

357 | Percolating on Faith | F. Henry Edwards
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 00:32

Hello and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host Carl Long and of course I am here on Percolating on Faith with some of your favorite guests of all, it is Charmaine and Tony Chvala-Smith. Welcome back, Charmaine and Tony.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 00:48

We are very, very glad to be here. Good to be with you, Carla.

Tony Chvala-Smith 00:51

Very, very glad we can be here and be part of this. Thank you.

Carla Long 00:55

Were the lucky ones were the lucky ones to get to hear from you. So as I mentioned, this is Percolating on Faith, but it's kind of a sub series of that as we're talking about Community of Christ theologians. And today we're going to be talking about F. Henry Edwards, who was an incredibly important theologian and Community of Christ history, and we're gonna learn all about him today. So Tony, Charmaine, where do you want to start with F. Henry Edwards.

Tony Chvala-Smith 01:19

So we thought we would start by just making a general statement about any of these figures we're covering. Because, you know, unless the figure is living, or we or we personally know people who knew the figure, we we have to encounter these figures through their writings. And that's always the case in historical theology. I mean, gosh, we we encounter Luther we encounter Augustine we encounter Tillich, now through their writings. But here's the problem with doing that, we just want to get that out on the table, is that a human being a person is more than what they have written? Right? They are more than a text. As, as the the philosopher Bob Mesle, once said, "To be a person is more than a text" and it's like, yes! I totally agree with that. And so we we experience F Henry Edwards through the things he's written. And we're going to try and reflect together with you, Carla, on some of his theological contributions, his journey, as much as we can know about that. But this, you know, this is a person who deeply touched generations of RLDS/Community of Christ people, and it's really hard for us to convey that part of his person, a person is a mystery, who can't be reduced just to whatever they've written or said. So that's kind of our caveat.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 02:33

And as we were talking about this earlier, Tony came up with what I thought was a really great analogy, is that what we're doing, in a way is we're working on a paint by number on this, in this case of F Henry Edwards. And we're going to just fill in some of the colors, that's all. We don't, we can't give you all of who he was, and all of what he thought and how he made changes in that thought, but we can fill in some of the colors along the way and give you some, you know, maybe a little bit of a silhouette or profile parts of who he was and the kind of impact he had.

Tony Chvala-Smith 03:10

So one of our one of our sources for this beside me, Paul, Paul Edwards, his son wrote a nice book called F. Henry Edwards articulator for the church in a series that was going on in the church and 80s 90s, called Makers of Church Thought, and it's Paul Edwards, one of the sons of F. Henry wrote this book, and Paul was a trained historian and philosopher, so, so he's a, he's a good critical voice. That's going to be a source we rely on. But then also, we use a variety of F. Henry Edwards books, in different courses we teach just to expose people to some of his thoughts. So that's kind of our sources for today.

Carla Long 03:45

Good. That's, oh go ahead, sorry.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 03:48

I was just gonna say as far as his his timeline and details about his life, we'll be using Paul Edwards book on his dad, to give us kind of context, the bigger context picture.

Carla Long 04:01

So I'm pretty sure in 100 years, when someone's looking back over my life, I really, really hope that they knew me and that they don't just look at my text messages and what I wrote, because I don't think that would give me, give a very good picture at all.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 04:14

It might be a humorous picture,

Carla Long 04:20

Yes a humorous picture, or they might draw some conclusions about me that are not very flattering. Who knows?

Tony Chvala-Smith 04:28

Well, being the Augustine and Lutheran kinda guy, um, I would say, Hey, we're justified by grace, not by our text messages. So take comfort in that, Carla.

Carla Long 04:38

I will and I also appreciate that quote. Thank you so much. So I can't wait to jump into here about F Henry Edwards. Biggest, most important first question, what does the F stand for?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 04:51

Ah, Francis.

Carla Long 04:52

Francis! No wonder he goes by F. Henry

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 04:55

Francis Henry Edwards the Second, actually. His father was the first so yes.

Tony Chvala-Smith 05:07

Close friends and family called him Frank. But he didn't like, Paul Edwards says that he didn't actually, he didn't think that was formal enough in his role in the church. So he just simply went by F. Henry. But that circle of people close to him would call him Frank, so.

Carla Long 05:23

Well, well, that's the only question I have for you. So thanks so much for being with us!

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 05:28

See you next time!

Carla Long 05:30

Okay, let's jump into F. Henry Edward. So tell me a little bit about his early life and tell me about who he was?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 05:36

Sure. Sure. So he's born in England, I think in Birmingham, in 1897. And he died in 1991. So what's that, 94 years old? What Tony?

Tony Chvala-Smith 05:53

I was thinking of Carla, the math major, quickly doing the calculation in your head.

Carla Long 05:58

I had it done.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 05:59

Did I did get it right?

