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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.

Karin Peter 00:27

Welcome to Cuppa Joe, where we explore Restoration history. I'm your host, Karin Peter. And here at Cuppa Joe, we partner with the Historic Sites Foundation to interview the presenters from their lecture series. And right now we're interviewing the presenters for the spring 2022 lecture series. And our guest today is Keith Wilson. Now, Keith, I forgot to ask you before we began to record Do you prefer? Professor Wilson, do you prefer any particular moniker?

Keith Wilson 01:08

If you're my student, I'd say Brother Wilson, but you can just call me Keith. That's just fine. We're, we're on the same level here.

Karin Peter 01:14

All righty! Well, thank you, Keith. Well, that's an honor to be able to do that for a distinguished person as yourself. So Keith Wilson, is for a few more weeks and associate professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University, where he has taught Book of Mormon New Testament and Old Testament courses. In 2008, he and his family spent a year at the BYU Jerusalem center. That must have been interesting. And Professor Wilson, there it is, I put it into my notes, and we'll use it here because it's accurate for a couple more weeks, Professor Wilson was born in Ridgecrest California, a fellow West coaster, and he is the fourth of 10 children. And you made a note that there were no earthquakes back then. So I'm going to have to ask about that. But,

Keith Wilson 02:08

Oh, there was a pretty violent earthquake about six years ago, and it's centered just two miles outside of Ridgecrest. And oh, it was, it was a real, it was a real shaker. Nothing like that happened when I was there. The biggest earthquake when I was there, biggest tremble when I was there was, Barb Walden was born right about the time I was going through high school, and she attended a small RLDS branch there and I was in the LDS ward there. So it was kind of interesting that we both came from that forlorn place in the desert.

Karin Peter 02:44

Oh, that's marvelous. I didn't know that. That's, that's great. Thanks for sharing that. So you served a mission to Vienna, Austria, and received a bachelor's and master's degree each from Brigham Young University in German and health science. Your PhD in educational administration is from the University of Utah. And your education specialty is institutional change, where you research and write about the fundamental changes in the RLDS now, Community of Christ Church, you have a lovely wife, Linda Marie, is it Crittle? (Correct.) Crittle, and you are the proud parents of eight children, a foster child and

32 grandchildren. And after 42 years of teaching at BYU, you're going to retire and just a couple of weeks. And you and Linda will be serving the church and a mission to Chile beginning this fall. So congratulations on that. That will be an exciting post retirement activity.

Keith Wilson 03:50

That would be more exciting. If I could say something beyond con mucho gusto.

Karin Peter 03:55

Oh, well,

Keith Wilson 03:57

that's "I'm pleased to meet you."

Karin Peter 04:01

So a few more things might be helpful before you go

Keith Wilson 04:03

The gift of tongues would be much appreciated.

Karin Peter 04:08

Well, we're going to talk today about your lecture for the spring historic sites Foundation series. And it is Clifford Cole: Architect and Re-founder of the Modern Community of Christ with Keith Wilson. Now, a lot of folks are familiar with the name Clifford Cole. We've talked about Clifford Cole on Project Zion before, but I'm not sure that we've talked about him and kind of the capacity that you're going to talk about him today. So I'm interested to hear what you have to say about Clifford Cole. And in your lecture description, I read a couple of things. So you noted that few members of the current Community of Christ realize that one previous leader had an outsized role in transforming the reorganization Church of Joe Smith the third, into the modern Community of Christ. Clifford Cole, did not crave the limelight. Nevertheless, he more so than any other individual quietly led the RLDS leadership away from the Joseph Smith restoration, which was more conservative to the Community of Christ. You call it the Christian Community of Christ of today. And your presentation seeks to highlight the way in which coal became the dominant leader during two crucial decades of redirection 1950 to 1970. So we're talking my early years in life as a member of the RLDS church. So first, my question is as a professor from BYU why Clifford Cole, as your lecture topic?

Keith Wilson 05:57

It's a good starting point. In fact, if I were to redo my Historic Sites Lecture, I think I would have titled it. As I've taught more and more about it, I think I would have titled it, Clifford Cole, the Martin Luther of the Reorganization. Now, even as you approach it from this standpoint, there'd be quite a bit of pushback by other academics and historians, because I'm, I'm taking kind of the great man theory, and that is that individuals, change organizations and somebody like Danny Sidaway, and others sociologically bent and things like that. They would they would argue vehemently, oh, it's cultural. It's your, you've got these trends going on in America. And then the Reorganization has this awakening after the Second World War. And you've got a an international church audience instead of just a local

