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Review of Answered by Fire

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Leonard Allen and Carisse Mickey Berryhill, Editors. *Answered by Fire: The Cane Ridge Revival Reconsidered*. Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2020. 157 pages.

In August of 1801, a Presbyterian pastor in rural Kentucky hosted an annual communion event that would turn into a massive camp meeting and revival that crossed denominational, ethnic/racial, and gender boundaries. That event is known as the Cane Ridge Revival and it helped launch the Second Great Awakening, which swept across the frontier before it turned back toward the east. The Great Western Revival, of which Cane Ridge was one of the most important contributors, has its origins in the late eighteenth century and continued well into the nineteenth century. The name of that Presbyterian pastor was Barton W. Stone, who would go on to become a central figure in the history of the Stone-Campbell Movement. While Stone has lent his name to the movement, he has always seemed to live in Alexander Campbell's shadow. While that may be true, there has always been an undercurrent to the movement that traces its lineage back to Stone. Perhaps it is time to reconsider and reclaim that legacy for our time. That especially includes looking closely at Cane Ridge.

Cane Ridge is considered one of the founding events in the history of the Stone-Campbell Movement. While this is true, do we, the spiritual descendants of the founders, truly understand what happened at Cane Ridge? In many ways, Cane Ridge has more in common with a Pentecostal revival than a typical worship experience within the churches of this movement. In large part that has to do with the rationalist legacy of Alexander Campbell's Enlightenment-inspired understandings of Christianity and who tended to keep the Holy Spirit contained in the New Testament. As for Cane Ridge, the Holy Spirit was unfettered, and that may be true as well with the ministry of Barton Stone.

Hoping to revive the legacy of Cane Ridge, five scholars affiliated with the Churches of Christ, offer us a reconsideration of the event in *Answered by Fire*. Thus, *Answered by Fire* seeks to answer the question of why the emphasis on the Holy Spirit that was present at Cane Ridge faded with time. The essayists, therefore, invite us to look closer at the role the Holy Spirit played at Cane Ridge and consider how a tradition marked by rationalism might be enriched by reengaging with the legacy of Cane Ridge.

The book is edited by Carisse Mickey Berryhill, the Special Collections Librarian at Abilene Christian University, and Leonard Allen, who serves as dean of the College of Bible and Ministry at Lipscomb University. It is the product of the Carroll Ellis Symposium that was held at the Hillsboro Church of Christ in Nashville in 2019. The focus of this symposium was on "America's Greatest Revival: Cane Ridge Reconsidered." The two editors are joined by three other scholars, all of whom are connected to the Churches of Christ, who participated in the conference. The remaining contributors include James Gorman, who hails from the Churches of Christ but teaches history at Johnson University, which is connected to the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ and has a Disciples legacy as well. He's joined by John Mark Hicks, who teaches theology at Lipscomb University, and Richard Hughes who is now scholar in residence at the College of Bible and Ministry at Lipscomb University. As for me, I am a Disciple minister who has a Pentecostal background.

The four presenters live and work in Tennessee and are connected to the Churches of Christ. Berryhill, who lives in Texas, provides the introduction to this book of essays. According to Berryhill, the symposium had at its foundation, a growing concern among some within the Churches of Christ about a cluster of issues, including a reconsideration of the doctrine of the Trinity, as well as challenges posed to the Churches of Christ by the charismatic movement, the civil rights movement, and the feminist movement. As Berryhill writes, the four essayists “have called for the recovery of a countercultural and mission-focused Christianity disentangled from American exceptionalism, from white supremacist hegemony, and from religious tribalism” (p. 9). While Cane Ridge did not perfectly embody these concerns, it was truly countercultural and mission-focused, and therefore, by reengaging with it Stone-Campbell churches might find a new way of addressing core questions present in the movement today.

Answered by Fire is composed of nine chapters organized into three sections that provide context, analysis, and application. All of this is couched in a recognition that Cane Ridge must be understood in the context of the Second Great Awakening. It also must be understood in the context of differing approaches to revival among Presbyterians, for Stone and Campbell took vastly different approaches. Stone was a New Light Presbyterian who embraced the revival. Campbell, on the other hand, was an Old Light Presbyterian who never truly embraced the revival.

