

Josh Mangelson 00:17

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

Karin Peter 00:33

Welcome. This is Cuppa Joe, where we explore restoration history. And I'm your host, Karen Peter. Our guest today is John Hamer. The editors can decide if they want to take out, I was going to say, the infamous John Hamer. John is a map-maker, an author and historian and a past president of the John Whitmer Historical Association. He's also a favorite presenter at the Sunstone Symposium, held annually in Salt Lake City, or in the COVID year of 2020, online, which was a great success. John currently serves as Pastor of Toronto Centre Place congregation. And you can find him weekly online, in the Beyond the Walls worship services, and all of the different ministries that take place at Centre Place throughout the week. So welcome, John.

John Hamer 01:26

Thank you so much for having me on. Great to see you.

Karin Peter 01:28

It's good to see you as well. So, your contribution to the Historic Sites Foundation Autumn Lecture Series was, "Bishop R.C. Evans of Canada: From the RLDS First Presidency, to Schismatic Church Leader". Now, John, everybody who did lectures in this autumn series have these bulky titles. If you were running an ad campaign, what would you have called this?

John Hamer 01:57

Oh, man? That's a good question. So yeah, that's a terrible title, the one you just read of mine. And it's tough, because when you, on the one hand, you know, you're doing something that's academic. And so that's kind of the academic title, right, as opposed to the more sensational or this kind of title. The problem with it is, is that we have, you want to try to throw in a bunch of stuff to make it so you can get to the interest groups, right? And so, one of the things when you're doing your hashtag for what you're, what the

interest group you're trying to tag here is, we want to get to people to know this is our RLDS history. So, this is Community of Christ history. You know, people who maybe like, you know, the schismatic stuff, you know, so when the church breaks apart, when people have these kind of conflicts, and somebody decides, I'm having my own church, then that kind of, that kind of thing is a branch of history that people, I think, find fascinating. And so yeah, I don't know. I guess what we'd probably, you probably do is what you'd want to do if you're gonna have a great title. Yeah. So, like it, his contemporary that he worked under, Joseph III, you know, the biography from Launius is called *Pragmatic Profit*, right? And so, he was able with, that's a beautiful title, where he was able to kind of sum up, you know, with just one adjective, kind of, what, how you understand or how we can get a mental picture of how Joseph III's ministry was. Which on the one hand, he's a, he's certainly, I think, every bit, he's very visionary and wants to accomplish, and did accomplish a lot of amazing stuff. But you know, but as opposed to, let's say, his own father, who was anything but pragmatic, you know. He was much more practical. And in some ways, I'd say, a lot more successful at accomplishing stuff that that was long lasting, or it was lasting, as opposed to something that was always the putting on the burner, and it was always boiling over. He definitely, his father created the boil. But whether or not that was, you know, I mean, obviously, lots of things have survived, but it wasn't necessarily, if he hadn't gotten killed, and you know, who knows what could happen? Yeah, so, I don't have one for R.C. Evans because he's not as well known. And so, here's a figure that was very well known in his day, but it's obscure now. And it's also dipping into this period of church history that is ignored. And so, we're very aware of that early church period. And so, we are just continuously wafting our minds back to 1830, and we're just always thinking about those kind of context of that 14 year period of time in the early church organization, or a little bit in a couple of years beforehand. But then, and then maybe we're a little bit aware of the reorganization period, and what, you know, kind of, just that leading up in that conference. I don't think we spend that much time on Joseph III at all, as we should, but anyway, people have started to be a little more aware of the Joseph III history. But even in American history, generally, once you get past the Civil War, and you get into this kind of murky period of The Gilded Age and the robber barons and the railroads and all that kind of stuff, that's all, nobody knows anything from the Civil War to, I don't know, World War I. It's all just all merges in there, right? And so, but there were important presidents, you know, McKinley or somebody. You know what I mean? These kind of people that are not, nobody thinks about anymore. And so, the same way, there's this very interesting time

period, when the Reorganization is really, really picking up steam. You know, when Joseph III goes to that conference in Amboy, and is recognized as the prophet and president of the church, there's maybe 300 members of the new organization at that point. You know, within just a, you know, a few years or whatever, there's 10s of 1000s. And, and so things go quite rapidly. And this is a really interesting time period for when the church was expanding.

Karin Peter 05:54

Well, thanks for that. That helps put it in this different kind of a context for us so we can understand, kind of, where we're going. So, if you go to view the lecture, and we encourage everyone to do that, and we'll give you some information at the end of our podcast, you have some great photos. And so, I'm very visual. And when I looked at the photos of R.C. Evans, you had mentioned, right off the bat, that he was known as a gifted orator and one with an ego, one with...

John Hamer 06:21

Yes.

Karin Peter 06:22

...quite an ego. And I must admit that when I saw photos of him as a young person, he had a certain cockiness to him. And he had this smile that was a smirk. And then you go on to his photos as a older person. He kept that smirk his whole life.