audience. And so they would argue, very forcefully, that you can't just say one person changes the church, I get that. A church organization is a it's a large, multifaceted, kind of thing. Some have described it sort of using the image of a snake, and in the body of the snake and, and the tail and everything else. They're all impacting the direction and movement. But, but even with that, taken into account, I still believe that certain well placed leaders, look at our own history do that many people discount Abraham Lincoln's impact, or George Washington's, even though they were they were moving a country, and the country was also moving, had lots of parts that were shifting, but nonetheless, these people at the helm or discreetly at the helm, they play an outsized role, like I said, in the one title, and I believe that Clifford cold really is the greatest point of impetus for change. And now he's joined with a cadre of colleagues and people that are also in there. It was largely in the 50s 40s 50s and 60s, so women were not playing the same role, and I'm not trying to diminish them, but they just were not getting into leadership positions. And so, it Clifford Cole had a cadre of people like Charles Neff and Duane Couey, and Maurice Draper, and F. Henry Edwards. And, and they actually kind of converged, coalesced. And Clifford though, I believe was the point, man, no, initially, F Henry Edwards was appointment he was in leadership for such a long time period. But F Henry Edwards still kind of put the brakes on traditional restorationism. And Clifford came through an upbringing that changed him and he, especially along with Charles Neff, Charles did not have the RLDS background came to the church through marriage, really. And those two really saw eye to eye and then as they work their way in others, kind of coalesced. And, and they, folks, they changed the church. There is just no getting around it. Some of the old timers Sherry Moraine and others were talking a little while in the back and they just they just openly acknowledged that people said, you know, W Wallace was the president of church but Clifford Cole was running the church and, and I think through my research, you can see that in a in a couple of really pretty strong ways. Now, go ahead with your look like Karin, you might have a question that you are going to,

Karin Peter 10:05

I do because your background is in institutional change. And so you recognize, of course, all of the factors. So as you're talking about this, I'm thinking, of course Israel A Smith and then W Wallace Smith would have been the official Prophets Presidents of the church during this period of time. I don't know if it would have been, Fred M, let's see, would have been in there in the 30s? Was it Fred M? Yeah then, okay. So these would have been the, like, third generation leaders, they're Joseph Smith, the third's sons. And, and this was also at a, my point with that is that there's always some change that happens, of course, with different leadership. But F.M., Smith was very much a controlling personality. That's how we understand him in the life of the church.

Keith Wilson 11:02

Right? Supreme directional control.

Karin Peter 11:05

Right and trying to get things kind of reined in a little bit. Whereas W Wallace is seen as more of an expansive leader, because that was during the time when the church became to started growing globally. But what I'm what I'm hearing, as you talk about Clifford Cole is, if you didn't live in the Independence area, in kind of where the headquarters of the church was, you wouldn't have not you wouldn't have recognized this, you would have put all of the changes on F.M. or Israel or Wallace.

Keith Wilson 11:40

That's right. And, and just the Presidents themselves are a fascinating case study. The way Frederick Madison is intent on controlling and having a real top down leadership, and an F. Henry Edwards is kind of brought in right there as his aide of the F Henry is, is kind of in the sidelines, just almost like he's being trained and x given exposure. And then with a Frederick Madison's passing, Israel is seen much more as, as kind of patching things up and try a very peaceable President that wants to see the quorums back together and functioning and things like that. And, and then W Wallace W. Wallace is from the third wife, and he never, ever expected to be in church leadership. He's a hardware salesman, out in out in Oregon, you know, and they vote him into the into to be the branch president or pastor. And he's at the back of the room, reading a newspaper, and somebody says, they're there, they're nominating you. And he goes, Well, I can't do that I, you know, I work these odd hours and everything. He has no preparation, mentally and spiritually, for the presidency. And yet, Israel, I think, senses his age and things like that. And, and so he reaches out and calls W Wallace, as his counselor brings him in as an apostle and, and things and so, and that's the first time but W Wallace. I think he sees this more as a family responsibility. And yet he's not. He's not a natural religious leader. And so he, it's the it's depending on how you interpret all these changes, some would call it the perfect storm. Some would call it the opportune moment when the clouds begin to park. And W Wallace then allows his secondary leadership to just really step in. I don't know if this is well known in the church at this generation. But W Wallace, in the auditorium there where they had the church offices, he had a door installed on his office that was an outside door, so that he could leave the office without the secretaries knowing it. And he'd go out and, and take a break or go fishing or things like this. And I guess it was just the pressure and he felt like the machine was moving forward. And it didn't he didn't have to oversee every little micromanagement. And so it's kind of an interesting thing to realize that he wanted to leave the office without the secretary knowing it.

Keith Wilson 12:54

I love that. I wonder if the current leadership knows that I'm not sure that they have that same avenue of escape. I hope they do.

Karin Peter 14:39

So when you were talking about this, his exposure, if you will, to the Presbyterian minister, and his understanding of the church as the greater Christian body that that was fertile ground. Joseph Smith the Third had some of that in his own way of thinking about Christian perspectives. There are some quotes I've read from him where he talks about the good in all denominations and the good of all people of faith and, and he seemed to have this broader picture a little bit in his own understanding. So there was some Got that floating around, if you will, there had to have been some fertile ground for Clifford Cole's perspective to be able to take root so deeply.

Keith Wilson 14:39

That's right. I think they'd like that. But, but nevertheless, then this is the this is the really kind of quintessential moment when things are just right. And it's in that process that you have somebody that's raised and very much At a dyed in the wool Restoration member, Clifford Cole, his dad's working there, and Ramona at the Herald house printing and things like that before they go out and start to farm in

