

Website History Timeline #1

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SPEAKERS

Tony Chvala-Smith, Josh Mangelson, Karin Peter, Lach Mackay



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 00:34

Welcome to Project Zion Podcast. This is Cuppa Joe, where we explore Restoration history. And I'm your host, Karin Peter. Today's episode is the first in a new series of episodes, where we're going to engage in conversations about the historical and theological journey of Community of Christ. Our guests for these discussions 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 12 Apostles. Tony is a theologian who teaches scripture and theology at Community of Christ Seminary, and at Graceland University. Both Lach and Tony are familiar to Project Zion listeners, but we welcome them today as well. Now, our plan is to have a series of 12 episodes that follow the development of the early church, the Reorganization, and the journey as Community of Christ. And we're going to touch on important events and their historical and cultural context as well as theological developments and their impact on the church. So as I said, this is a new series of episodes, and this is our first one. So we're going to spend some time kind of laying the groundwork, if you will, for our conversations. Talking a bit about where our story came from, and what the setting was from which it came. So we're going to start with Lach. I flipped the coin on this, decide whether we're going to start with Lach or Tony and Lach you, you one if we want to look at it that way, and you get to go first. So let's talk a little bit about the historical context and the things we need to keep in mind. As we discuss church history.



Lach Mackay 02:30

I think it's important to start every discussion of church history with an exploration of how we approach history in Community of Christ. And it's not always been that way. Some of the things I'm going to share that I think it's critically important when exploring our past, just keep a

number of things in mind. So the church history principles critically important. Number one, continuing exploration of our history informs our identity. So a people with a shared memory of their past, and an informed understanding of its meaning, are better prepared to chart their way into the future. Number two, history informs but does not dictate our faith, and beliefs. Sound history informs faith and healthy faith leads to insights about history. But our past does not limit our faith and beliefs, beliefs to what they were historically, the short version of that is, our history is not our theology. And that's, that's a different approach than than some people take. But it's so so very important. The church encourages honest, responsible historical scholarship. We, I'd say beginning in the 1960s, although there was some outliers earlier than that. But beginning in the 1960s, we really tried to start professionalizing our history programming or understandings of how to do church history, and I think we've done a pretty good job of that. Something that is increasingly a problem, though, is I encountered regularly now, presentism and our church history principles caution us to avoid it. Presentism or interpreting the past based on a current worldview and culture instead of on the culture of the time. It takes a lot of work to understand things in their cultural context. But again, critically important when doing church history. And we are getting worse and worse at that, in my experience in the US anyway. Number four, the study of church history is a continuing journey. So our conclusions are open to correction as new understandings and information come from ongoing study. Sometimes it's it's painful to admit that, that we got something wrong, that we we have to, you know, I've spent a lot of hours writing papers that I found a new source the next day, and I had to throw everything out. And that's just just the way the process works.

K

Karin Peter 05:17

And that's really hard for a lot of people and Community of Christ who grew up with a different understanding of the church's story. So so this is a key point in our church history principles.

L

Lach Mackay 05:31

And that may be the difference between the story of the church and the history of the church. There is a difference and I think you've touched on that. Number five, seeing both the faithfulness and human flaws in our history, make it more believable and realistic, not less. We need to try and understand by learning as much as possible about the context, that's going to be a theme that I think both Tony and I will lift up throughout our time together. The result when doing that is empathy, instead of judgment. Our scriptures are consistent and pointing out that God uses imperfect people. And our more recent church history is consistent and pointing out that God uses imperfect people. One of my current favorite examples of understanding things in context, I believe you can't understand Nauvoo without viewing it through the lens of the atrocities of Missouri. And I want to be clear that I believe that we shared culpability for those atrocities, we were not the innocence there. We shared responsibility for what happened. But, but we were also deeply scarred by those experiences. And that played a really important role in some of the decisions and I think, sometimes awful decisions that we made in Nauvoo. I'm guessing we'll have a chance to talk more about that when we get to the Nauvoo period. Number six, the responsible study of church history involves learning repentance, and transformation. As a church focused on promoting communities of reconciliation, justice and peace. We need to be self critical and honest about our history. It's important for us to confess when we have been less than what the gospel calls us to be. One of my favorite examples here is a Hans mill anniversary, where Andrew Bolton

was invited to speak. And he pointed out that the Missourians had apologized for the extermination order, which I don't think meant lever will kill you. I think that lever will forcibly remove you. But the Missourians had apologized. Andrew pointed out that we had never apologized for our actions, like attacking the Missouri state militia at Crooked River. I think it was inadvertent, we didn't know they were the militia. Let me clarify, the attack was not inadvertent, it was intentional. But we didn't know we were attacking the militia. We thought they were a mob. But either way, that's treason, we attack the militia, we should apologize for the things we got wrong there. That is what it means, I think to confess, we have been less than what the gospel calls us to be. Number seven, the church has a long standing tradition that it does not legislate or mandate positions on matters of church history. Historians need to be free to draw their own conclusions after thorough consideration of the evidence. So I respect people who have very different interpretations than I do. I don't think it's my mission to change their interpretations. I think it's important to do the best we can to interpret the sources that we have. We're getting close to the end. Number eight, we need to create a respectful culture of dialogue about matters of history. And we should not limit our story to one perspective, we occasionally would do that in our past. We now understand that diverse viewpoints bring richness to our understanding of God at work, and our sacred story. So there's not just one telling of the story or the history. And number nine, our faith is grounded in God's revelation of Jesus Christ and the continuing guidance of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ was and is the foundation of our faith and the focus of the church's mission and message. And when we actually live that out, that makes it a lot easier to still engage with some of the flawed folks in our past. So it's not about Joseph, for example. It's about Jesus.

