

Extra Shot | 150th Anniversary of the Church Seal

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Andrew Bolton, Blake Smith

Blake Smith 00:27

Hello Project Zion Podcast listeners. This is your host, Blake Smith. And I'm excited to bring you this Extra Shot episode in honor of the 150th anniversary of the church seal. That's right this month, along with several other important anniversaries in the church, we're also celebrating 150 years with the church seal. And there may be no better person to join me for this conversation than former apostle Andrew Bolton, because Andrew has done a lot of background research on the place of the church seal in the life of the church. So welcome back, Andrew.

Andrew Bolton 01:04

Thank you, Blake. Good to be with and our listeners.

Blake Smith 01:07

And of course I say Welcome back. Because you're not a stranger to Project Zion Podcast. As far as I can tell, you've been a guest on at least four occasions in the past, providing us with some incredible information, which by the way, listeners, we'll post those links in our show notes so that you can go back and listen to those episodes as well. But before we start, it's pretty much a tradition for us to have our guests tell us a little bit about themselves, so that our listeners can get to know you better. So what ought we to know about Andrew Bolton?

Andrew Bolton 01:42

So I'm one of four boys. I have three brothers. And although I fought to get my own way, I never expected to win all the time. So, I grew up in community and having to share. I'm northern English. That's very important. That's better than southern English. I grew up amongst beautiful hills. We call them fous. In the in the Pennines. And I didn't know it at the time, but my feet were walking on ground that missionaries from the Restoration had walked beginning in 1837. Some people talk about the Ribble Valley as a sacred geography as Kirtland or Palmyra. But I'll say a little bit more about my spiritual journey, my religious journey later in the podcast.

Blake Smith 02:45

Wonderful, wonderful. Well, you have done a lot of work, as I said earlier on the church seals, so I'm really excited to hear all that you bring to that topic. Can you describe the church seal for our listeners and what its role has been in the church.

Andrew Bolton 03:01

So the church seal is a picture of a Lion and the Lamb with a child in between. Underneath that image is the word "Peace." To begin with, it was used as a seal for legal church documents. But after World War One, it became a church logo began to be used on letterhead, publications, books inside and outside our church buildings. And often it was the only artwork in our congregations. It's become greatly loved.

Blake Smith 03:34

So we're of course celebrating the 150th anniversary of the church seal this month. How did it come into being?

Andrew Bolton 03:42

So three church leaders with long beards as was fashionable in those days, met the morning of April the eighth 1874 to finalize the design. That afternoon the church General Conference approved the design. So it was all decided in a day. The three church leaders were Jason W Briggs, President of the Council of Twelve Apostles, Elijah Banta in the Presiding Bishopric and Joseph Smith III, President of the church. So, what is going on that initiates this project is an important question. Two years earlier, the church had become a legal corporation in Iowa. Thus it needed a stamp for legal documents. But why a church, why a peace seal? Why a peace image? I think are three reasons. First of all, Joseph III and the early Reorganization, rejected the militarism of Nauvoo 1839 to 1844. The church in Nauvoo had an army of 5000 men. The US Army at the time had only 3000 more, 8000. Joseph was 12 years old when his father and uncle Hyrum was shot in Carthage jail. He saw his mother Emma collapse three times in the Mansion House, their home, before she was able to see the body of her dead husband. I think that marked him. Secondly, the American Civil War, 1861 to 1865, was a terrible war. Joseph III had experiences that pulled him from armies, violence and war in a peace direction. More American soldiers died in that war than in all the wars put together since. Thus, there were recent memories of the reality of war as tragic and terrible. Nine years earlier, it had ended. And in 1874, and this is the work of an Australian church member called Rick Collins. Rick Collins came up with this thesis. In 1874, the big news story was that the perpetrators of the mountain meadows massacre in Utah, which had happened in 1857, were coming to trial. 120 innocent men, women and children were massacred in a wagon train ambush in Utah. The Civil War prevented justice catching up and now it was front page news. Justice was coming. A peace seal said we the Reorganization were the peace Saints, not the violent Saints. We not only didn't practice polygamy, we also didn't massacre people. So that is the third reason why I think the peace image came into being. So Joseph III and others with him were repudiating the church's earlier violence in Joseph Smith Jr's time. They were heading in a peace direction in the Reorganization after Nauvoo. And Joseph III said in 1865. At the end of the American Civil War, that "Peace is eminently our mission." And there are other stories that we could go over that illustrate this peace path of the young Reorganization. The design of the church seal is part of this peace path that the RLDS church was on.