Montana. And, and so you have this really deeply ingrained RLDS family, and yet their children, particularly Clifford, in order to get an education rooms and is housed there in Moorcroft with a Presbyterian minister, a very good and kindly minister, that that really saturates Clifford with a whole different paradigm. And Clifford is stunned. He has a he has the it's 14-15 years of age. It's an interesting one, considering the history of the Restoration and Joseph Smith, but he has an epiphany there, as he as he lives with that, minister. Number one, he sees how good that minister is. And you know, we've in the Restoration, there's that nature of the Restoration that says join none of them. Are they on their Creed's an abomination. And so we have this either or dichotomy, that God is stepping forth, the only true and living church with a child, the Lord and pleased. It's interesting that he says collectively and not individually so that we all realize that there's imperfect, a lot of imperfect people in the church. But nonetheless, there's that paradigm. And it just as exploded when he's around Clifford, around Albert Nash's dinner table, because they'd have dinner and then he bring out the Bibles, and they'd have breakfast, and they'd have their spiritual moment. And Clifford heard somebody pray, that really was deeply devout in his prayers, He saw him bring some girl, pregnant teenager, and they had been shunned in the neighboring little town. And he and he took her in when no one else would, and his kindness. And then he started and then he attended their youth programs, and they're in their church with him. And he, he felt the Spirit in their churches. And so he was he was thrown for a real loop. And this this had deep, deep kinds of implications for Clifford in his in his oral history he uses I had a real crisis on my hand, and that was, what church should I should I should I serve because he wants to serve in religion, he loved the power of religion, and faith. And he said, he came to the conclusion that it didn't matter if Joseph Smith had the vision, it because the RLDS were my people, and they had just as much the Spirit as any other place. And so I wanted to work, but see he just exploded this idea of one true church, and that was that God was working in a specific Restoration. And that's, folks, that's the catalyst for where Clifford Cole goes with his faith. He wants to bring the restoration back in line with sound Protestant theology with more of a and really, to Clifford, the church is not a church. It's the church, which is the body of Christ. (Universal church.) Yeah. Which is very much traditional Christian. And, and so that's, that's the task that he undertakes, and he does it. He does it very skillfully, but quite quietly, he doesn't ever stand up and pound on the podium. He doesn't try to oust W Wallace or anything like that. But yeah, so that's, that's been my study. And I've just been fascinated with it. And I realized that it's, it's a two sided coin in terms of the nuances, the Restoration movements, that have broken away from Community of Christ. They, they sit there and go, we knew it, we knew it. He's the one that started this and Community of Christ, I think, needs to be saying, Wow, this guy did step into the end of the convergence, the point of convergence here. And he, he took us in a direction now that we, that we love and that we really relate with. And so that's kind of that's kind of the Clifford Cole as I see him.

Keith Wilson 20:11

Yeah, you know that, that's true. Joseph Smith, the third is just he has he has a real peaceable Spirit. You know, he recognized in Frederick Madison that that he was cut out of different cloth and implores him right at the end, you know, don't shove it down the people's throat. He was so much about common consent and things like that. And you know, Frederick Madison just did not hear it. He just got his feet underneath him and was hell bent on a different course. And, and so but, you know, Joseph the Third, he actually is gleaning a fair amount of that from Joseph Smith in his late Nauvoo days, where Joseph Smith is, is coming out saying, you know, I will defend a Baptist I will defend a Presbyterian and their

right to worship. And I think in some ways, Nauvoo because it's a whole city enterprise and not just a little part of the settlement like Kirtland. I think Nauvoo in some ways open Joseph Smith Junior's eyes to we've got to be inclusive, we can't and the exclusive thing is what really caused the unraveling, or with the neighbors coming down on him, but a large part of that carries over, I believe in the Joseph Smith, the third and the likes. And maybe it's, I don't know, maybe some of that's coming through Emma also because of her disdain for Brigham. And Brigham represented kind of one true church that has left and going west and, and we will be much more inclusive, you know, but you're right. Those seeds are all planted and brought forward. F Henry is very, is very inclusive and broad in that way. So yeah, I just fascinating. Now note too, as Clifford's influenced by the Presbyterians, Charles Neff, who's he influenced by? He's influenced by the Baptist, he was raised in a Baptist community. And then when he marries, what was the gal married? The RLDS woman, then he blends the two together and decides to keep harmony by going with RLDS. But so both of them really forceful people are really good leaders, quiet leaders, both of them have similar experiences, they come together and that's the spark right there. That starts things changing. It first happens when Clifford, you know, comes he's appointed, Reed Holmes is over religious education. Clifford was on the committee from Graceland there as Dean of Students on the committee to help rewrite the curriculum. And then he's brought in as the children's Curriculum Manager. And then when read leaves 1954 Clifford becomes the Curriculum Manager. And oh, that is that is he has the pulpit. He writes that first year, the book, The Prophet speak, isn't the Prophet Speak? Let's see, I just have it right here. I should, should give you the correct title. Yeah, there it is. The Prophets, "The Prophets Speak 1954." And in that, he begins to challenge the LDS formal interpretations of Old Testament prophecies and things and he takes Daniel chapter to task and he says, We cannot, you know, in no uncertain words, he said, this is this is dangerous territory, because what happened is in Albert Nash's living room when they opened those Bibles, Albert Nash kind of nailed Clifford on well, so how can you say that this verse means the restoration, and things like that, and Clifford couldn't defend it. And so he, he changed his, his perspective, its mind there. And he then begins that kind of quiet crusade he publishes that book, there's a there's some pushback from it, you know, when, when old time 70s And everything here that that they're not supposed to talk about the end, use that verse, But, but it just begins this process. Now, the big change happens when W Wallace says, oh, let's call him into the 12 and calls Maurice Draper, and to be a counselor, and boy, all of a sudden, you start to have this group that just are, are really converted to the idea of changing the church.