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Karin Peter 09:45

Thanks, Lach. A couple of things that you brought up just from the history principles before before we go any further. For our Community of Christ listeners, a lot of times in the field, I will get this question and so I would like you to go back to number eight is, is what you're telling me the church's official story of our history. So in the past we had that. How would you respond?

L

Lach Mackay 10:12

Yeah, I would say that Community of Christ doesn't take positions on historical matters, we encourage, open to honest, historical scholarship, wherever that leads to kind of an interesting way that has been lived out. When Todd Compton's book, on the plural lives of Joseph Smith came out, it was extraordinarily controversial in some Latter-day Saint communities, and he was getting attacked pretty viciously. Our response, when asked about the book was to say, we support good scholarship, wherever that leads. Now, I wish we would have gone a little further and said, and we think this is good scholarship.

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Karin Peter 11:00

All right, so everybody listening, Amazon's gonna have a run on a text that may or may not be still in print. So is there anything else you want to add to kind of foundation, how we look at the church history lock, before we go to Tony, for setting the stage for our theological context? We'll come back to this specific points and this kind of period time.

L Lach Mackay 11:24

I just want to reinforce context is critical. So very, very important. And that's not easy to do. It's increasingly difficult to do these days. Because we want to learn everything we need to know about a topic in a very short period of time, we want to I don't even think we want to read an article, we want to read a sentence and understand it. That's just not the way it works.

K Karin Peter 11:49

Yeah, I want to google it and get Wikipedias little blurb and then I know what I'm talking about. Yeah, absolutely.

L Lach Mackay 11:55

I like Wikipedia, but it might be a place to start. It's definitely,

T Tony Chvala-Smith 12:02

Yeah, and it's not it's not it's not a source to cite in a graduate level paper.

K Karin Peter 12:07

Thank you for reminding us of that. So with that, Tony, maybe we'll launch into what are some principles, if you will, that we need to keep in mind for our theological exploration of our story? Sure.

T Tony Chvala-Smith 12:20

So let's start with our standard working definitions of theology as faith, seeking understanding, right, and faith asking questions and hear for the sake of discussion, faith here is one sense of being grasped by the ultimate, I'll say I'll put it that way, one sense of being grasped by the ultimate in one's response to that being grasped by. So we want to understand that one of the analogies I often use for trying to understand what theology as a discipline is, is the analogy of falling in love. So when a person falls in love with another person there, there sort of, is something that sort of happens to you. Now there's elements of choice in but something happens to you. But then subsequent to that, it's really, really critical, important to try to understand what this is about, what this relationship means, what it could mean, how I'm going to function in it. So theology is kind of like that. It's a discipline of trying to make sense of this being grasped by the ultimate that's happened to us. So another way to put this is that the object the object of theology is not the past. The object of theology is the ask God, but not just any old God. God whose self emptying love is revealed in Jesus Christ. That's Christian theology, right. Now, there's Islamic theologies, Jewish theologies, and so on. Christian theologies primary object is God, who reveals God's self decisively, in the person of Jesus Christ. That's, that's the object of theology, and not the past, per se. But the sources of

theology are our standard sources for theology, our scripture, tradition, experience and reason. And so right away you can see we'll have tradition is that which has been handed on to us from the past and history does figure into the theologians, reflections. Modern and Postmodern theology takes the discipline of history very seriously. And most theologians I know, including myself are trained as critical historians kind of simultaneously. Right, you you when I was a PhD student, I took one of my best courses was in Ecclesiastes, ecclesiastical historiography, learning how to think research reflect on the history of Christian doctrine, the history of Christian thought, the history of Christianity, critically, but in the context of doing faith seeking understanding. So, the past matters to theologians. I mean, this the revelation of God and Jesus Christ is a past event. Still always happening, but a past event. That's its its benchmark. So we have to do history. And the critical theologian will say amen to pretty much everything Lach at about how you do history, right? history, history is not it's not critical history, if church authorities are spinning the answer. That's that's ideology. That's apologetics. That's a funnyville, another word. But it's, but it's not. It's not critical history. And so theologians have to teach churches not to be afraid of critical history, because one of the things that the theologian and historian share in common is this passion for the truth. Right now, the truth is a great big word. And there's different kinds of truth. But the historian is passionate about trying to understand the past, as as best as she can on its own terms. The theologians concern for truth is the truthfulness, faithfulness with which the church, in its own present context, is trying to articulate what this what this message is this good news this gospel is so different sides of the same thing. But we're still we're still both interested in truth. And both historians and theologians are, they ought to be very allergic to any kind of falsification, or method meddling with, with the object of study. So I, I'm trained in several disciplines, I usually identify myself as a historical theologian. And historical theologians are theologians who are concerned about the church's message and mission for today, but especially focus on the past Christian tradition, looking for ways to looking for insights, things, we've forgotten things we've missed things we didn't see things we we couldn't see, because we didn't have the right lenses that might help inform influence and guide Christian faith for today. You know, one of my favorite lines to describe what I do is that line from the movie, I think, the movies called Sixth Sense, "I see dead people." And I'm surrounded by the mere show remains in my office, I've got icons everywhere. Right now I'm looking at a picture, you can't see it. But I'm looking at a picture of the great Anglican Archbishop William Temple, who was one of my mentors and heroes, not living mentors, he died in 1944. But you know what I mean, so Christian theology stays in conversation with the church's past. We don't just make stuff up as we go along, we have to stay in conversation, because it may be that some figures, some theologians, some mystics in the past actually grasped the revelation of God and Christ more clearly, than our contemporaries might. And so we can learn from them learn things from them. So you know, when we we start examining Community of Christ history, what the theologian will do is the theologian relies on the critical historians say, here's what happened. And then the theologian will do something that will feel like presentism to the historian, but I don't think it is. It's more like 1842 given given what could be known about the Christian faith on the American frontier, how, how much did Joseph Smith Jr, speculations, align with that? Or depart from that? And did were there church members who thought there was a departure? And the answer is yes, there were. They, they published it briefly in 1844, I think called the Nauvoo exposé. And they thought this thing has gone off the rails. And that's an that's an example of how the what could be known about the Christian faith was available in that time. And so it's for the theologian, it's okay, we find we find if we do this carefully and sensitively, it's okay to say, in this in this in this particular event, this this was this was a distortion of what could be known about Christianity, or this was a derailing of what could be known about Christianity. So we have to do that. One of my areas of scholarly and existential interest is what happened to Christianity in Germany in the 1930s? And I can I can look in and study this and I can see it first, I want to be a critical

