

Cuppa Joe | W Grant McMurray Era

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

church, Grant McMurray, presidency, called, prophetic, seminary, Christ, history, historian, Zion

SPEAKERS

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Karin Peter 00:28

Welcome to *Project Zion Podcast*. This is “Cuppa Joe” where we explore Restoration history. I'm your host, Karin Peter. Our discussion today is part of a series we've been recording, 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 Historic Sites, and he serves on the Council of Twelve Apostles. Tony is a theologian who teaches scripture and theology at Community of Christ Seminary in Graceland University. Both Lach and Tony are quite familiar to *Project Zion* listeners. So, in this series, we are following the development of the early Church, the Reorganization, and then our journey as Community of Christ. We've been looking at important Church events in their historical and cultural context, as well as the corresponding theological developments and their impact on the Church. So today, we're going to be talking about the period of time when W. Grant McMurray was President-Prophet of Community of Christ, and I'm looking forward to hearing what Lach and Tony have to share on this. So, who's going first today in this discussion?

Lach Mackay 01:55

If that's okay, I'll jump in.

Karin Peter 01:56

All right, Lach, go ahead.

Lach Mackay 01:58

So, let's start with a little bit on Grant himself. Grant was born in Toronto, Canada in 1947, with two children of William and Noreen Norris McMurray. Grant's dad, William, served in the Canadian army and worked in advertising before becoming an appointee minister for the Church. Grant grew up in Toronto, Guelph and Ottawa, then moved to Independence, Missouri when he was 12. His father struggled to overcome a drinking problem and had separated from the family. Noreen assumed the responsibility of sustaining the family and eventually moved Grant, his grandmother and his sister, Donna, to Independence for a new start. He later graduated from Graceland, married Joyce Lorange, and in 1971 went to work for the Church as an assistant to Paul Booth in the Director of Program Planning. He was eventually able to complete a Master of Divinity degree as well. Grant was a founding member of the John Whitmer Historical Association in 1972 and named Church archivist in 1973, before becoming Assistant History Commissioner, the equivalent of Assistant Church Historian to Richard Howard. Dick and Grant worked together to negotiate with LDS historians on the trade of a

Book of Commandments, the Joseph Smith III blessing, which Mark Hoffman had previously agreed to sell to us. After spending 10 years in the past while focused on Church history, Grant became World Church Secretary and Executive Assistant to the First Presidency in 1982, and would spend the next 10 years focused intently on the present. He was called as a counselor in the First Presidency by Wallace B. Smith in 1992, and publicly designated by Wally as his successor in the fall of 1995, with Grant's ordination as prophet-president occurring in April of '96. Grant brought two inspired documents to the Church, now sections 161 and 162 of *The Doctrine and Covenants*. Following 33 years as a full-time minister for the Church, over eight of them as Prophet-President, Grant resigned in November 2004, noting that he had made some inappropriate choices, and also recently been diagnosed with early onset Parkinson's disease. He chose not to designate a successor, and turning to Section 104 of *The Doctrine and Covenants*, the Twelve entered a period of discernment which resulted in Stephen M. Veazey succeeding Grant in 2005. One of the major themes from Grant's tenure was a prophetic people. Building on the Church's 1830s emphasis on common consent, Community of Christ members in recent decades have been invited to participate in the prophetic task. In a World Conference addressed to the Church soon after Grant's 1996 ordination, he said, "We need to talk, my friends, about the way we have begun to move from our identity as a people with a prophet, to our calling as a prophetic people." The conversation continued in 2004. He said, "As a prophetic people, you are called, under the direction of the spiritual authorities and with the common consent of the people, to discern the divine will for your own time and in the places where you serve. You live in a world with new challenges, and that world will require new forms of ministry." President Veazey picked up on the theme in 2007 in section 163 of *The Doctrine and Covenants*. "God is calling for a prophetic community to emerge, drawn from the nations of the world that is characterized by uncommon devotion to the compassion and peace of God revealed in Jesus Christ. In an increasingly complex and challenging world, Community of Christ strives to be not only a people with a prophet, but to be a prophetic people." Another major event happening during Grant's time in office was Transformation 2000. That initiative was launched in 1997, and was described as a far reaching and challenging goal with concrete objectives to achieve in less than three years. The goal was to become a world-wide church, dedicated to the pursuit of peace, reconciliation, and healing of the Spirit. Objectives included articulating a clear and compelling Christ-centered theology of peace and justice, engaging 20,000 children, youth and young adults, in the exploration of Christian values and Restoration principles, with a focus on peace and justice, challenging every congregation to engage in outreach to children and youth, with a focus on peace and justice, with 200 congregations, modeling these emphases, establishing 200 new congregations with an emphasis on ethnic and cultural diversity, and finally adding 200 full-time field ministers, some paid and some volunteer, 1/3 of them would focus on youth and children. My sense is, and I was not involved intimately in Transformation 2000, but my sense is that we were unable to adequately train and support the large numbers of new ministers, and the revitalization effort didn't generate significant increases in members and tithing. Many of our best and brightest answered the call to serve, but after three years, we were unable to financially continue supporting many of those people, and the resulting separations generated significant heartache and hurt. A number of today's leaders, though, like Karin Peter and Robin Linkhart are here because of Transformation 2000. Also, during Grant's time, Community of Christ Seminary was launched. In the same 1997 sermon that introduced T2000 to the church, Grant shared that we were exploring the creation of a seminary with Graceland and Park College. Joe Serig was tasked with coordinating the development of a seminary, and for the work of focus and advisory groups and a seminary task force, World Conference Resolution 1274 was