Blake Smith 07:22

Wow. So war is not a new thing, of course, as we know. It's really interesting to hear the emphasis for peace. I'm also captured, I have to say, I'm captured by the comment that they made the decision in a day. What happened in the church that we can no longer make a decision that quickly?

Andrew Bolton 07:43

No, I didn't want to comment on that. Out of respect to my former colleagues.

Blake Smith 07:48

All right, well, we'll let that one go the.. But it is not well known in the church or any organization that I'm a part of, for that matter, to make decisions that quickly. So if I remember correctly, Andrew, you're an adult convert to the church and didn't grow up with the church seal. So when did you first encountered the seal? And what impact did it have on you personally?

Andrew Bolton 08:13

So let me give a bit more personal background. I grew up in the north of England. My dad was a British soldier for seven years in World War Two, he saw experienced terrible things. And family was dysfunctional because of that. He stopped drinking when I was 13. And that was a real answer to prayer. And when I was 16, I overheard him talking quietly, to my mother, about a conversation with his doctor that day. Dr. Lord had been wounded in the D Day landings. He too knew the horrors of war. But he was also a doctor, a healer. He understood my dad's experiences, he listened. Perhaps it was the first time that dad talked with somebody who really understood, didn't judge, and was with him. So from that conversation that I overheard, I understood for the first time that all our pain, growing up with my three brothers was the result of war. We were victims of World War Two, even though we were born after it. War was no longer a glorious, exciting game. It was a terrible, tragic thing. So that's the background. Five years later, I graduated from university, was working in Germany for a year. Yes, Germany of all places. I'd met a church member on board a ship crossing from England, to Germany. And the name of the person was John Menzies. He'd just had his Evangelist's blessing that day when I first met him, and he was on a spiritual high, but he couldn't tell me that because no way would have I understood it, it would have been all so weird. So he had discernment. So he introduced me to the church in Germany. And I really appreciate his loving sincerity that shone through. So a month later, we hitched out down the autobahn, from Hamburg to Hanover, and then got a train to Springe. A congregation with lots of young adults at that time, and very loving people. They felt like my own family. It was familiar, there was teasing. It was real. But they were better, more loving than anything I'd ever experienced before. John preached that Sunday, and on the pulpit was the church seal with the word freedom underneath. freiden, German for peace. I got it. By this time, I also understood the word Zion, I was looking for Zion. But until that time, until I met at church, I didn't have the word. So Zion means peace, I got it. In Germany, of all places, after World War Two, I got it. A year later, I was baptized, I wanted to be a part of creating Zion. And I knew that baptism represented change. And I knew I needed to change if Zion was going to come. And baptism in South Wales was the best decision I've ever made.

Blake Smith 11:56

Andrew, I really appreciate you sharing that personal story. I think often, I even speak from my own experience of walking into churches and seeing the church seal on the flag on the rostrum, and a variety of places around the church and really kind of taking for granted what that symbolizes. So to hear that personal connection really is a challenge, I think, to all of us. You mentioned about the war and about separating ourselves out as a Peace Church. I'm interested to know a little bit about how the look of the seal has changed, and I think it had some specific uses in the beginning that were more than just artwork in the church as it's used more commonly today.

Andrew Bolton 12:42

Yes. So to begin with, it was just a legal seal for church legal documents, and most church members weren't aware of it. The first church seal in its design had has a lion, a child and a lamb. And they're all going somewhere. That's Zion. They stand on three pieces of ground ... three continents: Europe, America, and Australia where the church, the RLDS church had a presence in 1874. The RLDS chose to begin to feel confident about its future. Behind the lamb, child and lion was a palm tree, representing Tahiti, French Polynesia, islands of the sea, where the church has also just being reestablished. Underneath it is the word peace. And underneath that, laurel leaves, again symbolizing peace. Around the outside, was the name of the church then Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of L.D. Saints. So that was the image and it also said incorporated 1872. So, as I said, most church members would not have been aware of it, it was just in the hands of the Presiding Bishop, the Bishop of Canada, and the Bishop in the British Isles.

