

Cuppa Joe | Theo-History | Wallace B Smith Era

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SPEAKERS

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Karin Peter 00:30

Welcome to Project Zion Podcast. This is Cuppa Joe where we explore Restoration history. And I'm your host, Karin Peter. Our discussion today is part of a series of conversations about the historical and theological journey of Community of Christ. Our resident panel members are Lach Mackay and Tony Chvala-Smith. Lach is an historian, the Director of Community of Christ's historic sites, and serves on the Council of Twelve Apostles. Tony's a theologian who teaches scripture and theology at Community of Christ Seminary and Graceland University. Both Lach and Tony are familiar to Project Zion listeners. So, we welcome both of them this morning. In this series, we're following the development of the early church, the Reorganization, and our journey as Community of Christ. We'll look at important church events in their historical and cultural context, as well as corresponding theological developments and their impact on the church. So, today, we're talking about Wallace B. Smith. And we're going to begin, I think, Lach with you. Don't we normally begin with the historical commentary? All right. So, we'll start with you. Welcome this morning Lach.

Lach Mackay 01:48

Always great to be with you, Karin. Wallace B. Smith was born in 1929. One of W. Wallace Smith's three children. He married Ann McCullough Smith and Wallace, or Wally, was an MD focusing on ophthalmology. Uh, quite successful. And then, he was designated as his father's successor in 1976, can be found in Section 152 of the Doctrine and Covenants. In a break with tradition, W. Wallace stepped down after a very intensive two year period of preparation for his son with Wally ordained in April of 1978. Although an active priesthood leader locally and serving on the Standing High Council, Wally had very little theological training prior to his appointment and little exposure to the inner workings of the church making his appointment significantly controversial among some general church officers. He served as prophet-president until April of 1996 when he retired, having named a counselor in the First Presidency, Grant McMurray, as his successor in a September, 1995 pastoral letter to the church. While his tenure is most often remembered for the building of the Independence Temple, uh, that is part of section 156 that we'll talk about, the ordination of women, also part of section 156, the Restorationist schism which started earlier with Restoration festivals, but grew quickly after 1984 and the decision to ordain women. He's remembered for the move towards Community of Christ as a new name for the church although it wasn't officially accepted until after Wally's retirement. He designated a non-Smith, Grant Murray, as his successor, again a significant break in tradition. Also, during this time,

a program, there was significant focus on Faith to Grow to strengthen members and increase membership. Unfortunately, that was followed by the Restorationist schism. Also, during this time, the Lundgren murders in Ko, in Kirtland. So, let's look a little more at section 156. This is April of 1984. It released Charles Neff from the Council of Twelve and called Geoffrey Spencer to replace him. It discussed the purpose of the Independence Temple, explored priesthood calling and commitment, an attempt to, to engage more fully priesthood members and better prepare priesthood members. It opened a path for the ordination of women. And it re-emphasized the role of members in bringing about the cause of Zion. We're going to specifically look at the Independence Temple and then at ordination of women, but let's look at the Temple first. A little context. You'll remember that our history as Christians with temples seems to be rooted in the book of Acts which we very much focused on. It was, it was almost the template for what we thought the church should look like in 1830s Kirtland. And because Acts describes the time solely in Christian history that people are still Jewish, the temple still played a role in the life of the church, that's what we thought we should do as well. And in Kirtland, we planned not just one, what they typically call the house of the Lord, but three. Those instructions in Section 91 of the Doctrine and Covenants, that's LDS 94. Uh, one of those is the one that was built. Then just south was going to be a house for the presidency or an office building. Further South a house for their printing operations. And it was, uh, our tendency to fill our public squares with temples which often lead to conflict with neighbors. We weren't putting courthouses in the middle of our communities, but sacred buildings. In Independence, at the same time, plans for a temple quickly grew from one to a 24 temple complex. And then the community was going to surround that complex. Our understanding of what fell into the realm of sacred was very broad, with schools for children, print shops, church office buildings, and storehouses for the poor, all considered worthy of being housed in temples. Sidney Rigdon, in 1838 Farwest, Missouri is talking about a temple we hope to build there, but it's going to be used for, among other things, it was going to be a place to educate our children, both male and female, to protect them from the more learned instead. Throughout much of the 20th century, we dreamed of building a temple in Independence with children saving coins to contribute to the cause. We talked about, I think, in an earlier episode, 1968 W. Wallace Smith brought section 149 to the church calling for quote a start to be made toward building my temple in the center place. And then it quickly, in 149a, clarifying that there would be no provision for secret ordinances, now or ever, in the temple in Independence. Wallace B. Smith's 1980, 84 section 156 called for work on building the temple to continue at an accelerated rate. For, quote, There is a great need of the spiritual awakenings that will be engendered by the ministries experienced within its walls. Specific details of Temple ministries were supposed to be developed by the First Presidency. According to 156, it's going to be dedicated to the pursuit of peace, reconciliation and healing of the Spirit. It's going to be a means of strengthening faith and preparation for witness. It's going to be a place for leadership education and for priesthood and members. The essential meaning of restoration as healing and redeeming agent was to be given new life and understanding through temple ministries. And it was called to be an ensign to the world, a symbol to the world. That,uh, kind of morphed into an ensign of peace, a phrase picked up from section 102 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Fishing River revelation. Shouldn't be surprising that there's significant overlap between the functions of the Independence Temple and the Kirtland Temple with both serving as houses of public worship, the strong emphasis on empowerment both spiritually and intellectually. The designs are nothing alike, but the functions of the spaces are-- worship, education, church administration. In Kirtland, we focused in the 1830s on endowment or spiritual empowerment. In section 156, that becomes spiritual awakening. In Kirtland, we had the school of the