passed in April of 2000, which empowered the First Presidency to move forward with the creation of a seminary and the appointment of a board of trustees. In June of 2000, we were approved as affiliate members of the Association of Theological Schools. In May of 2001, a memorandum of understanding was approved, formalizing the partnership between the Church and Graceland, with Barbara Higdon, serving as the first Provost on an interim basis. Initial degrees to be offered were a Master of Arts in Religion, and a Master of Divinity. Don Compier was announced as Provost in the spring of 2002, and when classes commenced that fall, the Master of Divinity offering had been replaced with a Master of Arts in Christian Ministries. From the Kirtland, Ohio Theological Institution in 1830s Kirtland, to the Community of Christ Seminary today, we have a long history of recognizing the importance of education in ministry. Another emphasis under Grant was diversifying Church leadership. He was very intentional about the need for leadership to reflect membership, and then 1998, 14 years after section 156 allowed for the ordination of women, the first female apostles were ordained. Linda Booth had served as Assistant Director of Communications prior to her call, and Gail Mengel had coordinated Women's Ministries for the Church. Mary Jacks Dynes, previously President of Seventy would join them in 2002. Also in 1998, Bunda Chibwe of Zambia was called to be a President of Seventy and then joined the Council of Twelve in 2000. Women had served in the Standing High Council since Patricia Trachsel was appointed in 1990, but that body became increasingly diverse under Grant. Stassi Cramm was called into the Presiding Bishopric in 2002, and was called by Steve Veazey, who continued to push to diversify Church leadership into the Council of Twelve in 2005. Also, during Grant's time, discussions began to pick up surrounding same gender relationships. Jurisdictions began submitting World Conference resolutions on the topic, and the conversations became more heated leading up to the 2002 World Conference, with several jurisdictions submitting resolutions asking that the 1982 Standing High Council statement, which allowed for the ordination, now the language that I'm going to use is language from the period, not language that we probably would choose today, but the Standing High Council statement allowed for the ordination of homosexual members only if celibate, and these resolutions called for that policy to be updated to reflect the inclusive nature of the Church. In Grant's April of 2002 Conference sermon, he shared that the First Presidency had received over the last few weeks, scores of letters, emails, and phone calls on the topic, many of which were "desperate and angry". He noted that there is no issue that divides churches around the world in our time, like the issue of homosexuality, and he called on us to reject the division and hatefulness that often accompanied the topic. In a surprise to all but the First Presidency, Grant shared that he had witnessed the approval of priesthood calls for individuals who he knew to be in committed same sex relationships, and that in so doing, he had ignored the provisions of the 1982 High Council statement. He also asked the delegates to table or refer all legislation focused on homosexuality. Members were both furious, and disappointed in President McMurray for willfully ignoring Church policy. I'd love to hear the impressions of Karin and Tony, but my sense is that the push for equality suffered a significant setback because of the backlash against Grant's words and actions. The World Church Leadership Council met in September 2002 and generated a statement affirming that going forward, it would follow the provisions of the 1982 guidelines regarding the calling and ordination of gay and lesbian members. It would require another 11 years, countless listening circles, and a new Prophet-President to navigate the approval and creation of National Conferences, which allowed us to have discussions at a national versus denominational level, and opened the door for change. That is a whirlwind tour through, through the life and times of W. Grant McMurray.