Blake Smith 14:14

Interesting, I had forgotten about that version of the church seal. I have seen it before, but for so long, we've been using just the child and the Lion and the Lamb. Do you have a sense of what the inspiration for the church seal image was? And is there a biblical story being portrayed here? I think it probably brings to mind one for our listeners.

Andrew Bolton 14:38

So the chase seal is in by inspired by the first 10 verses of Isaiah 11. And Isaiah 11 is a peace message. Isaiah 9 talks about the Prince of Peace, and Isaiah 2 talks about swords into plowshares, going up to the temple and learning war no more. So this is the third iteration of peace in Isaiah. It speaks in this passage of the coming of the Messiah, from King David's family, the royal family. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, it says and He will judge with righteousness and the result from the Messiah's presence will be that "wolf shall lie down with the lamb and a little child will lead them, they will not hurt or destroy, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." The Messiah brings justice, reconciliation, and the end of violence. A world is coming, which is good, safe for all children, black, brown and white. He or she, they, them. The Messiah will be a signal to the nations of peace.

Blake Smith 16:01

Do you reference in that passage from Isaiah, that it's a wolf lying down with the lamb? Do you have any idea why we have a lion lying down with the lamb?

Andrew Bolton 16:12

Oh, you're such a good questioner. There are other animals mentioned in Isaiah 11, including lion. However, I think we have to go back to the last verse of the hymn "Spirit of God Like a Fire is Burning." In Emma's hymnal, and I've got it here, 1836. The last verse goes like this, "how blessed the day when the lamb and the lion shall lie down together without any ire. And Ephraim be crowned with his blessing in Zion, as Jesus descends with his chariots of fire." So, we have lion at the end of the first line, to rhyme with Zion at the end of the third line, so it's poetry that drove the church seal.

Blake Smith 17:01

Yeah, that's a very interesting piece of trivia. I've often wondered about that. But it's always been a part of the church, of course, so I did not recognize that connection. Certainly, the hymn, "The Spirit of God, Like a Fire is Burning." is a celebrated hymn in the church. And really, it's an anthem for both the Community of Christ and the LDS church. So are you saying that in a way the church seal celebrates the peace vision of our common early history?

Andrew Bolton 17:33

Yes, absolutely. What's ironic is that we dropped that last verse in our hymnal, until Randall Pratt and I got it back in a revised form. But the LDS church still have, still sing that last verse. So, as you say, it's common ground for both churches. It's part of our early tradition. It carries the Spirit of Zion carries the Spirit of peace, hope for peace, from my earliest days. So it's lovely because of that. It's a bridge builder, to both of us.

Blake Smith 18:13

I do remember hearing a community of LDS members who were gathered in the Kirtland Temple, when I was assigned to Kirtland, and was in the Kirtland Temple worshiping with them and heard that verse for the first time and wondered about that. So it's neat to hear that common history and see that, and I've enjoyed having that back in the hymn. That particular hymn is not only important to the church, it is it has a special place in my heart because it was my father's favorite hymn.

Andrew Bolton 18:48

And there's a footnote the story about the hymn. It was originally called "American Star." And it was a patriotic, nationalistic song, "American Star," and W. W. Phelps demilitarized it and converted it to what it is today. So it's a swords into plowshares story that reinforces, I think, the peace push that was going on in the early church.

Blake Smith 19:23

That's great. I want to step back for just a minute because I meant to ask about this when you when you talked about it. Obviously, there have been changes in the seal over the years. And at some point, it was simplified to this image of the child and the Lion and the Lamb. Did we get rid of the other emblems like the palm tree because we had spread into so many nations that couldn't include it all in the seal or was there another reason that you're aware of?

Andrew Bolton 19:54

So it's a good interesting question. Larry Tyree who's done good work on the church seal. When he was in Tahiti, he wanted a version of the church seal to have a palm tree. And the authorities at the time turned him down because they said, it's not part of our tradition. But it's in the first seal. He was absolutely jubilant to find that he was justified. So I think when it changed, the church seal changed from being a seal to becoming a logo, you simplify logos. So that's what what's happened artistically.