Karin Peter 24:42

It's, it's interesting, because I hadn't thought of it this way. So I'm really I'm really fascinated by this. And mind goes to, the hymnals that Community of Christ has used over the years, you begin to see the changes in the tech of the hymns that we were singing. You can begin to see in the late 50s and early 60s And what I call the old gray hymnal, you can see the language begin to shift into a more kind of Christian perspective, from the the old, more Restoration tradition, hymns that were written by authors from the church. And I remember people being uncomfortable with some of that some of the old timers in my own congregation not not liking some hymns because of that. They became interested in things you can see you see things reflected that are more mainstream Christian theology, but you also see things reflected that are more social justice kind of terminologies as well.

Keith Wilson 25:45

A parallel Karin is in our church, in our in our most recent hymn book that now is being revised. But in the most in the current edition, for the first time, How Great Thou Art was, was adapted and brought into our hymnal, I can still remember an old, old time member from my parents birthplace, and I, she was in my ward here close to the university. And, and we'd sing hymns together. And I'd say, How about How great thou Art? Because I just don't like that hymn. It's way Protestant. And now there's hardly a church member that doesn't just belt that out. Yeah, great impetus from the Spirit as we sing How great thou Art. Yeah.

Karin Peter 26:29

Yeah, similar. Similar responses. I think the some of the changes that when I remember most was "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty", and it was a person, "I'm not singing that that's the old church of England hymn' and they just would not sing it. Okay! So um, but but we see those reflected, we see it in our current hymnal, we see the changes we've made reflected and kind of where we're going reflected. But let's get back to clinical so you had his oral history, you had some writings of his were there, were there challenges about learning more about Clifford Cole, or its was was his life, something you already had kind of formulated in your head, and you knew what you're going to talk about for your lecture?

Keith Wilson 27:13

Notes. I first began my study of Community of Christ about 20 years ago, I just started asking people, Dick Howard, Mark Scherer some of the some of the older game and who, who made the difference and things like that. And then I went to Restorationists. And they, they, of course, hold a fairly jaded story. And, and more and more, I just heard the name Clifford Cole. And so I've gone through the life and kind of progression of F Henry and Morris Draper, and Duane Couey and Roy Chevelle, and lots of those that were kind of in this point of convergence. But Clifford just kept coming back as the person. And then when I went in and looked at his time and leadership, and the specific things where he was the point, man, it just started to jump off the page at me. Now you have, you have lots of things occurring in this time period, you have, you know, kingdom of the mists on the Mississippi, there in Flanders' work. And, and that's a that's a real push, and then you have plenty of other things. But but it's this, Clifford just as a cusp. Now think of the years. So he spends, oh, let's see, let me make sure and get my numbers, right. But he spends, what's his total years in church leadership, he comes into church leadership there, he's under appointment, I think it's like 29 years that he's in church service. 22 of those are spent either as an apostle or as a Quorum of 12. 22 years, right during this time period. And I think the Quorum of 12 is 16 years. But even as an apostle, he is, he has Morris Draper in the First Presidency, who's listened to him intently. And then he has W Wallace. And he begins to there's quite a shift. If you go back and look timewise right there in 1958. By the time you get to 1960, the old members of the Quorum of 12 are being moved out and they know it, okay, because you've got this young cadre that have come in and they have the ear of the First Presidency. And, and so there's that shift occurring and even F Henry when he is replaced and retired there in 1966. He went out with a little bit of second thoughts because he can see that things are shifting so much okay to this young generation and things. He's not kicking and screaming, but You still catch some little nuances of Gee, are we changing things too fast? And then it's a torrential speed from 66 to 70. Who! You have the position papers, and you have the basic beliefs committee, and you have the statement on objectives.

And by the price 1970, when they publish, what is it Exploring the Faith? Is that? I'm sorry to be rough on my, you know, Oh, should I

Karin Peter 30:26

Is that the Paul Edwards text? (Nope.) It's the one before that.

Keith Wilson 30:31

We it's the rewriting of the epitome of ah, well, there's Yeah, it's exploring the face. That's right. I was almost going to tell you my professorial joke that I use once a semester and try to hold it just to once a class and that is, you know, how you begin to forget things as you get older? So you can die with a clear conscience

Karin Peter 30:54

I can tell my husband that!