Carla Long 06:00

Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 06:02

So his father had been an inactive Mormon, his mother had been a Church of England. And but but they had, they were baptized in April, on April 6 of 1883. And so by the time he came along, about 14 years later, they were, the church really shaped their, their lives in lots of ways. Not only religiously, but also socially, you know, who they saw and how they who they spent time with. He was baptized at about the age of eight. And as he goes through school, he has this great love for British history, and heritage, and he just can't quite give enough of reading and taking in information. And it was in a secondary school, it was I think, it was an Anglican school. So on Fridays, they would have kind of an extended worship time. And for him, this was his first exposure to non Restoration, non Reorganized worship. And he was a place where he really came to value people from other denominations, other religions, and to be part of that bigger religious conversation within Christianity. So that was a benefit for him, that he takes into his life. He's after he graduates, he's apprenticed at a Chartered Accountants office. And so he was going to spend, you know, who's going to learn the skills and become part of that company. But in 1914, on the very day, he turns 17, the war breaks out World War One. And anyone 17 or older, is supposed to report for military service. So on the very day, he turned 17, and this is what we're getting from Paula Edwards book on his dad. He, he refused to report and they came to the, to his house and arrested him and and so then for the, roughly the next three years, until the pretty much too close to the end of the war, he was at Dartmouth prison, Paul says for 36 months. He, he was unwilling to kill people. And he was willing to stand by that conviction, and, and not enter military charity service. In the midst of that, and those that time that he was at Dartmouth prison, he could go home occasionally for visits or short trips. And during one of those trips, he was ordained as a priest. And that was in 1916. There were people in the congregation who were conflicted, because they saw what he was doing was not very patriotic, and but many supported his convictions, even though they wouldn't have done what he did, perhaps, but they supported him. And he, once he was, had served that roughly 36 months, he went back to work at the place where he was going to be apprenticed and some of the clients said "You need to fire him." And because they were, they felt he was a coward by not going to war. And they did and he was fired. He, but he was very involved in the church and was taking leadership roles and service kinds of roles. And in 1919, he served as a secretary for the British Isles mission. And there were still, you know, when he would go to preach in some congregations, there would be some people who would get up and walk out. But over the next few years, his dedication, his acceptance of others, created

respect. Even if people didn't agree with with him, they respected him. So he in in 1920, he was ordained an elder. And he became an appointee that year, so he is 23 at this point.

Tony Chvala-Smith 11:05

23 years old, working full time for the church in England, in what the 1920s? Yeah, right. That's amazing.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 11:12

He was a missionary elder for an area, but he actually ended up serving more like a secretary to the general officers in that area. And a mission secretary and a historian is a statistician for the, for the British Isles mission. And in 1920, Fred M. who we talked about last time, came to the British Isles for an extended period of time. And he needed a secretary, and here was F. Henry, who was already doing those things for the church officers there. And so he spends the time with, with Fred M. as his secretary for a number of months, I believe,

Tony Chvala-Smith 12:04

Yeah, it's like maybe six months or so. And Paul Edwards notes by the way, that his dad had learned shorthand. So that must have been handy for Fred M. to dictate letters to someone who could speak British, British English and take shorthand at the same time.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 12:22

So he, then one of the things that Fred M. wanted to do was for, for, I wonder if he went by Francis or Frank at that point, but anyhow, F. Henry will say, to drop a list of students who should be encouraged to go to Graceland or help to go to Graceland. And if Henry put his name at the top of the list. Fred M kept putting his name to the bottom of the list, saying, "until you find me somebody to replace you, you you're you're essential here. And you're not leaving" basically. In a very kind and good hearted way. So, he does find a replacement for himself, and then goes to Graceland, in 1921. To enter the religious education program. And his first year was wonderful. He thoroughly enjoyed it. You know, he hadn't beyond secondary school, he hadn't had a lot of other education opportunities. At this point, though, he was an avid reader and always curious. And so, you know, it's like, oh, this is great. I can hardly wait for next year, but meantime. And so that was in 2001. In 22, in October at the, what was then called the General Conference, and he was called the the Quorum of 12. Yeah, he's 25 and

Tony Chvala-Smith 14:02

That's, that's gonna that's gonna put the kibosh on your college years fun, I'm telling ya.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 14:07

Exactly.

Carla Long 14:08

That's going to put the kibosh on any fun at all.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 14:13

So he said, thankfully, he, he had access to all the minutes of the 12 when he when he joined the 12. So he could figure out what his job description was.

Carla Long 14:32

This poor man Oh, my gosh! 25!