historian I want to understand as much as possible what was going on in its contextual terms. But then as a theologian, I have a different set of truth questions. How did this align with the gospel as it was known that All right, so that's a, that's maybe a slight divergence from? I might be more inclined than Lach on different issues in church history, say, What the heck are they thinking?

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Karin Peter 20:27

You know, well, then these will be interesting conversations that we have in our episodes as we go along. You know,

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Tony Chvala-Smith 20:33

I want to know about communitarianism in Kirtland. I also want to know about Fanny Alger. And I want to know what what was going on there. And so but you know, like, like the critical historian, and I'm, I'm not afraid to find skeletons in our closet. Because as a theologian, I already work with a concept called Original Sin. Right? Everybody's messed up. So I can, I can, I can work with that pretty easily. A couple of more things, and then we'll, we'll we'll move on. But I love that Lach reinforce that our history is not our theology. And I good history, faithful, honest, critical history can inform our theology, and it really needs to. Ideologically motivated history, bad history can deform our theology too. And so we have to be really careful about how we bring these disciplines together. We don't, we don't want to tell a false story about the past. And here's the reason why, I've said this before publicly. I, I've said it to Mark Scherer before and I think he agreed with me, I said, in my conversation with Mark is Mark. History, actually, as a discipline is a subdivision of ethics. And you think what what ethics is philosophy? How can history be a subdivision of ethics, and I said, Ah, memory is essential to conscience. No, no memory, no conscience, bad memory, bad conscience, or bad consciousness. And so it's really the history historian functioning as a critical historian is essential to our ethical life. So that we grasp what what happened on its own terms as best we can. But also recognize that there may have been other things that could have been done, and definitely things that we would do different differently. So you know, in order for us, in order for us to, to live with conscience about our past, we have to we have to know the truth, hey, this is true in personal life, too. You can't, you know, this respect, history is like therapy, right? It's plumbing, plumbing through your your life to say, I'm actually I did this, I, I've always said I did this, but really what I did was this, and that's kind of messed things up for a while. So. And finally, um, history, I think Lach would agree with his history. And I think he pretty much said this history is a moving target. Right, because we discover new things, we discover new sources, Lach has to rewrite papers because he was just about to turn it in. And he found a new source. And it's like, well, darn, but I'm also present knowledge and experience give us different lenses. We didn't have before, to understand the past differently. For example, in American cultural life. For a while, starting in 2020, we really started becoming conscious of how deeply embedded racism was in American social, political and policing structures. And we we started to have a conversation about it. But that got that got politically sidetracked, sidetrack, derailed, sadly. But it's now really quite impossible for critical historians to understand American history without the lens of racism. It would be false consciousness to talk about Andrew Jackson moving the natives out west without now being able to see that as part of a long, contextual stream of race, racism that's deeply embedded in in American life. And so new experience new not just new sources, but new experience new cultural awareness, gives the historian new lenses for going back over the

past and saying, Oh, my goodness, I never saw this before. But what was actually happening there, that was an expression of the same kind of racism that started in 1619. And before in the exploitation of Africa and so on. So those are some things that I come at this with in terms of theology might my primary my primary aim is always to help the church of the present live into its future with a message of good news about God's self emptying, self giving love and grace. That's my primary thing. But hey, like I said, I see dead people.

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Karin Peter 25:12

Thank you, Tony, I think our listeners already will be anticipating some interesting conversations. And I think a new way to process our story. So in the life of the church, sometimes we have kind of taken the idea that because we're talking about religious history, that religious history equals sacred history equals holy history. And, and if that's holy, we can't touch it, we can't explore it, we can't open it up and really examine it. And what I hear both of you saying is no, no, this, the fact that it's sacred or religious history means we should open it up and examine it to be more faithful and authentic in our living out our story today. So I appreciate that. So Lach, I want to come back to you. You've kind of told us how we'll be looking at our story historically. But can you begin to now set the stage, if you will, on the context that we need to have a bit of information on it, we're going to really understand the beginning, the inception of what we have come to know as Community of Christ or the restoration, our branch of the restoration tradition.