John Hamer 06:35

Yeah.

Karin Peter 06:36

So, a foreshadow of things to come, I noticed, as I then watched the lecture. So, let's get into that. You begin by giving us some context about R.C. Evan. So, set the stage for us about some of the history of the church in Toronto that's so important for us to understand R.C. Evans and his importance.

John Hamer 06:58

Yeah, I mean so, one of the things that led me to this story so, I'm the pastor of this congregation that R.C Evans was associated with. He, he wasn't ever the pastor because

he was too important to be the pastor of any congregation. So, he was more impor..., so, right from the start, he was going to be the district president, or president of the Canadian mission or whatever. But this was his home fief, but you know, as a congregation, but actually good for the congregation's own independent development. It always had its own regular congregational apparatus and a pastor and everything like that, that were separate from R.C. Evans and his enormous ego. So, in other words, even though he was there, and among and massively affecting the congregation, the congregation did have its own identity. And that would have been, that became important when the split later happened. Like you're saying, one of the things that led me to it initially is as visuals. I'm very visual as well. And we have, in the congregation, we've preserved all of these archives and historic photos and files and documents and everything like that, going back to the 19th century. And one of the photos we have is a very large form print of R.C. Evans speaking in one of the biggest contemporary theaters of the early 20th century, and it's just filled with 7000 people as he's preaching. And this is a pretty remarkable thing. We're not, there's not a lot of Community of Christ preachers right now who are addressing crowds of 7000 for a sermon, very often, you know, or however many thousand. I don't, looks, I'm maybe, I don't how many people were in this theater, really. But anyway, there's a lot of people in this full, three-triple-decker theater. And so, I'm like, wow! That is an interesting, this is an interesting component of our past, you know, in the congregation. And so, yeah, to set the tone, when the Canada, you know, is the very first country that the original church members, kind of, they're from upstate New York, they cross the border, and they start converting people in Canada fairly early. So, Canada is, after the US, is the first country that they, things get introduced to the church. And that and in Toronto was one of the first places where there was a congregation. The original pastor of the original congregation in Toronto was John Taylor, who later ended up being one of the apostles. He later sided with Brigham Young and went off to Utah and became Brigham Young's successor as the leader of the LDS Church. And so, Toronto has kind of a, an interesting history of interesting guys. Some of these folks that have been leading the church fell into disorganization everywhere. There were old time saints that continued to be here, but the congregation wasn't actively meeting. And so, one of the things that happened with the Reorganization period from 1860 onward to the 1890s, or something, is that old members were continually found and gathered in. New people were excited about it, their kids, their grandkids, also. And they would start making new cottage meetings. And from the cottage meetings, they tried to, eventually, have enough that they could get their own little building, and so on, and get going like that. And so, R.C. Evans

had been converted by the very first really important missionary, or the main, not first, but the main important missionary in Canada, J.J. Cornish, who just founded congregation after congregation. He's the reason there's so many congregations across Canada and also across Michigan. He converted R.C. Evans and then R..C Evans went on to help found the Toronto congregation. And this is all happening in the later 19th century, right up to, the leading up to the 20th century.

Karin Peter 10:39

How old was R.C. Evans when he joined the RLDS church?

John Hamer 10:44

Um, so...

Karin Peter 10:45

He was a young man.

John Hamer 10:46

He's very young. So yeah, he's, his dad had joined. He joined, his dad joined, when he was 14. And so, then he, himself, joins two years later, when he gets to go meet Cornish for himself.

Karin Peter 11:00

Okay. Excellent. And you have some photos of that time period that are really great...

John Hamer 11:04

Yeah.

Karin Peter 11:05

...in the lecture as well. So again, pointing our listeners to go and to view that. So, he's in Toronto. He's a young man. He starts to grow up. What happens with him? How does he become a church leader? And, what was he like?

John Hamer 11:20

So, so, yeah, he has a fairly rapid rise. He is a, he's good at studying. He becomes a strong speaker. And so, as people kind of notice, not only in Toronto, he was in London,

which is where, where the kind of the base of the church was, is where J.J. Cornish was. And so, he'd been there. And he got, you, he went kind of rapidly through the priesthood ranks, until, as I say, you know, fairly early on, he makes it to be, like, even like, a district president. And so then, and then he becomes known, because one of the things appointees or people who are church leaders who are working, kind of, for the general church, but was then called the general churches, world church. One of their main jobs was to go around and actually preach for people. And so, now there's all kinds of other things that staff should be doing. You know, but in the old days, the really, the expectation that everybody had was that the staff are the great preachers, and what they do is they go around as itinerary people and they go to each branch by branch, and then you, and you advertise essentially, that we're gonna have this great preacher. You have a revival, and you get people to come out there, and then people who, who like it, stay in that little branch. And so, it got to be the point very quickly that, because he was such a good preacher, and because everybody responded so well, that he would have his whole preaching itinerary planned for a whole year. As he was preaching reunions, and congregations and things like that, he got the notice of the world headquarters, right, the general church headquarters. And so, he started to, for example, preach at general conferences, world conferences, and that brought his attention to the Joseph III.

