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Project Zion Podcast

Josh Mangelson 0:17

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 0:30

Hello, and welcome to the projects I am podcast. I'm your host, Carla Long. And today we are back with two of our favorites in what is by far I'm sure your favorite series on Project Zion. Percolating on Faith and more specifically God Shots. This is a podcast where we have been taking you through the intricacies of systematic systematic theology. And is that really floats your boat? Well, just as weird as our two guests, Charmaine and Tony Chvala-Smith. Welcome back to our lovely guests.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:03

Yeah. What does this say about you?

Carla Long 1:07

It just says that I I'm just I'm just a wonderful learner here. I'm learning as we go along as well.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:14

Or it says that you are a class 10 nerd like us too.

Carla Long 1:18

Class 10? Oh, that's not a Scientology term. Is it? Oh, no.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:23

Ah, no.

Carla Long 1:26

Thank goodness. Yeah, those are something different. I need to rewatch that Leah Remini series. Anyway, jumping into So, today, we're talking about something that sounds a little bit like a scary movie, The Finality of Jesus Christ, which, I mean, when I when I mentioned that to my colleague last night, she goes, what does that mean? I mean, I guess we'll find out tomorrow is what I told her so. So when we're talking about the centrality of Jesus Christ, what are we talking about?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:58

Yeah, so talking about the finality of Jesus Christ in the context of talking about world religions, about other religions, and, you know, on a, if, if we were all theologians and trained in theology, it would not be as frightening a title as what it first comes across as In fact, when we were first looking at this, I thought, Oh, I'm a little uncomfortable with this title, because it could easily kind of first be seen as some kind of a fundamentalist approach to, you know, Jesus

being the only way that kind of thing. And actually, it's not it's, it's, it's trying to describe what do Christians bring to the conversation with other faiths about it without without jeopardizing without compromising who they are, and so that's one of the pieces that has to be looked at closely for Christians entering into dialogue or into theological encounter with other religions is how do we understand who Jesus is within the faith, but also then in relation to other faiths. So that's kind of why that whole finality of Jesus Christ is so important, but it doesn't mean well, there is one or two Christian approaches to the, to the dialogue with other world faiths that would say, it is only Christ, you know, you can only have salvation. That's the only revelation of God, but most Christians and there are many ways of approaching this kind of relationship with other religions that that doesn't have that fundamentalist view. So that's one of the things we're going to want to explore today is, is what are some of the many ways that Christian are finding to have constructive conversation and interaction and relationships with other religions.

Tony Chvala-Smith 4:08

This is a place where I think Migliorel could have used a different word. He should have asked me. Just kidding, of course. But in place of finality, I think he could equally have used the word decisiveness that is in in Christian faith in Christian theology, Jesus is seen as the decisive revelation of God, that is the revelation of God that, that that shows us who and what God is and is and is about. And I think decisiveness is a little easier word to work with and finality, which as you know, as soon as I hear that, it sounds like that's there's nothing more to say after this. And that's not what he means. But I just think that he could have used a different word to capture the same the same idea.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 4:54

And if you'd asked me, I probably would have had a an even less decisive word. Maybe the importance of Jesus Christ.

Carla Long 5:05

To be perfectly honest, this is probably why he never asked you guys.

Just so

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 5:09

Yeah, they're never be agreement.

Tony Chvala-Smith 5:12

Or maybe we could say in the words that 1960's song, Jesus is Just Alright With Me.

Carla Long 5:20

What a lovely title.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 5:25

So, so I think one of the thing that's that's helpful here is just to recognize that this whole area of theological endeavor is really quite new, quite new in our world really. It's only really taken

decisive, decisive. Sorry, going back to that word, concrete shape, mostly since after World War II, when it became globally important to see recognize the, how the world faiths can impede peace, how it can enhance peace, how understanding and acceptance of other people and their cultures and, and their religion is really important. If we're going to move forward together with any sense of civility, I would say, and so, you know, the the Holocaust really brought into sharp focus, the need for there to be opportunities for people to tell who they are and not for others to define who someone who the other is, and to have those kinds of conversations so. So it's pretty new for the world in general. And I think I would say that within Community of Christ, it's new as well. There have been individuals and parts of the church that have been quite involved in interfaith dialogue in local areas or regional areas, or involvement in different organizations. But the church as a whole has not really spent a lot of time thinking through or talking about having arenas in which to say, what is our theology, what's most conducive to the other elements in our theology? What what kind of approach fits us best, as far as our interaction with, with other world faiths and religions.