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Lach Mackay 26:33

Can I ask Tony, question first?

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Karin Peter 26:35

Oh, I'm sorry. Absolutely. I had that, on that on our notes that you had time for questions. Let's go back to Lach. Do you have any questions for Tony?

L

Lach Mackay 26:44

I'd love to ask Tony a question. I'm not sure if I understood clearly your understanding of the relationship between historical understanding and truth. Do you understand them to be one of the same or not one of the same?

T

Tony Chvala-Smith 26:59

I would say truth is a really mega concept, right. There's historical truth. There's scientific truth. There's biological truth. There's gender truth, there's existential personal truth, there's theological truth. This is a horrible image. But think of truth as the disco ball. That's reflecting things from all angles. I mean, holy cow, does that ever date me, but

K Karin Peter 27:26

Well, the fact, all of us on this call laughed when you said that day, it's all of us. So go ahead.

T Tony Chvala-Smith 27:30

So history is interested in truth is interested as much as possible in trying to understand what happened, why it happened? What were the forces shaping it? What contextual factors figured into that? What can we currently know about? What happened at Far West? Right, without without spin, but with the use of the best sources, the best tools, the best lenses? What can that's, that's a, that's a search for a kind of truth. Does that help?

L Lach Mackay 27:59

That helps a lot. That'll be helpful as we continue our discussions.

K Karin Peter 28:08

Okay. Lach, you want to go on to context,

L Lach Mackay 28:12

I would love to. So just like I generally talk about church history principles, whenever I'm talking about Community of Christ history. I also love to talk about communitarians, utopians, and Christian primitivist, which is part of the context of what's happening around us. And I think the communitarian element is particularly helpful and understanding some of what the heck was going on in Nauvoo? Not necessarily, why, but at least, maybe helping to give us some insight. So our story in context, we were there was this explosion in the early 19th century, of groups like us who believe that living and working in community was a better idea. Some earlier, some or later, there was something happening not just in the US, but in, in the US and Europe that that was causing people to ask questions about how they should live their lives. And so for small groups of people, they were landing on this idea of living and working in community. Folks like shakers founded by Ann Lee. And I'm really interested in the connections between these various communitarian groups the way that we interactedm trading members and leaders and ideas. So for example, with the shakers Jesse Gause, a member of our very first First Presidency, was a Shaker before he joined us and went back to the Shakers so I'm just really interested in what if any influence he had that might have been transmitted through the Shakers some of the ways that they believe in living in communities sharing all things common, simple living, and there's a As Larry Foster has pointed out in his work, there's something about living in community that raised questions about the nature of family, and, and how to interact with others. So sexuality. sexual relationships generally work their way into the mix for some reason. So for of course, shakers, they choose celibacy, and others as we'll discover, take different routes. An extreme example of another route or the Oneidans in upstate New York founded by John Humphrey Noyse. They also shared all things common. They had some pretty interesting practices like mutual criticism, where every member of the community would gather around one individual and spend hours pointing out their flaws and sharing ways that they

could live better lives. Sounds like a horrific experience to me, and also practiced complex marriage, where everybody was married to everybody else. Others the Harmonious harmony, Pennsylvania New Harmony, Indiana, back to economy Pennsylvania, founded by Father George Rapp. Among our connections to them were Sidney Rigdon, who lives near their community and economy, Pennsylvania. In our earliest German members, were previously harmonist. Folks like the Zundel family. They shared all things common, they gave money to those in need, they collected a huge amounts of money to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. They're caring for the poor by providing food and housing. They also chose to practice celibacy kind of purify themselves in preparation for the turn of Christ, and ended up causing a schism. And that's why some of those folks ended up joining the Latter Day Saints. And even folks like the Inspirationalists that the amount of colonies. So all of these groups and us examples of communitarian so there's something that happened in the culture that's causing people to think that we need to live and work together in community. Some of it is driven by this desire to replicate the book of Acts and this kind of Bible Communism's of have called it. Some of it is a reaction, I think, to the industrial revolution, but there's significant changes in the society at the time. We're also utopians as were many of the groups I just talked about and more. So for example, as the Latter Day Saints are driven from Nauvoo, they are looking for other communal groups to sell to a try connecting with the Oh knights are not successful. They eventually sell the temple lot to the Icarians French utopians, who had this dream of building a perfect society they called Icaria, similar to our concept of Zion, so communitarians, utopians, and Christian primitivist. Andrew Bolton, I think, has done a nice job of talking about our Christian primitive past, and particularly the influence of the book of Acts on us this idea, where we are desperately trying to physically recreate what we understood of New Testament Christianity, on the shores of Lake Erie. And acts seems to be the template for much of that. So, for example, living in a gathered community of believers because that's what's described in the book of Acts. From Acts chapter two verse one "and when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord. In one place." Joseph restates that in the Doctrine and Covenants section 32, to a the Community of Christ Doctrine and Covenants is December 1830. "And again, a commandment I give them to the church that it is expedient in me that they should assemble together at the Ohio." This idea of gathering together with like minded individuals, we were trying anyway to live, a variation of all things common. Acts chapter two verse 44, Joseph restates that in the Book of Commandments, that 1831 "and behold, thou shall consecrate all the properties that which thou has done to me with a covenant and a deed which cannot be broken." Why all things common? Concern for the plight of the poor. The hope is that the surplus of the wealthy can lift up the pours from Acts chapter two, verse 45, "They sold their possessions and goods, and part of them to all men is every man had need." restated in the Doctrine and Covenants section 42. "And behold, that will remember the poor and consecrated properties for their support. And in as much as being part of your substance and to the poor, you will do it and to me." Expands beyond just acts to this idea that we'll probably talk about later we're talking about Kirtland Temple of proclaiming the gospel to the rest of the world. So from Acts chapter one, verse eight, "You will be wanting witnesses and all Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria, unto the ends of the earth." And it soon grows into this idea of being endowed with power from on high. So they're sending missionaries out really early from Kirtland. And they develop this idea that they have to be spiritually empowered from Luke 24. This idea that they would have an advantage over those who were not filled with the Holy Spirit. And even why are we Christians with temples, Acts chapter two, verse 46, "They spent much time together in the temple" resulted in our hope to build three houses of the Lord's and called temples in Kirtland and our hope to build 24 temples in Independence, Missouri. So I think, really helpful to understand their focus on the New Testament, particularly acts, let me

