

350 | Percolating on Faith | Marietta Walker and Fred M Smith
Project Zion Podcast

Josh Mangelson 00:17

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

Carla Long 00:34

Hello, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Carla Long and today you're listening to percolating on faith. And of course, our wonderful and amazing guests are Charmaine and Tony Chvala-Smith. Hello.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 00:46

Hi, Carla. Good to be with you.

Carla Long 00:48

Wonderful to have you. Thank you so much for coming back. Okay, just feel so happy that you just show up. Thank you so much for coming.

Tony Chvala-Smith 00:57

You know, it's easy to come back in the virtual world because back is here and there.

Carla Long 01:03

And super close to your kitchen. What could be better? Really close? Exactly. Today, you're gonna be listening to a subset of percolating on faith and we're talking about Community of Christ theologians. And there are tons of Community of Christ theologians if you didn't know that. In fact, I am a Community of Christ theologian. Crazy. We're all Community of Christ theologians. Now I don't know someone's ever gonna do a podcast about me. Well, they might. Who knows, someday, who knows what the subject will actually be. But today we're gonna talk about two amazing community of Christ theologians: Marietta Walker and FM Smith. Now, I'm going to tell you everything I know about them so far. One, Marietta Walker, donated land for Graceland University; FM Smith was the son of Joseph Smith III. And the library at Graceland is named after him because he was the first Graceland grad. And

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 02:02

We've been to that library more than most students have.

Carla Long 02:05

I love that library, I had my own little place. It was so perfect and beautiful. And I just loved being there. And, and that's a little embarrassing to admit about my college years, but we're just going to move on from there.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 02:21

We want you to be an example for more students actually. Yes we do.

Carla Long 02:26

I did have some fun in college I promise. Anyway. So. So there's a few things that I know. And I'm assuming that there's a lot more to know about Marietta Walker, and FM Smith, and I can't wait to start this discussion. So where are we starting? Who should we start with?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 02:41

I think we're going to start with Marietta Walker for a number of reasons. One is that probably a lot of people would not necessarily put her into the theologian category. And maybe in her own time, she wouldn't have either, though, I think, I think given an option she would. But we're also doing it chronologically. And so Marietta Walker was born in 1834. And actually, she was born while her family was enroute from New York State to Far West. So they, they were already very involved in this new movement that was happening. So she was, she was born on the way to far west, and she was five years old, when they were driven out of Far West. And they made the trip then to Nauvoo. So, she would, some writers on her talk about her being a playmate to Joseph the Third. So they would have been roughly in that same time period as children growing up. So that's, you know, that's a very interesting part. And I'll come back to maybe some of that time in Nauvoo, because it was a traumatic time for her and her family, not just because of the death of Joseph Jr. and other leaders of the church. In fact, that's one of her memories as a 10 year old. Her father picking her up so she could see the slain as the bodies were brought back to Nauvoo. So yeah, so there, there's all of these things happening in her family as Brigham Young is taking over her family, leaves, leaves. They leave the church, they go to Pennsylvania, there her father dies, and she and her mom and a brother, go to St. Louis area, where they go to stay with one of her older sisters who lived there and who's married so they, I mean, this you're really getting a sense of the poverty of the time, how, you know, when there was a death, especially if it was the person, the breadwinner, or the property owner, the family went to another place where their family, a part of their family was stable, where they could live with them and, and subsist at least if if not thrive. But while she was there in St. Louis, she goes to an a girls school, and she excels. And the the woman there kind of takes her under her wing. And she excels as a student. And she soon becomes an assistant teacher as a pretty young person. And she says, she said of that time, and this is from some writing of her daughter, that this was the first time in her life where she was not identified. The first thing she was identified with was a Mormon. So this was her chance, she was finally being able to separate herself from that part of her family's story. And then you get a bit of a sense of why she, why that was so important, because I'm going to go back to their time in Nauvoo. The two of her, her brothers were tried for murder and hanged in Nauvoo, and writers more than suggest that it was, they were framed. And then another brother was was shot, was killed in Nauvoo, just across from the temple or just across from Brigham Young's house. And so, you know, you can imagine that this was, there was shame involved with all of that. In her daughter's writings, she talks about how in one of the books that Marietta Walker wrote, she, she was partly autobiographical, but she didn't want to put in too many of the details of her family's story like her brothers because she didn't want to be associated with that. She didn't want people to know that she was part of the Hodges family where these, you know, that these things had happened to so.

Tony Chvala-Smith 07:32

And if I could add something there this is, that's a Victorian culture, honor, shame, right. And the woman especially has to be careful not to do anything or say anything, or publish anything that would bring shame to her or the family. So it's,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 07:46

even later in her life. She's careful about that. But, but she's, here she is. She's a young woman, and is going to school and is thriving, and becomes an assistant teacher. And then she goes on to Oxford College for Women in Ohio, and graduates from there in 1859. And just shortly after that, she's, I mean like, barely graduated, her sister in Texas dies, she goes down there to help take care of her sister's daughters. And while she's there, the San Antonio Female College needs a principal, a president. And so she takes over that position for a while and she's, she's what, she's 25

Carla Long 08:40

Yeah, she's super young.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 08:41

Uh-huh. And so she takes on this role. And, you know, some of the, the writers, historians say, with the proviso that she would, she could do this until someone more suitable came along. But she was able to step into that role, and and do that. She married at that point. Her husband died. She had a daughter. And so and then she moves back to, well, so her husband dies in '62. In '64, she's trying to go back north. This is in the middle of the Civil War. And so she goes, gets back to New York City, via Mexico and Havana because she couldn't go overland in the midst of all the fighting and (the scenic route, Carla) and ends up actually, when she ends up in New York, it's just after Lincoln's assassination. So she's, you know, she's seeing the queues of people who are lining up to go by his, his, his coffin. So, it's, you know, this is a really, you start to think about this time period, and all of the upheaval and, and she's returning back to be with her family in Sandwich, Illinois. When she gets there she is, she's outraged because her family are starting to associate with the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Don't you remember what happened last time we did this? And so she's pretty resistant. She's pretty upset, first of all, and it's her brother-in-law, who is, who's kind of advocating for for the family joining the church. And, and, and she does, but it's a with a provisionally. There's a little proviso that that she has. And so she's she agrees to be baptized. But this is what she says, I think it's, it's kind of hilarious, but it gives you a sense of who she is. She said, I will accept your proposition, I will be baptized. And if I receive a testimony of the truthfulness of this work, I will do all in my power to further the interests of the church. But if, on the contrary, I do not receive it, I will work just as hard in opposition to it.