Karin Peter 13:04

Okay. So, let's talk a little bit about, kind of, his trajectory in leadership because he caught the attention of Joseph III. So where does that take him?

John Hamer 13:16

So, once that happened, so he's aged 36, this is 1897, and he's called into the Twelve. And so, in other words, he's recognized, you know, so that's a very rapid rise, and, you know, makes it all the way up into, you know, the primary missionary counsel of the church, as he's being recognized, essentially, for his preaching abilities and the fact that those preaching abilities actually encourage people to join. You know, that's how people are primarily brought into the church at this time, this time of kind of rapid growth for the church.

Karin Peter 13:49

Okay. So, he's serving in the Twelve at age 36.

John Hamer 13:53

Yes.

Karin Peter 13:53

And is still traveling through Canada on his

John Hamer 13:57

Yes.

Karin Peter 13:58

...itinerant preacher rounds. And his, his fame begins to grow more rapidly at that time, as well as the way in which he leads. So, Joseph Smith III begins to really depend on him in some new ways. Can you kind of talk about how that relationship develops? How he, kind of, becomes a right-hand man, if you will, to Joseph Smith III?

John Hamer 14:30

So yeah, so, by the time the century turns, so at the beginning of the 20th century, the 1902, Joseph III now is 69 at that point. So, he has been, he himself has been in charge of the church since very young, being a very young man. And in fact, actually, one of the things that's happened has been that as older members of the First Presidency or older other leaders have died off, he hasn't always refilled the positions. And so, in some ways, you know, the church is, sort of, vernacularly run, so, still all the way up through this time period, I would say it's not a very professional organization and it's rather a very volunteersie/slash whatever. We're all, you know, kind of deciding to do when we get together and do it, you know. There's not a, not a substantial bureaucracy or anything like that behind it until Joseph III's son, Fred M., revolutionized this, kind of, how the church headquarters system works. That doesn't happen yet. So, but at this point, as a 69 year-old, Joseph III is starting to think, okay, I got to think about what comes after me. And he starts working on both ideas for succession, but also like writing out, ultimately formulating letters to the church about how to, how do you understand succession? And what should, what is the constitution of the church about this kind of a thing? And so, he called for the first time now into the First Presidency, R.C. Evans, who'd been one of these apostles, and he also calls his son F.M. Smith, into the First Presidency. But F.M. is a bunch younger than Evans. Evans now is 40. F.M. Smith is 28. F.M. Smith is in graduate school. He's getting a PhD, which is really amazing at this time period that

Joseph Jr's grandson actually gets a PhD in sociology, you know, because it's a, it's remarkable that that was able to happen. But in any event, Evans considers himself to be, you know, very much, you know, the first counselor in the First Presidency, and not the second counselor. In other words, he is the one that has the actual experience. And one of the things that happens is, for example, they go together, Joseph III and R.C. Evans, go together on a tour of the United Kingdom, and visit all the saints and the, and all the congregations in Britain and so on. And because Joseph III is older and is more winded, he'll get up and say a few remarks, and then he turns it over to R.C. who brings the house down. And so, that really gives R.C. Evans a sense of, he's in the Presidency. He's the guy, the next guy, you know, as the old guy, who he respects is, you know, is kind of winding down. He's gonna be the guy.

Karin Peter 17:13

So, he truly believes he will succeed Joseph III as president of the church.

John Hamer 17:20

So, yeah, so, I think it seems pretty clear that he feels that that's the direction the tea leaves are going. I don't think that he, he certainly doesn't have a promise in hand or some kind of a revelation that says that's going to happen, but he's reading tea leaves. He's wanting that to happen for himself. A lot of times we think that the RLDS tradition was entirely always about lineal succession. In other words, it always had to go father to son to brother to brother to brother to son or whatever, but you know, brother or son. But in fact, actually, Joseph III made it very clear that he didn't believe that was the case. So, whereas many early RLDS members did think that there was a lineal priesthood or lineal succession, because they had heard that preached by Joseph Smith Jr's brother, William Smith. William Smith was a great promoter of the fact that brothers should take over after their brothers die. [laughter] Not a self-serving doctrine at all. But it was definitely one that he promulgated and popularized. Joseph III made it very clear. No, the point here is that my father ordained me several times during his, during his life to be his successor and predicted several times that he would be the successor. In other words, that was part of his prophetic role. It was not about family. And so, and so, Joseph III indicated that he could, might have appointed anybody who was, who God was calling to be the Prophet of the church he might appoint, with regardless of family. And the reality is though, the practice continued to be familial until the 1990s. But there, didn't have to go that way. And so, R.C. Evans, I think, wasn't delusional to think that it could have gone to him.