Karin Peter 13:31

So, yes, I'm stunned just listening to all the major, kind of, changes through there and I'm, I'm surprised the Church is not still reeling from some of that. But more came following that, right? We've been in several decades of change. So, Tony, with all of the things that Lach described, let's talk about the theological journey that took place as we encountered all of these changes in the Church.

Tony Chvala-Smith 14:02

Well, there's a lot to talk about here, but I'm going to try and, and be as brief as I can on it so we can continue to have an exchange on this. So, let me just say that, that there's a constant in Christian theology, a constant tension, I've mentioned this before, between faithfulness to the Jesus story, and credibility or relevance to the current cultural context. So those things, I see that always has a productive tension. If you go too far one way, you have problems. Too far the other way, you have problems. If you go too far on the faithfulness side, you, you basically say, it's written in stone and we can't, we can't possibly change the words. Let's just keep things the way they were back then. And that's not the gospel. But if you go too far the other way, you risk the faith of the church and the community simply evaporating into whatever cultural milieu it goes into, and losing all sense of Christian distinctiveness in that. So, the same tension you see in the McMurray years, it's been there all along, as we've started way, from the start back 1820s, right, right through the whole journey to today. So that, I just want to get, get that theological tension out there, because it's present here. So, being partly trained as a historian, I'm gonna name some of my sources here. So, Mark Scherer's *Volume III* is really, I think, quite good. And I should say that, and Lach can confirm on this, but the, the nearer the events are to the people talking about them, the harder it is to do really good critical history on them, because we are participants in it. And so, and yet, I think Mark Scherer's *Volume III*, when he deals with the McMurray years is quite, quite thoughtfully done and very helpful. So, Scherer's *Volume III* is one source. Another source for me is myself. This, this, my experience, my, most of my adult experience in the Church, and my professional experience in the Church and at Graceland have been around, they started in the McMurray years. So, I think Charmaine and I first really kind of got to know them. In 1991, the First Presidency had a young adult retreat, by invitation only, at Estes Park, Colorado, because that generation of Church leaders was wanting to hear from what we were, young adults, right, at the time I was still a young adult, were wanting to hear from, from young adults in the early 1990s, about what they imagined our hoped the Church to be, and the McMurrays were there at that retreat and Charmaine and I were at that retreat in Estes Park, Colorado. And that's the first time I really had any contact with, with, with Grant. Subsequently, a few years later, when he was in the Presidency, he would interview Charmaine and me for a position that was called Theologian in Residence, which we assumed late in 1996, and we came in with the understanding and acceptance of the leadership that we would be working the position together. So, so, so anyway, Grant's, Grant's ministry as Prophet-President certainly coincides with a major part of what has been Charmaine's and my ministry to the Church. So, but, you see, here's the problem. I can't give you the 30,000 foot view because it's too close, right? So, I'll do my best here. So, one, a historian has to be careful about claiming one's own self as a source, so I'm just, you know, caveat emptor, let the buyer beware here. And also, Charmaine and I always talk, talk about all these things, and so, so she had some very important insights which I'll include in my insights here about the McMurry years. So, so let's say first, that Grant McMurray is a critically trained historian who goes into the First Presidency. That's, that's a whole new thing. It's not like Wallace B., and perhaps W. Wallace Smith to some extent, didn't know