Carla Long 11:30

She is awesome.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 11:35

And for her, this isn't just about blindly taking on belief, obviously. I mean, she's saying, I'm going to look at this really closely. And she does. I mean, she's pretty soon thereafter, she's involved in, because of her education, her editing skills, her writing, she's part of a committee that's doing the manuscript of the Inspired Version.

Tony Chvala-Smith 12:04

So as they call it, the New Translation, yeah, Joseph's

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 12:07

New Translation. So she's very, very involved very quickly. So it's in '65, or '66, that she's baptized, and she's already in '66, then working on the manuscript. And then, and then she made the connections really quickly between belief and action. And I think that's a really important thing to know about, kind of the RLDS/Community of Christ movement is that there's always this connecting it to how do you live it out? And so it's in the 1868, so just after two years after being on that committee for the Inspired Version, she is at conference, at the general conference with a group of woman, women protesting that women don't have voice or vote in the conferences. Yeah. And, and it's not well received. Let's put it that way. Joseph the Third was not, did not find this humorous. And they were trying to be, you know, kind of a bit light hearted about it. And, and just drawing attention to this issue that, you know, women are the ones who are supporting the church, women are at least, probably more than half of the membership of the church, and yet, they have no vote. This is 1868 (1868! I was just going to say that), women don't get the vote in national elections in this country until 1920. So, yes, but Joseph was not amused and he kind of embarrassed them publicly. And she wrote this scathing and sarcastic satire. Yeah, she uses kind of, like Biblical language to talk about King Joseph, and how he, you know, did not look kindly on the requests of, of the of the maidens or something, but it was just, she was, and she said that, but the really interesting thing is that, and so they left, they left and, and, and Joseph, recognizing his error, said, Oh, you come back and she said, No, no, that's fine. But later in that conference, there was legislation put forward to have the vote extended to women in the church. And it was done so with a bit of a proviso that, that women couldn't initiate legislation, but they could be representative of the different jurisdictions. So, so even though you know, it didn't go as smoothly as she might have liked it did have an impact. And and for me that's an that is a theological expression is to, to, to look at where is the justice and injustice? Where is room being made to hear God in some new ways?

Tony Chvala-Smith 15:18

And and neither she nor Joseph the Third let it affect their relationship because Joseph the Third to him she was like a theological confidant. He (yeah) they constantly talk theology together. And so he saw, he saw her as every bit his equal in terms of that kind of dialogue and discussion. So I think that speaks well of both of them in terms of being able to retain or maintain a good relationship in spite, in spite of what happened in 1868.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 15:46

Right. Yeah, Joseph said Joseph the Third said that he valued his chats with her regarding gospel work and intellectual affairs. And then President Fred M. Smith, which, you know, was his, his son held her in high esteem, but there's kind of some fun things going on there because he, he grew up in Lamoni and when she later in her life is in Lamoni, she starts what they called a religio society, which was a debating group. And, and he was one of the young adults who came and he was, I think, a little full of himself perhaps, and, and sometimes, you know, not well behaved. And so, so they, I think they kind of bumped heads a little bit, but there was, I think, real honest respect there as well. But she had opinions.

And she held him to the same rules as everybody else. So, so it's kind of interesting to see these kinds of ongoing relationships with some other figures in the church that everybody would recognize. But you know, here she's, she's, there shaping Fred M before he becomes the president of the church by quite a few years So

Tony Chvala-Smith 17:06

Mark, Mark shear tells us funny story in his in Volume Two of his history, about Marietta Walker inviting a bunch of youth to her house in Lamoni and Fred M is, like, just over, over 14 basic teenager. It's kind of tall, gangly, athletic, and sort of, I think sort of outgoing, but he, she invites all these kids into her house, and he's trying to step out of the way and he goes to sit in a small dainty chair, and the chair collapses under his weight. And he just begins to laugh. And the, I don't know how Mariana felt about it, Mark doesn't say, but the woman who would become Fred M's wife was among the teenagers there, Ruth Lyman Cobb, and so she apparently found him quite charming,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 17:52