Part 1 focuses on "Cane Ridge in Context." The three chapters in this section provide us with a broad foundation to the conversation about Cane Ridge. In this section, James Gorman explores the Second Great Awakening as “the glorious days of the outpouring of the Spirit of God” (chapter 1). Gorman sets Cane Ridge in the context of the revivalism that is connected to the ministry of James McGready, under whom Stone was converted and through whom he entered the ministry. Gorman briefly notes the political (democratization of American Christianity), social context (including the first real efforts at evangelizing enslaved black people), and the theological context with its emphasis on new birth. Richard Hughes takes up Stone’s role as a champion of Christian freedom and the role that this played at Cane Ridge (chapter 2). Hughes writes that “for Stone and his followers, Christian freedom meant above all else the freedom of ordinary men and women to reject the religious pronouncements of popes, priests, bishops, and clerics of every kind. Instead, the Stoneites—unlettered as they were—claimed the right to search the Bible for themselves and draw their own conclusions regarding the truths of the Christian faith” (p. 28). Finally, in chapter 3, Gorman addresses the question of what really happened at Cane Ridge. Gorman offers up seven things that happened, beginning with communion, which was the original reason for the gathering. He notes that people camped, it was interdenominational, it was to an extent biracial, many different people preached and exhorted, the people participated in a variety of religious practices including fasting and prayer, and finally, people experienced new birth conversion. He also discusses the various religious exercises including people falling as if dead. Pentecostals call this being “slain in the Spirit.”

In Part 2, titled "Exploring Cane Ridge, the presenters take a deeper look at Cane Ridge itself. In the first chapter in the section John Mark Hicks delves into Cane Ridge's origins as a communion festival (chapter 4). He notes that while camp meetings on the frontier began with Cane Ridge, that is not how Stone conceived of the event. It was a sacramental festival and to truly

understand Cane Ridge one must consider this, even if the majority of participants did not partake of communion. For the Stone-Campbell movement, however, the connection with the table links Stone and Cane Ridge with the Campbell movement. In chapter 5, Richard Hughes offers a thoughtful reflection on Stone's views of slavery and how Cane Ridge factored into his understandings of the social aspects of the revival. According to Hughes, Stone's view of "gospel-liberty" not only applied to one's freedom to claim salvation, but it also meant "freedom to follow the radical Jesus who stood with the poor, the marginalized, the dispossessed, and those whose race or gender made them objects of scorn and rejection" (p. 61). It is this belief that led Stone to free his own slaves and to embrace an anti-slavery position during his ministry. James Gorman follows up Hughes's discussion of Stone and slavery, with a look at the role of women exhorters at Cane Ridge (chapter 6). While a distinction was made between women as preachers, something most at the time did not allow, and exhorters were present. Nonetheless, women were important participants in the proclamation of the gospel during the revival. He reminds us that patriarchy remained in force, but if women maintained a posture of meekness, then their witness was welcomed.

The opening two sections provide a foundation for understanding what happened at Cane Ridge in context. But the book is not simply intended to be a historical look at a key moment in American religious history and the history of the Stone Campbell Movement. The participants in the presentations that underlie the book, and the published form of those presentations, have as their intended purpose a reconsideration of Cane Ridge and Barton Stone's legacy within the movement. In other words, what message does Cane Ridge have for the churches of the Stone-Campbell Movement today? In the first chapter in the section (chapter 7), Leonard Allen takes up Paul Conkin's suggestion that Cane Ridge was America's Pentecost. The emphasis of Conkin's look at the event focused on the various practices and effects that were present, including the fallings, swoonings, holy laughter, the jerks, and other exercises. It is these effects that caught the ear of one of my students years ago, who at the time was part of the Vineyard, after I lectured on Cane Ridge. He recognized the similarity between what I had described and what was occurring in the Vineyard. The question then is, what happened? Why did Cane Ridge fail to capture the attention of the movement as it progressed? Part of the answer is due to the division within Presbyterianism between Old Lights and New Lights. Stone was a New Light who welcomed revival. Alexander Campbell, on the other hand, was an Old Light and was offended by the emotionalism of revivalism. Ultimately Campbell prevailed, but at what cost? As Allen notes, though Cane Ridge had an important effect on American evangelical pietism, for Campbell's movement it was "an embarrassing and dangerous delusion" (p. 94). John Mark Hicks then picks up the question of how revivalism, the Holy Spirit, and unity are connected with Cane Ridge (chapter 8). Again, he returns to the communion festivals and how on the frontier they become places of unity informed by the Holy Spirit and revival. Thus, Stone's belief that unity should be the polar star of the movement has its origins at Cane Ridge. Hickes writes that in 1833, shortly after the union of the two movements, Stone noted that in the first decade of the nineteenth century he had identified four types of unity: "Book unity was founded on a creed. Head unity was founded on a consensus of unwritten opinions. Water union was 'founded on immersion into water.' But Stone opted for 'fire union,' which is the unity of the Spirit" (p. 101). What a contrast with Campbell and his ancient of things. This leads Hickes to identify five modes of visible unity, what