about history or hadn't, hadn't studied history, or weren't aware of critical history, but it's one thing to know about history from a critical perspective, it's quite another thing to be train as a critical, critical historian. And so, Grant was, and that gave him an incredible capacity to describe our theological situation in terms of what he knew about the Church's story. He knew the Church's story exceedingly well, and his, his sermons and his talks were always full of amazing anecdotes and stories and things that come out of the Church history. That was quite, that made him quite endearing as a speaker to Church members, because, hey, he's talking our language, right? He, he's talking about us and our Church. The same time, Grant knew all the questions, all the issues, all the struggles, all of the things that make one wish one could have gone back in the past and shaken a few people and got them to do things differently. So, he knew all of that, but also personally, Grant, this was something Charmaine has observed, Grant, Grant was okay with being personally vulnerable when he shared stuff. You know, he was quite open about his story. And that 2002 Conference sermon that Lach mentioned, we were there, I remember it, and that was a moment of, of profound vulnerability. And yet it was complicated, because what you saw there was that there's a deep tension between being prophetic and being a president, right. We refer to our leader as the Prophet-President. Well, that's, that's almost an oxymoron sometimes, right. So, in that particular circumstance he referred to, he had abdicated the presiding role, in a sense, by letting certain things happen that the rules said shouldn't happen. But one could argue that he was functioning from the prophetic side there. So, the, what we sometimes hold together, Prophet-President, there are situations in which it's really almost impossible for those to be held together. But I do think I agree with Lach, that, that the, the, the fallout from that did slow us down going forward because a lot of jurisdictions were like, well, hey, we've been trying to follow the rules here and the leader isn't. What do you mean? So that was pretty, a pretty, pretty complicated morass we got into at that point. Lach has already mentioned Grant's deep stress on diversity, on diversifying, diversifying Church leadership. Grant was particularly concerned about the Church's history with African Americans, and was quite open and honest about our failures there. I remember him at an event early, early in the 2000s, maybe, maybe it might even have been in '99, it was very early in his, his ministry as Prophet-President, there was an event at the Temple in January that was, that had a lot of African American Church members come in to talk about the Church and its, its experience in, especially in the United States, with, with, with black Americans, and Grant was very open and vulnerable about the Church's failures there. So, his, his concern for diversifying the makeup of Church leadership, I think, is quite, quite laudable. And then we've heard about T2000 and the desire to engage young adults in the ministry of the Church. My wife noticed that this, this had the positive effect of opening a lot of young adults in the sense that they were ministers in a way that had not been done before. At the same time, young adults who came into T2000 ministry positions found themselves typically working in settings where generations one or two older than them were, were in charge of their work and had a whole different set of values and expectations. And it became, there were a lot of difficult pastoral issues that came up there because young adults working in that environment found themselves pushed upon by generations that didn't fully understand them, even though some of these young adults were their own children. So, there were a lot of difficult pastoral issues that came up there for young adults trying to function as full-time paid ministers. By the way, it's very interesting, we have a, an iffy sort of history with paid ministry, right. We want it and we don't want it, going back to our roots in the 1820s and '30s. We need a professional ministerial class, and yet sometimes people in the Church resent it. And so, it's a common, common thing in the church for a jurisdiction that's paying for ministry to expect, like, their, their paid person to be everything for them, when in fact, one is usually