apostles, the Kirtland, Ohio Theological Institution, which included Hebrew studies, Kirtland High School, which included reading writing English, Greek, with students ranging in age from six through adults. In independence, that becomes education for priesthood and members. Kirtland focused on preparation for mission and you couldn't actually as a missionary go overseas until you had been endowed with power from on high in Kirtland. Independence also understood to be a place for preparation for witness. Lots of overlap in the functions. I believe Kirtland, though, was somehow perceived to be a threat, probably because of the Restorationist Schism, by some church leaders. So, instead of connecting with and building on Kirtland and the history there, the 1994 Independence Temple dedication, I think, was in some ways, intentionally disconnected from Kirtland. So, for example, we didn't sing the Spirit of God Like a Fire is Burning, which I, I think personally was a mistake. I recognize it's a fight song and we're a peace church. So, that's a little problematic. But we could, as we eventually did, simply rewrite some of the verses and reclaim the Lion and the Lamb verse, one of the original six verses, rewritten by Andrew Bolton and Ran, and, uh, Randall Pratt. So, I think we would have been helped by building on Kirtland instead of intentionally I, in my opinion, disconnecting from it. That part of 156 the, the Independent Temple, the preparation of priesthood, um, that's often lost in the controversy surrounding the ordination of women which 156 provided for. Again, a little context on, on the role of women and priesthood in the church. Emma Smith, of course, in 1830, is ordained to expound scriptures, section 24, it's LDS section 25, Harmony, Pennsylvania. The ordination of Emma's counselors in the Relief Society occurs in 1842. And when somebody asked why Emma wasn't being ordained in 1842, Joseph explained it's because she already was in 1830. Joseph Smith, Jr. told the Relief Society in March of 1842 that the Society should move according to the ancient priesthood and he was going to make of the Society a kingdom of priests as in Enoch's day, as in Paul's day. Joseph turned the key over to the Relief Society, uh, in 1842. Later in the LDS tradition, historians would change that from, I turned the key to, that's changed to, I turned the key on your behalf. Didn't want to, didn't want to let any authority slip out. Women and Nauvoo were performing healing blessings. And when men complained about it, Joseph's response was Well, does it work? Well, well, yeah. Okay then. What is the problem? Uh, Rosannah Marks said this to E.C. Briggs, Oh, I did not have to call for the elders to minister to my children. Often I would anoint them with oil when sick and they would immediately be well. Fast forward to the Reorganization, D. W. Mills anointed and set apart Emma Burton in 1890 to administer to the sick among the females of the church. That infuriated Apostle T. W. Smith who called it a square out and out ordination. He was not amused. Emma Burton went on to perform healing blessings in California, French Polynesia and Australia. The general conference in 1905 considered a resolution to ordain women although it was not considered favorably by the Presidency and the Twelve, probably because the motivation for the resolution was that if women were ordained, they could get free passage on the trains. Not necessarily a theological argument, but (. . .) a financial argument. In 1920 and 1935, Fred M. discussed the possibility of ordaining women in the Saints Herald. In the 1970s, women were being called to priesthood offices, but the calls were not being processed by district and stake officers. World Conference resolution 1141 in 1976 resolved that consideration of the ordination of women be deferred until it appears in the judgment of the First Presidency that the church by common consent is ready to accept such ministry. And 1980, New Zealand and parts of Australia brought a resolution to conference calling for the authorization of national churches that would then consider ordination of women and other related activities at an, as a national jurisdiction. So, a forerunner to the eventual development of national conferences. That did not pass. Uh, and then, of course, finally, in Section 156, 1984, when President Wallace B. Smith. My, my