Tony Chvala-Smith 7:42

So up until the 20th century, one of the traditions that governed how Christians Catholic and Protestant, typically viewed relating to other religions was a tradition that goes back to St. Cyprian in the late second, early third century. In its own context, it made a certain kind of sense. But then it became a tagline and that was cyprian Supremes famous saying extra clay sium Nola, Sal was outside the church there is no salvation that had that had a particular meaning for him in say the year 220 to 230. But that then became kind of a governing principle. And in the Western world when all there was was Catholicism that meant that outside the Catholic Church, salvation is not possible. Once there was a Protestant Reformation

it was still held that outside the church, there's no salvation but then the question was, which is the right church. And then when you get into the modern world, and the modern missionary movements that, for the first time introduced, introduced people to other living world religions that began to raise Questions for people. So, you know, going back to World War Two, and the post Holocaust period, one of the things that sensitive Christian theologians really had to deal with was, oh my gosh, this this absolutely massively horrible Evil has connections to the Christian ideas that were taught for centuries about the Jews being outside of salvation. And so that's really when this you know, when when the the impetus to start thinking about other world religions differently was, was brought on by in part by monstrous monstrous evil and tragedy. But then, you know, with, you know, Charmy mentioned globalization, and then in our time, it's even more acute because, unlike unlike our grandparents, And to some extent, even our parents, many of us today, have neighbors, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, who are Buddhists who are Hindu who are Muslim, the world has become a very different place and so, so coming up creating a Christian theological approach to how we'll deal with World Religions is really a it's an ethical necessity. For us. It's really important, because this is about how we will live with neighbors now, right? Because World War II and the Holocaust especially, and other kinds of genocide and actions, whether they be war or terrorist, show us that what we think impacts how we act, and how we act towards the other.

Carla Long 10:55

It's so true I remember you just brought back this memory when I was living in the Philippines. This very sweet woman who is a missionary for the Mormon Church, she said, You know, I've converted to Mormonism. And my family is all Catholic. And she said, I'm very, very sorry to see to say that they're gonna burn in hell, but they are. Wow. And I was so taken aback by that. I was like, you think your family is gonna burn in hell? She's like, I know they are. So, I mean, I don't know now that I know a little bit more about Mormonism, Mormonism. That's not exactly what they think. But, I mean, just the very idea that she was kind of okay with that blew my mind.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 11:37

Yeah. Yeah. And, you know, some of the questions we have to ask ourselves and in those kinds of when we start with those kinds of statements about other faiths is, what kind of God is it that we believe in? You know, what about this God who came in humans form to let us know who God is. Is this a God of love? Is this the same God that would take delight in killing people for not having the bright list of ideas in their heads? It's, yeah, those are the that's one of the really important pieces of this is that interaction with other world face in a respectful way, can really help us to critique our own theologies, and to say, you know, where is this consistent? Is our idea of a loving God, a grace filled God? Is that is that consistent? Or maybe maybe that's not what our God looks like, and maybe, you know, we need to, to see what our theologies might actually be describing as what we believe to be God. So yeah, it's, that's really a great example.

Tony Chvala-Smith 12:59

And to explain Send that example out. I've I've heard Christians and seen them say on Facebook, absolutely unimaginable things, for example, that Gandhi is burning in hell because he was a Hindu. And that, you know, Mother Teresa, if she didn't, she didn't ever have a born again, experience, she's gone to hell. I mean, these these things are utter caricature tours of the Christian faith. They're also caricatures of particular verses in the Bible taken completely out of literary and historical context, and used and weaponized and so it's really it's really important, certainly for us in Community of Christ today to try to have a theologically rich and an ethically sensitive and humane way of talking about how we will relate with in a in a multi religious world. That's Gosh, it's like World Peace really just kind of depends on this. Yeah.

Carla Long 14:12

So what does mili already say about the finality of Jesus Christ? What does he say about? I know that he has a lot to say in this chapter. And I remember you saying in an earlier podcast that this is he did a really great job of kind of encapsulating this, could we jump into what he had to say?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 14:27

Yeah, I think we can. And I think one of the things that will be helpful just to remember as we go along is that Tony and I might be making some connections back to Community of Christ theology or aspects of it. But the in many ways, what we'll be doing is kind of being descriptive

of the the ways in which mili mili already is breaking this down as different approaches of Christianity to this important element in in the The world being in conversation over some one of the things that can divide us the most. So, so some of us is going to be more descriptive of these different ways that that migliore gives us a way of approaching it. And he, I'll just say the traditional approach is there's three categories. The first is exclusive, exclusive, or exclusive ism, which basically says that Christianity is the only belief in Christ is the only way that God is is revealed, and the only way to salvation or a right relationship with God. And so it says there is just this one kind of way. Then there's inclusive ism, and inclusive ism. Actually, that's that has a whole bunch of different options within it. And we'll be exploring some of those. It is more of a way of finding sometimes an awkward but important walk with other world faiths, where we're upholding who Christ is for us. while respecting, and understanding and learning about other world faiths, Tony's gonna add a bit here on the inclusive