in spite of (in spite of that), his lack of grace. But anyhow, so, so she, you know, she's very involved in in Lamoni. She marries Fry, Samuel Fry, who's, turns out, he's also a rancher, he's a philosopher, he's a student, he's, you know, he's all of these kinds of things. But he's also a rancher, and has a ranch in Nevada. And so, she, they get married, they, she becomes a ranch wife, and they have two daughters, and she just throws herself into all of that. And so she and she, the kind of the academic pursuits, she kind of lets go of during that time. It's like these different seasons in her life, and she fully embraces each one. But they were both both she and her husband were involved in church work, even there, and then they move back to Lamoni and, and her husband has a large herd of cattle there, they have land, which eventually she, she donates part of to for Graceland College. And she, she just is an entrepreneur, as well, because, you know, they have this large herd of cattle, and her husband takes care of the cattle but she is making butter. So she's, this is really high grade butter too. And she's sending it over. Is she sending it to Denver? I mean, yeah, yeah, she has a contract with somebody in Denver that she's making butter for and so, but all through her life, you know, she's, she's growing things or she's creating things or she's making things to help survive and you know, there's no shame in that. This is like all part of what you do and, but she's also, you know, intellectual person and while she was there, once they return back to Iowa, she pretty quickly becomes the superintendent of the Sunday school and she starts a magazine free for youth and another one for children and these eventually get taken over and get incorporated into resources by the church. She has the develops the United Daughters of Zion, which is the first church-wide women's group, cross the church, so, so even though she's in all these roles, she doesn't have an official title. But she's doing things that are that, that are needed, and that are theologically important to the church. She's, she believes in training children in the faith early and to maintain that throughout their lives. And so that's why the youth magazine in the, in the midst of this, too, and I'm trying to remember what year it is now, oh, it's in 1888. And she, so there's what were called compendiums and it was like, listings of scriptures that prove certain points. So, you know, the beliefs of the church are such and such, and rebaptism, here's all the scriptural passages that prove that that's required. And so there were a lot of them, lots of people created these; missionaries, and others who did a lot of preaching. And she and Henry Stevens created a compendium. Her name comes first. And so that would indicate, well, quite a number of things, I would say that she was probably the originator of most of it, and probably did a lot of the editorial work as well.

Tony Chvala-Smith 21:53

So and that thing was in print, in print continuously until the 1950s. And then it was kind of re-edited. When I became a member of the church in the 1970s, you could still buy a copy of a later edition of that. So, so you have a doctrinal textbook that had, you know, about 100-year, not quite, but about 100-year life. So that's pretty big for a test.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 22:18

So, you know, it's, it's, in all of these, when she saw something that needed to be done, or she saw something that needed to be taught or wanted to help teach things in a more methodical way than she did. During that time that she, after, when she was at the girl school, and then went on to, to do her education and in Texas, and all of that before she came back and, and was re-baptized into the church, she was a Methodist. The school that she taught at was or that she went to was a Methodist school. And so she ident, so she had a rich resource of theological understanding that she was drawing from, and you can see, you know, that she wasn't just regurgitating the things that she had learned in the church, but that she was drawing on a much wider understanding of Christianity. And so it's it's that kind of theology that, to some extent, we all do. But she really put it to work. And she helped other people to have ways of passing it on.

Tony Chvala-Smith 23:29

I think you could say that her her theological impact on the church was both short term and long term. And in her time, she's this highly articulate, gifted writer,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 23:39

and pretty, and very well educated for women in that time.

Tony Chvala-Smith 23:42

And so she's, she's able to help the church articulate aspects of its faith, then, within the framework of that time, but then the fact that she is so committed to education that she gives 20 acres of land, to the what, what becomes the larger parcel of land Graceland University is now situated on, that's kind of the long term impact. And so, here all these years later, Charmaine, and I work for Community of Christ Seminary, originally, when the church first started talking about having the school they wanted to call the School of the Prophets, they they wanted it to be a school for training, a real ministry. Yeah. And that's it's a Graceland developed out of that in 1889 to the 1895. And so she was very instrumental in that and so

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 24:24

Well and this is another piece. I don't know if you know that, that she'd been wanting to do this for a long time. But she knew that people would not listen to her. So she had, she figured out who she needed to influence to talk about because there was, she had suggested the idea many years earlier, and the General Conference had agreed that it would be good to have a college to train leaders in the church, but nothing happened. And so, and so then she's starting to figure out well, okay, so if they have land and they have, you know, so people who are going to help raise some money. And yeah, so she really helped to make it happen even though again, she didn't have the official power, she did

understand people and the institution and didn't let the, the, the narrowness of the day really keep her from sharing what she had to share.

Tony Chvala-Smith 25:29

She's very much a late 19th century Reorganized Latter Day in terms of her theology, but, you know, based on what Charmaine just said, she had a broader vision than, than that, too. She wrote a book on, called the life and death of Joan of Arc. I mean, here's a, here's an educated, thoughtful, RLDS lady in the late 1800s, early 1900s, writing a book on a Catholic saint from the Middle Ages. I've got a quote from this book. This is, this is Marietta Walker. She says this, how, how soul limiting is the view which sees God's hand only in the narrow horizon of our own homes, our own destiny, our own church. It is a view of the Providence the fatherhood of God, which no true Christian can or ought to entertain end quote. In other words, God is much bigger than the Reorganized Church. That's a pretty bold thing to say, in the early 1900s, as this very revered figure within the Reorganization. She's got a vision of something even bigger. I think that's pretty cool.

Carla Long 26:36

Especially when we were banking on the one true church idea. I mean, we were banking on that. That was our thing. That's a lot of churches things, of course. But I mean, that she, I mean, I have a few things to say. One, it seems like she was the originator of the thought, if you want something done, you got to do it yourself. Like she just got stuff done. She's like, we need this. I'll get it done. We need this. I'll get it done. She sounds awesome. Moving on to my second thought. I think I would have liked her. But I also think I would have been a little bit scared of her.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 27:07

Probably Tony and I were talking about that earlier. It's like, I wonder how easy it would be to be on a committee with her.

Carla Long 27:13

Yeah. I mean, she seems a little bit like, if you do not have your ducks in a row, she's gonna let you know about it, and she's gonna let you know about it in front of everyone.

Tony Chvala-Smith 27:25

We decided that Marietta surely always had well informed opinions, and also was quite willing to criticize your uninformed opinions.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 27:34

But we don't know that for sure.