clarify that they were not ignoring the Old Testament, and that soon, significant elements are there as well. But I think it's helpful to understand our early Kirtland period through those lenses.

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Karin Peter 36:12

A lot when you talk about Christian primitivism, and you were using the different verses out of Acts. And then comparing what Joseph Smith put in the Doctrine and Covenants. It wasn't just Joseph Smith, who was interested in this, I want to make sure our listeners are understanding. There were lots of people experimenting and using pieces of Scripture, and trying to live them in how they understood to be authentically in their time. So we were an example of Christian primitive.

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Lach Mackay 36:48

One of many, one of many, and what I find really interesting and intriguing. They weren't just, symbolically remembering they meaning early Latter Day Saints, symbolically remembering, they believed they were living again, those things, and they were really intentional about it. But because we're not very scripturally literate, we often don't pick up the clues they leave. There's, you know, you know, Sidney Rigdon says something Kirtland even before he joins the Latter Day Saints, that is very specific saying we are we are trying to do this. But usually they're not saying we're trying to create this, again, we're trying to live this again. They're just using language to describe what they're doing that comes right out of the New Testament. So just fascinating.

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Karin Peter 37:37

Okay, so as we become more scripturally, literate in our discussions, as we go on listeners, we will better understand our own story. So Tony, how about you?

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Tony Chvala-Smith 37:47

Yeah, I'd like to comment on on on that. And then I'll like say a little bit something about revivalism. So, um, so a theologian will look at a setting like that, and ask the question, what are the underlying theological or religious assumptions that people have in the setting? And all of these different experiments and primitivism itself as a phenomenon, they, they share an assumption that I suspect many of us would find not an assumption we would share. And that assumption is that which is oldest is truest. I call that the primitivist fallacy. Like that, which is oldest is truest. And so somehow we've somehow the only way to have authentic Christianity is to is to get back and have exactly what they had.

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Lach Mackay 38:45

Isn't there another fallacy that there was one Christianity to restore?

T

Tony Chvala-Smith 38:52

Exactly, that's, that's another fallacy, right, that there was an original thing. And it'll be in the 1960s, when our church finally, finally officially says, there wasn't an original thing. There were many original things. So yeah, there's multiple fallacies going on there. But when I look at our own tradition, that primitive is fallacy really, really created problems. Because if, if that which is oldest is truest. And you've already gone back to the book of Acts, you know, that there's like a whole bunch of books prior to that. And so, it must be even truer the further you further back you go. And so in my in my view, the primitive is fallacy or the primitive assumption that which is oldest is true as kept motivating Joseph to try to recreate older and older stuff. And before you know, you've got a you've got Egyptian polytheism and, and theocracy and polygamy, right. I think those I think those are those are are complex phenomena. But part of that part of the reason they could they could happen is because there was this shared assumption that somehow that which is all this is truest. And that's an assumption, that's an assumption that ought to be in our, in our time ought to be challenged, right. Certainly in other areas of life, we don't believe that 1920s medicine is older than 2020s medicine. I don't believe I want 1920s medicine. Thank God that it was there because it's part of an evolutionary development. But we in most have, in many areas of our lives, we don't function with the idea that that which is oldest is truest. So, theologically is problematic. So that's just one thing to think about primitivism. So other contextual pieces I'm interested in his revivalism. And that period of our movement arises in that period in American history, in American religions is referred to as the Second Great Awakening. Roughly from 1790 to 1840. We fall squarely in in the bulk of that. And I like Nathan Hatch's book, the "Democratization of American Christianity". It should be titled the "Democratization of American Protestant Christianity", I think, more accurately, but he, in my view, he still offers one of the best contextual pieces for understanding lots of aspects of our early theology, and also a fairly good context story 1820 stories context oriented reading of, of the Book of Mormon as a piece of 19th century literature, he's really good on all of that. So democratized Christianity in the wake of the American Revolution, meant a number of things, it meant that no longer was tradition as received the arbiter of religious choice but my own personal experience, I have to have an experience and what I experience is absolute truth for me. Now, that itself has got a lot of problematic assumptions in it as if the individual is isolated from everything around but nonetheless that that's the Second Great Awakening has that is one of its working assumptions. You have to experience salvation tonight, or you're going to hell if you die. And that's the the revivalists traded heavily on on that that assumption that the individual and the individuals private personal religious experience was the final arbiter of Christian truth. That was essential to revivalism. Another thing that was essential to revivalism is the sense that conversion is a one time thing, right. You, in American religious culture to this day, so people will still ask you are you born again? That's straight out that straight out of 1820 Did you ever born again experience? To which my responses tell me exactly the New Testament, when was Peter born again? There's a lot of them. But um, another thing too, is that the revivalists were pop popular preachers. They they develop persona, right? They some of them pretended to be like John the Baptists, or I forget the one. Maybe Maybe Lach, I'll be the one who was called the white pilgrim Thomas, maybe. Anyway, they developed colorful persona. And of course, they traveled 1000s of miles on foot on horseback preaching revivals. If you read their stories, many of them have experiences and had call experiences that sound extremely, extremely like the earliest version of what we call Joseph's First Vision, the 1831 to account of it reads pretty much like one of those revivalist preacher call experiences, call conversion experiences. So that means that there was I'll call it a trope, the trope of the revivalists conversion experience that was out there and people knew them they knew the stories and Joseph's's earliest vision sounds like those stories, not like what we read in the later