Karin Peter 19:05

So, what happens when F.M. Smith is designated the successor?

John Hamer 19:11

Well, obviously that's a big disappointment for R.C. Evans. So, lots of things happen. So, this is a big generational shift. It's sort of like what we're gonna face in, you don't have to worry about it the United States, but in the Commonwealth and in the UK, and everything like that, the, when Queen Elizabeth passes away or decides finally, she's going to have to retire or whatever, for health purposes, nobody hardly alive remembers any other monarch than her. I mean, you do if you're, even then, but it's a long time ago, even so, no matter how old you are, you know, that's been a long time. And, you know, she was queen when Churchill was Prime Minister, you know, I mean, so, this is, so, likewise for the church. So, after this, this is the whole lifetime of Joseph III being in charge, and nobody having any other thought of how that could be. And so, it's no surprise that any change would be, would necessarily have to be revolutionary. And so, the amount of problems that F.M. Smith ended up having, you know, this whole crisis that's called Supreme Directional Control, and other words, who's in charge, you know, really, is what, kind of, that was about, is kind of because he had ideas that were new and that were different, and everybody else was just used to what had always been. And so, the idea of, that he did, of wanting to modernize the church, of wanting to professionalize staff and responsibilities and things like that, do different things, I mean, visionary stuff, make the auditorium, make the hospital, you know, make all of these things, you know, that they wanted to do to be, you know, part of the 20th century. Nevertheless, he had caused a lot of conflicts with lots of people. Just, and, I don't think he's to blame for the conflict that he had with R.C. Evans, you know. So, I think R.C. Evans wouldn't have liked anybody who took over, but he certainly also doesn't like F.M. Smith. And so, there is a very serious resentment that happens. And I think it's, in some ways, it's R.C. Evans' ego about wanting to have been the successor. In another way it's also a belief that he had that he was more qualified and would have done a better job of leading the church as a result. And so, maybe that the church is being taken in a bad direction, he was probably thinking. But then again, he's not totally unbiased about that component, or rather he's quite biased. But essentially, the original, kind of, deal that they kind of, work out is, they'll just let R.C. Evans go back and have Canada as his fief. And so, more or less, R.C. Evans, kind of, becomes in charge of the church in Canada, and does a good job of

continuing to develop stuff, especially in his sub-fief of Toronto. So, in other words, he's, on the one hand, you know, Count of Toronto and Duke of Canada, you know, or whatever it is, you know. So, but he's so, he's in Canada, in Toronto, this is when he's having those theater gigs. And so, he's growing the congregation from being just a very tiny congregation to being, at some point, almost, if not the largest one, it's certainly one of the largest congregations of the RLDS church in the early 20th century.

Karin Peter 22:24

And growing his ego. Can you talk a little bit about the stained glass windows?

John Hamer 22:28

Yes. So yeah, when the congregation moves to its second building, because it quickly outgrows its very first building, they, one of the things they do is commission a stained glass window, that is a, you know, a triptych, which is a, kind of, a traditional Christian form of three, right. And sometimes in a triptych, you will have things like the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, or, or similar kinds of things, right, you know, the adoration of that in, any way, you might have any similar kinds of themes. But R.C. Evans' triptych is, on the one hand, it's Jesus, right, and Joseph Smith, and R.C. Evans and R.C. Evans is in the middle, you know, so, of that.

Karin Peter 23:19

Which says a lot about how he saw his own value and worth. So, he's, he does not become the president of the church. He does become the leader, however you want to describe it, of the church in Canada, and becomes the Bishop of Canada. It's almost like a reconciliatory offering to give the title Bishop of Canada. So, what happens with that? I mean, why can't he be happy with that? What, how does the story go?

John Hamer 23:57

So, the problem with it is that he might have been able to be happy with that and he might have not. But whether he was happy or not, it may not have lasted either way. But he wasn't happy with it. And so, one of the things that had happened was, from that perch, he nevertheless, couldn't help but look at headquarters, to look across the border and say, what's going on down there in Independence and Lamoni is not what I would be doing. Obviously, things are not going the way it should be. And so, he was definitely, was the kind of person who was sniping from the side ground, you know, sidelines. And so, as a

person who was kind of doing this, kind of, you know, sniping that wasn't, you know, keep, it wasn't like a thing where, okay, you're fine as long as you stay in Canada and don't bug us or something like that, and we'll deal with the problem later kind of a situation. Instead, it's like an active fomenting of problems when F.M. Smith has enough problems that he's got enough people to fight with in general. And so, as a result of, probably as a result of R.C. Evans having a bunch of critical things to say about the church presidency, and specifically the president, he was not invited to speak at a general conference. And so, normally because he had been, you know, you know, understood, generally, I think quite broadly, as the best orator in the, in the Reorganization. But he was, I think, that there's no doubt about that. So, I mean, you can all the different things you want to say nuanced about R.C. Evans and his ego, how the other kinds of things, I think, that people can agree the probably from all accounts, he was an amazing orator. And so, from being the person who may well have been the best orator not only in the whole restoration, so I don't know that anybody in the LDS Church could match with this guy. But anyway, so, but, and then he, to a place where you know, they, he routinely not only preached once, you know, world conference, general conference lasts all week long. He routinely is asked to preach multiple times, even in the course of a conference, and now he's disinvited from that at all. And so, or not invited, and so

Karin Peter 26:04

Snub.