Tony Chvala-Smith 27:36

We don't know that. But she was, she was absolutely revered and she, she died during the 1930 General Conference.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 27:45

Right. But, but what's even cooler, so her birthday was April the 10th. And this was a General Conference in 1930 that was, that was meeting from like the 8th to the 15th or something like that. And so on the 10th was her 96th birthday. She was living with her daughter in California at the time. She'd only, she'd only just moved out there the previous year. Up to that point, she'd been, you know, cooking her own meals and taking care of her own rooms. So, so she's out in California, it's her 96th birthday and the conference sends her a birthday greeting on the 10th, her birthday. And there in California, there's a group of like 50 or 60 youth that come to serenade her and wish her a happy birthday on her birthday. So she receives these greetings, and then she dies two days later. And when it's announced at the, at the conference, the place goes still. And everybody stands.

Tony Chvala-Smith 28:59

Yeah. All 7,000 people, Mark Scherer notes, all 7,000 people all stood without any prompting stood. So that's, that's a kind of intimation of the kind of impact she had on the life of the church. Yeah,

Carla Long 29:14

That is, that brings me to tears. I mean, the very fact that she reached that many people. And she's 96, she was 96. That woman. I mean, God's hand was certainly upon her for sure. That's, that's really awesome. I love that story about her. And

Tony Chvala-Smith 29:35

It must have been that good butter that she made.

Carla Long 29:37

I know. I mean, theological impact. Awesome, really great. But how good was the butter? All three of us are butter lovers.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 29:51

And the you know, this is by the time of her death, she's influenced at least two and maybe three generations of youth and children through the programs and the magazines and the books that she had created. The, there's a cohesive women's group, there's a woman's column in the Saints' Herald. There's organizations with, with, you know, real structured leadership in congregations. And so much of it was due to her saying this is, this is what's needed. Let's do it. And, and just very clearly understanding the need. And as an, as a good teacher helping people incorporate it.

Carla Long 30:44

Well, you haven't mentioned this either, but you know, like Fred M., and his brother, Israel A., right, and his brother W. Wallace, they were probably all in her circle, in her globe at some point. And they were the Presidents up until, like, 1978, or something in the church. So like, who knows how far her, yeah, who knows how far it went? I mean, yeah, it's pretty amazing. Yeah.

Tony Chvala-Smith 31:11

Yeah. It's interesting. He or she didn't have a very high opinion of Fred, Fred M.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 31:17

Well, in some ways. Go ahead. You got to finish it. Now.

Tony Chvala-Smith 31:23

I mean, Fred, Fred M., I think deeply respects her. She found Fred M.'s, I think, style and manner, I'm guessing she found them overbearing, and maybe less than spiritual. And in her mind, because she, she says, she says somewhere, I think might be Mark, I'm quoting this from Mark Scherer, but she says that she, she always imagined the church would be the church triumphant, but not with Fred M. at its leadership, or as its leader.

Carla Long 31:53

This is why I would be a little scared of her. I would think that she would like see everyone very, very clearly.

Tony Chvala-Smith 31:59

I'm sorry. Did I jump ahead there?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 32:00

No, no, that was fine. I just wanted you to finish that thought. Because, yeah, one of the things he, he's so, during that, that General Conference in 1930. At the very end of the conference, there's a memorial service for her here in Independence. Her body was returned to Lamoni and there's a service going on in Lamoni at the same time as there's a service going on here. And Fred M. spoke at the one here in Independence. And he said, No, no person has done more for the development of the work of the Reorganization than, than has Marietta Walker. (What an honor.) Yeah, yeah. So, but very much, you know, this is a working theology that, that she is representing. Not one you just hold in your head, though. It better, better have some substance and some, and and make sense. And I would say that with her, that it's consistent with the bigger Christian message, the bigger world of Christianity. And, but also, then let's, let's make this happen, let's, let's make Zion something we can see and do. And, you know, she gave this land to Graceland, but then right on the edge of the land, she also had a small chicken farm that she sustained herself through for a number of years. And so it's like, yeah, she wasn't afraid of the hard work. And, and it wasn't either intellectual or, or the doing. It all fit together.

Tony Chvala-Smith 33:41

Yeah. There's elements of her that remind me of one of my grandmothers who, who was born in 1897, who went to Central Normal School, which is now Central Michigan University to become a teacher. And, but who, who, who, though, she gave up the life of a teacher to marry a farmer, my grandpa Walrath, she was always sophisticated, well spoken, well read, articulate. And in some respects, I, I think there's a, I see similarities there. So. So, it's interesting segue, and I think one of the reasons we pair these two figures is because, well, because one of these figures broke Marietta's nice little chair, that's a good reason, but, but also because they represent a kind of a shift in the theology of the church. And if I can use, Paul Edwards years ago, wrote a one volume little history of the church called, I think it's called Our Legacy of Faith, and he, in describing the difference between Joseph the Third and Fred M. he described Joseph the Third as an old world man and Joseph, uh, and Fred M. is a new world man. In other words, Joseph the Third and Marietta, these, these people grew up in the era of horses and buggies and most people they knew as farmers. There, there are not huge factories and

