. It's still a highly provocative and relevant book, and another book written by Jeffrey Spencer, who was theologian, member of the council 12, passed away about 15 years or so ago, who was a personal friend of Sherman's in mind, he wrote a book called Strangers and Pilgrims, which is its own kind of expiration of different models of the church. And you might still be able to find that one on a bookshelf in a Community of congregation somewhere to really good books on ecclesiology. And then I think I would recommend, if you, if you do some background reading around it, Bonhoeffer book, Life Together, which is a profound meditation on the nature of Christian community. Of course he's writing it, h, he wrote it in around 1937 or eight, as he's part of an underground seminary that's living in close community, but trying to find ways to train pastors to resist fascism and Nazism in Germany. It's a it's a marvelous meditation on on the

nature of being together, and it needs a little background reading in terms of his is it's very Lutheran, which for me is not a problem, I love it that, but it's it also is, you need to know something of Bonhoeffer's life before you read it, but it's a small book, and it's you'll find it a very provocative read on the nature of the church.

Carla Long

Well, thank you for that. I appreciate that. And, yes, I interest will have my copy of Harold Schneebeck I think unless I've already given it away to some poor seminary student. You always always request that they have it. And actually, I see on some of our Facebook groups, and I'm on Community of Christ, Facebook groups that people are always looking for that book.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Interesting. Alright, we'll keep gathering them up when we can find them. And, um and people can let us know if they're if they're needing them.

Carla Long

Absolutely. Well, thank you so much for this awesome conversation about ecclesialology. And, um, I I really appreciate especially talking about, you know, thinking, self awareness about the church. You know, I think a lot of times in a lot of different churches, perhaps the institutional church, they don't want people to think about the church. You know, they just want people to continue living their lives, doing what they're doing and don't think about the church. Just keep on doing what you're doing. But I think it's really important for us to do.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

And that is actually one of Migliore's descriptions of of kind of wh at is the role of members in an institutional church, and they're they 're there to maintain the institution, but but not necessarily to be t hat involved themselves in the in the journey. So, yeah, very well said.

Carla Long

Yeah, so for Community Christ, we want people to be in the journey. It makes it super messy.

Tony Chvala-Smith

It does make it super messy. But you know what I think? One of our greatest current ecclesiology texts is actually Community of Christ Sings, for goodness sakes, find the hymns in there that have to do with the nature and mission of the church, and they will, they will bring tears to your eyes. Tears of hope and joy. There's so many amazing hymns in our new hymnal that that are are trying to speak us into a new ecclesial reality. And so that's kind of exciting to be able to sing a potential future every time we sing those hymns.

Carla Long

I just podcasted with Jane Gardner about our hymnal and she said something exactly what you just said. We sing our theology before we do our theology.

Tony Chvala-Smith

Very true.

Carla Long

That's awesome. And a great place that too close. Unless you have something else you want to say that I didn't ask. Is there anything else about ecclesialology that you wanted to say? Except don't forget you're yearly ecclesialology exam.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Your ecclesioscopy.

Carla Long

Don't forget it.

Tony Chvala-Smith

Yes, we promise not to forget it. And if anybody needs another one, we're happy to do it. Do for further work on that.

Carla Long

Yikes! Well thanks again.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

But we're not really doctors. We only play them. Sorry!

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

I'm afraid. I'm really afraid Our listeners are gonna realize how much coffee we've had today.

Tony Chvala-Smith

Well, that will be really good for them to realize that it'll be good and exactly how little we've spoken, you and I, we usually speak at least once a couple times a month, and we have need of some catch up time. So that's probably why we're having so much silly time on this podcast. But thank you again, Tony.

Tony Chvala-Smith

Oh, thanks, Carla.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith

Our pleasure.

Josh Mangelson

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