sense is that section 156 and the ordination of women felt disjunctive to many members. It felt like a complete break from the past. I believe we would have been well served to better provide members with tools to process change by educating them on our then 154 year old history of exploring the relationship between women and priesthood authority. I'm not arguing that we should have made that decision in 1984 because of the, the history from the 1830s and 40s. I am arguing that members would have been more easily able to do the mental gymnastics necessary, uh, to get there if we had better equipped them. Uh, the people who cared most about what happened in the early church are the same people who probably objected most strongly to ordain women. So, I think we would have been helpful to, to better equip them. Having said that, a lot of the best source material is from the Relief Society minutes and it's, it was not available in 1984. It was locked up in vaults in Salt Lake. Initially, those who hoped to reverse section 156, uh, came to the 1986 conference well prepared with lots of, uh, parliamentary maneuvers, again, trying to remove it from the Doctrine and Covenants. When this didn't happen, a more significant schism developed with thousands separating into Restoration branches, they became known as. Many felt strongly about maintaining their names on our roles. They worshipped separately and didn't support the church financially. Um, they often, those branches, continued to split over various topics. And, like many others, they have struggled to keep their children engaged, as in, of course, Community of Christ. Some of those Restorationists united under Frederick Larson and established the Remnant Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Fred suffered a stroke in 2019 and there was confusion regarding his designated successor following his death. So, that group also split. So, um, this Restorationist schism has continued since 1984. So, to summarize Wally's tenure 1978 to 96, 18 years as Prophet-President, a time of very significant change, a time of disruption as families were torn apart over the ordination of women. In some ways, it reminds me of the 1844, 45, 46 period as families came apart, trying to figure out who to follow, whether to accept polygamy after Joseph's death. Uh, Wally's time in office, though, was also a time of celebration as the worth of women was finally fully recognized and the long dreamed-of temple in the center place was constructed and dedicated.

Karin Peter 17:09

Lach, I just wanted to ask, um, a, a con, uh, question on context. So, sometimes we look, look back at this time period and, and from our lens now and say, Oh, my gosh, why were so many people upset about women's ordination. But in 1984, that was only a couple of years after the ERA amendment officially tanked and women had been going through a, a huge struggle to try to get that passed in the United States. And finally, it was defeated. And, so, we forget that there was, there was all around us, at that time, a struggle within the United States to, to try to determine the role that women would have going forward. And we still don't have an Equal Rights Amendment today. So, this was really progressive and shocking for people at that time, but it was also part of a larger conflict.

Lach Mackay 18:06

Yeah, not just a church issue, uh, (Yeah.) which I think we're seeing today on lots of topics as well.

Karin Peter 18:12

Yeah, absolutely. So, I guess that wasn't a question. That was a comment coming from my, my own, um, perspective of that time, that, that was just a really difficult, difficult time. Okay, Tony, let's delve

into what that means for us in our theological journey. There's a lot of content there. Where are you going to start?

Tony Chvala-Smith 18:36

Where am I going to start? Well, this is going to, this is going to be both easy and difficult. The difficult part is that a good historian will tell you that the more recent stuff is the harder stuff to get at because we don't have the space of distance to see it. And, so, we're now talking about a period in which, in which, uh, uh I was coming into, uh, significant activity in the church. And, so, in 1983, my wife Charmaine and I were hired by the Michigan Region of the church to be executive ministers for two years. And, so, we were working for the church as executives in 1984 when section 156, uh, was offered to the church. So, so, uh, this is, this is like contemporary history. This is my life we're talking about right now. So, in some respects, I, I, uh, I claim that my lenses will be a little bit foggy on it. I'm happy to claim that and I'll tell you what I think and you can take that as it, how, however you want to take it. Um, so, for, for decades now, Charmaine and I taught a class at Graceland called Community of Christ Theology. And in our syllabus we titled, we, we used, uh, used a phrase of a 1960s movie that Charlton Heston was in to describe the 19, the, the, the period of the 1980s the agony and the ecstasy, right, the movie about Michaelangelo starring Charlton Heston back in the 1960s. Um, I could, I could quote Dickens here, too, it was the best of times, it was the worst of times. Best of times, uh, the, the, the church, church population and church activity was kind of, in some respects, at its peak--large reunions, larger congregations, um, a lot of excitement about being part of, being part of the one true church. Okay? On the other hand, the, the agony was that the, the work that had been done in the 60s and 70s was still very much alive in church leadership. And what had happened in the meantime, when we, when we got to 1984, schism was inevitable because they're already two churches, in my view. Um, it's not inconsequential culturally that the schism in our church happened in a period when the religious right in American culture was on the ascendancy because the, the, the groups that broke away would have shared the same kind of cultural, political, social, conservative values of, generally, things like the Moral Majority and other, other groups in that, from that period that, that were, uh, trying to, to reclaim some sort of glory days they remembered, partly, rightly, partly wrongly, from the 1950s. So, I think it was inevitable that, this, this, this was a marriage that was not going to work. Um, you had, you had a large number of, of, of church members who were, were still, who, who, who had not taken in the critiques of the 1960s and still thought that the preaching chart was, was a, a doctrine that had been dropped from heaven. They were, only they were, uh, showing it in the form of slides called Go Ye and Teach slides. And, so, they had not taken Arthur Oakman's, uh, thoughtful critique in 19, the 1960s that, that doctrine is our best guess. And doctrine can be reformed. They, they assumed that doctrine were infallible truths and they assumed that the Go Ye and Teach slides, the one true church, the, the preaching chart theology, that, that, that was an immutable thing that had always been from 1830 on and along with that when a real lack of historical consciousness about development, about how things change and move and develop. So, so essentially, we had a fundamentalist church inside the Reorganization, and another church that was sort of struggling to be born that was coming out of the 1960s and 70s and that, that was yearning for, uh, for some kind of relevancy to the late modern world. So, that was just simply, uh, you know, I, I, I understand what Lach was saying, I'm, I'm not sure I fully agree just simply because I, I think the, the, the theological worlds these two groups we're living were so different there was just simply no way that you could imagine, uh, a reconciliation of those worlds. So, what can I say about the Spirit? Well, let me, let me go to, um, Lach mentioned that the, that, uh,

