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WHY? WHEN? WHAT?

A BRIEF STATEMENT OF THE ORIGIN, PROGRESS,
AND DIFFERENTIATING DOCTRINES OF THE
CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

BY

J. M. HOWARD, D.D.

Designed for General Distribution, and especially for the use of
the Christian Endeavor Societies of the Denomination.

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A BRIEF ANSWER

TO

THE QUESTIONS, WHY AND WHEN DID THE CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ORIGINATE, AND WHAT ARE ITS DISTINCTIVE BELIEFS ?

THE Cumberland Presbyterian Church, though its first Presbytery was not organized until 1810, had its origin in the revival of 1800. This revival began in 1797 in Logan county, Ky., under the ministry of the Rev. James McGready of the Presbyterian Church. About 1796, in western Pennsylvania, while a theological student, McGready was awakened to see that though he was preparing to preach to others, he was himself an unsaved sinner. He sought and found pardon and life in Christ. This experience led him to make the new birth a principal theme of his preaching, and to labor to arouse the unconverted within the Church as well as on the outside.

In 1796 he moved to Kentucky from North Carolina, taking charge of three country congregations, Gasper River, Red River, and Muddy River. The region was known as the Cumberland country, which embraced that part of the States of Tennessee and Kentucky lying between Green River on the north and the Tennessee Ridge on the south, and reaching the Tennessee River on the west. The scattered pioneers were immersed in the absorbing worldly pursuits of the backwoods, felling forests and opening farms. Spiritual life was at the lowets

ebb. Scoffing and worldliness prevailed, and the Church lacked the spiritual power to resist these downward influences. Much of the preaching in the Presbyterian pulpits was a lifeless discussion of the decrees of God. Many Church members and even some ministers were destitute of vital piety.

Amid such surroundings McGready began his ministry. He wrote out a prayer covenant in which a few members of his congregations joined him. It was in these words: "We bind ourselves to observe the third Saturday in each month, for one year, as a day of fasting and prayer for the conversion of sinners in Logan county and throughout the world. We engage to spend one half hour every Saturday evening, beginning at the setting of the sun and one half hour every Sabbath morning at the rising of the sun, in pleading with God to revive his work." The first signs of revival were seen in the Gasper River Church, May, 1797. The interest spread until the whole congregation and neighboring congregations were awakened, and continued to extend in ever-widening circles. Camp meetings, which grew to be so important a factor in evangelizing the scattered settlers, had their origin in connection with this work. The first one was held at Gasper River in July, 1800. From it the revival influence spread far and wide throughout the Cumberland country.

But even Church members and ministers opposed the work. Rev. James Balch, a member of McGready's Presbytery (Transylvania), visited Gasper River to put a stop to what he and others regarded the disorderly and fanatical proceedings. He denounced McGready's teachings, especially the doctrine of "experimental religion."

Thus there grew up an anti-revival party, and the controversy thus engendered continued until the revival party was driven from the Presbyterian Church and forced to organize an independent Presbytery, which ultimately grew into the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

One cause of opposition was the method adopted in providing missionary pastors for the multiplying congregations. By the advice of an aged minister in Transylvania Presbytery, Rev. David Rice, men of piety and talent, though they had not attained to the required standard of literary qualification, were licensed as exhorters and placed on "circuits." This was opposed as irregular. The doctrines taught by the revivalists were a deeper cause of opposition. Exhortations urging sinners to accept salvation freely offered to all were looked upon as an implied denial of the eternal decrees. Moreover, the men licensed and afterward ordained were permitted to adopt the Westminster Confession with the exception of "the idea of fatality." By fatality they meant the doctrine that only an elect number have any share in the benefits of the atonement. They could not believe or teach that God from all eternity foreordained a certain number of men and angels unto eternal life and foredoomed a number equally definite and unchangeable unto eternal death. This departure from the Westminster teaching was considered positive heresy and proved the one irreconcilable difference between the two parties.

In October, 1802, Alexander Anderson, Finis Ewing, and Samuel King, who, though lacking classical education, were men of approved talents and piety, were

licensed by Transylvania Presbytery to catechise and exhort. Kentucky Synod soon after divided that Presbytery, and the southern portion, embracing the Cumberland country, was named Cumberland Presbytery. Five of the ten ministers composing this new Presbytery were the friends of the revival and five its bitter opposers. The names of the former were James McGready, William Hodge, William McGee, John Rankin, and Samuel McAdow. By the addition of James Hawe the revival party soon after acquired a majority of one. The ordination of Anderson, Ewing, and King followed, increasing the majority and making Cumberland Presbytery the ecclesiastical representative and instrument of the revival. The revival ministers came to be designated first as "the majority of Cumberland Presbytery," then "the Cumberland party," and finally "the Cumberlands." In this way the name of the new denomination had its origin.