Tony Chvala-Smith 16:31

Yeah, it's this is the most complicated of the three traditional ways in that. inclusiveness typically hold that, you know, Christ. Christ is the revelation of the way to salvation, but that Christ may come to us through other religions as well. Right. So it's still the inclusive approach says it. Jesus is the revelation of God, but that revelation is not strictly found only in Christianity. Right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 16:58

Thank God may be at work. salvific ways beyond Christ but not excluding Christ's effect in the world. So it but there's a several different ways of doing this. And we're going to dig deeper into that a little bit. And then the third one is pluralism, which can sometimes is the idea that of valuing equally, all world religions. Sometimes critique of that is that it can come sometimes come down to the lowest common denominator, let's see what what things we kind of have in common and just affirm those, but then it dilutes all all worlds face to that as being essential or primary, rather than fully acknowledging the uniqueness of each and respecting them for what they uphold. So so that's the but pluralism is which is kind of a in a way a relativism of all World face, recognizing that they may all be essentially trying to do the same thing, or are working for some of the same things. But, but the critique is that then it's not really upholding the richness of any, or the uniqueness of any or the, the historical or, or social context that each has sprung out of. So that's the critique on that side. So those are the three ones that you'll traditionally hear, and then merely are really, really fine tunes those and helps us hear some of the really good theology that's happened in the last century. That helps us find different ways of claiming what's important And as well as engaging with the other

Tony Chvala-Smith 19:04

So so at this point really relies on the work of Paul knitter who's probably been one of the preeminent theologians of world religions. He's partners Christian, but he's he's been a kind of a pioneering figure and how to how to think about world religions and engage with them. And so, so Malay takes knitters seven, knitter, basic knitter and Malay basically say, you know, the three categories or two, that's two two too confining, there's actually it could actually be broken down into more like seven and so that's, that's where they go.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 19:45

So the, the first one is the one that we talked about that fits most closely with exclusivism, which indicates that Christ alone is Savior and Lord of all Salvation is only available through faith in him. And and that one, and I think it's knitter who who says this, he uses total replacement as the way of defining it. Like the only way that another religion can have full salvation is to totally replace their way of thinking with this way of thinking. I think that's probably the easiest way of saying so that's that's really ties with the more fundamentalist view of exclusive exclusive ism that you would find within Christian, some Christian faith.

Tony Chvala-Smith 20:40

So in this position, there's no there's actually no dialogue with other religions. You, you talk to other religions to convert them because you believe your religion is the only true religion. So that's far end of one's one side of a more complicated spectrum.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 20:54

So the second type is one that still says that Christ alone, his salvation is Savior and Lord and that salvation comes through explicit faith in him. But it also acknowledges that there may be some awareness in other in other world religions, have God, the presence of God in the world, or maybe even have the presence of Christ in the world. And so there's this some room made for the possibility that God might might be working in other ways in other religions. And so this those who would uphold this would probably join in the dialogue, but very cautiously. They would be somewhat concerned about compromising the importance of Christ alone as Savior. And this one is sometimes called the partial replacement.

Tony Chvala-Smith 22:01

So the third one is represented by one of the documents of Vatican two called no struck a Tata in our time. And this is from the 1960s. And this was a Roman Catholic Church doing a major rethinking of its relation to other religions and either and other forms of Christianity. And basically this this position says, Wait. there there's there's light and some truth and some holiness in all religions. Christianity, or at least Christ is the fulfillment of what all religions longed for. So there's the Christ element. But as the church wants to honor the integrity, and religious values, that are in other religions that may point people towards what Christianity is about. So it's still it's still taking the position, that it Christ is a fulfillment Have all human beings longed for hope for, but it's not saying there's no truth in other religions, we must simply displace them. And that's, that was a major, major step for the Roman Catholic Church to make in the 20th 20 century. So, you know, the, the idea that there's truth, other places, probably can resonate with, certainly with with Community of Christ people too. So that's the, that's the third kind of the third position.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 23:29

So a fourth approach is still would uphold that Christ alone is Savior and Lord. But it this one differs in that holds that the saving grace of God known through Christ is in some manner, present and available to all people whether or not they ever hear about Jesus. So the idea that

the act God's act of becoming incarnate in Christ. That that act of Jesus life, teachings, death, resurrection, has made Christ available to all of creation, and that whether or not you know, that, that is there for you, it is there for you. And it creates a path of salvation that you don't have to name or ever have learned about, but that it changes the relationship of God to creation. And so all of creation is there for available has available to them. This effect of Christ in the world and sometimes one of the early theologians who picked this up and and built on it was Rahner and he the coined the term anonymous Christians that in effect, everyone is potentially affected by Christ, therefore, anonymous Christians, and that's there they are, they can benefit from who Christ is whether or not they ever know of him. So that's a that's a very intriguing approach it one of the criticisms of it is that it's still kind of imperialistic or kind of paternalistic, that here are people whose own religions, the religions that they grew up in or that they've chosen that they're not, they don't really know they're Christian. We know they're Christian, but they don't know they're Christian, which is, is, I think, a valid criticism, but I think the idea of Christ's action having some kind of available influence for everyone is, is quite an interesting place to go.