section 156 struck many people as disjunctive. Actually, that's a word that was, that appeared in a 19, January 1984 editorial in the Herald from the First Presidency, probably written by Allen Tyree, though it's not, not known for sure. The, the, the, uh, editorial was titled New, uh, uh, like New Revelation. And its whole theme was disjunctive revelation, how, how new revelation, if it's really new, will often be disjunctive with the past. Uh, if I remember reading it at the time, other church, church members, uh, read their Heralds a lot then. And I remember a lot of us reading the January Herald and reading that editorial and thinking something's up. Here we are a couple months away from World Conference and something's up here. So, at the time, it seemed like a brilliant statement. As I look back at it in retrospect, I think it was the wrong language. So, uh, this was a place where one could have made the case, the ordination of women is not disjunctive with the past. It was, it was pushed aside in the past and actually was in the past. There are women deacons, women apostles mentioned in the New Testament, women prophets. And, so, disjunctive made it sound like, um, this was going to be a, a departure from orthodoxy. And that's how, uh, section 156 struck a lot of, uh, uh, Restorationist minded church members then as a departure from the orthodoxy that they were deeply, uh, deeply embedded in, right? So, in reality, the ordination of women could be demonstrated from the New Testament. And, and also what could be demonstrated was that in the late New Testament period and into the second and third century, it was pushed to the side as the church tried to accommodate in some ways to the Rom, Roman culture, to a suspicious Roman culture that it found itself ever more involved in. So, but, uh, we, we have seminary students read that editorial, uh, in Community of Christ Theology because it's really, I think, an important piece of, of theology, uh, from that period. Essentially, what was happening was that the Presidency was trying to prepare people for what was coming in 1984. Now, this, 1984 was D and C 156. Sometimes I'm a little shocked that it hit people like a stone dropped out of heaven, when in fact, for 20 years or more, this had been on, on the docket. People had been talking about this. In fact, when I joined the church in 1975 in the South Central Michigan District, uh, I discovered, uh, as an 18 year old, there was a controversy there because a pastor in that district had submitted a call, uh, to the office of Elder for a woman, uh, to the District President, the District President who later became a Restorationist, was not happy about this, sent it up the line, and it got stall, stall, stall, stall. And that congregation became quite unhappy about that. And so this controversy had emerged, um, so (. . .) section 156 was not a bolt from the blue, really. We, there had been, there had been discussion, argument, disagreement, uh, debate for a long time about it. Um, I think what was shocking was that, uh, it came from the Prophet. Now, I have to say, 1984 was my first experience as a delegate at World Conference. And I was an Elder. I was a newly ordained Elder. So, I was in the Elders Quorum meeting which, which met in Stone Church, in the main sanctuary of Stone Church, packed, packed, packed. And, uh, when, when, when the document was read, which there was like this moment of, like, the, the, the deep silence that you would, the, the nothing that's in the universe of silence, right? You, absolute silence, and then the whole chamber exploded. And people were trying to get the floor, um, yelling, yelling, yelling to get the floor. And, um, the arguments were of two kinds. One kind of argument was, uh, the Prophet has been deceived. Uh, don't pay any attention to the temple stuff in it. That's the, the, there's a, the, the, the woman stuff is a rotten apple and it spoils the whole barrel and so none of this is true. And the other kind of argument was, scripture is not infallible. We've never believed that. And we, we have to be open to new revelation. And this is, this is, this is already happening. And, right, so it's kind of a, an argument that pitted old, very old interpretations of tradition with a lot of proof texting of some scripture versus new understandings of tradition and new understandings of scripture pitted the two things together. And I, I was right there and I, I watched it.

And then I, of course, was part of the, uh, part of the, uh, conference deliberations on section 156. By the way, that same conference, there was also a resolution on open communion. And there was a discussion session in the Auditorium chamber. Uh, I actually spoke in favor of it, uh, but the, the, the people, people lined up at both two different microphones to speak for and against. The line was exceedingly long for that. So, the, the, the two, the two churches were, were having it out right there, really, on open communion, uh, which was going to take another 10 years to formally come about. About 10 more years to come about. But then ordination of women really was the, the hot, the hot button topic. Um, during the conference sessions, on, on that one, one piece, one, one thing that a delegate said that was quite powerful, and I forget who the delegate was, but he had been a confidant of Fred M. Smith. And he said in his statement, Fred M. Smith told me this was going to happen one day and it would come by revelation. That was actually a little piece of personal experience tradition that was, I think, quite, quite helpful for, uh, members who are on the fence there to know that. I, I don't remember the delegate's name, which is unfortunate, but I do remember him saying that. So, anyway, that's

Lach Mackay 29:24

Garland, Garland, Garland Tickemyer?