Blake Smith 20:34

So that's kind of how it transitioned from seal to a logo.

Andrew Bolton 20:39

Yes. So. So how did that transition happen? Perhaps is the question. We're, looking at? The answer is World War One. World War 1914 to 1918 is the short answer. And Matthew Naylor who you may know President of the National World War One Museum in Kansas City. He's a church member originally from Australia. His grandfather was a British soldier on the Western Front. And Matt Naylor, called World War One, And remember his president of the World War One museum for the United States. He calls it the founding catastrophe of the 20th century. It was the first mechanized, industrialized and chemicalized war. Millions died. The American Civil War was terrible. This was many times more terrible. So it's the founding catastrophe of modern times because from it came the Russian Revolution, the rise of Hitler, World War Two, the Holocaust, the Cold War, and Matt Naylor also says 911 Because the maps in the Middle East that have complicated the Middle East, were drawn up by the colonial powers France, and Britain, in World War One. So the church seal after World War One, and the horror of World War One is distant for Americans, in some ways, although is a World War One memorial in Independence. But it's not distant for Europeans. Every British village, every British town and city has a World War One Memorial, because so many millions died. In Leicester here, the memorial is to 12,000 men who died in city and county in World War One. So but there's awareness in the church after World War One in America, that it wasn't the war to end all wars as it was promised to be. So FM Smith, and others wanted a peace symbol, and they already had it in the church seal. So the church seal now becomes logo. We use it on our church letter stationery, on Herald House books, inside and outside our church buildings, including the then new Auditorium. Look around the Auditorium, you'll see it in the concrete outside. And it's also at the front, the seal's been modernized by the stage either side of the stage. So this is the beginning of the church seal becoming the church logo. And it has an astonishing effect in our denomination.

Blake Smith 23:45

Yeah, so it's no longer just a practical legal tool, but something that really serves as a reminder to us every day, through like you've said, our books and our stationery and in our churches. So how, how important has the church seal become in Community of Christ identity and mission today?

Andrew Bolton 24:05

So the influence of the church seal has been massive. And I'm an Englishman and we're used to understatement. It's a prophetic symbol. It's a symbol of Zion's peace that's hinted at in the Isaiah 11 passage. I love the idea, that there's visual theology that even a child can understand. Don't think we'd have a temple dedicated to the pursuit of peace, reconciliation and healing of the Spirit without the church seal shaping us as a people over the 50 years or more from the 1920s to the 1980's. It helps

sustain and renew our peace mission that Joseph III and early members of Community of Christ had first started in the Reorganization. So, I think we could have lost that, but the church, but by making the church seal the church logo after World War One, that has renewed that peace mission in the Reorganization every time we've looked at it. And people love it. Every church, I've never seen any church member who is disappointed by it. So today, I think we're challenged to follow Jesus, the Peaceful One, the Peace Messiah, because of the church seal. The church seal has shaped us as a movement. The first church seal in 1874, as we discussed, has a palm tree and three continents. We were already becoming an international movement. Now we're in 60+ nations with a peace mission everywhere we go. And the church seal is artistically rendered in local cultures all over the world, right? I have some beautiful images of that. My favorite is the doors in the Simimbaan congregation, near Roxas Isabela in the Philippines. Jennifer De Guzman is standing by the door. And they made the door to enter the sanctuary, the church seal like it is on the Temple. She got the idea from the Temple. So it's carved by a local Filipino craftsmen, in local Filipino wood. It's beautiful, and inspiring.

Blake Smith 26:38

Is there a place where our listeners might be able to see some of these pictures and church logos Andrew?

Andrew Bolton 26:44

Yes, I did the presentation for Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation, where I show quite a number of these images. So we can give the reference to that, the link to that perhaps in the program notes.

Blake Smith 26:58

We will definitely do that. I want to ask one more question and then see if there's anything that you want to add. How might we celebrate the church seal in our families and our congregations going forward.