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 14:37

I know! And, and he's thrown into he's assigned to headquarters, where he has some some areas he's specifically supposed to be helping, but Paul says he's mostly organizing and reorganizing the 12. And so I took a look to see what what's happening historically in context, during that time, and so this is around the supreme directional control controversy with Fred M. When, you know, as I think Dick Howard said, there were 14 churches, 14 churches and as, as Fred M is taking on the presidency, he's having to, to, if if the church is going to move forward, he's having to, to say we've got to move in one direction. You know, apostles can't have their own little fiefdoms where they're, they're the financial officer, and the administrator and the theological voice. Yeah, not. So yeah. So in this, the reason that of Henry is having to organize and reorganize is that in between 1920 and 1922, there's a change in the Council of 12, there are eight new people appointed as apostles in that time period. So there's a huge, huge shift. And an F.M. Smith is saying, this is a new era, we need to be ready to move out into the world. The apostles need to be missionary out, oriented, not administratively oriented. And you're gonna need to leave behind some of your little areas of control and move out into some new areas. So that's, it's a very tense time in the church. And if Henry is connected with Fred m, it becomes even more so. Because in, let's see, 20 1924 he marries Fred and his daughter. {Laughter} Yes, exactly. And then he's, you know, he's variously assigned to different areas in the church, and, but he's also has an amazing ability to write, and to write, in ways that really, are inviting and accessible to church people, wherever they are on the theological spectrum. In fact, he begins to find himself being invited to write things that help to explain the theology of the church at the time. And by 1933, he's written Fundamentals, which is, at the time actually was seen as liberal, quite liberal for the understandings of the church at that point, but it's an apologetic says in apologetics meaning explaining the reason for your faith. It's not apologizing. It's like, Oh, I'm so sorry. I thought that it's more like explaining what is the theology of the church,

Tony Chvala-Smith 18:04

and defending. Defending kind of the core convictions of the Reorganizatio. you know, circa 1930.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 18:10

Right. But with the new with, apparently, a slightly liberal bent, we would, as we read it from our place now, we would say, Oh, my gosh, you know, this is so much like the previous 100 years, but, but we wouldn't be as sensitive to the new nuances. And the fact that he's quoting all kinds of authors outside of the Reorganization outside of the Restoration. And so that book, multiple, multiple printings, and totally revised edition, and still being sold,

Tony Chvala-Smith 18:50

1980's you can still buy a copy of it in the 1980s. So a theological that has like a 50 year, half life, it's pretty, it's pretty big, pretty big deal. Yeah, I mean, he's, he takes that old preaching church theology, and gives it this, he takes he takes what was like black and white sketches, and gives it a kind of full color representation in Fundamentals. It's very articulate, and well spoken and well reasoned, and so he he's, it's not for nothing to Paul Edwards title, his book, F. Henry Edwards Articulator for The Church that really is a great description of F. Henry's theological abilities. One who articulates makes clear, explicates explains, this is who we are, this is what we believe. This is why we believe it. He's very good at that.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 19:47

Really gifted and like I said, so accessible. In 1946 when Fred M. died, his brother Israel A becomes the president and and as Henry is asked to be a counselor to the presidency, So he's now in the presidency, and, and works in that role has a really heavy administrative role during that time. But he's also taking classes wherever he can. So, Lawrence, Kansas, which is about, you know, 45 minutes to an hour away, he would go there for evening classes, and to William Jewell college, which is in Liberty, which is just north of here, he would go there and take classes when he could, you know, one here and there, but all the time also writing and, and lifting some of the heavy administrative roles.

Carla Long 20:43

Hold the phone, he went to,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 20:46

What was that?

Carla Long 20:47

He went to KU? He went to Kansas?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 20:49

University of Kansas!

Carla Long 20:51

He's a Jayhawker.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 20:56

Yes!

Tony Chvala-Smith 20:57

So there's always grace and forgiveness, Carla.

Carla Long 21:01

Thank God.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 21:03

But he, of course, he never graduated with a degree of a bachelor's or anything beyond that. Because he, he was, he didn't have the time, he would have had the interest and would have loved to do it. But other things called him. So for 12 years, then he's counselor to Israel A. And when Israeli is killed in a car accident. W Wallace becomes the next president and keeps him on as one of his counselors, which doesn't always happen. There isn't always that transferring. And during W Wallace, he's chairing the Basic Beliefs committee, and which will have a large voice and restating the theology of the church. Eventually, the book, Exploring the Faith is, is published in

Tony Chvala-Smith 22:05

70. The first edition published in 1970. Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 22:09

So. So lots and lots of things that he was involved in, he was also involved in reading and writing, compiling for four of the volumes of church history, which he worked on after he retired. He retired, he was released from full time appointment in 66. But that was after that, that he started working on, you know, a few volumes of the church history, which his son does, says, you know, it wasn't the academic kind of history that we would talk about today. But but a more relaxed understanding, that has testimony and things like that in it as well. Superannuated, 1978 48 years of appointment. And it was still writing writing articles for the Herald, his wife died in 1974. He moved to West Haven, which is the Senior Living setting, in 82. Continued to write and, you know, we were looking at he has an article in The Herald in 86, and 87. So this would be the ordination of women right after that, when there's a lot of split in the church and controversy, and to think he'd been back there in a Fred M's time with the split. And here he is, at the end of, you know, at the beginning of his ministry in here at the end of his life, also trying to help people deal with change, both theologically and socially with within the church. So a

very, very rich life. He died in 1991. Any plan much of his service, {laughter} which isn't a surprise, really.