Tony Chvala-Smith 29:26

Yes. Thank you. That's exactly who it was. Uh, yeah. I remember right where he was standing when he said it. So, it was, uh, now after the conference out in jurisdictions, uh, Regional Presidents and Stake Presidents had enormous firestorms to put out. And Charmaine and I worked for the church in the Michigan Region and our Regional President, Gary Beebe, and Regional Bishop, Larry Norris, were exceptionally good leaders and immediately when we got back they planned a series of meetings in four parts of the state that were connected then to the four campgrounds connected to the in those parts of the state. And, uh, those meetings were, uh, say what you have to say, but we're going forward with this. And, so, it gave people a chance to air and also hear from experiences from folks who've been at conference and so on. I think it, it helped significantly there to, to limit the, the subsequent, uh, damage, uh, caused by, by schismatics on that. So, that's kind of a little bit of my experience of that whole era. Um, I can also say that, uh, Charmaine was among the first group of women ordained in 1985. She was ordained November 17, 1985, I believe it was, and we were living in Toronto at the time. We came back to Michigan where it had been processed for that, for that event. So, um, so, what else can I say about the theology of this period? Well, there were a couple of absolutely brilliant theologians who worked for the church then. Duane Couey, who went into, who became a Presiding Evangelist during that era, and Geoffrey Spencer, who went into the Council of Twelve. Both of them became very dear friends and mentors to Charmaine and me. And, uh, Couey, uh, Couey had been very influential in the 60s and 70s and, and Dwayne, uh, was very much influenced by the theology of Paul Tillich. I asked him once, what's one of the most important things you ever read from Paul Tillich? And he told me, Tillich's famous, uh, it's like 1947 or 8 sermon, You are Accepted. A sermon on justification by faith was ex, extremely powerful to Duane. And Geoff Spencer became a, a, a, an important personal friend as I was trying to navigate whether I wanted to stay with this, with this church or not. He's one who helped me when I was a seminary student to, uh, realize that when one need not, uh, uh, surrender one's intellect in order to be a member of the church. That was important for me at the time. Um, this was a period in which the word grace came increasingly more fully into, uh, Community of Christ

vocabulary or RLDS vocabulary, um, in the, in the material that was prepared to, to help people adjust to the Faith to Grow program in the early 80s, and so on, uh, the concept of grace was lifted up. Prior to that, grace had been kind of a, grace had been spelled with four letters in Community of Christ, (. . .) we weren't like those Protestants who, who were saved by grace. Well, uh, we, we, we came to see that that was, that was problematic, a problematic theology. And, uh, I remember, uh, Geoff Spencer, many years later in a lecture once, saying that, that he had, he went to do a study on grace back in that period. And he went to the Book of Mormon and he went to the index of the Book of Mormon. And he knew the word grace appeared several times in the Book of Mormon, but it wasn't in the index. And he said, In the index, you went from God to grave without grace, which is a very charming and powerful statement. And, uh, uh, so, then, of course, uh, Wallace B.'s, uh, section 156, um, brings, brings peace and justice language right into the fore of the church, right into, into church life. And that's been, that's been catalytic ever since. But I think something else is really important in Section 156 that, that gets overlooked is his, his use of the phrase in regards to the temple, that it shall be a place in which the essential meaning of the restoration as healing and redeeming agent will be, uh, explored and so on. Essential, right? What's the difference between essentials and peripherals? Or as they said in the 70s, uh, uh, ultimate principles and middle principles, that was language being used in the church. What are, what are our ultimates? You know, going back to Charles Neff wondering, gosh, what should we teach in Asia? What's, what's the most important stuff? What's less important? And it turn, it turns out that, that one of the reasons there was a schism is because the less important stuff was the most important stuff for one group of people. Right? And, so, the first, the first vision, the plates, the old story, Inez Smith Davis and so on. That, that had been, uh, that had been the gospel for some people. Well, when Wallace uses that language of essential meaning as healing and redeeming agent, it, it gave a lot of church members who were uncertain whether this denomination had anything further to offer them, if, if all it was, was a, was a, a fundamentalist sect off of Mormonism, then there was nothing really here for a lot of people. But then, if the essential meaning of this can be identified as being a healing and redeeming agent in the world, well, it has, in other words, going from, going from being The Restored Church, to a church whose mission is to restore people to, to restore the humanity of people. That became a, a basis, a theological basis for lots of people to say, This is, this is something I can, I can sign on to. So, I think that was a very insightful part of that section. And also what I would call, uh, a, an example of the Reorganization slash Community of Christ being the Protestant side of the Restoration. Protestantism, if I may use Tillich's language, um, Protestantism exists as a critic, is a critical reduction to essential principles. And, so, after Nauvoo, we had to decide what's the most important stuff. We'd always been thinking about that and always been trying to figure out what's most important. Um, it's just that from the 1880s to the 1980s, the whole, the whole one true church story as it was laid out in the preaching charts had, had kind of, uh, replaced the, the search for critical, essential principles. So, so, um, what are some other things I can say about this era theologically? Um, you could say this is an era of, of clashing mythologies, right? An old, an old, an old mythology, and not using the theology in a negative sense, but an old mythology of the, the, the story, the mythos of the restoration of the original church, that story, versus a story, a new story of a church that is trying to come into, come into thoughtful con, uh, conversation with late modernity and is willing to rethink itself and is stripped down to its most essentials in order to do that. So, two different, two different symbol systems at work there. Um, this, this is a, this is a, a, Charmaine and I were talking about this yesterday, about this period. She mentioned that section 156, Wally gives a very brief glimpse of the revelatory process. In other words, there is a little preamble, a little preamble to the, to the section, and he talks about prayer and fasting