Andrew Bolton 27:11

So it's the 150th anniversary, that's something. So it's important to celebrate anniversaries. So the church seal should be in our homes, as well as in our congregations. It should be a conversational piece. So you come into our house, it is at the end of the passageway, it's the first thing guests will see as they arrive. This year, because the 150th anniversary, we should have a special church service in our congregations in our mission centers, at our reunions and camps to celebrate the church seal. And it's because it's visual, it's accessible to everybody, including the little children. We should talk about it in our Sunday school classes. Maybe people could listen to this podcast, and then discuss it. Or watch the presentation with the images on the Historic Sites Foundation webpage. Making a church seal could be a good church school class, for children. And we've done that lots of times before. Let children creatively do work of lion, lamb, child and peace. So we have a stylized logo, that and we want, we want that. But all the time people are doing their own artwork, they're inspired by it. So if you go on the web, you can see Jesus sometimes as the child, the adult. So that fits Isaiah 11 as well. So I would also encourage us to read, study, the whole scripture that inspires the church seal. That is Isaiah 11 Chapter, verses one to 10. Because I got things from that that I've been missing by just looking at the church seal. The church seal just reminds us of verse six to nine. But I had missed the fact all this

peace comes about because the Messiah comes and for Community of Christ members, the Messiah is Jesus. So it's, Jesus is central to the peace mission of the church. We can't have peace without Jesus, being informed by his teachings and life and ministry, particularly in the Gospels. So, Jesus the Messiah, means peace, personal peace, social peace, the end of war. And also it's a Green Peace, because we want to address climate change. So we should have a Greenpeace seal also in our congregations. That would be fun to do in a reunion wouldn't it? [Yes it would] Do a giant piece seal in green, and it could be made out of greenery. So, and then, having done all this creative work and study with the church seal scripture and artistically, to remember that it's practical pursuing of peace, making peace personally, in our families, congregations, at work and in our neighborhood. And I want to say a little bit about peace in our congregations. You know, there are people in our congregations that annoy us. And that's where we learn to make peace. You learn the importance of love the importance of forgiving. So, think of the brother or sister that irritates you. They're instruments in Jesus hands to help us be better peacemakers. So think globally, about peace, think Zion everywhere. But act on doing peace locally.

Blake Smith 27:22

I appreciate your willingness and honesty to say that there might be people in our congregations who annoy us. We don't want to admit that. We love everybody. Right? So a little bit close to home. Well, Andrew, is there anything else anything that I haven't asked that you wanted to tell us about with regards to the church seal or how we might use it or its importance?

Andrew Bolton 31:39

So I think I would go back to the first time I saw it. As John Mensies preached in a loving congregation, I saw it, saw the words frieden, German for peace, and I got it. It was a revelation. That changed my life for good. A year later, I was baptized in South Wales. I was cautious. It was a very deliberate, carefully thought out choice. And I was so scared at the end, about what I should do. And I realized that to not be baptized was not to stay in the same place. In fact, it was to go backwards. In a sense, even into darkness, to go forward, to be baptized, was really scary. But it offered hope. And I went for hope.

Blake Smith 32:42

I so deeply appreciate you sharing your story with us, Andrew, because I have known you and your family to be incredible models of peace and peace action and peace works. And so to know now a little bit more about where that all started. brings extra meaning for me to the church seal. And as I look at it, I will remember that story and be challenged to let it transform my life as it has yours. And I hope that will be the case for our listeners as well. So thank you so much for being with us today, Andrew and for all the work that you do in peace work. And in being just a model of bridge builder and relationship builder across lines of, as you might say, annoyance or just disagreement and all of those places, but also in in creation justice and social justice. So you do such incredible work. And I'm really glad and honored to be able to be here on this podcast with you today. So thank you for that.

Andrew Bolton 33:56

Thank you for hosting and your ministry to my son when you were a chaplain at Graceland.

Blake Smith 34:00

Absolutely. That was that was a joy and a challenge. But it was it was indeed a joy. So thank you also to all of our listeners here at Project Zion Podcast, we invite you to go back and listen to some of the other work that has been done by Andrew, and also to view his presentation on the Community of Christ Historic Sites website which will also be included in the links in the show notes. Now because the hymn the Spirit of God like a fire is burning has played such an important role in part of the history of the church seal, we thought that before our usual Indian music, we play a clip of the hymn that was provided by David Hines. Until next time, thank you for joining us. Be blessed, and we'll see you again soon.