Tony Chvala-Smith 26:08

Rahner's position actually has a very ancient pedigree in Christianity, going all the way back to the second century there's a theologian, an apologist, meaning a defender of Christianity to two, Greek and Roman criticisms. His name is Justin, St. Justin argued in his couple of his works way back then, that Christ is the loss the Word of God that the loss is present in through all creation, as a kind of imminent rationality and things. And therefore, anybody who is trying to live in accordance with love us live in accordance with what reason teaches, is in some sense already a Christian even if they have not fully heard about Jesus or or confess Jesus and so Rahner's idea at some ways, always a little bit impacted that second century theologian. So the the fifth type that Migliore lays out is a little it's a little more complicated I think than the others. And it's it's attributed to the the Yale theologian, George Lindbeck and also what a Migliore's mentors Karl Barth has a position similar to this and the idea here is that religions are each their own unique kind of language games. Each religion is distinctively uniquely historically what it is and they there they can't be that religions or each languages that can't be reduced to some sort of common denominator and so we're Linbeck goes with that is that Christian Christians To recognize that when they talk about salvation, they're talking about terminology that's unique to their tradition. And that terminology may have no bearing on what other traditions talk about. In other words, you have to let each tradition describe what it means when it talks about the heat about human life, about human fulfillment, about salvation, so on. And Linbeck, you know, says, you know, for us as Christians, Christ is, is the center the the way by which we, we make judgments about what to do and what to think and so on. But, we have to be very careful about trying to apply the rules, the rules of the grammar of the Christian language, to other religious languages, which may not have those same grammatical rules. And so you let each religion be what it is and recognize that God is able to be at work in each language game. I hear he's taught lubeck of course is talking about the Christian God because Linbeck's a Christian, I can't, you can't think yourself outside of this language. But that God from a Christian perspective is at work in each religions distinctive, unique particularity to to bring about the greatest possible good for individuals in that in and through that system.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 29:26

So for Linbeck it's not so much about imposing a particular theology, either on Christians that they must have about other faiths or on other faiths about how they must understand God in order to be in contact with God. This is more of an approach that says it's kind of it's maybe like a radical hospitality is that if we are going to live out what it means to be people have Christ that there needs to be this vulnerability openness to really understanding and hearing what other faiths are about. It's not about amalgamating it's not about mixing them or, or diminishing all any of them so that we can have a conversation about the same things. It's about valuing the different pneus valuing these different takes on what is life. What does it mean to be in harmony, with creation and with all that is within and around, that there's much to be gained from the conversation with the other that's a term that Linbeck uses quite a bit is, is to respect the thorough othernessness of formal faiths, other than our own. So it's more like a what is a? It's a it's what stance do we take in relation to others, and it's one of respect and honor.

Tony Chvala-Smith 31:11

At the same time, you know, but for both Linbeck and Barth, the central revelation of God remains Jesus Christ. And that's part of our language. And right and so and so they would both say, Jesus is able to take care of himself, thank you, he's free. He, he is completely free to speak to other people in in through their language games in whatever particular way Jesus wants to speak to them. So the church, the church doesn't, the church does not have some sort of leash on on the Triune God, God is fully able to take care of God's own work in business, in in language games that are quite different from the Christian ones so that so they're trying to honor the uniqueness of each religions own distinctiveness at the same time, both Linbeck and Barth, you know, uphold as Christians that Christ remains the central revelation of God for us.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 32:09

Right. And the sixth is goes even deeper into this dialogue, values it even more. And it considers the idea of mutuality as the way in which religion should interact with each other. This one would really be kind of leaning more towards the pluralism that we talked about in that early the three main categories, though, for many Christians. It's this isn't an abandoning of Christianity, but it is about how does our conversation with so it'd be kind of taking what the fifth step the or the the fifth way approach, the Linbeck approach, but not just saying we just need to really understand each other and accept each other. This is saying, we can really learn from each other. We can, we can, our own faith can be strengthened. As we let it be critiqued by our in our discussions with other faiths. We can begin to see what are those things that we uphold, that we don't really take seriously and live out? We can critique in gentle ways other other face, and in that way, assist them in living theirs out more fully and finding those common grounds between us. So this one is more engagement and an openness to changing and being changed in the process, I think would be a good way.