and trying to, carrying the burdens of the church and trying to understand what the Spirit wants to say, and, and that the, the nature of the stuff he's, he's about to bring forth is, is so revolutionary he had to keep seeking over and over, Is this right? Is this right? In other words, he gives a window into the human side of the revelatory process. And I thought that was a, a really, really good, good point she made and it, it applies from that point on. You will see, uh, subsequent, subsequent, uh, sections of the Doctrine and Covenants often have in a preamble something about the experience of, of the, of the Prophet, and it, it healthfully demystifies the process, right? In other words, this is a human being who's, who has authority and is charged to discern these kinds of things, but the wrest, how they wrestle with it. So, something else that, uh, that she mentioned, I think that's worth mentioning, is that in this period, you had people trying to rethink the nature of priesthood. So, for example, Larry Norris, who was the Bishop of Michigan, uh, Charmaine reminded me, he was, he was insistent on, on helping people understand that, that priesthood was about servant ministry, about being a servant to others, which you would think is natural, and yet, uh, I remember very clearly, there were two tiers in church life, quote, unquote, the holy priesthood, and then the rest. And, uh, uh, you, you could feel that tier, tiering, uh, easily in church life at the time. But, uh, people like Larry began to take, take priesthood and, and instead of an up down hierarchy began to shift it over 90 degrees so that it was a, uh, more lateral and less hierarchical in terms of how it functioned. I think that's been very, very important for us. So, um, those are some things I can, I can think of, think of re, related to this period. One other thing I could mention, too, or I think I should mention, is that the concept of Zion went through some shifts in this period. Geoff Spencer wrote an article on Zion as symbol and process. And in the old mythology, which was still present, there were people who wanted to gather to Jackson County in the 1980s, who are anticipating that Enoch's City would drop out of the sky here when people got their stuff together enough. And, um, Roy Cheville had long, long, long before that tried to steer people away from, from that sort of mythological idea of, of Zion, the kingdom of God, but it was, you know, it, it, it had long play in the church and so it was hard to steer people away from that. But, uh, Geoff Spencer tries to argue, Look, Zion, Zion is a process. It's an ongoing thing. Zion is the, Zion is a word we use to describe this process of, of, uh, more fully trying to live out a vision of God's, God's future in, in the world. And, so, um, that became new language for the church at the time. And I should also mention the 1982 hymnal, Hymns of the Saints, the burgundy one, which, which for me at the time was the new hymnal because the, the red, the hymnal I saw, I, I used when I first joined the church was the gray hymnal,

Karin Peter 40:36

The gray hymnal. The Hymnal.

Tony Chvala-Smith 40:38

Right. From 19, 1956, I think it was, but Hymns of the Saints, um, had a lot of new stuff in it, as well as old stuff. And if you want, if you want to, uh, get a sense for theological shifts, it's interesting to go to Hymns of the Saints and find hymns that were in the gray hymnal that have been rewritten. (Um huh.) So, for example, the old David H. Smith hymn, uh, Let Us Pray for One Another, an old, an old prayer service hymn that had a kind of, it, it, it was lovely, but also dark. The, you know, the, the, the scourge goes flaming past. It's the sense of we're all huddled together waiting for the end to come and so on. Well, Maurice Draper took that hymn and, and added Zion process language into it and, uh, completely changed it, uh, in, in a way that, that fit the church's sense of itself better in the 1980s. But you can, you

can compare, uh, uh, hymns that were retained and changed. And you can learn a lot about theological change that way, uh, just, just by doing that kind of comparison.

Karin Peter 41:43

As well as hymns that didn't make it into the red hymnal that had been in the gray hymnal including a bunch of national anthems and, um, some old timey hymns that people loved that lamented that they were not included in the new hymn.