called into a position to do certain things, not everything. We did not have a strong enough ethos of local paid ministry, to make that part of T2000 succeed well. And yet, at the same time, it did open lots of young adults at the time to a sense of their own ministry. Grant was really good about articulating that our history is not our message. Our history is not the gospel. Our history is not our theology. These things are different. They're interrelated, but they're not the same. And for Grant, history, obviously, as tradition, informs our theological journey, but it cannot, it cannot be our message. We cannot, we simply cannot talk about our past as if that's the gospel, and Grant was very good about making that very clear. And so, the way I would put it there is that our history, as tradition, can become illustrative of theological principles and gospel claims, but it is not normative. We can't just turn history into, well, it's been done this way, so we must never do it any other way ever since because that's the gospel. No, Grant was very aware of the differences between history and theology. I think that was quite, quite good for us. Also, in Grant's presidency, theology stopped being a dirty word in the Church. I mean, coming out of our roots in the 1820s and '30s, there was this democratized sense that, that theology is the thing those eggheads in the universities and seminaries do. We don't have theology, that's man-made stuff, to use their language. We just have the gospel, pure and simple. That's, that was a long tradition in the Reorganization. But Grant used the word "theology" a lot, and it became okay to use that word to describe the process of faith seeking understanding. So, the seminary is a success story coming out of T2000. The seminary still exists. The seminary is doing extremely well. I work for the seminary. Charmaine works for the seminary, and we have, we have two degrees, and we have lots of hopes and prospects. And so, T2000, I've heard Mark Scherer describe T2000 as a hail Mary pass. And Church leaders at the time were, in the late '90s, were, were aware to some extent of this great, cultural, religious shift away from institutionalized church and religion and so on, they were aware of it. T2000, could be seen as a last attempt to live out of that paradigm. I think I would, I would argue with Mark and say T2000 was a series of hail Mary passes, some of which were caught, the seminary was one, some of which were fumbled, and the fumbling was not necessarily from personal mistake. It was simply we didn't have the funding, funding to make it go. Lach mentioned that there was a, there was a great sense of the time of, you know, if you build it, they will pay, right. And it didn't work out that way. You had an increasingly aging population of the Church who were doing the giving and so there just, there just wasn't the financing to make it go. But some things succeeded. And also, I should mention that in the realm of religion, how do you measure success and failure? So that's kind of complicated. Lots, there are lots of things that we'll never be able to measure that were successful, that came out of T2000. But we didn't start 200 new congregations and we didn't retain 200 full-time paid staff from that, so. So, one other thing, and this is something Charmaine and I have talked about, and she, she mentioned, I really want to credit her on the ship, Grant was able to put Zion language back on the map for us. Zion language, it's sort of, we've sort of lost touch with it, felt it kind of faltered because it had been traditionally associated with kind of literal images of, of gathering to Jackson County, Missouri, which, by the way, is a horrible place to live in the summer, if you hate the heat, like Tony does. So...

Karin Peter 26:42

Like what's happening right this minute, as you speak.

Tony Chvala-Smith 26:44

Oh, gracious, yes. So those old images of marching to Zion, singing songs of everlasting joy, and so on, that had been part of the mythology of the Church earlier and very, very powerfully so, those had