Tony Chvala-Smith 33:52

Yes, that's a really good way to put it. A couple of couple of important theologians who take this this route One that Migliore mentioned is the great German theologian, Jürgen Moltmann. But another one is, is the late Paul van Buren. But both of these both of these Protestant theologians were really actually willing to learn from Judaism, especially after the disaster of the show up and let you know ask Judaism for some corrective help, you know, how can we as Christians, not continue some of the some of the ideologies and ways of speaking that that contributed to the Holocaust. And so it's, and both Moltmann and van Buren are, we're are we're really deeply Christian theologians. At the same time, learning from others, for both of them in different ways, provides corrections to question ways of talking and being that have been actually disruptive. So, so that's the, the advantage of openly entering into dialogue is that it may change you. It also may change the ones you're dialoguing with.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 35:16

But but not in fundamental ways, not in the in the most central ways in which your Christian which is, which may be a little, is much more nuanced than the pluralistic one where you kind of are only looking at what you have in common in in this, this one. You still are actually it's partly helping you define what is the critical center of your faith, and how do you live from it. Rather than kind of confusing what the critical center is from the subsequent rings of belief that come off of it or the practices that may simply be tradition or, or the practices that that are valid to it. So you're, it's causing you to look more closely at what is foundational for you in your faith and exploring, investigating, even questioning in a collegial way. Others in other faiths.

Tony Chvala-Smith 36:26

So the last one that really were holds up is, yeah, Charmaine, it's kind of way on the other end of kind of a radical pluralistic view. It's typically connected with with the philosopher of religion, John Hick, but this one, this one wants to move away from focus on Christ altogether. And instead focus on God but God with question with quotation marks around it and inserting instead, maybe the phrase the ultimate or ultimate reality or something like that. And then this would wants to hold that, that all religions uniquely point to some kind of ultimate reality and they are each a viable path for getting to that ultimate reality. Hicks analogy and Migliore points this out Hicks analogy is that it we're all on we're all on one mountain just on different sides of it, we're all heading to the to the top and your path right different paths we get to the top looks different to us, because we're at different places but there's not a right path to the top. There's multiple right paths to the top. And in some respects this one for Migliore though this one is kind of the the one off from the rest of them in that it it. It downplays the importance of the revelation in Christ and place up the idea that there is a center and ultimate center that everybody is heading to just by different different paths using different words and so on.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 37:56

So that kind of gives us a sense of there being a lot of different ways in which Christian Christianity has chosen to approach the discussion and, and within Community of Christ. We have, I think, a representation, probably have almost all of those, I think maybe all of them. And and so it's, we're, we're quite we have quite a spectrum of views in the church as far as how do

we interact with other world face, but I think, probably in some parts of the church too. It's not a question that's actually been discussed in a intentional way. And so this is a this is a place where I think Community of Christ in different parts of the world has a lot to bring to the church as a whole And especially to bring to those who have the narrow experience of North American Christianity. So, you know, I think of our our colleagues in India, who are asking the very important questions about how do we how do we open our doors to Muslims who want to worship with us? And how do we extend God's love? How do we extend maybe even the Lord's supper? Ha. How do we begin to create these bridges that are that people are wanting to cross that's the that's the fascinating things from stories in India and Africa. There are people who are wanting to to celebrate the bigness God, and I have ways I think of the story in the that boonta jewboy tells about, and I don't remember which country it is

Tony Chvala-Smith 40:12

It's in West Africa somewhere

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 40:14

somewhere in West Africa, where a Muslim family has come to the church. And they, they attend. they uphold value their, their background as Muslims, but they basically have have offered the church their daughters to be raised as Christians. So, you know, here's people standing in a place, asking, where's the bridge? How can we build this bridge together? In India, many people who are by birth Muslim? And who are who are saying, we believe in Christ to maybe differently than you? Is there room at the table? So it's it's a very relevant topic, especially in a world that tends to want to divide right now to divide by faith or by culture or by color or by race and this impulse to say how how can we affirm each other is really crucial and can be can make turning points for individuals but I think for for the world as a whole.