Tony Chvala-Smith 42:00

Yeah, yeah. Now, I, I'm at an age where, uh, I can compare then to now. And then in the ear, early 1980s, if you went to a RLDS church service on a Sunday morning, there would be four men up front in dark suits with white, white shirts and narrow ties, narrow dark ties. Um, and, uh, the service would follow the same pattern week after week. Um, a sermon would be 40 minutes long. And a test of your real abilities as a priesthood was whether you could quote fill the hour. That's what it was referred to then. Uh, in those days, often there were Sunday evening services, too, and Sunday evening service was a, was similar, only shorter and that was where often new priesthood members or younger priesthood members got a chance to practice preaching. So, the sermons were shorter. And most congregations then had a Wednesday evening prayer service that was attended by, depending on the size of the congregation, uh, maybe 10%, a, a small number, you know, 10, 12, 15 people. And, uh, those were following, uh, instructions that went back to Joseph III. There might be a, a piano or organ prelude before the service, but once into the service, no instruments were used and everything was sung acapella. There was usually a little call to worship, a few thoughts, and, uh, two priesthood members, typically, and another priesthood member would, uh, give a short, a short talk based on some kind of Scripture topic that may or may not have been related to anything at the time, but, uh, and, and we, there will be a season of prayer and a season of testimony. And, uh, uh, I have nothing but, uh, very, very fond memories of those experiences. Uh, they were very formative for me as a 19, 20 year old. So, but that's, that's what church life was like. And reunions, even for dis, small districts, districts of six or seven congregations, reunions might have 200 or 300 people who were there full time. Um, and the congregational business meeting once a year, uh, you know, there, you might have somebody who was pastor for several years, uh, who was voted in each year. Um, it was, it was a very different world from the world we have now entered into where we are trying to figure out what is the relevancy of meeting together at all in lots of places. And, uh, so, there's part of me that misses those days, but a big part of me that misses nothing from those days, especially theologically. So, uh, we, we've, we've, uh, evolved, I think, in, in very good directions, but it does not yet appear what we shall be going forward into the 21st century. It's uncharted territory ahead of us.

Karin Peter 44:58

Okay. So, um, I, I, I appreciate that you, um, have some fond memories for prayer services having been, having had the mandated, in my family, from the day I was born until I was old enough to say no at probably 16, my memories of them are very different. Although I do remember we refer to each other as brother and sister. So, sister so and so and brother so and so. I do recall that. So, I wanted to, to just ask a, a question about this pivotal time. Um, I went to a presentation by Tex Sample who wrote a lot about oral traditions. And he used 1968 as kind of this idea that the world shifted and everything we did was different after 1968. And there's lots of sociological and, um, theological discussion about that. But

for Community of Christ, we've always lagged behind a little bit. So, this period of time with Wallace B. Smith feels a lot like the church's 1968. So, especially with how inspired counsel is given to the church. It shifted after 1968. So, I, I would appreciate hearing from each of you about that. What, what does this period of time represent for you, um, and how things, how the world shifted for Community of Christ? So, Lach, I want to start with you.

Lach Mackay 46:40

I'm intrigued. I think I need to process that a little bit. I, I would have thought that W. Wallace was our 1968, um, just because I think some of what he's doing is a reaction to a very delayed reaction to the 60s. Having said that, it turns out much of the language he's using is Elbert A. Smith 1940s. He's, he's drawing Elbert's language and putting them in his documents. Um, and, so, that blows my theory out of the water. But, yeah, um, you know, I was three in 1968. So, um, I, I think I could agree with that, but I'd like to process a little more.

Karin Peter 47:29

Okay. Tony, how about you?

Tony Chvala-Smith 47:32

Well, let me at least comment on the lag time thing. Um, I think the revolution that took place in the church in the 60s took 20 years actually to hit people. And we, we have the, the, the carrier pigeons move slowly in Community of Christ life, right? And, so, um, it took, you know, and, and once they got there, once, once Community of Christ conversations or RLDS conversations started forming the seven commissions, right, the Worship Commission and the Zonic Relations Commission and the Missionary Commission, those Commissions lasted decades, (. . .) until long after we had moved beyond commission systems locally. It, it's just, it's, it's a, we, we have this kind of, uh, this sort of, uh, slow evolutionary process out in the church. So, um, I can, I can perhaps understand that, that the, the, the American Cultural Revolution that took place in 1968 took that long actually to hit, uh, Community of Christ congregations. And that's partly because of the sectarian mindset of the church. It's a set, to use the term neu, neutrally, uh, is a very tightly knit, uh, group of people who have kind of strong boundaries between inside and outside, a real strong sense of their identity and their and their reason for being and they protect their boundaries. And, so, it takes a long time for things to permeate. So, um, yeah, I can see the 1980s. One of the things the 1980s did was it did create a, a kind of a decade and a half long identity crisis for the church, right? So, back in the, back in the, the one true church, Go Ye and Teach days, you knew exactly why you were RLDS and why everybody else was wrong, or at least not right enough. Alright, so, once all of that had been, all the, all the, the bases for that had been falsified by showing you just can't, you just can't hold this. It doesn't, it doesn't make Biblical sense, even, right? Once, once that was, was absent for people who paid attention to that kind of thing, the question of who are we then is going to last for another 20 years. (Um huh.) I think it's not until we get into, uh, the early 2000s i, uh, in, into the first part of the Grant, into Grant McMurray's presidency where we begin to come out, slowly come out of the identity crisis and have a sense, a, a, a dawning sense of, This is who we are, obviously connected to the new name, but also connected to theological shifts and changes. And, uh, I, I will, I will, a, a, a hill I will die on is that currently we know who we are and what we're about better than we have since 1960. (Okay.) It's, we still have the lag, we still have the lag time effect in

congregations, but institutionally, we, we know exactly who we are and have a strong sense of identity that we haven't had for 60 years. So,

Lach Mackay 50:44

I think the enduring principles have been critical in that. enduring principles critical in, in fostering that.