he calls a new five-fingered exercise that gives expression to the work of the Spirit. These include confession, transformation, liturgy, practicing the kingdom of God, and spiritual formation practices. In the ninth and final chapter, Leonard Allen returns with a reflection on "The Eclipse of Cane Ridge in the Restoration Movement." He continues the conversation begun in chapter seven pointing out how Campbell and Stone had different understandings of the Spirit and revival and how Campbell ultimately prevailed. Allen would have us reexamine Stone's legacy by reconceiving the place of the Holy Spirit in the life of the churches. He points to figures, like James Harding and others who maintained a connection with Stone and his view of the Spirit, though Campbell's legacy prevailed. He suggests that the Churches of Christ/Stone-Campbell churches fall into the Modernist tradition in its views of the Spirit, which is rooted in the Enlightenment emphasis on a reasonable Christianity. Thus, he suggests that most of us would find ourselves outside our Campbellite comfort zones if we had been present at Cane Ridge. Whatever our comfort level, Allen offers up a re-engagement with Cane Ridge as a means to provoking and stirring in us a "needed recover of a more biblical, missional doctrine of the Spirit. It can bear witness, if we will let it, to the fresh surprising, and sometimes strange work of God the Spirit" (p. 114).

The editors not only include nine chapters/presentations in the book, but they also provide an appendix that offers the reader several original sources that range from Stone's own reflections on the revival to the responses of those outside the movement, some of which, like the account given by Methodist revivalist Peter Cartwright, were caustically critical. What these sources, along with discussion questions, offer the reader is a way to get a firsthand sense of what happened at Cane Ridge. What is perhaps most important is the inclusion of reflections by Stone written years later that demonstrate that he always believed that what happened at Cane Ridge was a work of God. He writes in his autobiography published 1844: "That there were many eccentricities, and much fanaticism in this excitement, was acknowledged by its warmest advocates; indeed it would have been a wonder, if such things had not appeared, in the circumstances of that time. Yet the good effects were seen and acknowledged in every neighborhood, and among the different sects it silenced contention, and promoted unity for awhile; and these blessed effects would have continued, had not men put forth their unhallowed hands to hold up their tottering ark, mistaking it for the ark of God" (pp. 132-133).

Disciples/Stone-Campbell churches are known to be part of a movement that prizes reason. Campbell's embrace of Locke and other Enlightenment thinkers played a significant role in this emphasis. To some extent, there was value in this emphasis since it offered a sense of assurance to folks who could not describe the spiritual dynamics of their faith. Campbell offered a simple answer. Look to your baptism. That is sufficient. Stone would come to affirm that belief, but as the authors point out, Stone never lost the revival spirit of Cane Ridge. He understood its value and the transformative nature of that event in the lives of its participants. Might we benefit, as a movement, if we reclaim that sense of the Spirit that Stone had embraced early in his ministry?

On a personal note, I came to the Disciples from Pentecostalism. I found the Disciples emphasis on reason attractive, but like Stone, I have never lost that sense that the Spirit is free to work in ways that cannot be controlled. So, I found this book, brief as it is, to be a powerful

invitation to reclaim a founding vision of the movement that has been largely obscured by the influence of Alexander Campbell.

The authors of these essays do not wish to throw off Alexander Campbell's legacy. Instead, they seek to restore Barton Stone and Cane Ridge to a position of being an equal partner in defining how we determine what this movement stands for. We have, at least among Disciples, claimed his slogan of unity being our polar star, but what about his perspective on the place of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. While Stone might not be an orthodox trinitarian, he did embrace the work of the Holy Spirit in a way quite different from Alexander Campbell, who seemed most comfortable when the Holy Spirit was contained within the pages of the New Testament. If we reconsider the legacy of Cane Ridge, then Campbell's emphasis on a reasonable Christianity can be balanced by Stone's more open New Light spirituality. While the authors of the book address their remarks to one particular branch of the movement—the Churches of Christ—I believe the entire movement, especially the Disciples branch, would benefit by reengaging the legacy of Cane Ridge—and not just as a historical oddity but as a word for today. Therefore, *Answered by Fire: The Cane Ridge Revival Reconsidered* is book offers an excellent starting point for that conversation.

Robert D. Cornwall served until his retirement in June 2021 as Senior Minister of Central Woodward Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Troy, Michigan. He holds a Ph.D. in Historical Theology from Fuller Theological Seminary. He currently serves as a board member of the Disciples Christian Unity and Interfaith Ministries and co-chair of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America-Disciples of Christ Bilateral Dialog. Among his books is Freedom in Covenant: Reflections on the Distinctive Values and Practices of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), (Wipf and Stock, 2015).