Carla Long 41:55

You know, I appreciate hearing all of this. I was gonna make a joke after you guys went through all seven of those that I didn't get Oh, do it again go back but I, I did it that was very, that would be very unkind of me. But I, I wanted to talk. I mean, I love hearing this, this is so so important for us to hear. I wanted I know you jumped into the Community Christ aspect a little bit, I just wanted to, you know, I do something. It's very, very small. What I do is very small, but I always make sure to never say the Community of Christ. And I just because I don't want people to think then I think our church is the only Community of Christ. all lowercase C's, right so, I mean, there's, I think that there are little things that we can do to help people who walk through our doors, see that we are not exclusive in this like we we truly do believe that there's truth in all religions and Not to condemn. I mean, I just I hear the condemning so much. And I and I love that we've been focused on ecumenical ministries on interfaith ministries. I'm part of the Salt Lake City interfaith Roundtable, as well as the Utah Valley interfaith Roundtable. And who I do I have some stories about that.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 43:21

That could be quite interesting.

Carla Long 43:24

Let's just say we could be a little bit more ecumenical and interfaith Valley in Utah County, okay, if anybody knows what I'm talking about, I could be we can try a little harder.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 43:35

It would be nice to have a few more faces represented. Is that what you're saying?

Carla Long 43:39

You know, yes! But anyway, we're working on it. We're trying so so I mean, I love where we're going. I love that we are seeing the value in how other churches view God. So I mean, I just think this is so important. Can we talk a little bit more about Community of Christ? Sure. You know, like, What do you What does Community of Christ have to offer this greater worldview?

Tony Chvala-Smith 44:05

Yeah, I think a good place to start for us would be with our Enduring Principles which have become so central to the life of our denomination, which is the life of a very diverse community spread over gosh, you know, over dozens of countries, and then even more cultures than that. And so, if we, when we start talking about our faith in terms of grace and generosity, or you know, unity and diversity or the worth of all persons, these things are dear to us. In linpack fashion, these are part of the particularity of our tradition, but they give they give us our own distinctive lenses and ways of acting in the world. If you if you deeply believe in the worth of all persons it's a very easy step to say, I am going to, I am going to be supportive of the Muslim community in my, in my city when they're being attacked by, you know, racists and others. Or if you if you really believe in the pursuit of peace, the pursuit of Shalom, then getting involved in interfaith committee is it's an easy step. So in other words, we have certain principles that are distinctive to us that come out of our tradition, that form our tradition that are easy bridges to use the bridge language can easy bridges to being generous and hospitable towards others. So that's, that's one thing we have there.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 45:45

Right. And I think our our focus on peace and justice can easily drive us in a positive way into those places where the conversation is already Taking place. So a few months ago, we went to a gathering in Kansas City area that was sponsored by the poor people's campaign, and was talking about race and white supremacy and white supremacy. That's right. And so they're in the group were Muslims, Jews, Christians of all sorts and those who would not identify themselves as believers in any faith. And yet, together, we were teaching each other. How about the realities that different groups face in a culture that is becoming increasingly more violent, less tolerant, and and run by subtle, sometimes subtle, and sometimes not subtle undercurrents of, of fear and distrust racism and hate. And so, you know, those are places where people choose to be together for things that will benefit all. And so, you know, those are natural places even if you don't have in your area. You know, an interfaith initiative that's that's taking shape or that is growing or that is it, like Carla's saying is, is trying to expand that, that there are other places where we can meet and uphold and support each other in the best that each of our religions offers and brings in watts for humanity.

Tony Chvala-Smith 48:01

And I would say, you know, our, our belief in practice of continuing revelation. And our understanding of Scripture can be really helpful in these discussions and this kind of dialogue and interfaith activity is for us. The God, the God of Jesus Christ is ever leading us onward ever calling us into new dimensions of the Divine Being and of divine truth. And so we can go into conversations, you know, committed to Jesus Christ but having an open ended vision of what that means, and further are our scripture principles are. Our statement scripture and Community of Christ says, We, as a church, we will not use passages of Scripture to divide, harm, abuse, or denigrate others, that is a misuse of our sacred texts. And that's also In one of our sacred texts and Doctrine and Covenants, 163, seven, that this, that it's not pleasing to God when we use scripture to, to, to say harmful things about other people, other groups, other religions. There's, there's no good that ever comes of that. And so, you know, the good news of Jesus is found in the Scriptures, but not everything in the scriptures would be good news. So we we want to be careful how we interpret a new scripture, especially as we relate to other religions. So we got we've got some pretty cool stuff to work with. Right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 49:35

And, you know, just trying to be really specific there and just chatting with Carla earlier and there's that the one scripture that is often held up as being the scripture that that shows that only Christians are the you know, only those who follow Christ are, are pleasing to God or in relation kinship with God will have salvation and it's the

Tony Chvala-Smith 50:02

It's John 14:6, I'm the way the truth and the life no one comes to the Father, but except through me.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 50:08

