

## Separate Ways

**I blush for my fellows, who hold up the Bible as the bond of union, yet make their opinions of it tests of fellowship; who plead for union of all Christians; yet refuse fellowship with such as dissent from their notions. Vain men! Their zeal is not according to knowledge, nor is their spirit that of Christ.**

~ Barton Stone, 1835

When Thomas Campbell spoke of “being silent where the Bible is silent,” he allowed for different opinions on what silence meant. The *Declaration and Address* acknowledged there would always be differences of opinion among Christians, but that human opinion should never be a test of fellowship. However, two very different views developed about how the silence of Scripture should be applied. One viewpoint was that **silence prohibits**; the other that **silence permits**. By the late 1800s, southern churches in the Stone-Campbell Movement argued that the Bible’s silence does not authorize societies, instrumental music, choirs, or other perceived innovations, while northern church leaders contended that Scripture did not prohibit these practices, which were used to aid evangelism, worship and ministry.

By the late 1880s, some within the Movement were calling for a formal recognition of the division they believed had already occurred. Daniel Sommer, editor of the *American Christian Review*, saw the changes in the church during the previous thirty years as examples of apostasy. He was not pleased with the expanding role of women, including the first ordination of a female minister in 1888. In his editorials Sommer began to make a distinction between the “church of Christ” and the “so-called Christian Church” (Disciples of Christ). In 1889 in Sand Creek, Illinois, an elder read Sommer’s “Address and Declaration” (an obvious play on Thomas Campbell’s Declaration and Address). In his “declaration,” Sommers outlined his plan to save the movement from the “abominations” of missionary societies, salaried ministers, choirs, and instrumental music. If churches did not give up these “corrupt innovations,” Sommer warned, “we cannot and will not regard them as brethren.” Sommer drew a line in the sand.

Official recognition of the Churches of Christ as separate from the Disciples of Christ came with the Federal Census of 1906. Census director Simon North contacted David Lipscomb to find out whether Churches of Christ and the Disciples of Christ had become separate groups. Lipscomb, then editor of the *Gospel Advocate*, was the most influential person among Churches of Christ from the close of the Civil War until his death in 1917. Lipscomb, himself a student of Alexander Campbell, essentially excommunicated the Disciples ten years earlier. In a letter dated June 22, 1907, Lipscomb informed director North that there was, indeed, “a distinct people, taking the word of God as their only and sufficient rule of faith, calling their churches ‘churches of Christ’ or ‘churches of God,’ distinct and separate.... from all other bodies.” When published in 1910, the 1906 census listed as a “New Denominations” the “**Churches of Christ.**” The Stone-Campbell Movement now had officially separated into two streams.

Sadly, this would not be the last division within the Movement. While the **Christian Church/Disciples of Christ** did not undergo as many subsequent divisions as the Churches of Christ, controversy still remained over cooperative missionary efforts, open membership, and theological liberalism. In 1927 conservative Disciples held their first North American Christian Convention, marking the beginning of the Independent Christian Churches/Churches of Christ as a distinct group from the Disciples. Efforts during the 30s and 40s to restore unity failed. Those congregations that chose not to be associated with this new denominational structure went their own way as the **Independent Christian Churches/Churches of Christ**. The third stream had emerged.