Carla Long 24:14

Not shocking at all. That's amazing.

Tony Chvala-Smith 24:17

So when we think about him as a theologian, and we do we, we should think of him as a theologian. He's in many respects, self taught. He did not go through Seminary in graduate education, but he is a very sophisticated theological thinker and read widely when you start going through his books and checking footnotes out and checking quotes out, he quotes from one of his favorites was the the British theologian, Anglican Bishop Gore, who was Bishop of Birmingham, right about the time of Henry was baptized from 1905 to 1911. Gore was there. I'll try to remember a little bit more about gore's influence on F Henry later. But Gosh, he quotes gore he quotes William Temple, he quotes Paul Tillich a lot in some of his books. He quotes the John Bailey, Scottish theologian, he quotes Georgia Harkness, a, I would call her a pioneer feminist theologian and in American theology, quotes Bonhoeffer for quotes Bart. He's like, he's like a sponge for mid 20th century, like great mid 20th century theology. I have heard this anecdotally that he told a group of appointees once that he subscribed to the Journal of Theology Today. And that one of his practices was to make sure he read every every issue of a cover to cover. And I don't know if that's, I've never heard that substantiated. But if it's true, that's a big deal. We've taken Theology Today for decades, I have never read one of those all the way through, so so but that's how he kept up in the theological field. And when you when you read his stuff, you have this sense of breadth, there's this great breadth of knowledge, not only theological knowledge, but historical, cultural knowledge. And ever, he's he's just, Paul says that he was like, it was like, purely English. And so this, this desire to have a breadth of understanding of everything comes comes through in that way. I remember, Paul shared a story once in a public setting about his dad, that I think is quite illustrative of a lot of things. He said that in their home, they were they were going to, they were redoing a room, they were going to repaint a room. And it just so happened that, that Paul asked his dad something about the the kings of England, and is that well, I need to walk you through this. And so he took out a magic marker, and on one of the walls that we're going to paint starts charting out the whole lineage of the Kings of England on the wall. And Paul said, afterwards, the wall was painted. But no matter how many times they painted it, the Kings of England kept bleeding through. And Paul use that as an illustration about how our history kind of history always finds this out. But I think the idea that he would, he would, he could simply chart out, I mean, that's good heavens, hundreds and hundreds of years of English monarchy, just charted out on the wall, it gives you a sense for his academic ability, his his his mental ability, and when you read his stuff, there's this. It's all it's very, it's a very elegant and clear prose that he writes in. So it's, he's a delight to read, actually, even all these years later. But you know, very, very skilled, very

skilled thinker and an example of a theologian is one who, who practices faith seeking understanding faith, asking questions, faith, articulating itself. F. Henry Edwards was really, really good at doing that.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 28:07

Yeah. And that's one of the things that I wanted to kind of keep coming back to is that for him, the whole purpose of theology was to have a more vital relationship with a living God. And so, you know, he talks about knowing about God is not nearly as important as having experience with God. And so that's the purpose to which he puts his writings is to help people keep connecting with a real God, a god that's there with them and for them. And, and with that, he would see, so some of the times when people would write to him and say, Well, what about all these changes that are happening in the churches near the end of his life? And he would, he keeps helping them to see that, that God helps us see more, as we are ready. And so the whole idea of ordination of women, he's, he's not making this just a social issue that people are battling over. But he's saying, you know, we all know women who have more skills and ability to do some of the things that priesthood requires, than many of the men in those roles. And it's so anything, but people weren't able to see that. And, you know, and now that people can see, God is helping the change occur. So it was it was, God was all part of this. And history was huge, huge piece for him. As far as, well partly because his early interests were all about history, but he saw history and scripture as having a lot to teach us about context. You know, how we can understand what was happening if we don't understand them in their setting. And also, that scripture and history teaches us something about the tentativeness of our knowledge and our understanding that there's always room for more. And so, you know, with this in regard to who God is, there wasn't room to get stuck permanently in one place. Because if if you are open to God, God will meet you where you are, but then new things, new experience, new learnings, if you're engaged in the world, are going to make you ask questions and take us places you didn't know you were going to go. And that's the nature of God. That's the nature of the kingdom. Yeah.

