

Cane Ridge Revival

The revival at Cane Ridge was as ecumenical as anything that had ever happened on the frontier, which was commonly marked with sectarian bigotry. Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist clergy, perhaps as many as 30 or 40, not only worked together "with more harmony than could be expected," but they forgot their confessions and creeds and preached the gospel. It was a suitable climate for the emergence of a unity movement, especially since it was the people themselves who were demanding a united effort.⁶

The size of the revival was estimated from 12,000 to 20,000, with Stone himself going as high as 30,000, a figure given by military men. The crowd was said to have been made up of all kinds, from the governor of the state to prostitutes, blacks as well as whites, the blackleg and the robber as well as the devout worshiper. It was a large open air meeting, or several meetings spread over an extended area, with several preachers discoursing at one time.⁷

The woods were filled with hundreds of vehicles and tents, creating a vast campground. It was an occasion for excitement and fervor, and for several days there were many phenomenal, incredible manifestations. Stone called them miracles, insisting that if they were not miracles, they had the same effects in that they caused many unbelievers to accept Jesus as the Christ.⁸

These "exercises," as they were called, consisted of laughing and singing, the jerks, dancing, falling, and even screaming and barking. Stone was impressed with their authenticity. While he did not personally experience any of them, he describes them in detail. The falling and screaming would sometimes go together, leaving the subject as if he were dead. The jerks were mostly head movements, which sometimes agitated the whole body.

Stone reported that some of the people became amazingly acrobatic, for they would stand in one place and jerk backward and forward with their head almost touching the ground. He says the dancing was heavenly, as if accompanied by angels, and would continue until the subject fell over exhausted.

"Barking" was a description given in derision, for it was actually grunts

that accompanied the jerks. Witnesses would see people on hands and knees in the woods, making this noise with uplifted hands, and would report that "they barked up trees like dogs."

It was the singing exercise that Stone considered the most inexplicable, for it came not from the mouth or nose but from the breast, the sound emanating from deep within, and it was heavenly. When he and a doctor friend attended one pious lady thus affected, they agreed that it was the most unusual thing they had witnessed in all of nature. Such exercises were done by the devout and unbelieving alike, the devout manifesting a concern for the lost and the unbelievers testifying to their repentance. It was a revival where the gospel was preached and where sinners turned to God, and it was this that gladdened Stone's heart most of all.

Stone was convinced that the "miracles" attested to God's presence and approval. Thirty years later in his *Christian Messenger* he recounted what the great revival had meant to him, explaining that it enabled him to see the effects of the religion of Jesus in people's lives more than ever before.⁹

The Cane Ridge revival was part of the Second Awakening or Great Western Revival that had its roots in the Great Awakening in New England under Jonathan Edwards a half century earlier. But one historian likens the earlier revival to "a backyard bonfire" in comparison to the conflagration that swept through Tennessee and Kentucky in the early 1800's. Another has called it "America's Pentecost."¹⁰

It was a spiritual facelift to the frontier churches who were struggling for existence amidst a rapidly growing population in which only a small percentage professed church membership. Sensualism and secularism permeated society in general while sectarianism and indifference blighted the churches in particular. Preachers like Barton W. Stone longed for a revival, and it came with a vengeance and with the thunderous cries of the likes of James McGready.

The revival not only meant spiritual renewal for the churches, but their numbers increased significantly, some congregations gaining hundreds of new members. Moreover the revival served as a catalyst in initiating a movement to unite the Christians in all the sects.

Apology of the Springfield Presbytery

Cane Ridge not only had ecumenical implications in that ministers of all faiths preached the same gospel and reaped the same harvest, but there was anti-Calvinism in its appeal that "Christ died for all men" and not only for "the elect." This brought opposition from orthodox circles of Presbyte-

The Stone-Campbell Movement

By Leroy Garrett

(order from www.acupressbooks.com or www.amazon.com)

← Barton Stone

He was well rewarded, for he continued gaining in both preachers and members, growing at least as rapidly as other churches on the frontier. In 1804 he had but a few hundred members in 15 congregations in Kentucky and Ohio. By 1826 he could count 15,000 members in 300 congregations.

Stone and Alexander Campbell

Beginning in 1823 Alexander Campbell made 14 trips to Kentucky during his long traveling ministry. On his second visit in 1824 he met Stone for the first time, and from then on they saw each other frequently. When together they conversed at length; when separated they carried on a vigorous correspondence, often disagreeing. In afteryears Stone handed Campbell an impressive compliment: "I will not say there are no faults in brother Campbell; but that there are fewer, perhaps, in him than any man I know on earth; and over these my love would throw a veil and hide them from view forever."

He goes on to say of Campbell: "I am constrained, and willingly constrained, to acknowledge him the greatest preacher of this reformation of any man living. The Lord reward him!"²⁰ This provides a clue as to why the Stone and Campbell people were able to join forces and present a united front for their common cause. Though Stone was 15 years older than Campbell and had begun the Movement while Campbell was yet a teenager back in Ireland, he nonetheless relinquished his right of leadership to the man he considered abler than himself. Richardson says that Stone's reformation was "almost identical" with that of Campbell's, and that the two men formed a warm, personal attachment to each other that lasted through life. He concludes that it was their friendship that made possible the subsequent union between the two movements.²¹

Yet there was some unevenness in their relationship, as could be expected between two strong leaders of separate energetic movements.

This was disconcerting to some of their collaborators. An editor in Tennessee complained that "There seems to be an unnecessary jealousy existing among some of our brethren in regard to whom credit is due in commencing the present Reformation, father Stone²² or brother Campbell."²³

The claim to priority was however the least of their disputes. One practical difference was whether those within the Movement should be called Christians, which Stone adamantly insisted upon, or Disciples, which Campbell strongly favored. The dispute resolved itself by the use of both names.

Another serious difference was the practice of open Communion, though they did not then call it that. Stone believed that Communion was for all believers, while Campbell, even though he professed a "We neither invite nor debar" position, believed that only immersed believers should take the Lord's Supper. While this issue was never resolved and has been a point of conflict throughout the Movement's history, it too was practiced both ways in the early days.

Behind the Communion question was a more fundamental difference, baptism by immersion as a test of fellowship. Both men repudiated their infant sprinkling by being immersed as adults, but Stone was unwilling to make immersion a test of church membership and Communion while Campbell was, at least in his earlier years. Stone believed that baptism by immersion was ordained of God, but he was unwilling to make it the *sine qua non* (absolutely essential) of the Christian faith, as Campbell appeared to.

As for the practice of rebaptizing those who were not consciously baptized "for the remission of sins," which some of the Campbell people insisted upon without his approval, and which continues to be an issue to this day, Stone wrote:

To assert that none but such as have been immersed for the remission of sins are members of the Church of Christ is to assert that Christ has had no church on earth for many centuries back: for but a few years ago had the old apostolic doctrine of baptism for remission been revived.²⁴

Stone urged forbearance toward those who remain unconvinced of the truth of baptism by immersion, a position that Campbell later took in his now famous Lunenburg Letter (1837). But in those years leading up to the union of the Stone and Campbell churches in 1832 it was a serious point of difference. The Stone churches simply did not make as much of baptism as did the Campbell churches. The Campbell people in turn considered the Stone churches too "latitudinarian," one of their big words in those days, on what they saw as a command of God.

This issue was resolved by the Stone churches eventually accepting