John Hamer 26:05

He sees that as a snub. And so, he goes back and grouses and, and now, any, kind of, like, let's say, passive sniping, or whatever, becomes, kind of, active grouching. And so, active grouching ends up leading F.M. Smith to essentially create a commission to come and see what's going on in Canada, you know. So, the world church, the general church has let Canadian church go its own way and let R.C. Evans do whatever he wants up there. Now, there's going to be a prophetic commission, you know, to come and review what's going on. And when they go there to review, nobody likes what's happening. So, on the one hand, R.C. Evans and the congregation are, don't like oversight, and then the president of the church doesn't like open insurrection, you know. And so, it comes down to, kind of, a dual of that, a test of authority. And R.C. Evans, after getting to say his fill and to, you know, argue at length against the president in a business meeting, you know, shout out, you know, shouted chump match, is relieved from priesthood and walks out. And so, he

walks out of the congregation. And so there's maybe 1200 members of the congregation on the rolls at that point. And it's estimated that 300 or 400 of them walked out with R.C. Evans. And the reality is, is that when you say you had that many on the rolls, you know, and you have that many walk out, I mean, I, the congregation, I'm the heir to the congregation, right. So, and I have all of our, all of our apologetics about what we said about this. We tried to minimize how many people walked out here. But I would say, you know, realistically, it's got to be half, you know, in terms of the people who were really active and paying tithing and that kind of thing. And so, you split the congregation in two as a result of that.

Karin Peter 28:09

It's a huge deal. So, I was struck when I watched this, and again, when you, talking with you, talking about this. They actually came up, the commission, and gave him this chance to like vent to them of whatever his issues were. And it made me think of our policy of faithful disagreement, which there are ways to vent that are healthy, and there are ways to vent that are not healthy. And so, one of the things is to vent from the pulpit.

John Hamer 28:38

Yes.

Karin Peter 28:39

Not helpful for staying in good relationship, all around.

John Hamer 28:45

Yeah, so, he had the opportunity to present his case and instead, he took it as the opportunity, you know, it's like when you can also say you can give somebody enough rope to hang themselves. They gave him plenty of rope and he chose to hang himself in that sense. So, institutionally, it so, a lot of times when people decide they want to do something, they do that based on because they're mad, and that makes them feel good or something like that. And so, they don't always think of what they want the outcome to be. And so, even if R.C. Evans was totally justified in all of his complaints, you know, he had justice on his side, the way that he went about it, I think there's no way that the outcome is that somehow he's now in charge of the church or something. And I mean, you know so, this is not a forum where this kind of a grievance fest and complaining about the church presidents, from the pulpit to his face. It's not cowardly, 'cause you're

saying or something like that. But on the other hand, I don't see how it results in anything other than what happened. And so, the presidency really has no choice but to say, okay, you know, you've, you've declared you're in open insurrection, so we don't have any, what can we do, you know, so that's...

Karin Peter 29:58

And that's what happens.

John Hamer 29:59

Yeah.

Karin Peter 30:00

So, even in the Reorganization, there are limits.

John Hamer 30:03

Yeah.

Karin Peter 30:04

Which most of us chafe at at different times in our life, but they are there. So, he leaves.

John Hamer 30:13

Yes,

Karin Peter 30:13

He is relieved from priesthood. Half the church of Toronto goes with him.

John Hamer 30:18

Yes.

Karin Peter 30:19

What does he do now?

John Hamer 30:20

So, he organizes his own new church, and he has lots of connections. And so, his new church ultimately ends up getting called Church of the Christian Brotherhood. And there

is a, just a beautiful and much more substantial church building that had been the Presbyterian kind of Presbyterian Church, which is right now in the middle of the city's hospital district. So, it doesn't exist anymore. But they went and bought that and, and so started essentially got their own thing going and actually, because of the connections and context that he had, he was able to, it's actually just down the street from the parliament, he was able to get the parliament to charter it, you know, and so, and essentially, he creates a, what I would say is a, in practice, an RLDS church from the early 20th century, that nevertheless as jettisoned a bunch of restoration distinctives. And so, he decides to rip root the Smith family and Joseph Smith and Book of Mormon and those kinds of things all out of the church. But I would say that probably in practice, and in general, the kind of doctrines and everything else would have all been, more or less, identical to what they would have experienced in the Toronto congregation. But it has that distinction. And so, in that sense, it may well be it's a post restoration tradition church because it rejected the restoration tradition component of it. And yet, it would be very identifiable probably, if you were to just walk back and forth between the two churches.