Right. And the reality is that there are many ways of understanding that passage. And I think if you use the lens of those six or seven different approaches that Migliore describes, you would come up with six or seven different interpretations. You know, letting that scripture speak, but interpreting it for different ways in different ways. So you know, there are ways of understanding that Christ helps us helps us to be in that relationship with an aspect of God with the aspect of God that Christ calls father, that through Christ, we can have connection to that aspect of God, but that there are many other aspects of God that are others have connection to as well, it doesn't. It doesn't rule out that God is reaching out to people in many other ways. And throughout Christianity, there's this been this acceptance that God is always speaking and that in nature itself, and we've talked about this before that God is revealed, and that, that that is one of the natural ways in which people may come to know of God's presence. And so, you know, even even some people who might say, Well, you know, Jesus is the only way or certain belief about Jesus is the only way they might also acknowledge that God is revealed in nature and in other kinds of ways. So, anyhow, this the idea that there are many ways to interpret, understand passages without making them without weaponizing them as Tony said before.

Tony Chvala-Smith 52:01

So we have Carla, we have some resources. If we plumb the depths of our own history, our own story, we know what it's like to be persecuted. But if we're honest, we also know that Zions Camp coming out to Missouri with, with weapons ready to take back what was ours was actually not one of our better ideas. And so we, I think we could, we could plumb our own history for riches and resources that could point us in the direction of better interfaith relationships inside of inside of the Christian tradition, we have learned over the past 40 or 50 years that the idea of being the one true original church, actually is has not been a very helpful idea, and it's not a sustainable idea. And so we've come to understand ourselves as being one within the Circle, that the circle that the Jesus circle is pretty pretty darn big. We have our own unique place in it, but we are not the circle. And that's really good that that helps the community be properly humble in the face of this great mystery we all stand in. So now we've got some cool stuff to work with

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 53:17

That can help us in our interactions with other faiths Is that likely God is bigger than our comprehension of God. And God is at work in ways that we cannot fathom.

Carla Long 53:35

Well, I I personally love hearing this because it makes it so much easier to relate to the Salt Lake City interfaith in the Utah Valley interfaith you know, I don't I don't have to be feel sorry for them because they don't have all this light and that I you know, although there I will, I'll be honest, there are times when I feel like people think that about me and I will I will tell you it's a bit a bit annoying.

But, but I really appreciate that we were where we stand on this and where we try to stand on this. We're certainly not perfect. We don't do things the best way all the time, but all of the good ecumenical work and interfaith work that we've been doing, you know, being part of the National Council of Churches, so on and so forth, has been really enlightening. I think for a lot of people, myself included,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 54:28

It matters, it makes a difference. And all of these actions contribute to a to a different feeling in the world to a different sense of reality to creating a different reality. And it all matters. For those of you who've been maybe following along in Migliore or trying to figure out whether or not it's worth getting the book at some point. Migliore also in this chapter does a little section on Trinitarian theology of the religions. And it's really fascinating and I think really helpful and does a little piece on salvation in other religions, and what are some different ways of understanding that and then also has a couple of segments on conversations between Christianity and Judaism, and Christians and Muslims and, and a piece on witness to Jesus Christ in a religiously pluralistic world. So he's very aware of the intricacies of this, of this situation, this issue this opportunity in the world, and I think gives a lot of good resources for thinking about it for feeling about it, for preaching about it for living it Yeah.

Carla Long 56:02

Well, I really appreciate this conversation. Thank you so much. It's not an easy conversation in some ways, is it? Because, I mean, you have to be very careful in a lot of ways about what you say, I mean, and make sure you're not coming from just a Christian viewpoint all the time, you know, in this kind of conversation. So, it's not an easy conversation. So, maybe Migliore had more ideas when he said, The banality of Jesus Christ, you know, maybe, maybe he had some pretty good reasons for doing what he did. So we're coming to the end of our podcast, is there other? Is there something else that we needed to talk about that we didn't quite get to?

Tony Chvala-Smith 56:41

Well, I like to just share a little a little story. That might be a good lesson here. And it's not my story or Sherman's it actually is a story from the 13th century. So before any of us were born, Carla so I'm going to take us back

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 56:59

Oh before you were born, even?