Keith Wilson 30:55

You're a true Christian! But Exploring the Faith, that is really the, the great, what would we call it? That's really the kind of the Bill of Rights to the new church constitution, the original 13 articles of the Epitome of Faith. They're expanded to like 19 or 20 of the language, it bears the language of St. Paul schools of theology got all this Protestant, Triune God and things like that. You forsake some of the some of the things I shouldn't say for sake, but scuttle some things that are very Restorationist and the likes. And so exploring the faith is kind of the final stamp. Now, there's other big things, obviously, that signal change in the church. But you notice the firestorm of the Position Papers and the Restorationists. It's, it's saints at the crossroads. I mean, it's it's 1970. So, so the word is out. And it's been established by Clifford and, and those that are on board with him in such a forceful way. And, and then you start to see the fissures forming, and 90 and then 14 years later, of course, it just, it just breaks there with the ordination of women in 1984. So yeah, it's a it's a fascinating thing to study. And I can still remember, who's your apostle that just barely passed away? (Dale Luffman?) Yes, Dale Luffman. Dale presenting at a John Whitmer. And just the year before the Council of Churches had admitted Community of Christ, and how, how you just exalted over that we have finally, you know, and you had some in the audience that were of the Restoration has been going, Really, we don't see this, we see this as the final nail in the coffin. But yeah, so I see this really, largely, the changes are occurring theologically, conceptually, between 1950 and 1970. And then the external church changes occur from that point. Women in the priesthood, the nonlinear succession, and renaming the church, okay, and those see take step in from 1980 to 2000. So you've got these 2, 70-80 at the double boilers just bursting, and then and then it takes off in 80. But yeah, so it's, to me, it's just fascinating, I, I think about it, and I know I'm the rest I'm you know, I love the Restoration even outside of the, of the face of the of the Reorganization, but I, I undertook this project, in a way for selfish reasons. And that was, I wanted to see what changed people's view from being dyed in the wool Restorationists, to very casually associated with the, the 19th century Restoration. And, and so, yeah, that's the point that I've began with, but in the process, I realized that he these are my religious cousins. And I really, I love it. When some of the old timers in my John Whitmer presentations, they'll come up and say, you know, our history better than we do! And I kind of think well, I do know some aspects now. Richard Howard, nobody ever touch Richard Howard and it's understanding and things and the first President Peter

Shirts, it really good historians and things, but, but in my own little niche that I pursued I, I think I have those oral histories are fascinating. It's hard to get a hold of them because they made a commitment that we won't let them be published and things like that we want them for, for church archival resources. But I was really grateful that the Cole family gave me permission to, to read and to quote from Clifford's oral history because it is just rich in detail.

Karin Peter 35:23

Well, let's talk a little bit about that. What were the things that you discovered, both from his oral history and your most recent study into his legacy of change that you really felt like you had to share in your lecture that you just thought were really dominant themes or important points?

Keith Wilson 35:43

Yeah, his quiet conversion to Protestant Christianity is the is the thing that just when I first read that and came across it, all of a sudden, the pieces fell into place in my mind, because I just wondered why he would, why he takes so much heat and everything because he was a quiet person. And he was a, he was quite a gentle person from what I can read. He was a consensus builder, as President and a 12, and things like that. And, and, you know, it takes a lot of gumption to take the heat in the kitchen all the time, you know, and move into the living room or something a little bit of the dining room

Karin Peter 36:25

or get a door outside so you can leave without your secretary knowing!

Keith Wilson 36:28

That's right. But, but I just wanted to know, kind of what made Clifford tick. And when I when I saw those youthful experiences, where he felt the Spirit at RLDS reunions and things any and he had deep, he didn't even mention in detail in his oral history, the fact that he felt like he was called to the ministry at one of the reunions. Devil's Gate reunion, I think is where it was up there, Wyoming. But he didn't go into much detail. I wanted him to kind of give me a little bit more but he just said there was a turning point. But then you combine that with Albert Nash, I mean, how many RLDS would be raised in a Presbyterian home during their teenage years, their high school years for four years with a minister? That's, that's exposure that you'd never, you'd never consider anybody getting. If you're converted from Presbyterianism to the Restoration, then you're going to kind of see all the weaknesses of Presbyterian and you're going to kind of go wow, the, the Restoration has so much to offer so much more. But, but when this was in the reverse, and he and so yeah, it was it was a fascinating kind of little intersection. See, Charles Neff doesn't really ever have that. Charles Neff is Baptist. And it's the love of his life that that converts him and yet he has the Asian and the war experience and the exposure there. So he brings that back. And it's a real important component. But, but for that reason, I can't bring Charles Neff to say, Oh, he's, he's right. At the cusp. I see Clifford, at the cusp there of the moving the church in a little different direction. You have people like Robert Flanders and, and he certainly he certainly drives a nail and Joseph Smith Jr's coffin, because all of a sudden, Emma Smith statements about polygamy and everything else that was that must have been just really disquieting for, for traditional members, to have an in depth study like that, and to and to have to countenance the fact that they have to rearrange their thinking about Joseph Smith, the third and the likes, and, and we've had, we've had some of those same things. Richard Bushman's, "Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling", was very disquieting for a

number of church members to see different sources and different perspectives, and things like that. And so it's a, it's a rough thing for, for traditional church members to be exposed to.

Karin Peter 39:21

It is I still hear people uncomfortable with new Mormon history. I mean, that's just the reality, even though it's been alive in the life of Community of Christ, for what 50 years, people are still terribly uncomfortable with some aspects of it. My parents been two of them, who my father would be one of those traditionalist and yet he had a copy of Kingdom on the Mississippi in his study when I was growing up, so he'd read it, but he still had a really hard time he actually read Dan Vogel's making a profit a couple of years ago and that, that threw him for a loop

Keith Wilson 39:59

Yeah, yeah, well, Dan's a great non believer. And so it's

Karin Peter 40:05

It's a lot to take in.

Keith Wilson 40:07

Richard Bushman, and the thing that I like too about Bob Flanders and Richard, I see him both in the same category. They're, they're, they've done really in depth research, and they're not there to be an iconoclast, and to just dismantle the whole faith. But the funnest thing for me with Bushmans, Rough Stone Rolling, was his little diary that was published on the road with Rough Stone Rolling, and how Richard was so concerned about how church members would perceive this, this new paradigm, and things and he was not wanting to, to destroy, or the faith or to tear it down, nor was Bob, you know, it was a total shock to Bob the way it was received. And, and really, and he ended up, you know, becoming, what was it was a Methodist or? (Presbyterian). And, and that was, that was kind of painful to see, because I, I went down and visited Bob, just shortly before he passed, and that was he was, he was long since past his prime, but it was, it was an icon in my mind for somebody that was willing to publish a solid research and, and to want the church to can't countenance it, not necessarily wanting to undercut the church, but just to say, let's, let's come, let's come to new information that we have here in countenance.