Wentworth letter. Another thing too, is that democratized Christianity meant that I don't need no theological degrees to understand Christianity. And in fact, the people with the theological degrees, those highfalutin Yale and Princeton and Harvard people, they get it wrong all the time, and they're just experts, they claim to be experts, but they don't know anything really. Answer So, the revivalist would would pillory, the educated clergy from the northeast. They also they also really detested Calvinism, as they understood it. Of course, they didn't understand Calvinism in terms of its 16th century context. That was not even possible for them. But the idea that salvation is ultimately finally in God's hands, was deplorable to the revivalist because you can't preach for conversions if you if you think people are predestined one way or the other. So they made jokes about Calvinism all the time. This reviling of experts, it has a good side and a bad side, right? The good side is that in the Latter-day Saint tradition, you don't have to be trained. You don't have to be a trained clergy person to be called into priesthood. And there's, there's lots of benefits to that. There's also lots of detriments to that right, especially for us today in an age of major risk management questions, right. But they the revivalists love to poke fun at all these educated clergy and at the experts, and that's had a long negative half life in American religious history and American social history, right. So, and interestingly, it didn't work very well, because in order to be revivals, preacher, you at least had to read. You had to be literate. And while all that played into early, Latter Day Saintism, gosh, as soon as we could we started, started establishing schools and schools of prophets and our own little theological seminaries. And we tried to start learning Hebrew, we didn't do great at it. But we tried. And so we knew right away that education was important. Even though we had adopted the assumption that a train educated clergy is somehow connected to a apostasy and falsehood of you, by the way, we don't hold in pretty much any other area of life. But we we did hold it there. So the Second Great Awakening is our matrix. It really deeply impacted our origins, we we originate in it. And so the thing that's, that's one of the things that's really important, for example, in the Book of Mormon, which I read totally as a 19th century text is, have you had have you had the salvation experience? Right, the book of Amos is classic, right, going out into the woods, to let the words of mine the words of my father, sunk, (sic) grammatical problem there. The words of my father sunk deep into my heart about redemption and so on. And, and then he has a vision, right, that's classic Second Great Awakening. Finally, one of the things that's going on to theologically in our origin period, is we're still wrestling with the Puritan heritage. The Puritans were, in a sense, communitarians. But they were also Calvinists. And so there's this whole heritage of puritanism. That's kind of good news, bad news, the American frontier, but the Puritan theological heritage heritage was deeply embedded in in the Northeast of the United States. And here's a place you see it. I always this is this is I'm, I'm simply trading trading off trading a piece out of a lecture I give on the Book of Mormon in a seminary class. So, backing up to the 16th century, John Calvin, the great Swiss reformer, one of the ways he referred to God's got God, God likes to accommodate God's self to human weakness uses Calvin uses the word accommodation. And for Calvin, the Bible was in was a piece of literature that was a divine accommodation to our human needs. And so it's it's part of the Divine divine love that that God kind of makes God Self available to us in ways we can get. The Puritans who are Calvinists believe that but they didn't like the word accommodation. The word they chose instead was condescension. That word made more sense to him, but it said the same thing. And guess what word appears a giant handful of times in the Book of Mormon to describe God reaching out to two people God's condescension, behold, behold the condensation condescension of God. I'm just gonna say the condensation of God is not what I behold the condescension of God. Right. There's, in my view, there's there's Joseph reflecting the Puritan theological heritage positively Some of it, some of it, they liked, some of it they didn't like. And it's stamped on them. Right? They that's what they grew up in that is their context. And so not surprisingly, the Book of Mormon contains, it contains a kind of argument

with an acceptance of aspects of the Puritan heritage. Yes, on this no on this. So that's, that's a theologian looking at this period, and raising certain kinds of questions, noticing certain kinds of things that theologians make the big money to notice.

K

Karin Peter 50:36

The big money, yes. All right. Luck. Do you have any comments on that? Because a couple of things came to mind to me as Tony was speaking, I'm I'm wondering what came to mind for you.