Carla Long 57:01

That's what I was gonna say, but I thought it'd be too easy

Tony Chvala-Smith 57:04

Much easier for Charmaine to say that than for you, Carla. So, so I have not quite been born yet in 12019. But there's a story about Francis of Assisi. This is somewhat early in his career. And I just want to say that, you know, Francis, St. Francis is one of my heroes. And you will, you will have to look really hard to find a more Jesus centered person in the history of Christian thought. So, that needs to be kept in mind. So, Francis is young and this this endeavor, this formation of the Franciscan Order, and this, this group of people who are committed to poverty and radical obedience to Jesus is just getting going really. So the Crusades have been going on. In the Middle East, and Francis, and some companions get on a ship and they cross over the the Mediterranean and what's happening in Egypt is known as the fifth crusade right then. And so it's very likely that Francis went, went to Egypt, seeking martyrdom, seeking to, you know, go the whole way with Jesus and and and die trying to represent Jesus to the Muslims in Egypt. So, imagine the places Damietta and imagine this impoverished skinny, young adult ish monk and an attendant crossing the battle lines in and going towards the the Muslim side. And Francis and his companions are taken, taken captive and they're taken to the taken for the Sultan of Egypt. Malik Al-Kamil and Francis wants to try and convert him and the, the Sultan listens, listens for a while. And, of course that doesn't doesn't convince the Sultan. But apparently the Sultan was so impressed by this simple, impoverished man talking about Jesus, that they didn't harm him. And they let him let him go. And he went back to Italy. And one of the results of this encounter was that the the Muslims allowed the Franciscans to be in charge of Christian shrines in the Middle East, some of the Middle East and Francis never again wants to mission eyes, Muslims. So it's a story it did happen. There's apocryphal elements of it, but but the conclusions that I just mentioned, seemed to be historically viable conclusions from that. So Francis went trying to either die or convert a Muslim, he came away with deep respect, and had created respect in

the other. And the result was a new kind of understanding. And Francis Francis certainly did not abandon Jesus, He followed Jesus even more closely. But there's something there's something about really trying to follow Jesus, that that can make it impossible for us to want to do harm to those and other religions. And we'll even teach us to love and respect them, and to treat them as human beings of full work who bear the image of God. Who if we want to use the Christian language, have Christ in them. So I think it's a it's a cool story. It's a story that that teaches us some things about what interfaith relations could be like today. What, what if, instead of trying to convert each other, we just want to honor each other's humanity and each other's journeys and we come away with We both come away more deeply transformed by the encounter. That could that could create a different kind of world.

Carla Long 1:01:10

So Tony, I don't know if this is during that time period or not, but you remind me when we were in Jerusalem, and we were in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, you know, like the Egyptian cops on the roof, and the Armenians own The, the basement and the Catholics own, like another part of it. And you were right. Like, there's a what they told us that a Muslim family passes down the key of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre down through generations, and it's a Muslim family that holds on to the key because they don't have a dog in the fight. And I don't know if that happened when you were talking about it at that same time period, but I was always struck by that idea that like we have these different kind of Christian groups that cannot get along. There's there's been like, a murder in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre over cleaning right? And stuff like so those those groups can't get along, but we have a Muslim holding on to the key to the whole building. So I mean, it's just, it's such an interesting way to look at it. It's just crazy.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:02:11

Well, Christians and Muslims have have not not always been at each other's throats. If you go back even further to St. John of Damascus is seventh, eighth, seventh or the eighth century, one of the last of the great patristic theologians, John of Damascus and his father before him, worked worked for the Sultan of Damascus. In other words, there was a time when Christians and Muslims worked for each other in and gave each other space. And so it's, it's possible but the most important thing today is not only that it's possible, it's ethically essential. It's absolutely ethically imperative that we learn how to honor and love the other and make space for the other.

Carla Long 1:03:10

Well, thank you so much for that. I think that's those are beautiful closing thoughts. And just a beautiful wrap up to what we're trying to say in this podcast is to use community, Christ language. There's worth in every person there's worth in every religion, and it is up to each of us, all of us to see that worth and to recognize and appreciate it, I think. So, anyway, thank you so much for being on the podcast again. You too have been wonderful, as usual. I really appreciate it. And so our next podcast in

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:03:44

Which the last one in this series of God shots, it's, we we've come to the end of the line correlates its last things.

Carla Long 1:03:53

Do you think people are crying or celebrate?

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:03:56

I don't know. But it's Migliore's chapter on on Hope, Christian hope and gosh, he's he's great on this topic and we want to talk about eschatology last things.

And are you afraid Carla you're going to be left behind?

Carla Long 1:04:20

Well, I..

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:04:25

Caught you off guard there.

Carla Long 1:04:28

Little bit. I keep getting I keep getting Christian hope confused with Star Wars and the final. I can't not get that confused I got Christian Hope.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:04:38

Carla, let's just say that Migliore and, and we and a lot of other theological thinkers have been working hard to reframe some of this away from the usual default settings of the the end is near. We're all going to die, that kind of stuff. It's Christian hope is quite different from what people typically think it is about.

Carla Long 1:05:02

Oh, well, that was a really nice job. All right. Well, thank you so much. Thank you, Carla.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:05:10

Thanks, Carla.

Josh Mangelson 1:05:12

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