Karin Peter 31:55

So, and he doesn't leave needling the RLDS church alone.

John Hamer 32:00

No, no. Yeah, so yeah, his next, his plan, and he actually starts it, but yeah, he hasn't. He's a great media guy. And so, you know, the fact of being able to do these, fill these theaters is a, you know, is a substantial thing. The fact that they print these broadsides. He prints, open letters, and pamphlets, and all these kind of things. And so, he's really good at spreading all that. And he definitely, so he definitely embarked on a, you know, I'm going to take, you know, the church down kind of campaign. And by the way, actually, a lot of the people in his own congregation, his new church were, like, okay, let's just close that chapter and move on. Although some of them were perfectly happy to go on the tirade with him. But a bunch of them were like, okay, let's stop this now. And let's just, you know, do something positive and move forward. But no, when he ended up at the time of his death, which is right after this, and so he dies of flu a year after the Great Spanish flu pandemic, and, in 1919, as he is preparing to, an entire series of anti- RLDS lectures. And so, ultimately, he's thwarted in his goal of taking the RLDS church down. And it's, remarkably, the congregation that he created in his church, despite the fact that it was kind of formed around him, nevertheless survived for about a generation. And also,

remarkably, considering again that he took a lot of the lifeblood and everything out of it, the Toronto congregation also regrouped and did very well. And so, both went their own ways and ultimately, several members of R.C. Evans' church, when it over time slowly, either individually, or when it all closed down, many of the ones who anyway who stayed with the restoration came back to various RLDS congregations.

Karin Peter 33:57

Okay. You mentioned that he was an excellent marketer. You have some great photos in your presentation on the Historic Sites Foundation website, where the social media of the day are individuals wearing placards on their, those things you see in cartoons, placards on the front and back, and then walking up and down the sidewalks handing out papers.

John Hamer 34:21

We'd be doing that in the old Popeye cartoons or something like that. So, it's clear that that's what people were doing. In other words, they didn't just make it up for the cartoon. So, yeah, they've got these things which they've printed. So, they printed broadsides. And so, they're huge, and with giant fonts. You know, Bishop Evans that, you know, to preach on such and such, you know, and then, and so, then the members, you know, are just plastered in those things and walking up and down, you know. Go down in the Princess Theatres, 7p.m. You know, those kind of a thing. So, it's very amazing way, but that's the time period of how you did that kind of advertising. So, it's really...

Karin Peter 34:53

Oh, yeah, it's great that we need photos of that in the center of Communications at headquarters so they can appreciate how far we've come.

John Hamer 35:02

He has a, he has a really neat essay, or one of the times when he was explaining about this about the theater, the theater outreach, and he was saying, you know, "I got a lot of push back from church members about this theater outreach," because they're like, "Theaters are places of sin." And in it, you know, there was a time and all this kind of thing, "Why are you in a theater" and all this kind of thing? "And I said, I'm in a theater to access all these people who wouldn't step into a church." You know, and so, it's kind of an interesting argument, because it is, that is something that we've continued in Toronto, where, you know, we have, you have been continually innovating innovative,

ministry, outreach, right. And so, where we are doing things, where, our invitational ministry isn't in places and locations that, and including our new facility, which doesn't look particularly church-like, and people ask, well, why, why are you doing that? And we, and we have a similar answer to what R.C. Evans was saying.

Karin Peter 35:59

So, that's, yeah, one of the contributions that you can trace back in the Toronto congregation to his understanding of what it meant to reach out to people where they are. Yeah, absolutely. What are some of the other important contributions that you could, kind of, say R.C. Evans gave to the church?

John Hamer 36:18

Well, to the congregation, besides that one, which I think is good, is that he also, I think, contributed to a congregational tradition of being ornery. So, the congregation has been very proud of not, of like congregational autonomy and saying they're, you know, like, congregations have their own, you know, say so on things. And so, I like, have all of the records and things like that. And so, there will be, like, a note that the world church presidents, you know, "W. Wallace Smith came and, and they appointed so and so to be the pastor, and which is..." and the congregational historian writes at that point, "...which is out of order because the world church has no authority to appoint pastors." You know, you know. [laughter] And also, and there was a tradition too that the congregation was the last congregation in Canada to surrender its deed to the world church, and you know, and all this stuff. And even down to when I first became associated with the congregation, one of the things that I found, you know, was central to congregational identity, so, they, the church headquarters in Canada is in the town of Guelth, and so, Guelth is shorthand, is like you might say, Independence for everybody else. You know that, so, when you're talking about church headquarters around here, people say Guelth. And so, the congregation recorder and things like that, to get on her good side, whenever you would, at a certain point you learned to say, "Oh, Guelth." Even though, by the way, I've found, I've always found Guelth to be so easy to work with. Everybody there is, wants to help the congregation, everything like that. But that was not the congregational preserved memory, right? You know, the memory was that we were doing all these things and, "Guelth!". Any way, you know, so.