kind of fallen by the wayside. And yet Grant was able to pick up the Zion thread, and connect it very deeply to the peace and justice thread that had been articulated by Wallace B. Smith in Section 156. And so, the Zion of our dreams becomes language we start using again. But now we're thinking of it not as a walled, safe city, but we're thinking of it as, increasingly as the transformation of the world in the direction of peace and justice. So, Lach mentioned the prophetic people theme that, that Grant first articulated in that initial, in his initial sermon as Prophet-President of the Church, and let me, I can back that theme up to the early 1960s, where F. Henry Edwards used the term "prophetic people" to describe what God wanted us to be in a book titled *The Divine Purpose in Us*. So, that thread goes back even farther, that God, that God wants the Church to be a prophetic people. And by the way, F. Henry Edwards, in articulating that back in the early 1960s, said, a prophetic people are people who do the kinds of things the Hebrew prophets did, that is, speak for the poor, speak for those who are ill housed and, and poorly educated. He had a very strong social impact, very strong social dynamic to it, that, that F. Henry Edwards articulated. And so that, I just want to say that the peace and justice theme didn't just get dropped on us, all of a sudden. It had, it had a history in the Church and Grant was aware of that history. One could say that Grant put, this is not a good metaphor, but it's the best one I got, Grant put some teeth into the peace language that Wallace B. had given us in Section 156, right. So, the Peace Colloquy became increasingly more important during that era. And speaking, speaking of peace, hiring a Peace and Justice Ministries Coordinator, at the time Andrew Bolton, that was, that happened during Grant's presidency. And so, the peace theme got a lot of, a real boost from Grant's presidency. I like to think of sections 161 and 162, and then the subsequent Veazey sections up to 165, I refer to them as the new creation texts of the Church. That is, the, the, the old RLDS self-identity, which was de-mythologized in the 1960s and early '70s, and which was not sustainable intellectually, from that point on, left the Church without, kind of, a strong sense of identity for, for quite a number of years. But beginning with Murray's presidency, there's this sense of, of what the, the, the Trappist monk and former Methodist theologian, Paul Jones, would call a re-mythologizing of the tradition. As we'd gone through this stage of critical deconstruction, now it was time to reconstruct, and Grant was brilliant as a reconstructor of a new image for what the Church could be. Section 161, I think this, absolutely critical where the words are, "Claim your unique and sacred place within the circle of those who call upon the name of Jesus Christ." In other words, that, we canonized those words, which effectively put an end to the idea that we were the one and only true church. He goes on in that section, right, to say, "Be faithful to the Spirit of the Restoration," now that's important, "the Spirit of the Restoration," not the letter of the Restoration, "mindful that it is the Spirit of adventure, openness and searching. Walk proudly and with a quickened step. Be a joyful people. Laugh, and play, and sing, embodying the hope and freedom of the gospel." One might say, not embodying the rules and regulations of the past so. So, that, the images in that section were very, very important for helping us develop a new, develop ourselves into a new sense of our identity. And then in 162, regarding our sacramental theology, he says, "You have already been told to look to the sacraments to enrich the spiritual life of the body. It is not the form of the sacrament that dispenses grace, but it is the Divine Presence that gives life." Now that is critical language, right. It's, it's not, it's not the form, i.e., it's not that you were baptized by immersion and every part of your body was pushed under. It's not the form, it's the Spirit that gives that gives life there. So, it's a different, it's a whole new way, at least in Community of Christ, to think about our sacramental theology. It moves it away from a series of rules into a series of spiritually enriched, enriching practices. That's pretty important. He goes on to say, "Be respectful of tradition and sensitive to one another, but do not be unduly bound by interpretations and procedures that no longer fit the

needs of a worldwide church.” Okay, there's the, there's that polarity, faithfulness and credibility right there in, in that very sentence. And then he says, “In, in such matters direction will come from those called to lead.” I mean, we became, we literally became Community of Christ during Grant McMurray's presidency, that the ideas that are behind what Community of Christ is, and will be, had already been articulated in the 1960s, but it took a while to get there, which is nobody's fault. It just is, it's the way things develop, right. And without, I mean, you could say, without W. Wallace surrounding himself with really critical thinkers, that, we would never have gotten here. Without Wallace B. and his openness to all kinds of possibilities for the Church and his, and especially section 156, we would never have gotten here. But, so, you're finally in Grant McMurray's time and through his ministry, we, we are, we are really starting to take on what it means to be Community of Christ. We have a ways to go on that yet, I would be the first to say, but his, his presidency and his ministry were extremely important in that era and for us today. We, we are part, partly who we are today because of his presidency.