Carla Long 30:45

He sounds very gentle and compassionate and intimidating, all at the same time.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 30:52

I don't know what his person, how he was in person. But I gather that he was that he was often invited to do things. So you know, at least later in life. He kind of had this, he he and his and his wife this one a few times, she was able to travel with him for ministry, went to Hawaii a series of times. And, you know, he was very, he was always welcome. And you know, so he had made some positive impact on people. So I don't know if he was imposing because of his knowledge or not.

Tony Chvala-Smith 31:30

We have a one one sermon of his recorded that we use in classes. It was a 1954 World Conference sermon, titled Freedom Under God. And it is very, very well spoken, articulate. It sounds like a university professor giving a lecture in some ways. It's very interesting, though the context of the sermon 1954 World Conference, this is right after the McCarthy era. And so he he is a F. Henry's. So unlike Roy Chevelle, who would would like get in your face and criticize you for believing stupid things. {laughter} F. Henry Edwards has a very sophisticated way of laying out a rational case, that if you're listening to it makes you feel like you've been believing stupid things, but nobody ever said that. You're not shamed into, you're invited into a new way of thinking. So his manner is highly, highly, logical, reasonable and persuasive, but never in your face, kind of. He never, at least from what we can tell, he doesn't talk down to people. But he he has this deep belief in the things that he is saying, and their truth. And so that comes out in the way he he treats everything as if it's an argument that needs to be very carefully and logically laid out.

Carla Long 32:48

And with a British accent, I bet it sounded even better, even better!

Tony Chvala-Smith 33:03

Actually, if you would think so in that 1954 sermon, he's been in the United States by that time for 30 years. It's it's very lovely English, but what I don't typically hear the the British isms in it. Certainly living in Missouri for a long time took that out of him, but he still sounds very polished and sophisticated. When you listen to him very. What's the word I want? There's the sense of, yeah, gravitas and what he what he has to say. Every word counts whether in his writing or in his speaking. I think that's very important. If we think about the sources of his theology, when you when you start reading his books, he quotes scripture, a lot, a lot, a lot. And yet, he's not boobless cystic. He's not fundamentalistic not not. He doesn't ever "The Bible says the Bible says", it's always in the service, his quoting scripture is always in the service of something that he tries to demonstrate by reason as well. And he's, he's very, very deeply shaped by tradition. And here I'll say two traditions he's shaped by the older RLDS theological tradition he inherited that was the we call it the old preaching chart tradition, in some ways that book fundamentals is a very sophisticated explication of the preaching chart theology. But here's the other thing. He's very much shaped by the Anglican traditions he grew up he grew up with in England it's interesting that fundamentals in in chapter one of the early chapters in the book, a chapter titled, God, the Father is Almighty. Where did he get that phrase? Not it's not phrasing we use typically and coming to Christ. Well, he got it from the Apostles Creed, which he would have heard recited in those worship services when he was in secondary school. We believe in God, the Father almighty, the creator of heaven and earth. And so there is he, he shows his indebtedness to tradition constantly, even though he doesn't say, by the way, I'm quoting tradition here. So the Anglican tradition left his stamp on him, that turned out to be good for the

Reorganization. Both he and Arthur Oakman another Brit from the period brought a great deal of classic Christian theology with them that had been that they'd been shaped by the Anglican tradition. That turned out to be really good for us. So yeah, he's rational, thoughtful, tradition and scripture almost kind of blend together in his in his writings. I think I mentioned earlier his, the the Anglicanism of Bishop Gore. So Bishop Gore was an amazing and unfortunately often forgotten today, Anglican Cleric theologian, Bishop, Archbishop. And, you know, Paul Edwards notes in in his book on on F. Henry, that Gore was a major influence on him. It would be a cool project sometime, maybe for retirement, who knows? What you want to do is you'd want to read all of Gore's published works. And then if you went back and read F. Henry's works, I suspect, you would start to hear a lot of gore echoes in it, but Gore's theology like a lot of Anglican theology, early 20th century, highly focused on the incarnation. And that makes them Christ, for Edwards, the center of everything. For Edwards, it finally is all about Christ. And I think that's an inheritance of that, for the focus on incarnation in in Anglican theology. And also, Gore, you know, this is the, this is early 20th century, and, you know, science and philosophy everything's changing. And gore was among a group of Anglican theologians who believed that the substance of Christian theology was not altered by modern science and philosophy, right? That you could, that there could be a lovely, a lovely mix of modern philosophy and science and classic Christian doctrine. And gosh, you see, you see that in F. Henry's work, too. He's, he's Trinitarian, though not overtly so, he's Trinitarian. He's not anti-reason at all or anti-science. So those kinds of things, I one of his books, the divine purpose in us is strange. I've never noticed this before, until today. This is a great book 1963, if we remember what quote from it later, but that, um, that was a hardcover book and on the cover, is a classic Trinitarian symbol of the triangle, and then the kind of three petals spiral. I said, was that what you call it Charmaine?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 38:17

It's a Celtic symbol of the three.