assembly lines in their lives. It's a different world. Right? It's in some respects it's a kind of a pre-modern world. Fred M., on the other hand, as encouraged by his father grew up highly educated. He, he's, he comes of age in the world when there's such a thing as Ford Motor Company, and, and in the world that sadly produces World War One and World War Two, but mass mechanization, people moving from the country to the cities to find work in factories, whole social transformation of the countryside going on. He's, he's highly educated. He, yeah, he was that he was that first graduate of Graceland. Got his Bachelor of Science degree there. Went, then a master's degree. And his view, he, he, in the back of his head, he always knew he was going to become the next leader of the church, though Joseph the Third gave him lots of freedom to not do that if he didn't want to. But he always knew he wanted, he was going to need as much education as he could get. And this is a, this is a really important theme for Fred M., that you everybody's given gifts and your responsibilities to develop them as fully as you possibly can. And for him, that meant education. And he did a PhD at Clark University. He did the work of a PhD in about a year's time. And here's why. His father, Joseph the Third is in the last stages of life. He, Fred M. has said yes to becoming the church's next Prophet, President, he's going to be ordained at the 1915 conference. His, his father passes, in the meantime, he and his family have moved out to Massachusetts, so he can work on this degree kind of post haste. And in the meantime, his father goes sicker and sicker and, and finally, finally passes away. Fred M., and his wife becomes sick, right at the time, they should be getting on a train to come to independence with their daughters for the ordination. And they can't make it. And so but all this is, I mean, this is all in this compressed period. And he finishes this PhD with, with the famous psychologist G. Stanley Hall, right around 1915 or so. And to, to the historians will tell you to get to get a doctoral, to get the chance to do a doctorate with G. Stanley Hall, at Clark University in 1914, 15, 16--this was an absolute plum position this, Hall would have seen Fred M. as a prize student to have got, got him in. And so in the midst of the, the trauma of losing your dad, of you and your family struggling with illness, of you're supposed to be a General Conference to be ordained, but you can't be because you're too sick, the doctor won't let you travel. That's what's going on. But his, his, and then he's got church people are saying, why does, why do you need so much education? And his argument is constantly, God gives us gifts, it's our duty to develop them the best we can. And he figured he knew what, what it was going to take to lead the church into the 20th century. And that what he had, was, needed to be developed as much as it could. So. So that's, that's part of his, his story. He takes over leadership of the church in 1915 as, as Dr. Frederick M. Smith. So,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 38:41

But I think that part of that questioning about why do you need so much education probably came after the fact too, because I think there was a little bit of a bias among some people that, oh, educated people are the ones who are going to cause problems, because Fred M. does shake up the church. He does challenge the way things have been. He does cast a bigger vision of what it means to be the church in the 1920s and 30s and 40s. And people were not ready for that. They'd had a nice, a nice cocoon of being the one true church, as you mentioned earlier, of having that security that you are right with God because you are in the right church, and that nothing else is really matters. We have the truth. Why do we need to learn anything new? We already have the whole package. And so when FredM. does disturb things, and challenge people to to look at their world in a different way to get involved in politics, to get involved in things like labor unions, and standing for the poor? Whoa, you know, that's,

that's beyond the pale. And so I think it was kind of partly blaming his education for why he was disrupting life, their, their religious life so much.

Tony Chvala-Smith 40:14

Yeah, I mean, his, he's this very pragmatic thinker. Highly principled. But his, his sense is that what good is, what good is a church with all these wonderful ideas if we don't do something to transform society. And that is, that idea that the church is supposed to exist to transform society is a very new idea in American Christianity, that he didn't think of, this, this is something he inherited from a larger movement going on called the social gospel movement. And, you know, I want to say something about that. And then in a minute, I want to look at a 1924 sermon that Fred M. Smith gave over the radio,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 40:55

that he was, that this was breaking edge. You know, this is the new (Yeah) the new way of communicating. And he was right in on it.

Carla Long 41:05

I bet he gave a great podcast too.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 41:08

Oh, oh wouldn't that be great? Oh, man.

Tony Chvala-Smith 41:12

We have heard clippings of his voice before and it's, it's very professorial. Yes, it's very professorial. (It's horrible and,) You would be terrified, Carla.

Carla Long 41:24

I would probably have to run immediately to the bathroom.

Tony Chvala-Smith 41:28

So you know what, to talk about Fred M., I mean, I think the historians will typically want to talk about Fred M.'s transformation of the church. And that thing he's known for supreme directional control where he takes this, he takes this church which, which is essentially a collection of fiefdoms, right? Of 12 apostles, of bishopric, and a presidency and like, what is that that's 12, and that's like 14 separate churches. And he's, he's inheriting the leadership of this. And he said, he's basically saying, I can't lead this anywhere. This, this is not leadable. You need to let me actually lead the church and of course, the church, church, the church's memory was terrified of having what they saw as an autocratic leader because though nobody said it out loud, the memory of Joseph Smith Jr. in Nauvoo, was a long shadow over the Reorganization. So nobody wanted to have a church with an autocrat. And he's not saying I want to be an autocrat. He's saying I want to be president.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 42:26

But he's also saying he really lifts up again, the idea of communities making a difference, and the idea of gathering. You know, lots of people have been saying, Oh, that's, you know, with Joseph Smith the Third, Oh, let's have everyone gathered to Lamoni. And then to, you know, Independence. And he's

saying, No, no, no, no, let's, you know, let's take our time. Let's, you know, and, and many people really were appreciative of that, because they didn't want another Nauvoo with one person as the, the connector with God, the connector with people, the all of that. And so now here's Fred M. saying, Yeah, let's do this. Let's, let's have people eventually gathering to Independence. And let's make a difference in, in our communities, making communities that affect everyone for good. So yeah, there's lots of these little, you know, for some people warning flags, oh, you know, here's somebody who thinks different than we do, and where might he take us?