In October, 1804, the minority of the Presbytery, led by Rev. Thos. Craighead, carried their fight into the Kentucky Synod, charging the majority with ecclesiastical irregularity and doctrinal unsoundness. The Synod cited both parties to appear before it at its next meeting, and also appointed a committee "to attend the earliest meeting of Cumberland Presbytery and inquire into the case and report to the Synod." None of the revival ministers obeyed the citation. They denied the Synod's right to arraign presbyters before its bar or to interfere with a Presbytery's prerogative in licensing and ordaining ministers.

At the Synod's meeting in October, 1805, a commission composed of nine ministers and six elders "clothed with full synodical powers" was appointed "to confer with

the members of Cumberland Presbytery, and adjudicate upon the presbyterial proceedings." Every member of this commission was a known enemy of the revival and the "Cumberland" party. It met at Gasper River meeting house December 3, 1805. All the members of the Cumberland Presbytery with the candidates and licentiates were present. The commission adopted a paper solemnly condemning the Presbytery for licensing young men to preach and ordaining some who "were required to adopt the Confession of Faith and Discipline of the Church no farther than they believed it to be agreeable to the word of God," and it was resolved to proceed then and there to examine these young men and "judge of their qualifications for the gospel ministry." First the members of the Presbytery and afterward the young men refused to submit to this resolution, averring that the Presbytery had the exclusive right to examine and license candidates, and was competent to judge of their faith and ability, and that the Synod had no right to take them out of its hands. The commission then rendered its verdict, declaring that the young men never had regular authority to preach the gospel, and solemnly prohibiting them from exhorting, preaching, or administering the ordinances. The older ministers of the revival party were cited to trial before the Synod at its next meeting, October, 1806.

Had this verdict been obeyed it would have put an end to the revival by silencing the most effective revival preachers. But the members of the Presbytery resolved to continue preaching as before, and to encourage the young men to persevere in their work, disregarding what they believed an illegal prohibition. To secure united

action in the work and in efforts to obtain redress, a Council was formed made up of the ministers friendly to the revival and elders representing congregations. This Council held regular meetings, but refrained from the exercise of any presbyterial functions. Under its direction the revival work was extended into distant neighborhoods and missionary evangelists were sent to Alabama and elsewhere.

William Hodge and John Rankin attended the meeting of Kentucky Synod, October, 1806, to plead for some relief from the commission's action, but the Synod proceeded solemnly to suspend them both from the ministry. At the same meeting Cumberland Presbytery was formally dissolved and the parties and their complaints remanded to Transylvania Presbytery.

In 1807 and again in 1808 the members of the Council sent earnest petitions to the General Assembly imploring relief and the restoration of their presbyterial rights. But the Assembly declined to act because the matter had not come up by regular appeal. In 1808 a semi-official letter prepared by order of the Assembly was sent to the Council pronouncing the action of the commission unconstitutional, and stating that the relief asked for could have been granted had the Synod's minutes been before the Assembly. An effort was next made by the Council to secure reconciliation through Transylvania Presbytery, but that body decided that no exception concerning "fatality" would be allowed in adopting the Westminster Confession. The revival ministers were thus given their choice, to promise allegiance to what seemed to them false doctrine or be shut out from their rights as Presbyterian ministers. They chose the latter alternative.

In 1809 they again appealed to the General Assembly for relief, but that body now voted unanimously to deny their petition and to sustain the action of the commission and Kentucky Synod. This decision is now, more than eighty years after the event, almost universally admitted by Presbyterian ministers to be contrary to Presbyterian law and usage. After this one more appeal was made to the Synod, but this effort also failed, though the members of the Council offered to yield everything that did not involve the abandoning the work of the revival and the adoption of the "fatality" feature of the creed.

At its meeting October 4, 1809, the Council voted to organize an independent Presbytery, but at this juncture three of the ordained ministers, William Hodge, Samuel Hodge, and Thomas Nelson withdrew, having made terms with Transylvania Presbytery by consenting to adopt the Westminster Confession without reservation. This left but three ordained ministers, William McGee, Finis Ewing, and Samuel King, present in the Council. McGee was unwilling to go forward with the organization; so, lacking the constitutional number to form a Presbytery, the Council adjourned without taking the desired action.

February 3, 1810, Finis Ewing and Samuel King, accompanied by Ephraim McLean, a licentiate, repaired to the home of Samuel McAdow in Dickson county, Tenn., for the purpose of forming a new and independent Presbytery. McAdow spent the whole night in prayer, and in the morning of February 4 with face aglow announced his readiness to join in the organization. So Cumberland Presbytery was solemnly constituted or

reorganized. Its first act was to ordain Ephraim McLean. It met again the next month, at which time several congregations were represented and six licensed preachers and seven candidates were received under its care. At a meeting in the autumn William McGee became a member.

