

# **Personalities, Publications, and Politics in the History of Churches of Christ**

## *Lesson Overviews and Discussion Questions*

by John Young

### **Lesson 1. Welcome and Introduction**

In this video, John establishes the overall goals for this series, recaps the early religious history of the United States, and introduces Barton W. Stone, one of the most significant figures within the early Restoration Movement.

#### *Discussion Questions:*

1. Does it surprise you to learn that the United States was, to a large degree, moving away from the Christian faith in the wake of the Revolution? Does that impact your perception of whether the country was founded as a Christian nation?
2. The Second Great Awakening appealed to people on an individual level with a powerful message of personal repentance, but the message was also a collective one in that it called people to work towards reforming their society in some way. In what ways is the gospel call personal? In what ways is it communal?
3. How did Barton W. Stone's participation in the Cane Ridge revivals shape the course of his career?

### **Lesson 2. Campbellites? Or Christians?**

In this video, John introduces three more significant figures from the early Restoration Movement—Alexander Campbell, Thomas Campbell, and Walter Scott—and explores how their efforts brought about growth, and growing pains, during the movement's first several decades.

#### *Discussion Questions:*

1. Had you heard a version of the “five fingers” plan of salvation before? Was it different from the one taught by Walter Scott? If so, what do you make of that?
2. What were the most important factors that led to growth in the early Restoration Movement? Do you see those things in Churches of Christ today? If not, why not?
3. Of the issues that threatened to divide the Restoration Movement early on, are any of them still pressing today? Or have we moved on to other concerns?

### **Lesson 3. Growing (Apart) at the Turn of the 20th Century**

In this video, John explains how and why the Restoration Movement gradually diverged over a variety of doctrinal, hermeneutical, and socioeconomic factors, culminating in the separation of the movement into two streams—Churches of Christ and Disciples of Christ.

*Discussion Questions:*

1. Trivia question: along with Garfield, who were the other two American presidents associated with the Disciples of Christ/Restoration Movement?
2. How important was the official recognition of the division in 1906? Were there already two groups by that point?
3. Do you know of any modern T.B. Larimores? How is their work being received?

#### **Lesson 4. Seeking a New Identity**

In this video, John addresses the early twentieth century history of Churches of Christ, touching on the impacts of the World Wars and overviewing some of the doctrinal difficulties which threatened to divide believers.

*Discussion Questions:*

1. Were you aware of the differing interpretations of “the millennium”? If you have been in a class on Revelation previously, how was that issue addressed?
2. How do the stories about some of the notable women from the early Restoration Movement change your perception of the history we have covered so far in this class?
3. Did you know about Carry Nation’s connections to the Restoration Movement? What other famous cultural and political figures can you think of who also have ties?

#### **Lesson 5. Institutionalism and Its Discontents**

In this video, John explores the most significant split within the history of Churches of Christ: the division over the acceptability (or not) of jointly-sponsored “institutions” and evangelistic efforts.

*Discussion Questions:*

1. What accounts for the tremendous growth experienced by Churches of Christ in the mid-twentieth century—a period often considered a “golden age” in our history?
2. Do you see the impacts of the institutional division within Churches of Christ in your local area today?
3. How does bringing in some examples from the history of Black Churches of Christ change your perception of the history we have covered so far in this class?

#### **Lesson 6. From Gainesville to Boston to Los Angeles**

In this video, John unpacks the intended, and unintended, consequences of the growth of discipling-focused campus ministries in Churches of Christ.

*Discussion Questions:*

1. Do you see any parallels between the politics of Churches of Christ from the 1960s and the politics of Churches of Christ today?
2. Have campus ministry efforts played a role in your life? In the work of your congregation?
3. Did the division between Churches of Christ and the ICOC impact congregations in your area? If so, what is the relationship like today—better, worse, the same?

### **Lesson 7. Growing (Apart) at the Turn of the 21st Century**

In this video, John discusses the declining influence of many of the institutions which had previously kept Churches of Christ tethered to each other, as well as the rise of new voices, platforms, and issues which have shaped the more recent history of our fellowship.

*Discussion Questions:*

1. Why is it important to be aware of the ways in which we read and interpret scripture?
2. What kinds of extra-congregational institutions have most profoundly impacted your life? Your family? Your congregation?
3. Who are some of the most famous “Church of Christ celebrities” you are familiar with? What does their connection to the fellowship say about our place on the cultural landscape today?

### **Lesson 8. Practical Lessons from Our Shared History**

In this video, John offers some thoughts on the practical lessons Churches of Christ in the 21st century can take from our shared history, particularly on the heels of another tumultuous election season.

*Discussion Questions:*

1. How familiar are you with the history of the early Stone-Campbell Movement, and with the histories of restorationist predecessors and influences like those discussed in this lesson?
2. Does the persecution of the Sandemanian church impact in any way your perception of the morality or appropriateness of the American Revolution and its related war? If so, how?
3. What lessons can we learn from the example of the Sandemanians? What should we emulate? Are there things we should do differently in our own contexts?

## Personalities, Publications, and Politics in the History of Churches of Christ

### *Suggestions for Further Reading*

Benson, RoseAnn. *Alexander Campbell and Joseph Smith: 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Restorationists*. Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2017.

Brice, Tanya Smith, ed. *Reconciliation Reconsidered: Advancing the National Conversation on Race in Churches of Christ*. Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 2016.

Casey, Michael W. *Saddlebags, City Streets, and Cyberspace: A History of Preaching in the Churches of Christ*. Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 1995.

Crawford, Wes. *Shattering the Illusion: How African American Churches of Christ Moved from Segregation to Independence*. Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 2013.

Dochuk, Darren. *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011.

Foster, Douglas A. et al, eds. *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*. Grand Rapids.: Eerdmans, 2004.

Gorman, James L. *Among the Early Evangelicals: The Transatlantic Origins of the Stone-Campbell Movement*. Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 2017.

Harrell, David Edwin Jr. *The Churches of Christ in the Twentieth Century: Homer Hailey's Personal Journey of Faith*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000.

Hatch, Nathan O. *The Democratization of American Christianity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

Hughes, Richard T. and James L. Gorman. *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024.

Long, Loretta M. *The Life of Selina Campbell: A Fellow Soldier in the Cause of Restoration*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001.

Love, D'Esta, ed. *Finding Their Voices: Sermons by Women in the Churches of Christ*. Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 2015.

Robinson, Edward J. *Hard-Fighting Soldiers: A History of African American Churches of Christ*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2019.

Williams, D. Newell, Douglas A. Foster, and Paul M. Blowers, eds. *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2013.