Tony Chvala-Smith 43:35

So I think there's a, an aspect of Fred M.'s theological thought that is not, in my view, it's not lifted up enough. And that's his connection to the social gospel, the Protestant social gospel movement of that period. You actually see phrases from it come out in his writings, and even in the Doctrine and Covenants where in one of his Doctrine and Covenants sections, he uses the phrase, religiously social reforms. That's like, that's like a plum statement right out of the social gospel movement. But, umm, here, I want to, before I, before I introduce us to this I want to say there's an interesting phenomenon you find in Reorganization theology in the 20th century, up to the 1960s. And I call it the oil and water phenomenon. And what, what I mean is that you have a figure like Fred M. later you'll see it in Arthur Oakland, and sometimes in F. Henry Edwards. They, they have, they have this body of Reorganization beliefs and practices and self understandings. This, this body of one true church doctrine that was in the old preaching charts, they've got that, but then they've been reading, studying, imbibing the theology of the generally of the wider Protestant tradition. And they see all kinds of points of contact between that and some of the best stuff in their organization. And so when you're reading their stuff, sometimes what happens is, you have, at least for me, I see old Reorganization preaching chart theology, oil. And I see like all kinds of early and mid 20th century really good mainline Protestant theology, water. They, they did not know how to bring these together. And so what happens in their writings is you see these things side by side. So I'm going to reflect here a few minutes on a sermon of Fred M.'s that's highly social gospel. It's like Walter Rauschenbusch through and through what I'm going to mention Walter here in just a minute. But you can, you can find sermons on either side of this that are like old fashioned RLDS sermons. So he's got, he's got multiple things going on in his head, it doesn't know how to bring them together, yet. It's going to take a while for the church, to learn how to bring those things together into a new, a new thing. And in order to do that, there has to be some critique of the old, which he's not quite ready, and the church is not quite ready to do yet. So that's the oil and water phenomenon. So social gospel theology 1870 to 1920, 30, it's a movement in progressive Protestantism, mostly in the United States, though there, there were precursors in Europe, essentially, to take some of the main themes of the Christian tradition, especially related to love and justice, and start to apply them to modern social problems created by industrialization. And so the, the modern industrial age, the rise of the barons, and the monopolies and the trust's that people like, oh, Rosen, break,

Carla Long 46:33

Rockefeller? (sorry) Rockefeller?

Tony Chvala-Smith 46:34

Right. Yeah. That kind of stuff. That's going on at this time. And most Christians, Catholic and Protestant are still talking about dying and going to heaven. And social issues and problems seem like completely forbidden to talk about. But the social gospel movement arises as essentially Protestant thinkers are saying, Protestant thinkers are beginning to say, the Christian Church and the Christian faith are becoming completely irrelevant in this new modern age. And unless we can bring, unless we can bring Christianity into some kind of new conversation with modern, modern ideas, and with the problems created, created, created by industrialization, the real problems that have individual negative effects on people: poverty, well, poverty, illness, prostitution, so unless

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 47:28

unsafe work conditions,

Tony Chvala-Smith 47:29

absolutely child labor, stuff like that, you, you can't just talk about heaven and praying about it, and waiting until you die. That doesn't solve these problems. And these problems, in the meantime, have, have negative consequences in family and society. You've got to deal with the social problems and the Christianity these people inherited, they felt like it wasn't up to the task. So they began to rethink Christianity. And the, the chief, the chief alchemist in this movement was Walter Rauschenbusch, a Baptist theologian and pastor and Rauschenbusch, his his books, his books, 1907, Christianity and the Social Gospel, Christianity in the Social Crisis. I have an original copy of it here. It's an amazing book. And then at the other end, 1917, A Theology for the Social Gospel and then he dies in 1918. But Rauschenbusch is kind of like the most influential thinker of this movement. And here's the cool thing. I've got this collection here. Norman Ruoff's collection of the writings of President Frederick M. Smith, this is Volume One, theology and, and philosophy. And I have this sermon here, 1924, Fred M. Smith, a sermon titled Christianizing Society. Right? That is the theme of the whole Protestant social gospel movement. How do we Christianize society because you can't, you can't talk about regenerating individual lives apart from their social connections. The idea that you can somehow save people and redeem them, but not redeem the social order they're a part of doesn't make any sense because people are social beings. We're shaped by our societies, right? So. So that's, that's Rauschenbusch. And, and so when you, when I read the sermon of Fred M.'s, what I, what I find in this, it's like, it's like an amazing, amazing summary, in his own words, of this whole book by Walter Rauschenbusch. So I'm going to read you just this a part of this sermon. This is, this is Fred M. Think of it again, it's 1924. It is the duty of the church to develop and promote this social consciousness and agitate such social reform. To discharge this responsibility, the church must be something more than a Sunday entertainment society; something more than a performer of ceremonies. And now in italics. The pulpit must stand for social reform, denounce selfishness in all its forms, free itself from the charge of being subservient to the interests entrenched behind the bulwarks of self serving interests. In other words, the church has to stand for social reform, preach it, and free itself, from its captivity, to the the, the, the corporations and the monied economy that keep it from saying what it really needs to say. It's like this is 1924. So it is not enough for the church in its efforts to promote Christianity, to call on individuals to come to Christ. But the call must be to come with the tools of service in hand, ready to devote time and energy and talents to the common welfare. And so, this sermon, it starts off in a way that reorganites at the time would have liked. It talks about, you know, how society is deteriorating and, and marriage is, marriage

is under attack and, and the birth rate is falling. Ah, themes that Rauschenbusch picks up on in that book. But then he's what he's what he does in the sermon is he makes a switch, and how can we deal with this? We have to deal with it as a social phenomenon. Right, we have to deal with it in terms of the social causes of these things. You, you, you can't, you can't solve this theologically, by telling somebody just come to Jesus and you'll be alright. Right? It's no, the society the whole society needs to be transformed by Christian principles, too. That's social gospel theology. And so it's just amazing to read this and find these, these, these clips in here. Um, the church must foster social reform. And its stalwarts may even have to enter politics to accomplish it. Oh, it must stand for social freedom. And this necessitates a break with present conditions. For the church must stand for wealth becoming pervasive and not the heritage of a privileged class. He, he outlines in the sermon, the problem of wealth disparity. This is 1924. Listen to this. That there is something wrong with our present system in the matter of wealth distribution is evidenced by the fact that less than 5% of the population in our country own more than 95% of the wealth. This means that to a high degree, the surplus is individualized. In other words, there's all this wealth that's been created, it's been created jointly, but only a few people have it. And they individualize it. They've made it their wealth, when in fact, it needed to be the society's wealth. And so that surplus wealth beyond what people's basic and decent needs are, that surplus wealth, should be, in his words, socialized. By socialized, he means it should be available so that everybody has enough, everybody can get the education they need, as individuals, everybody can get what they need, in order to live the most fully human life, which can then help create a society that is a more, in his words, Zionitic society. I mean, this is

Carla Long 53:13

Preach it, Fred, preach it.