Tony Chvala-Smith 38:21

And it's like, we don't know did he did he asked Herald House to put that symbol on there, did Herald House put it on there? We don't know, but it's perfect. It's perfect for Edwards. You know, this is Anglican theology at its best. And he seems to have been an inheritor of that. So he's got he's got this breadth, but Anglican Anglican theology, early 20th century had developed a strong social concern too. So there's this in people like Gore and then later William Temple, there, there's a mix of really solid classical theology and a concern for workers rights, concern for the labor movement, a concern for, you know, social life and so on, and that that comes through in in Edwards's theology, too. So, Charmaine's we've got a great quote here. Go ahead, Charmaine, this is from 1963 from F Henry.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 39:15

So, you know, this would be the during the beginning of beginning of Civil Rights in the midst of the Civil Rights movement, but it also in the recognition of the inequities in the culture. So, this is from his book, *The Divine Purpose in Us* page 215 and 218. "Beyond doubt, it is the will and purpose of God, that is people shall be a prophetic people. The people of God should have neither time nor inclination, inclination to follow after every widely heralded cause which lays claim to their support but Church members lack the maturity required of their calling, if they stand supinely by while members of minority groups are exploited, or are denied their human rights, or if they neglect their duties as citizens because they consider politics dirty business, or if they manifest no sustained ignorant indignation against the betrayers of public trust, or make no significant protest, when the children of the poor go hungry, or ill housed, or half educated. These are the things that concern the prophets."

Tony Chvala-Smith 40:41

That's a powerful quote. And isn't that amazing? That's 1963. That's march on Washington, right? That's. And the RLDS church was not really a civil rights leader leaving church. And so here's F. Henry Edwards, drawing on long years of ministry, study, reflection, some of that British tradition and so on. And it's like, long before Grant McMurray said, we need to be a prophetic people, here's F. Henry, we're saying that we're called to be prophetic people and that has political and social ramifications.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 41:15

Here's what it looks like.

Carla Long 41:18

And that Worth of All Person's core value really being called out there.

Tony Chvala-Smith 41:23

Yeah. And, you know, if you think to our previous podcasts on Marietta Walker and Fred Smith, remember how Fred Smith was into the pulpit must stand for social reform. And here's F. Henry Edwards, you know, for decades after, after Fred M issued that statement, saying, church members need to be politically engaged, and they need to be doing the things the prophets did, which involves standing for those who are on the underside. That's pretty, that's pretty cool stuff. You think about it. Now the church's track record, and that, is there always room for improvement, right. But at least you've got somebody in church leadership saying that in 1963, and, you know, connecting the dots, gosh, if we believe that Jesus is the incarnation of God, and that what Jesus did is what God wants us to do, then here's, here's what we need to be socially and politically when it comes to things like exploitation, racism, and social injustice, education, housing, etc. It's pretty, pretty cool, really. So. So, um, one of the things that I think we both like about F. Henry Edwards' theology is his openness to revision. And Charmaine mentioned that a bit earlier, but my goodness. There's a there's an element of this,

that I wish she'd done more, for example, because he's an articulator, he's, he's not a critic. Right? You know, I'm inclined to say, Joseph Smith, Jr. what in the heck were you thinking? F. Henry Edwards tends to see it as a slow evolutionary process. It's like, you can't fault anybody, you just, you just move along with God in this. It's like, No, I do want to fault people here, so. But he is he is he's ever open to learning new things, ever open to changing what he has written and said in the past, and doesn't want people to get stuck on how he said it in the past.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 43:30

Yeah. I just read from, from Paul Edwards book. It's page 86. "One of the things on his mind (of Henry's), during his last days was a fear that Fundamentals would be republished. He feared that following his death, the publishing arm would be inclined to publish what had been a highly successful item. He felt it would be unfair to the reader, as well as to himself to portray the thinking of that earlier time, as reasonable thinking for today." And, you know, if you're thinking about this is in the 80s, in the early 90s, and all the splits that happen over ordination of women, there would have been a temptation to to mollify is probably not the best term, but to say to those who are more traditional, "We value where you are to let us let us, you know, affirm some of the things and the Fundamentals. It's okay, if that's where you still are." So he, I think it was a justified concern. "During those 40 years of publication, his written, production broaden centering generally on whatever he considered to be essential to the larger understanding of the members." I think that's kind of fascinating, too, is that for him, he was it wasn't just what was he interested in? What did he think would be helpful to the membership and that's where he died. And then tried to articulate things. "As the years passed, he continued to present a more and more liberal approach. He was not a liberal in the way of the modern expressions of that ideology. But he was liberal in the classic meaning of that word. He was open, consider it, and willing to be affected by what he learned." I thought that was a good description of how he saw his earlier works, which have been, you know, in this little church, immensely popular, immensely successful, but saying, I hope that that's not, that's not all I'm remembered for.