Karin Peter 33:23

All right. So, this has much more content than I anticipated for this particular episode. But I do, I do have a question. But before I get to that, I wanted to revisit the, the idea of Grant's sermon where he mentioned being present where people were ordained who were in same gender relationships. So, I'm not sure about the idea that it, that it disrupted or pushed back the timeline on when the Church would have been more accepting. I think the Church took a while to recover from 156, and then this was the next really major hit, if you will. And it took about the same amount of time to recover. It just, it just happened in a different way. But it had the same impact as if it had been inspired counsel, as what we saw with 156. I do think it broke open the discussion that was no longer a sidebar. So, I think before then, the whole discussion about equality and diversity and sexuality were sidebars to other discussions, but this, this brought it into the center of who, who we are and what we were discussing and made it important. I also think when you look at the context of the United States at the time, we were, we were still on the forward edge of the religious dialogue around this particular issue. When you look at what happened in Omaha, and the reaction that happened in the Midwest after that, with, with the Methodists, you can see that this, we were following the same kind of pattern. We are very much in, in cultural context in the United States, at least, but we were on the forward edge of that. And the last thing I want to say about that is that when Grant did that in his sermon, he actually focused all of the, kind of, anger that was floating out there around the issue that people didn't know what to do with it, they just dumped it on him. So, you could say, in a prophetic way, he took the, the brunt of the anger that was flowing through the Church around the discussion and gave it a place to live, whether it was healthy for him or not, that freed up people to have a healthier discussion, a more complete discussion. So, living in the midst of that in a congregation that was mainly LGBTQIA folks, that's what it looked like, at least for me. But my, okay, so that's the, on that subject, you can respond to that as you will, but that was, were my comments. I have a question. As I look at this, Grant's presidency was the first time the First Presidency was a completely non-U.S. presidency. So, we had a Canadian, a Brit and an Australian, right, as the First Presidency. Did that have an impact?

Tony Chvala-Smith 36:54

So, I think it did. It might be hard to disentangle the cultural part of the impact from the fact that, that Ken Robinson and Peter Judd were just such exceptionally competent and astute ministers. Now, I say that, I know them both, and I'm friends with them both, but when Grant resigned in November of 2004,

and we were, we were in that limbo area for a while, the kind of leadership that both Ken and Peter gave in that period was absolutely exceptional. There was no sense that the boat was going down. They, they kept a, kept things even and steady, steady, and there was a sense that we were going to move forward and that we were not going to gossip about this, and we're not, the Church, the Church was not about one person, it was about God's work in the world. And they conveyed that so incredibly. Now is that, is that part, is that part of the temperament of the Commonwealth? That's, that's a...

Karin Peter 38:01

You're married to a Canadian, Tony. You tell us.

Tony Chvala-Smith 38:04

I know. I am, and so, I say "God save the queen," I guess I'll say "God save the king" now, right. So, British, British theology, in the history of Christian thought has a kind of levelness to it, level, even keeledness, moderation. And whether that comes out in that kind of a presence or not, it's going to take future historians to dig that one out. My hunch is that they would probably say, well, yes, right? The volatility and the emotional immaturity of American culture is not represented so much in Australian, Canadian and British culture. Now, it's not, I'm not saying there's people in those cultures who are not emotional, or emotionally volatile. It's just that the cult, the culture, those cultures have ways of keeping themselves steady in the midst of all kinds of things. British theology, like William Temple and Archbishop Gore, so on, just, just this, this magnificent kind of depth, and even keeledness through it as they explore all kinds of difficult issues. So, it is quite possible that a presidency of, from the Commonwealth had certain kinds of temperaments that helped the Church in very deep and significant ways. So, I'm really on kind of thin, psycho-cultural ice there, but I, I'm certainly willing to, to hazard a guess at that.

Karin Peter 39:34

Thanks, Tony. Lach, do you want, do you have anything to add to that?

Lach Mackay 39:38

Sure. Yeah, I think that had to have a significant impact, but I'm not sure that maybe more impactful, were simply who they were as individuals. So, for example, Ken, as a clinical psychologist, I think, was very involved in helping us move forward on issues of sexuality, I think critically important. So, is it the Australian or is it the background, professional background? I, you know, I think it's probably both.