Tony Chvala-Smith 53:16

This is, this is 1924. year, we are almost, almost 2021. And we have the same kind of wealth disparity, even worse, in the United States, where one or 1% or less hold, like, like a vast percentage of the wealth, and people are struggling in food lines right now. Fred, the Fred M. saw the same thing in 1924. And he says, the pulpit needs to preach about that that's wrong. And it creates, it creates sin in individuals' lives. People don't create sin on their own. It's created in terms of the social network we're a part of. I think that's, that's, that's pure and good social gospel theology. Self-serving interests, self love-- these are the things that are behind this massive movement of wealth into the hands of a few. And I'm trying to find this other quote here, one, one, see if I can find page 150. Yeah, uh, one, page 150. The Gospel has social content. To find and free that social power is or should be the task of the church, and the objective or goal of the church. The prime, and then he says, the prime law of Christianity is the love of God and the love of neighbor. And in other words, the church is, the church's task is to live out and to practice, to preach the love of neighbor, and also to see that the love of neighbor gets, gets, becomes part of the social and political conversation, so that we don't have wealth being amassed in the hands of a few and peoples' lives being destroyed by powers beyond their individual control. So, I mean, this is this is pretty, this is pretty radical, radical stuff. And it's interesting, you know, I'm reading through parts of Rauschenbusch today--you don't read this book in an afternoon--but, but reading through parts of Rauschenbusch today, he has a whole section on the pulpit and the social question. That is that the, that the church needs to use the pulpit to speak about these social, these social ills and social questions. And he's not talking about, you know, to denounce this person for

that, or this person for that. It's not, that's not what he means. It's the social conditions that have been created by a society that refuses to love neighbor, but allows wealth to be amassed in the hands of a few. Rauschenbusch says the pulpit has got to speak about that. Right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 55:51

And so you can begin to see some of the, some of the theological underpinnings of a peace and justice church in many of these themes. Some of them kind of went over a lot of church members' heads, but a lot of them really sank in deeply and, and helped, helped people in the church see the world in a different way; to see what does it mean? What are Zion conditions? What, what does? What could it look like to live in, in this way that's different from the society around us.

Tony Chvala-Smith 56:28

So the social gospel theologians argued that the church exists to serve the kingdom of God, not for its own self for its own sake. And so I'm sure that Fred M. picked up on that. He picked up on all of Rauschenbusch's Kingdom of God talk. The kingdom of God is the goal of the church, not that the church gets bigger and better, right. And I'm sure that that immediately then connected for Fred M. with Zion, and the Kingdom of God on Earth. The church had some ready-made traditions, going back to the early period, that easily dovetailed into social gospel talk about the Kingdom of God. And you know, Fred M.'s saying, you know, Christianity has to be about more than, than getting Jesus in your heart. There has to be, because lots of lots of big businessmen get Jesus in their hearts, and then they fleece their workers. And that's not what Christianity is about. So,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 57:15

I think, you know, you can see this lived out in that period of the church, where as people are gathering in Independence, there are also these other elements that are, are also being developed, influenced primarily by the church. The hospital being there and available in Independence. The social services. Different kinds of organizations that initiated from the church eventually coalesced with other community, social services league and things like that. But many of these things were integrated into the idea of what does it mean to be a gathered community? And so it's, you know, wasn't just again, talk, but it's like, how does what does this look like? How do we take care of each other? How do, you know, those who don't have many means still thrive, still be full members of the community and of the church.

Tony Chvala-Smith 58:23

So, so one of, I mean, one of Fred M.'s themes in this is the idea that you socialize the surplus. In other words, that the surplus wealth needs to be put to the common good. Right? Now, Rauschenbusch has a very similar idea. And Rauschenbusch gives all kinds of examples of how that happens. For example, Rauschenbusch says nobody tries to put out, put out a fire on their own house alone. We have a fire department that is provided for by the common good through taxation. And so Fred M. talks about, you know, socializing the surplus and the church needs to stand for that. He also recognizes that you can't, you're not going to, the only way, the only way that's going to, going to happen in some people is through a, an inner transformation. So he, he holds together both the, the, the social message and the inner transformation that's needed to live it out. And, and he says that the church is the specialist in this, right? That, that this is what the church does, and this is what society most needs. Society most

needs a group of people committed, whose religious commitments are to the social common good, but who can demonstrate in their own transformed lives at that common good is, is worth, worth joining, joining in for. It's a really profound vision of what church life is about, and my goodness, highly, highly relevant in our own time, 100 years later. But if you want to understand where some of the church's justice talk today comes from, it's not recent stuff. Right? We, we have a tradition of social justice talk in the church that Fred, Fred M. was very instrumental in, in helping it enter the church. But it didn't just come from him. It came from Walter Rauschenbusch. It came from the Protestant social gospel movement. And it's something we have resonated with as a church ever since. We have to, we have to struggle with, in the default setting Christianity in American culture is, is highly individual and pietistic. It's about it's about me and my relationship with God and nothing else. We have to fight against that. It's not that that's bad. It's just that it has no ultimate goal except me. And so it's highly self centered. That the social side of that is, is what the social gospel movement was trying to emphasize. And Fred M. sees them both together and really holds it up. So, he's a, he's a really fascinating theological thinker and this aspect of his thought, gets, gets, I think, overlooked a lot. He's not a perfect person. No, Fred M.'s, Fred M.'s racial attitudes fit, the Mid South of the time, that he would not be a paragon there for us.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:01:05

And even holding these views, he's also more of a nationalist, than, than we probably most of us would be comfortable with today. But, but he's this, this mix of things. And his sense of vision and purpose of the church, causes him to explore and share these.