Karin Peter 41:35

He was gracious enough to allow me to interview him when I was doing a master's in Christian ministry. And I was taking a class on Community of Christ history. And he I lived in the same town he did. So we didn't meet personally. But he talked on the phone to me several times to just share different things about his experience. And one of the last things he said to me and granted, I'm a, I grew up RLDS, so I 'm, you know, embedded as in the restoration as everybody else. But I grew up on the west coast RLDS, so it's a little different. And I remember him saying to me, "Well, you don't, we don't talk like any 70 I ever met before!" which I thought was the greatest compliment ever. So he, yeah, he, he really was a delight. And he did help us in our historical journey to make huge strides in who we became. So when you are going through this, it fascinates me that you spent all these years studying RLDS and Community of Christ. So I found I find that just really interesting that that has been an area of focus for

you. But when you were doing this and doing your research and listening to the oral history, did you learn anything new, or did anything really surprise you that you didn't have an inkling about before?

Keith Wilson 43:04

You want to know the thing that was most stunning for me, and that I had to work very difficult or very, very hard to, to make sense of was in those in 67 and 68, the Joint Council seminars and why they would invite the St. Paul's professors to come in and teach the RLDS leadership. But I actually was able to put the pieces together pretty nicely after seeing Clifford Cole's background, and his is great respect for good Protestant. And then it combines F Henry was one who really preached education. He and of course the model is, well it goes all the way back to Frederick Madison, and he finishes his PhD before he will even accept the President's position. And so you have a culture of education being deeply implanted. And, and so then with Clifford Cole, feeling some a lot of embarrassment about our 70 our appointees, they are not educated and we're passing on things. And Clifford has a real seminal experience where right after he was made an appointee. Let's see which area it was. I think it might have been Iowa, right up there. He was just across the state line from Charles Neff. They became quite close because they were both new appointees. But Clifford was moved into an area where they'd had a 70 Come or maybe an apostle and make a rather flamboyant prophecy in a church meeting that there was there was a great famine coming and they had to hunker down and get their food storage and everything else. And any might have even given it a timeframe the next year or something, there will be this and this will happen. And if you're listening to the Word of the Lord, I tell you, the it's right at the door. And the next year, they had the best crop ever. And there was no famine. And, and Clifford had to go in there and work with a bunch of members that are saying, you know what's going on and stuff like that. And those kinds of things shape this young appointee. And then when he gets in, he says, we are not going to be the old firebrand preacher, we are going to be solid grounded in both the scriptures and in our educational background and training. And so once again, that, that that kind of that Protestant exposure, so he then really pushes and Richard Lancaster and others are some of the first ones right there in 1960. To go to go over to St. Paul's thing and, and start taking classes, you know. Golly, for most people in the restoration, that would be seen as the as the height of hypocrisy to go try to learn from people that their Creed's are an abomination, you know, and stay away from this and everything and shoot in our LDS temple films, we used to have a Protestant minister, you know, that was depicting kind of being in league with Satan. And it was, it was it was that it was that strongly embedded in the Restoration that there's something much better than Protestantism. Okay. And so, and for the RLDS church to start having the First Presidency and the Quorum of 12, taught and instructed by Protestant professors, you know, well, that one was off the charts. But, but it makes sense when you start to see what happened with Clifford and others, this non education, kind of part of the Restoration collide with this newer thing. And the likes, they weren't, they weren't very gentle, though, at times, even though they were still very gracious and other ways. I mean, they came back from one session that's been noted by a number of people in their histories. W Wallace is there with the joint counsel, they're being instructed, and I think it was, it was at Carl Bangs, or anyway, one of them came back, and they started an afternoon session, he said, We need to get something kind of clear as we teach you, if it becomes apparent to you, that, that there's a conflict between Joseph and the Restoration, and Jesus as taught in the Bible, which direction are you going to go? So I mean, it was a very bold thing of saying, No, we're not totally on board we see good and your faith and everything, but we're not on board with with your basic tenants. And, and so he just presented the dichotomy there of which are you going to

believe and go with Joseph for Jesus? And after a long pregnant pause is kind of the way some have described it, W. Wallace said, Well, Jesus, of course. And see, W Wallace was sucked into a false dichotomy, that many in the Restoration would believe that question embodies and that is, how can Joseph be contrary to Jesus? I mean, if you've, if you believe his first vision accounts, and the Book of Mormon, it's not a contrary evidence of Jesus, it's another so but for W Wallace, he wasn't a schooled theologian, when that question came out in that bluntly, you know, even clouded in what many would see as a false dichotomy, that and that becomes symbolic of that turning point.