Karin Peter 50:44

Alright.

Lach Mackay 50:45

Yeah, I agree with that. I think so too. Yeah.

Karin Peter 50:54

It's been interesting to see the shift from people sharing who we are, the shift from basic beliefs to enduring principles. I have found that really fascinating as I've watched that transition take place in different places in the church.

Tony Chvala-Smith 51:10

Let me add one other thing I, I learned from, (Uh huh.) from a friend who was, who was a friend of a famous Quaker writer, and he got to know our church and got to know our story, our, our, the, the development of our story from the 1960s on, and he said, Do you guys realize nobody's ever really done this before? I mean, of course, there have been reformations and changes and shifts, but in the space of time, we've done this in, nobody's ever really done it quite like this before. It's, it's very, it's very, what, what we've been through is very unique to us, um, and so I think that's a, that's very, that, that's very compelling to me.

Karin Peter 51:51

At least nobody's done it before without inquisitions, and, (Right.) and such. Yes.

Tony Chvala-Smith 51:57

There have always been, you know, uh, religious revolutions and, and reformations and so on. But the kind of thing we've done internally (Yeah.) is, is very, very unique. (Okay.)

Lach Mackay 52:10

So, I sometimes ponder, and, and I don't, I wouldn't be part of the denomination if we hadn't done that. But, but I wonder how much of our current struggles are related to the pace of change and how much is simply the larger cultural factors that we can't control. (. . .) What might we have looked like if we had, had moved more deliberately? I, I don't, I don't know. What do you think?

Tony Chvala-Smith 52:39

Yeah. Well, um, I'm not sure. I mean, I think in a sense, there was some deliberation in it. It's just, and average church people voted for it at World Conference after World Conference. They just didn't, you, you just couldn't see the big picture of what, what you were voting for, or what, what the, what the, the outcomes would be and so on. Um, but, um, it's, it's somewhat easy to, to Monday morn, morning

quarterback on, I wish church leaders in the 70s had done this or wished church leaders in the 1980s had done this. Um, but when, when, when you're trying to manage, think of that Far Side cartoon of the crisis clinic, on fire floating down the river toward the waterfall, when you're trying to manage the crisis clinic, uh, it's, you have to do what you have to do at the moment. And, so, um, we have different kinds of principles in place, now. If, if, if we had to go through that again now, we would do it differently. But that's because we have grown, right? I, I do things differently now in my 60s than I would have done them in my 30s. It's because I've learned a few things. So, I don't, I don't, yeah, I, I, I don't think, uh, for me, I'm able to look back at that era and say, Gosh, I wish church leaders had been, had been, uh, more careful about this or about this or about this. Um, it's going to be hard to manage anything in a church that was actually two churches.

Karin Peter 54:18

Okay. So, before we close, I want to call our listeners' attention to some other Project Zion Podcasts that might, um, be of interest after the conversation today. So, episode 34 is an interview with Wallace B. Smith that you can listen to and hear him talk about this period of time. And if you want to hear a different perspective on it, or maybe simply, uh, a different angle on it, you can listen to episode 217 which is Julie Smith who is the daughter of Wallace B. Smith. And in that conversation, she talks about this time period and what it was like in the household and being, um, a female child of Wallace B. Smith as all of this unfolded. So, there are more that discussed 156 and other aspects of our conversation today, but those two in particular, are, um, excellent ones to listen to. So, any last comments or questions or anecdotes or anything from this time period that either of you would like to share?

Lach Mackay 55:37

I think we did an amazing job of learning from our experience in the 1980s. And, and did, um, a, a really nice job preparing people to discuss the, the name change, for example, which I think could have been much more disruptive, um, equipping them to process that by exploring the, the various names through the years, etc. And I think we also, um, did a much better job at preparing people to, to have the national, U.S. national conference discussion. So, I'm thrilled that we learned from our experience and, and I think of, (Okay.)

Tony Chvala-Smith 56:15

Yeah. Uh, two things. First of all, uh, I, I got to know Wally B. a little bit over the years and he was a poised, articulate, strong, and yet gentle, but very, very thoughtful leader. He was, uh, as, as I remember him from the, that period. Uh, you, you couldn't have asked for better to get us through that period. And the second thing is that, if I can slightly modify, modify that, quote, that famous quote from, uh, uh, the Civil Rights Movement, um, and Martin Luther King, the, The arc of the moral universe is long and messy, but it bends towards justice. And the church I belong to has been trying to stay on that arc, even though it's been messy at times.

Karin Peter 57:12

Absolutely. Alright. Well, I want to thank both of you for today's discussion. And our next episode, we're going to explore the W. Grant McMurry era of Community of Christ. And some aspects of that that come to mind are, uh, what it means to be a prophetic people and something called T 2000 which lives in the memory of the church, the seminary, um, and other issues of exploration. So, we'll look forward

to that conversation coming up. In the meantime, be sure to catch up on all the topics Project Zion Podcast covers at projectzionpodcast.org. And again, thank you, Lach, and thank you, Tony. I'm Karin Peter. Thanks for listening.