Tony Chvala-Smith 45:40

I suppose you could say, I mean, he wrote, like dozens and dozens of articles and books and stuff. And in some respects, he was kind of a theological rock star in the church in that era. But his openness to changing his mind is really instructive for us. And he's, as far as I can tell, as he's changing his mind. He never he never denigrates where he's been, you know, and that's pretty neat. I mean,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 46:08

or there are those who are there.

Tony Chvala-Smith 46:10

Yeah. Yeah. It's, uh, yeah, go ahead. Carla.

Carla Long 46:14

I mentioned this before, but um, you know, in my first ordination, prayer to priest, my Australian mother who ordained me pray that I might have some more humility. And it sounds like F. Henry Edwards had humility in spades. It sound like he's very, like, he's willing to say, Okay, I can, I can learn more, and I can always do more. And I think that that's amazing. I probably have a lot to learn from F. Henry Edwards.

Tony Chvala-Smith 46:39

You know, the the book Fundamentals, it's, it's, it's very well written, it's theology would drive most of us crazy today in terms of what he articulates. So he's, he's still very much in one true true church mode, and true church priesthood, Book of Mormon, Inspired Version, he treats all of these as if they're just the facts. It's interesting to me that later in life, he moves beyond that, and, and, and sees that the church has moved beyond that to and doesn't doesn't want to sort of reprint theology that was good once upon a time, but is not, you know, that does not is not suitable anymore.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 47:22

But I think the one thing he would carry through from beginning to end is that, again, that sense that this is really about, how do you deepen your relationship with God. It's not just about the ideas or having the right ones or the wrong ones, or the most progressive ones, or whatever. But what is it that can help us more easily in our time connect with this God. And so later in his life, 1980, he wrote this book on meditation and prayer. And it's, it's, he's that same kind of gentle style of inviting people into these practices, and understanding what they can mean and how they can help connect us to God and something of the nature of God. It's just full of quotes from Christians, different kinds of Christians, and non Christians. And in the back, there are prayers, prayers from different denominations and movements, for those times when we don't, can't pray ourselves, and to help deepen our own prayer life. So, you know, going from starting with the one true church back at the beginning of his ministry, and near the end, opening the doors for people to explore other denominations and faiths ways of praying, as well as taking very seriously big part of this book is taking statements from the Lord's Prayer and unpacking it. So little chapters on little front the various phrases. And it's, it's lovely, and there's a timelessness about it, that that invites people into relationship with with God, which is, all of the things he did, were still pointing back to that as the primary conviction of what he was about.

Tony Chvala-Smith 49:24

So his, you know, his theology works from central convictions. He thinks that what you believe does matter, but you have to be open to revising how you state it and how you understand it.

Ideas have consequences. Exactly. Yes. At the very start of Fundamentals, he has a little short chapter about why the content of belief matters, and it's still worth reading. I think, you know, that it's not just about lots of times today, your theologians say, I don't care about what you believe I care about practice, and he would say, but what is your practice based on like what what is it grounded in? Behind behind every action there is some expressed or implied belief. And so that really matters what you're expressing and implying there. So. So he works on the central principles. The incarnation, the church is the body of Christ, by the way, really important thing about his theology, it's always for the church. He's not, he's not into

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 50:23

posturing.

Tony Chvala-Smith 50:24

Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 50:25

the theological world.

Tony Chvala-Smith 50:26

He's not a spiritual solo act or anything like that, you know, theology, scripture, church history, spiritual practices, and disciplines, prayer, meditation, everything we do is for the sake of the body of Christ. And that again, that's that's also a uniquely Anglican sort of flavoring of his theology. I think, unlike lots of American theologies that are highly individualistic, his his is not really it. It has its own F. Henry flavor. But it's, it's very, it's this this bread that we mentioned earlier, it's because he's always thinking about what will be good for the church right now.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 51:06

And so the some of the themes and words that come through, whether implicitly or explicitly is grace, which had been a dirty word in the church, because, you know, it was that cheap grace that those Protestants talk about. But he, he helped people in the church to be, to be aware and start to name what God's activity is as grace, and then that God is a loving God. And that if we look at the big span of history, we can begin to discern where God's movement is in in that long narrative, and that God has been with us and is with us, and will be with us. And it's a loving God, that that accompanies us.