Karin Peter 48:45

Yeah, I've heard people talk about that moment, in different context, as well. But I'm also recognizing that in Community of Christ, even when it was RLDS, our, what I what I share with even my own family members who are LDS is that we are the descendants of disgruntled dissenters. That's, that's where we come from. And because of that, we're okay not agreeing with something that Joseph Smith said. We don't care if it's written in the Doctrine of Covenants. We're okay not agreeing with it. And if it becomes prevalent that most people don't agree with it anymore, we'll keep putting that down. We don't always take it out. But we're okay saying that doesn't fit anymore. We're just not going to do it and off we go. So the Word of Wisdom was big when I was a kid, nobody drank coffee in my church community. But, you know, that's long gone. You're gonna see potluck, every Community of Christ Potluck's got coffee going on. So we put that down and we're okay. It's still in the Doctrine and Covenants. People ask us well, how do you stay That's not literally, obviously, so.

Keith Wilson 50:04

Well continuous revelation really is a principle that opens, opens the door wide open to change like that. And yeah. And so that's, that's very conducive in that sense. Now it does, it does kind of cut against the restoration impetus, and that was that God would speak through prophets to bring forth the fullness of the gospel. But in many respects, the LDS or the restoration and those that claim to it, it's very much like a Magisterium where it's a top down kind of situation, which is very out of favor in today's churches. And yet the Prod, or the Community of Christ has gone through more of a democratization, where each voice is important. And so it makes decision making tough but but the voice of the community shifts, then then it really allows that the revelation on the Blacks and the priesthood was kind of a great case study, because Community of Christ, the RLDS shifted away from that quite quickly. It was it was 19th century sort of policy, it was survival in Missouri and things like that. It became quasi doctrine for us, as we came out to the isolated West, and then in order to, to wit to withdraw it or to change it. He'd had to wait on full blown revelation. And, and most don't respect that. They just feel like Oh, you were way behind the times. But but it was this. It was this adherence to top down revelation, not revelation from horizontal but vertical. And so it was, it was it was a fascinating kind of case study. And we still kind of cringe it being called racist when the church was waiting upon revelation.

Karin Peter 51:59

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So I want to, I want to ask you, I want to get to some discipleship formation kind of questions, if you don't mind. So as you kind of step back and look overview at our current Community of Christ, you're looking at it from outside, but you're looking at it from a long period of

observing and being engaged with Community of Christ. So how do you see Cole's legacy shaping and forming disciples in Community of Christ today?

Keith Wilson 52:32

I see it just very central and fundamental to the Spirit of Community of Christ Community of Christ is if there anything, it's inclusiveness, we want to embrace all of God's children, we do not want doctrine or policies that exclude so things like the LGBTQ movement, things like race and those things, that's just that, that's, that's the heart and soul of Clifford Cole, he wanted the community of, or the Restoration to, to, to not be so inclusivist or not be so exclusive, but to be inclusive, and so, you know, he's reaching out to Protestant ministers, he's, he's rewriting the Restoration. And it's, and it's exclusiveness he's, that's just the Spirit of Community of Christ. I mean, and when the Community of Christ has a movement for you know, when you want to pick up the seekers that are leaving the LDS church, because it's still quite formal and rigid, that's that inclusiveness we want, we want to welcome you, your, your, your cousins here in the Restoration, and you've, you've fallen out of out of favor with your fundamental principles. But look, we have, we have the same pedigree, but we've moved with the culture and things where we were much more inclusive. So I see that as being really the heart and soul of Community of Christ today. I and i love that the other disciple kind of awakening thing is, man, I have some really good good people that that I just think, you know, they were raised in my context, they'd be LDS if I were raised in their context, I'd probably I'd probably be Community of Christ. Lach Mackay but what I was saying, you know, just so, so respective of LDS views and things like that, especially with the, with the sites and how we, you know, just flood the sites with LDS members and things like that. And, and, yeah, never, I mean, he must have answered that question a gazillion times. When are you going to sell us the Kirtland Temple? It doesn't ruffle Lach. He just kind of smiles at them. Little do they realize they're looking at the direct descendant you know of Joseph Smith. (Yeah, yeah, absolutely.) He doesn't tell him that because it has words he says, they look at me like, I'm weird. But, but you know, and Andrew Bolton, and some of the ones that have been real active in our interfaith group, they've just been really uplifting to rub shoulders with and realize we have Barb Waldon, we have much more in common. And then we have the differences. We have a volume coming out right now, I guess you're aware of it that's that I write just on the other side of the line from Lach about the first vision, and we just kind of go back and forth. And, well, here's what we believe. And here's where we differ. And it's, it's very, it's just very collegial.

Karin Peter 55:46

There's a lot of that in, in the academic and historical aspects of our traditions where we share back and forth. And I think a lot of times people aren't aware of the collegiality that exists between our scholars, particularly in particular. So I have a personal question, and that is, how did your or how has your study of Clifford Cole and, and his life and ministry contributed to your own discipleship, your own ministry, your own faith experience?