Karin Peter 38:06

I think many congregations listening to this, to this particular episode have had similar experiences, whether it's Guelth or whether it's Independence, where that has happened. And I, I spent some time in an ornery congregation myself. So...

John Hamer 38:23

So, for the rest of the church, what I'd say is that, definitely, in terms of the succession, this was highlighting a lot of people were, let's say, thinking that lineal succession was the only way to go. And people were very much questioning that even in the 1990s, when Grant McMurray, the first non-Smith, became president of the church. But I think it's a very clear illustration, going all the way back to the succession from Joseph III on that it was very viable all the way then to have whoever was being called, it was being called regardless of being a Smith or no. So, that was certainly there. And certainly, also this willingness to explore different and new ways of outreach, and how are we finding people where they're at, as we already said. But then finally, there's also a tale to, you know, the cautionary tale that is going to just be about human nature generally, that we always'll have and are going to continue to still have, which is, what are you doing this for? And so, for R.C. Evans, at a certain point, if he is doing it for the institution, he lost sight of that and you know or if he's doing it for the calling and mission of Christ and spreading that. And instead, he is, at a certain point, potentially just caught up in his own ego and that's the kind of thing that is, that happens with human nature all the time. And it's a cautionary thing to always be on the lookout for. And I would say actually, when you have these kind of skills, like you're the greatest orator of your generation, it is, it's very difficult not to be surrounded by, not to surround yourself with and accept, let's say, only the voices that are praising you and that are constantly giving you the feedback you want to hear and pushing away all of the critical voices and not wanting to listen to those. And so, people get surrounded by what we say, yes, man or whatever. And you lose the capacity to discern what's real, right? You're, you start living in a bubble. And that's a tale that was true for Joseph, Jr., I think that that's the answer of what happened in Nauvoo, and why it all went off the rails and everything. And it's also, I think, what happened with R.C. Evans.

Karin Peter 40:50

We're quick to point it out when it happens in secular world. We can see the reflection of that right now in the United States in our political dynamic that we're experiencing in early 2021. But we don't like to name it, if you will, in our religious life, in our life of

faith together as a community. But the cautionary tale it is. And so, it's good for us to remember it and to know it, and to look and reflect on our own lives for that matter. And what that looks like.

John Hamer 41:20

I think, I think we shouldn't hesitate to be telling it in our religious life, including when we're talking about prophets or leaders because we even have that in the literary tales of prophets in the Bible, you know, so even, you know, the Bible's focus on David. And yet, David's story is a cautionary tale story. It's told that way. It's not told as a hagiography where every single thing that God, David ever did was absolutely right. And that, rather, it's told us a very human story. And it doesn't mean that David, as a biblical figure, the literary figure there, is not loved of God, because of all the things that David did that are frankly, villainous, and abuse of authority and all those kinds of things. But it shows that God comes to us in and through our humanity, and that our leaders shouldn't be worshipped. Our leaders should be understood to be the people that they are. And that even if you admire someone for all of their capacities, you don't have to, you know, buy the entire, I don't know, everything along with it, that goes along with it. In other words, if the person is, has a blind spot, you're better off helping them identify it, if they're able to be reached, you know, so that they don't go off the rails, off the rails.

Karin Peter 42:33

Absolutely. So, as you, you are an historian. You have been for your, probably whole life in some aspect. So, how has your study on historical perspective been affected as you've looked at R.C. Evans? And how is it, kind of, what is it said to your own discipleship formation?

John Hamer 42:56

Well, I mean, I definitely, I mean, I definitely take those cautionary tales to heart. So, no matter how much, so, my husband, Mike, when I write something that I'm just, I'm beaming about. And I just think that this is the best essay I've ever written and this kind of thing. And his immediate, he immediately sees the spelling error, this grammar error, these kinds of things. And so, his eye immediately goes to that, and it just deflates me. You know, nevertheless, I'm very happy to continuously have a partner who is a sounding board, who doesn't just speak to the kind of ego or whatever that I might be feeling when I'm, think I've come up with something that's really, you know, whatever.