Tony Chvala-Smith 51:52

That's interesting, because this book that he wrote in 1975, called the Joy in Creation and Judgment. It it originated in conversations he had with his wife in his wife's late, late latter stages of life. In fact, she she died before the book, I think, was was published, if I'm not mistaken, but they talked a lot about divine judgment, what that is, and, and this whole book,

kind of rethinks divine judgment in terms of God's loving purpose, which is a really nice way to rethink divine judgment. That is, it's real. There's such a thing as divine judgment, but it's always put, it's always based on on God's love. And so that's love for us and God's desire for humans to, to mature into the flower into

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 52:14

and to know that they're forgiven so that they can have the freedom to keep growing.

Tony Chvala-Smith 52:40

So yep, so that's kind of a picture of F. Henry Edwards, Carla, as we understand theologically,

Carla Long 52:46

Well, that was really interesting. And, you know, like I, I've, I think I read Fundamentals, like in Sunday school. Yes. And I remember thinking two things. Whoa, this is super deep. Whoa, I need to read it twice, or three times or 50 times. And, I mean, I wasn't mature enough in my theological journey to really understand that that's not where we were anymore, or whatever. Maybe that is where we were in Mapleton, Kansas? I don't know,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 53:16

Possibly.

Carla Long 53:17

But I, it's so nice to have a picture of the man behind fundamentals. And did he write, right, what four books, five books?

Tony Chvala-Smith 53:25

Oh, more than that.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 53:27

There's a whole, let me see how many pages so this is books and articles, and editorials, because he was also the editor of several magazines, that the church had that beyond the Herald. And he wrote extensively for the Herald. But there are two it's like 20 pages note at, yeah, over 20 pages of articles and that he wrote, so.

Carla Long 54:04

That's amazing.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 54:05

Yeah, there's actually it's, it's 35 pages,

Carla Long 54:09

Quite prolific, my goodness.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 54:11

Yes.

Tony Chvala-Smith 54:12

Yeah. That and all of his administrative and ministerial work, family, family life and so on, you know, you wonder how people could do that. It's hard for us, in our social world to imagine how you can have that kind of output. And yeah, and and without laptops!

Carla Long 54:30

I don't even I can't even imagine that world, honestly, like, it's really difficult to imagine. But I really have enjoyed this walkthrough of F Henry Edward Edwards his life, I mean, becoming an apostle at 25. I mean, he, what a what a life he led. So it's been really interesting and really awesome. So I mean, you can just tell and see where parts of his life as you were talking about Tony and Charmaine, about how parts of his life just kept popping right back up with Bishop Gore and with all those different Anglican quotes, I I just think it's really, really fascinating. So thank you so much for helping us walk through his life and learn more about him. I really appreciate it. So I always ask you the final question, was there anything you wanted to say that you didn't get to say?

Tony Chvala-Smith 55:13

Oh, final things. Um, we know that there's controversy about historical controversy about what his sentence was, for his conscientious objection, World War One that well, if the historians wrangled that out, is his son, his son, Paul, does mention that he received a death sentence that was commuted. But, you know, fat family history is different from critical history, so wouldn't just let the historians have their way with it.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 55:41

And I think the other part would be that we haven't really hit on his, you know, little pieces of the, of the personal part, which was that he had a wry sense of humor, and that, you know, he he could see the, the, the joy in the in the little things. And so I think that's, you know, you need that you need to have that to fill out this picture of someone who was deeply committed to helping people connect to the church, but for the reason of connecting with God, and, you know,

Tony Chvala-Smith 56:25

oabsolutely,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 56:25

and breaking some rules along the way. And that's okay.

Tony Chvala-Smith 56:32

I think, too, we, we have to remember Community of Christ today didn't just develop in an instant. And we, the churches, we are today, a Christ-centered, Justice oriented church, that seeking for ways to be a peacemaker in the world, that is wanting to practice inclusion, and, you know, an Open Table, so to speak, the theme, the themes that shaped who we are today, as Community of Christ, those themes have connections to people like F. Henry Edwards, and Fred M. Smith, and Arthur Oakman, and others back in the mid 20th century. So we, we don't want to ever forget that we did not make ourselves we stand we stand on their shoulders in the tradition that they helped shape. So I think that's important to remember. Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 57:20

And he's one of those bridges that transition people from the one true church and the preaching charts, to an open conversation with the rest of Christianity, and letting letting God be bigger than our, you know, our rightness. And so even as the church is doing that, he's one of the voices that's helping make that possible, as he's moving from Fundamentals, to many of the other things he wrote after that.

Carla Long 57:50

Well, what a joy to learn more about him. Thank you so much for this podcast. I really have enjoyed it. I really appreciate it. And it's as always, it's just been great to be with you. Always good to be with you. And looking forward to next time. Thanks, guys. Yeah.

Josh Mangelson 58:14

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