Carla Long 1:01:26

And we should always be worried about presentism, about putting our 21st century values on someone who lived a long time ago,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:01:34

Right. With all kinds of circumstances we can't even imagine.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:01:38

But I think it's helpful, though, to realize that when, for example, in our church, when church leaders like the Council of Twelve, or the Presidency, make a public statement on racism, or gun violence or something like that, they're doing exactly what Fred M. wanted the church to do. The pulpit is standing for social reform, as we've got to create a society that's safe for everybody. A society in which all people can flourish. That's the kind of social reform that Fred M. was interested in. And it's still the kind of social reform the church is interested in today. So, he's a, he's certainly a different character for Marietta though, though, I think there's, there's some shared impulses there. And, and just, he just has to live in a different world from what Marietta grew up in. (Exactly.)

Carla Long 1:02:26

It's so interesting, you know, if Marietta's motto was, if you want something done, right, you gotta do it yourself. I feel like Fred M.'s motto is, you know, if your church suddenly disappeared, would anybody notice? Right, something like that. Maybe that's just what I've learned today. I, he's, he seems like such a fascinating man. I might not have liked him very much.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:02:50

Well, if you were for the things he was for, you would have been, you would have been really happy. I mean, he was trying to break the church loose from, from a kind of, my, my language, stupor that they had been in, of, you know, navel gazing, if you want to see but you know, thinking they were the end all and, and he's starting to stretch their view of who they are. And then he and the next step is he brings in other people into leadership roles, who will continue to do that, that will continue to challenge the church to not just be comfortable, but to sense God's call

Carla Long 1:03:34

Sounds like a good President, Prophet to me.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:03:36

One other thing that might be important for us to know. And this is something that historians will have to, have to verify. This, this is something I heard on the conference floor in 1984, when the World Conference was debating Section 156, on the ordination of women. A man who had been a confidant of Fred M. Smith spoke on the conference floor and said, Fred M. Smith told me ordination of women would come one day, and it would come by revelation. And that was a kind of that was one of those clinching moments in the debate over that section of the Doctrine and Covenants in 1984. But if it's true, if the historians could bear that out, then Fred M. was far seeing as well. And he, he saw that some kinds of injustices in the church would be righted, eventually. They're never righted fast enough, but he at least could see that it would be.

Carla Long 1:04:26

Oh, that's pretty amazing. That, that gave me a little, few chills. Thank you, Tony, for bringing that up. That's amazing. Well, you know, I, from learning what I've learned about F. M. Smith, I had, of course, heard about supreme directional control. And he also got the Auditorium built, which is a feat and took a long, long time to get that sucker built. You know, like there was a lot of things to not like about him, basically, is what I'm saying. But this turns it around. And it shows how far reaching what he really promoted in the church, how far reaching it's gone. I talk about those social justice issues all the time, all the time with my congregation. We preach about those social justice issues almost every Sunday from the pulpit in Salt Lake City. And it makes me really proud to know that we come from a long history, over 100 years, of talking about those things and trying to be a church that is making a difference in the lives of people. Our mission initiative to abolish poverty and end needless suffering. I mean, one of the five goals, if you will, of the church is just exactly this. (Yeah.)

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:05:32

Exactly.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:05:34

Yeah. So we're anchored, what we are today is anchored very deeply, way far back 100 years back for sure. And further, of course, but you can definitely see the anchor points in Fred M.'s theological statements.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:05:48

And one of the next people we will talk about, F. Henry Edwards, he, F. M., Frederick Madison Smith is very important in the fact that he had as much influence that, that F. Henry Edwards has as much influence as he did. But then in his own right, he, he takes some of these themes deeper. And he, he broadens not only the theological understandings in the church, but also spiritual formation. And he, he ties those together, even in a, in a tighter way. So.

Carla Long 1:06:31

Well, I'm looking forward to that. F. Henry Edwards is a super deep guy. Like he is, he gets there. And I will, actually I don't know if he ever quite gets there. There's, it's infinitely deep, but he digs down pretty far.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:06:43

Yeah, any and yet he had this way of communicating that everyone could understand, which was really important.

Carla Long 1:06:53

Well, thank you, you two. This has been really wonderful. Is there anything else about Marietta Walker, or F. M. Smith that we should know before we head out?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:07:04

Well, I just think it's kind of interesting with Toni ending up with Frederick, Fred M., talking about women would eventually be ordained, to think about Marietta's influence on him. And, you know, whether or not that might be part of the, part of what influenced him, seeing strong women who were unapologetic about leading.

Carla Long 1:07:34

I wondered that too.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:07:36

And the only other thing I can add is, be kind to the teenagers. The teenager who breaks your little chair might be the president of the church tomorrow.

Carla Long 1:07:46

You never know. You just never know. Well, thank you so much, you two. You're wonderful, and I really appreciate you and I, I've learned so much about both Marietta Walker and F. M. Smith. I really, really appreciate it a lot.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:07:57

But we're glad to do this.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:07:59

Thanks, Carla.

Josh Mangelson 1:08:08

Thanks for listening to Project Zion Podcast, subscribe to our podcast on Apple Podcast, Stitcher, or whatever podcast streaming service you use. And while you're there, give us a five star rating. Project Zion Podcast is sponsored by Latter-day Seeker Ministries of Community of Christ. The views and opinions expressed in this episode are of those speaking, and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Latter-day Seeker Ministries or Community of Christ. The music has been graciously provided by Dave Heinze.