Karin Peter 40:08

Excellent. So, as you said, we'll, we'll look back on that 30 or 40 years from now, and in the grand sweep of Community of Christ, and see what kind of impact we can trace from that. So, any last comments or anecdotes or thoughts about this particular period of time,

Lach Mackay 40:29

I've got a couple. Now in the same 2002 conference sermon where Grant talked about witnessing ordinations of folks focused in committed same sex relationships, he also, and also without engaging Church leaders outside the First Presidency, I believe, announced the Kirtland Temple Visitor Center Project, which was a significant surprise to many in leadership. And it almost feels like he was taking a

play out of Wallace B. Smith's book with announcing, you know, women in the priesthood and the Independence Temple at the same time. Let's give something to the progressives. Let's give something to the conservatives. Maybe, maybe that'll smooth it out. Well, of course, it didn't in either case. Maybe a valuable lesson for future leaders on what won't work. In 1996, I was at a John Whitmer Historical Association Conference in Kirtland and the member from the Washington D.C. area, George Walton, who loves statistics, presented a paper on the future of Community of Christ, based on baptismal rates and just all kinds of stuff, that he had culled from the *Herald*, again, that's 1996. Larry Norris, Presiding Bishop was there, and seemed not at all amused with what George was presenting. It was not a promising trajectory for the Church based on George's work. Larry seemed not at all happy about that. Remember, I was siloed at Historic Sites until 2016. So, I have long thought, why didn't they listen to George? You know, when I'm out there in a congregation with six people, I'm like, I cannot believe they didn't try and address this 20 years ago. Well, of course, I now realize they did. They did have some concept of what was happening. I think that timing is fascinating. George in '96 to 2000 announced they recognized what was happening to some extent, and were trying to address it.

Tony Chvala-Smith 42:45

Yeah.

Karin Peter 42:48

Yeah, trying to address change with an old paradigm is always tough, right, so. We've learned a lot.

Tony Chvala-Smith 42:55

Yeah, referring back to, I'm just thinking back to what Lach said a few minutes ago, about taking a, borrowing from Wallace B.'s playbook there. I'm thinking of the old, the old, the old, the old saw used for weddings: something old, something new, something borrowed, and something blue, right? So hey, that's what theology is, right? So, it is, it is all of that. And Grant was really good at the something old and something new and bringing them together in creative ways. One thing that listeners might not get out of this is how absolutely witty Grant was. He was, he had, he had a George Burns kind of sarcastic, sardonic, ironic sense of humor, not, not in a mean way, but simply, simply with, with a look, or with a few well placed words, he could have you in, in stitches. He was extremely witty and funny in that, in that role, which was very endearing to people, right. People, people felt, I think always with the Smith family, there was a sense of, of proper distance. But with Grant, there wasn't quite that sense that you had to, had to keep a certain, a certain reverence before him. So, he was very, very approachable and he wanted to listen to everybody. He was, he was very, very good at that. It's a perfect example of how hard it is to be a prophetic church. That's who we are, who we want to be, but it's really tough work. And so, finding one's way into the strange and unknown landscapes of the future is really, really difficult. At the same time, you were trying to be faithful to God's revelation in Christ, right? It's not, that's, that's not negotiable, and yet how we interpret and live it and articulate it in, in landscapes our ancestors couldn't have imagined. Grant was, Grant was on to that and that's where we still are. We still have to do that in ways I think perhaps that he now couldn't have imagined because as we get further and further into the 21st century, I think we find that the, the, the landscape in which religion and particularly, you know, our brand of Christianity, is trying to navigate, is a very, very odd and forbidding landscape. So, we have faced these landscapes before, and we will continue to face them. It's part of the journey.

Karin Peter 45:24

Thank you, Tony. So now, as everybody is furiously googling, George Burns, at least everybody under 50 is googling George Burns, thanks, Tony. This has brought us, I think, to, to where we are now in the life of Community of Christ. And so, our next episode, let's look at some of the sweeping themes we have discerned over this journey of our past almost dozen episodes, and see what we can identify as indicators of where we might be going in that interesting and difficult landscape, and possibly even identify some minor characters in this story that we might have overlooked as we have gone through. I am aware that often, when we talk about the history of the Church, is always through the lens of men, and maybe there are some women's voices we could pick up in some of these as well. So, we'll do that in our next episode. In the meantime, be sure to catch up on all the topics *Project Zion Podcast* has, and all the series it has at projectzionpodcast.org. And again, as always, thank you, Lach and Tony, for sharing with us today. I'm Karin Peter. Thanks for listening.