And, he was very supportive of me, but was also, you know, giving me that, that grounding and perspective. And I appreciate that in the many close friends I have who do give me those kinds of pushback. And so, that definitely, I'm attuned to that, in part because of examples like R.C. Evans. Part of what I did with this particular study, why I did it is that also, you know, as a historian, but as a historian who is now doing other things in terms of being pastor and other things in church work, I tried to encourage people who are interested in history who were in church to do their own branch histories, to do their own congregational history. And so, part of this grew out of a kind of preliminary study I did of the history of my congregation. And so part of it also, is as designed to kind of show people, I know that, in this case, we have a, he's kind of a superstar for the congregation. But there's also, they're interesting tales in all local stories. A lot of people aren't aware of, even heard of R.C. Evans and they haven't heard that. They might not have heard of any of these things. But you can find interesting stories within, within your local heritage and explore them, share them. In some cases, there's things that are embarrassing. You know, the things that would have been devastating in the time. So, the congregation, you know, was very wounded and there was pain, but it was, it's generations now. So, now we can look back at it with retrospect. And so, there are stories like that, I think, in your own congregation, wherever you are, that, that you could explore and share. And I encourage people to do it.

Karin Peter 45:19

Wonderful encouragement for the historian in all of us. Hopefully, we all have an aspect of that to discover. So, I want to thank you for sharing a little bit about R.C. Evans with us today. And again, we'll point people to those lectures. And I want them to see all the wonderful slides that you have with the photographs. And you go into more detail about the history of the Toronto congregation. And I just wanted to point out for our listeners who are not from Eastern Canada, or the eastern United States, kind of, where Toronto is. I meant to do that in the beginning. And I forgot to do it and why that would have been one of the first places the church went.

John Hamer 45:58

Yes. So, we can, we could look out from the lake, and sometimes we can see all the way across the lake to upstate New York, which is where Palmyra and Kirtland is, right? And so, we are on Lake Erie, one of the Great Lakes, and Lake Ontario, I mean, one of the Great Lakes. And if we look across Ontario, Lake Ontario, we can see anyway, that New

York and so it's very close. And so going over, for us, to go to a Hill Cumorah trip and things like that is actually very close. People are sometimes very, a lot of people in United States aren't too familiar with Canadian geography. And so, I get a lot of people who are from California who think that I live in Vancouver, you know, essentially, because they know that Canada is right above them. Actually, Canada is right above everybody. And Toronto is very much closer to, let's say, Washington DC than it is to Independence, you know, anyway, so.

Karin Peter 46:53

And just a stone's throw across the border from the original places where the church was formed. So, it makes sense that that's where missionaries went. Yeah, thanks. I apologize. I meant to share that at the beginning. So, before we end our visit here about R.C. Evans and his life and the schism that took place, any closing thoughts about him that you want to share, or about Toronto, the congregation, or even what you're doing now in Toronto?

John Hamer 47:20

Yeah. I mean, it's been, it's wonderful that we have this kind of, this preserved rich heritage. So, one of the things that I like about, I mean, it, I think it's true, generally across the restoration, but different congregations have done it better or worse, but just being a record keeping people and also saving heritage. And so, I have this repository, you know, of, let's say, so many archives and books, and photos and everything like that, and all the tithing records, and all the sacramental records and everything like that, going all the way back to the 1890s for the congregation. And there's no way, even if I devoted myself to it, I could do it justice as a history. But so, that's why I just say there's so much that we have in this heritage, and we shouldn't just focus on the beginning part of it. And we, and I think that we should look at, like, this periods that are otherwise lost. So, this particular is a black hole, I think period of between the Civil War and World War I. And so, being able to go back there and see what were our ancestors doing that caused them to want to be part of this, you know. And that helps us when we do that. Then we understand it, especially more recently than that a old, old past, which is quite alien to us, frankly. So, when we get to what was going on in the '50s, or the '40s, and the '30s. And then the end of the last, that we're also able to re-identify what part of our identity, why this has so much meaning to us now. And actually, we end up finding, a lot of times people think the whole Community of Christ trajectory, you know, got, went nutso, beginning in 1960. And it's been on a, you know, Mr. Toad's wild ride, or something like

that, ever since. Actually, the church has been actively changing the, since it started. And so, a lot of people are only aware of the most recent time because that's the end of their actual memory kind of history. But if you look, if you open up the, you know, the archives, blow the dust off all this stuff, you realize, wait a second, this has been the entire thing the entire time. And so, the more we experienced that, and the more we understand that, the more, I don't know, we can kind of connect with that, like tradition of ongoing excitement and change that has been at the heart of this tradition the whole time.

Karin Peter 49:50

That's well said, John, thank you. And thank you for joining us today, for this. And I want our listeners to know that you can find John's lecture, as well as the other lectures from the, kind of, international church or across borders, Beyond Borders series that we, that Historic Sites Foundation offered this past autumn. They are all on historicsitesfoundation.org. And I encourage you to view those as well, 'cause you don't want to miss out on the slides and the maps and all of the rest of the content that's there. So, for our Cup of Joe part of the Project Zion Podcast, thanks again. I'm Karen Peter. We'll see you next time.

John Hamer 50:36

Bye, bye.

Josh Mangelson 50:44

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