L

Lach Mackay 50:45

I was captured by the discussion on education. I agree with what Tony was saying. And I'm just really curious. Now, I'd like to figure out more why we valued education, while while rejecting some of the folks in the Northeast that that hiring some of them to teach us or trying to anyway, and buying their textbooks. You know, what, what was driving us? I think I have some insight, but I need more. I think at some point, we talked about how, you know, we want to teach geography because we can't send missionaries out if they don't know where they're going, or how to get home. Yeah, Sidney Rigdon, is talking about the Far west Missouri temple. And some of the things they hope to do with it, which of course, didn't get built. But he talks about how they want to educate their children and teach them to read and write so they can take care of themselves. So they saw education as a way to protect the vulnerable, those that were being taken advantage of by the more learned, he said, but there's more to it. And I'm sure I'd like to kind of dig into that at some point, but it won't be in this podcast.

T

Tony Chvala-Smith 51:57

I think that's that's really fascinating. Locke, and, you know, there's, there's the, the social justice part of me that wonders if part of the critique is, is essentially a social critique of the wealthy class that has access to stuff that we don't have access to. I think an aspect of our early movement is that there are a variety of points of social critique that are being lived out there. Communitarianism is actually could be seen as a social critique of industrialization, and the drawing of people from the countryside into the cities to work horrible, horrible factory jobs, as in England, you know, Dickens, England, there's a critique there. And so some of our some of our social justice impulses may be deeply rooted in, in genetic material from that period. I think they, you know, it's, it's, it's, it's interesting that we're critical of the educated but want to be educated. But if if the critique is understood as a critique of privilege, you know, of the, of the privilege of the 1%, who have all the resources, that's different than it's, it's not that we hate education, is that we hate we hate that, that privilege robs the rest of us, the privilege of some robs the rest of us of the resources that everybody should have.

L

Lach Mackay 53:19

That comment made me think of that. The irony of when we finally start converting the desperately poor from those factories in England, we soon give up on the idea of all things common and pretended we never taught it. By Nauvoo, but the care for the poor is still there,

and they're still doing some collective farming. But it seems like at the time when they might really embrace that, which I did, it was not part of them.

T

Tony Chvala-Smith 53:47

Yes, well, and by and by the way, all these experiments had forgotten that there was there was a very long successful communitarian Spirit experiment called Catholic monasticism. (They didn't think about that) Right? That was connected to something they had already written off. But they could have learned some things from the Benedictines about how to do all things in common.

K

Karin Peter 54:13

So from both Lach and Tony, we hear aspects of our context for the time period that we're talking about that are so important for us to, to keep in mind going forward, especially as we talk about the very beginning of our part of the restoration tradition. There are a couple of things that came to mind. As both of you were sharing one of them that came to mind kind of goes back to where we started with our history principles. And that is as we really begin to look more broadly at the context from which the early church came. We we have in our own tradition, idolize some aspects of our story and made them unique to us. And yet when we look at the broader context are not unique to us. Whether it's the idea of living in community all things in common or whether it's the reality that during the revivalist period to go out into the woods into a grove and have a spiritual experience was not unusual. And it was not unique to our founding story. But it's found in other faith traditions, founding stories from this same period of time, Frontier religion, Christian primitivism, etc. And so those history principles that help us with the broader to be open to the broader picture, I think will benefit us as we go forward in the in these episodes about our own story. There are some things we didn't touch on that I would like to hear from you about. One of them is and it was kind of talked about, I think, Tony, you mentioned Andrew Jackson. And if we're going to talk 1830, which is where we are in today's episode, we can't really set the context fully without really talking about what was happening in United States history. We've talked about kind of the religious northeast context, but that set in a broader context, which is we're talking about the US at 1830. Couldn't can either of us say anything about Andrew Jackson 1830, and how that affected our story, especially with the Indian Removal Act,

L

Lach Mackay 56:26

like the narrow view and then turn it over to Tony. Okay, he actually published in the church print shop behind Kirtland Temple, the northern times, the Jacksonian newspaper. So we were huge fans of Jackson bought into the populism and huge fans.

K

Karin Peter 56:47

Tony, you want to add to that?

—

T Tony Chvala-Smith 56:49

Yeah, it's, it's hard for me in 2022, to look back on Andrew Jackson, now, with a lot of favor. I think what we would call the Indian Removal Act, from 1830, is it's a, it's a it's a slow genocide of First Nations peoples that was carried out by the US Army and the US government, and their supporters. Literally, they death marched native peoples from the southeast, all the way up to Oklahoma. What do you make of that? By the way, as we record this, I'm I'm sitting in the Temple, which is in Jackson County. And there's a statue of Andrew Jackson down by the courthouse, at least I think there still is. And this, again, is an example of current, current understanding, current experience of the deep, deep racism of American history and culture makes one go look back at someone like Andrew Jackson and think I know he was populist. I know, I know that when he was elected president, all kinds of frontiers, people got to come to the White House and spit tobacco juice on the furniture and whatever they did. And so that sounds pretty cool to populace. But this also was a man who participated in a genocidal act. So what do we do with that? Right?

L Lach Mackay 58:28

What's worse than that we saw God at work in gathering those native peoples together. Right? Right, we can reach him with our missionaries easier.