Keith Wilson 56:19

It's been, it's been kind of a, a little bit of a, of a lightning rod in that I have, I've had my challenges to my faith. My PhD was I was exposed to those who had left the church and wanted intellectually for me to leave in the things they had me read and study and you're pretty much beholden to, to your committee and things and, and so I had those times and moments when I was plunged into lots of

contrary voices. And for me, it my own foundation turned me back to the restoration, I saw what I believed the others were offering. And it wasn't, it didn't feel nearly as rich and, and as what I had. And so unlike Clifford it, it turned me back more, okay, to my roots and my faith and, and that's what's really sustained me during my 42 years of formal teaching with the Book of Mormon text and treating it as a as a bonafide historical document and not just a piece of really uplifting literature, or depending on how you countenance it. And so that's, that's been a great journey for me. The other thing I love about my study with RLDS Community of Christ is my own faith is isolated enough that they do not realize the depth of faith in those that were restoration cousins. And they are always when they hear that I'm a scholar, somewhat academic of the RLDS and Community of Christ. They want me to stop wherever I am in my lecture and just tell them more about Community of Christ and RLDS because we we just don't have any substantial congregations. I mean, there's one or two out here in the, in the whole state of Utah, you know, and so it's, they've, they always, you know, there's rumors, oh, well, they're, they can't turn on the air conditioning they've made, you know, they're struggling financially. And, and so it's just, it's, we need good information. And so,

Karin Peter 58:44

yeah, it's hard when you don't rub elbows, with people, you begin to other them. And I think that has happened in multiple contexts and has gone in both directions. Yeah.

Keith Wilson 58:55

And the question I'm asked somewhat frequently to like Lach, so when are they going to when they realize I've studied the faith and know, a fair number of the church leaders? When are they going to sell us the Kirtland Temple? And I said, my comment to them, Have you ever seen Bridge of Spies? You know, that statement, Last Man Standing, the Kirtland Temple represents the day of Pentecost in the RLDS Community of Christ. Don't insult them by asking even to the last member, when are you going to sell that to us? Because that's the day of Pentecost and that's the spiritual impetus.

Karin Peter 59:32

It has great significance definitely. Well, I want to give you the opportunity to offer any closing thoughts that you'd like to share with our listeners, but before I do, I wanted to ask So who's next? So you gave your lecture on Clifford Cole? You come back from Chile from your mission? You have some spare time. Who you're going to you're going to research next and do a lecture about?

Keith Wilson 59:55

What can I really should do Karin is If I were true to all the funds that my own university has afforded me quite generously to, I almost have a locker and at MCI, you know, I just, I've come in and out of the airport, three and four or five times a year, I should put together my composite study, which is to trace all these facets, the Bob Flanders and I've done them all as individual lectures at John Whitmer. But, but I haven't started or stopped to put them all in print and to do the, to do the St. Paul's school, and to do the F Henry Edwards and to do all these places that I see in this 1950 to 1970 time period where the fundamental DNA of the Restoration changes to become the Community of Christ DNA. And so I should do that, because I think I can do it without taking a poke at a Community of Christ, the affection and feelings I have. And yet, there's something about an outsider looking at somebody's history that you it, it's more trusted in the aggregate scholarly world because it's never seen as self promoting or

anything. And so, you know, I'd love to do that. But I don't know Karin I, I don't like criticism. And so when you're right, you open yourself up for, for every critic out there.

Karin Peter 1:01:33

Well, even if you don't write it, we'd love to hear a podcast. When you come back and begin to put that together, we'd love to have a podcast on that, where you put all of these pieces into play.

Keith Wilson 1:01:45

There's, there's a lot of them. History is complex.

Karin Peter 1:01:49

So any last thoughts before we close our episode today?

Keith Wilson 1:01:54

No, just thanks for your for your graciousness, in wanting to host me and, and get an outsider's perspective. Thanks for for sensing the importance of, of history, in our own composition. Within the LDS faith, we have a real push to do personal history. And I realize more so than then than I have in the past that if you don't record and review, where you've come from, you learn you lose a significant portion of who you are, you know, we have those little quips about he doesn't know history is bound to repeat it and things like that. But on a personal level, you know, I, I think about my ancestors that, that were there in Kirtland and received a copy of the Book of Mormon and, and the kind of changes they decided to make and, and to uproot families and to just go with this restoration, and, you know, Community of Christ, if somebody walks into your church today, they're in the Midwest, they won't feel huge differences from other Protestant communities, you guys are most churches are very welcoming and have central core doctrines that are very similar. And yet, without the history of Community of Christ, that's, that's where that's where you're kind of your soul is, you know, to, to know, what's brought us to where we are right now. And, and so I just love the fact that you're wanting to keep that alive and, and where I can I'd love to contribute to support you because I want my children to remember their history. I wanted to visit the grave out there and you know, six water at six crossing there in Wyoming and see their ancestor that froze that night, you know, and said to his wife, "My children will be raised in Zion." you know, that's, to me, that's just like, who just kind of gets a hold of me. And I just think blood in my veins comes from that, that that experience. And so yeah. And I mean, hopes, one of the best that you have working within is Lach Mackay you know, he is he knows the power of history. And he, he wants to keep that alive and vibrant in the community. And so, yeah. So I'm glad to just be in those kinds of circles.

Karin Peter 1:04:29

Well, thank you for sharing with us here at Project cyan our cup of joe series is introducing Community of Christ history to an entire different set of listeners. And this has been a most fascinating discussion, and I've really appreciated it and getting to know you a little bit as you transition from your teaching ministry into wherever God takes you in the next month as you learn Spanish and as you venture out off into Chile. So thank you, Keith Wilson, for joining us today. For our listeners, we encourage you to view Keith's lecture and you can find all the historic sites lectures for the Spring 2022 series will be

archived on the [historicsitesfoundation.org](https://www.historicsitesfoundation.org) website. And as always, this is Cuppa Joe part of the Project Zion Podcast. I'm Karin Peter, thank you so much for listening.

Josh Mangelson 1:05:39

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