T Tony Chvala-Smith 58:36

So that's, that's part of the context, right. And, in a sense, there's a part of our early heritage where we're trying to value native peoples well, not in terms of their stories, but in terms of the Book of Mormon story, we will value you because you fit into our story is going to, but still, there was at least an attempt to try and honor the worth of native peoples. But honestly, it's happening in a context, which that is simply not taking place. And the people who who had lived, whose lands these war for 1000s of years, are now treated as squatters that need to be forcibly removed or killed. So that's that's a difficult aspect of our of our foundational context. It's important, I think, for us to acknowledge that our movement began in the United States in a period of like, pretty much unconfessed unrepented racism, and that that does that does mark? Anything that starts there and we need to be aware of that, and then we need to make changes that we can make in the 21st century. People knew what they knew, and thought what they thought I recognized that. They like I had limited vision and And, or are marked by self love and selfishness. And yet we can we can see that that context is having as being ultimately kind of a harmful context and to lots of people. So it's important thing to claim that

K Karin Peter 1:00:17

because we can be on impacted by what's in our political and social culture. Right. Right. Luck. And

L Lach Mackay 1:00:23

then in another irony, we had times were treated like those native peoples. As at Hans mill, you know, somebody shoots a 12 year old in the head. I don't remember how that little boy in the

head and says knits will make lice. That phrase most often turns up when, when they're talking about doing it to native peoples.

T Tony Chvala-Smith 1:00:47

Yeah, I think that's really I think that's a really important. We knew we knew what it was like to be othered. Billy, and we also knew how to other those darn Gentiles. Right? So

L Lach Mackay 1:01:02

I would say we should know, not just knew, but we should know what it's like.

T Tony Chvala-Smith 1:01:07

Yeah, no, we do. Oh, absolutely. Yeah,

K Karin Peter 1:01:10

It goes back to the ethics of our, our conscience in our with our memory. I think, Tony, as you talked about earlier, the other thing that came to mind, and Lach, I've heard you talk about this many times, and that is the climate of spiritual seeking of the time, can you say a little bit about that,

L Lach Mackay 1:01:28

then I'll leave even more room for Tony. So the Smith family heritage seems to be one of seekers, just Smith Sr. For example, this idea of, of seeking for some form of primitive Christian church, and not not really connecting with any organized religion early on, but stuff desperate sense of seeking, which, as Tony pointed out, seeking something that never really existed to begin with, but I think pretty important in the culture of the Smith family and many others.

T Tony Chvala-Smith 1:02:05

Okay, Tony? Yeah, I mean, I think, interestingly, that seeking context is still very much alive in in the 21st century. It faces us with a paradox. On the one hand positively. People are seeking for I use my language, they're seeking for the seeking for deep connection with what is transcendent what with what is beyond with what what is holy and different. And, and that's always a good thing. That's part of the human condition we always longed for, and seek that which is greater than ourselves. God, if we want to use that language, I'm in the individualistic context of the United States, and in some other northern European places. Secret ism. And the deep, long term commitments it takes to be a community are a bit of a paradox. They're a little bit of oil and water put together, right? Because I'm, I'm seeking, I'm seeking deep connection

with God. And I love this community that also seems to align with that. But then if the community makes some choices or decisions I don't like then it's like well, Away with you. I'm gonna go seek somewhere else.

L Lach Mackay 1:03:25

Sorry, seekers, I'm sorry, spiritual but not religious. Yeah, in some way or secrets today? Yeah.

K Karin Peter 1:03:35

Yes, we can talk about that as we go through Pew Research and, and other pieces that inform us of the rise of spiritual seekers in our contemporary context. So I appreciate the conversations that we've been having in the being concerned about time as we go forward with our podcast, I wanted to just kind of recapture that we have explored some of the foundational pieces that are important to our discussions as we go forward with these episodes. And we've also established that the context, religious context, social context, cultural context, political context, all of those things are going to have impact on the story of the church. And we're going to explore some of that as we go forward in our historical theological exploration as well. But before we come to a close from this episode, I wanted to give each of you an opportunity if there's any last thought or comment, or question you want to raise before we close this episode. So Lach, I'll start with you any, any last thing you'd like to share?

L Lach Mackay 1:04:41

I have to say I've never worked with Tony before, but I'm enjoying it so far, and really looking forward to continue the discussion.


T Tony Chvala-Smith 1:04:48

And likewise, I've never actually worked with Lach before in this kind of way. And so I'm, I'm quite enjoying it too. I think we're going to have a lot of fun together. I know we're going to disagree on some stuff, but I think we're gonna have fun, fun in the disagreement

K Karin Peter 1:05:01

Well, our listeners can't see this. But there have been smiles and nodding going on even in aspects that we may not all agree. So I would look forward to that as well. So I want to thank both of you for being willing to participate in these episodes. And for today's discussion that kind of kicks this off for us. In our next installment in this particular series of episodes, our topic is going to move to Joseph Smith Jr. and the development of the early church. This is where I must admit I have the hardest time with the church history principle that, you know, we can't be judgmental about when we look back at this. So I'm going to be fighting that as we have our conversations. I'll just get that out in the open now, before we start. So in the meantime, for listeners, be sure to catch up on all the topics that you can find on the Project Zion Podcast, you

can go to [Project Zion podcast.org](http://ProjectZionpodcast.org) and see a list of all the series there. You'll see Lach and Tony and some of those as well. Again, I thank both of you. I'm Karin Peter. This has been cuppa joe. Thanks so much for listening.

 Josh Mangelson 1:06:22

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