Three and a half years after its organization the Presbytery had so increased in extent and numbers as to make its division into three Presbyteries and the formation of a Synod necessary. The Synod, which took the name Cumberland Synod, at its first meeting appointed a committee consisting of Finis Ewing, William McGee, Robert Donnell, and Thomas Calhoun to prepare a Confession of Faith. In the form of words adopted when Cumberland Presbytery was organized three years before was this provision concerning the creed of the new organization: "All licentiates and probationers who may hereafter be ordained by this Presbytery shall be required before such licensure or ordination to receive and adopt the Confession and Discipline of the Presbyterian Church, except the idea of fatality which seems to be taught under the mysterious doctrine of predestination. It is understood, however, that such as can clearly receive the Confession without an exception shall not be required to make any." In forming the Synod the following points of dissent from the Westminster Confession were made:

1. There are no eternal reprobates.
2. Christ died not for a *part only*, but for *all* mankind.
3. All infants dying in infancy are saved through Christ and the sanctification of the Spirit.
4. The Spirit of God operates on the world, or as coex-

tensively as Christ has made the atonement, in such a manner as to leave all men inexcusable.

The committee appointed by the Synod to prepare a creed simply modified the Westminster Confession, expunging what they believed unscriptural and supplying what they thought omissions of vital truth. The principal changes were in chapters III. and X., and consisted in the omission or modification of the statements concerning the decrees of God, unconditional election and reprobation, a limited atonement, and cognate doctrines. The Presbyterian polity and the evangelical Presbyterian doctrines were retained. This revised Confession of Faith was adopted October 14, 1814, and continued to be the creed of the Church until 1883, when the Confession presented in this volume was adopted. It retains the same essential doctrines enunciated in the revision of 1814, though in somewhat briefer form and with a more logical arrangement.

In the matter of ministerial education, while classical training is not made an essential requirement, a liberal course in the English branches and in theology is required. The founders of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church shrank from adopting a standard that would have excluded every one of the twelve apostles from the ministry. They believed that some who are converted late in life are called to preach, and that the strict Presbyterian rule would prevent these from obeying God's call. They held that some who never enjoyed the highest scholastic training become eminently useful in the ministry. They deemed it right, rather than to allow wide districts to remain entirely destitute of the gospel, to send forth sound teachers who loved souls and knew the way of sal-

vation, even though they did not know Hebrew and Greek.

But these fathers labored to secure for ministerial candidates the most thorough preparation possible. Schools and academies were established wherever the pioneer missionaries planted Churches and formed Presbyteries. In 1826 Cumberland College, an institution for the whole denomination, was opened at Princeton, Ky. In 1842 this central school was removed to Lebanon, Tenn., and named Cumberland University. The Church's Theological Seminary is located here. Among other principal schools of the denomination are Waynesburg College, Pennsylvania; Lincoln University, Illinois; Trinity University, Texas; Missouri Valley College, Missouri, and Arkansas Cumberland College, Arkansas.

The spirit and power of the revival were perpetuated in the new Church. By 1820 the work had extended to Missouri, Indiana, Illinois, Arkansas, and Mississippi; and in the years which followed Churches grew up in every State and Territory in the wide domain stretching from Texas to Pennsylvania, and the missionaries of the new denomination followed the tide of emigration westward to the Pacific.

In 1829 a General Assembly was formed with four Synods and eighteen presbyteries. In 1834 10,688 conversions were reported. In 1835 the numerical strength of the Church was estimated as follows: Synods, 9; Presbyteries, 35; ordained ministers, 300; licensed preachers, 100; candidates, 75; communicants, 50,000. The latest statistics (1892) place the number of communicants at 171,609. There were then 2,916 congregations, 1,670 ministers, 270 licentiates, and 264 candidates.

During the year ending May, 1892, there were 14,862 additions, and the total contributions were \$794,576. The total value of Church property was estimated to be \$3,641,621.

Through Presbyterian Missionary Societies this Church began to send missionaries to the Indians in 1819. Through its board now located in St. Louis, Mo., missions have been established in Japan and Mexico as well as among the Indians and in numerous towns and cities in our own country. From a new Publishing House at Nashville, Tenn., the Board of Publication issues books, Sunday school papers, lesson helps, and other periodicals, including the *Cumberland Presbyterian Review* and the central weekly organ of the Church, *The Cumberland Presbyterian*. Weekly papers owned and conducted by individuals are published in the interest of the Church at other points.

The Board of Education, located at Nashville, Tenn., and the Board of Ministerial Relief, located at Evansville, Ind., are doing good work in their respective departments, the former in aiding young men who are pursuing their studies preparatory to entering the ministry, and the latter in providing for the wants of aged and disabled ministers and the widows and orphans of deceased ministers.

In 1880 a Woman's Board of Missions was organized. It has sent missionaries to Japan and Mexico and contributed largely to the work among the Indians.

This Church remained undivided during the civil war. Before the war there were 20,000 colored Cumberland Presbyterians. In 1869 the colored members asked and received permission to be organized into a separate Afri-

can Cumberland Presbyterian Church. This Church has its own General Assembly and in 1892 reported about 15,000 communicants and 200 ordained ministers.

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church has from the first grown by making converts rather than by making proselytes. It has grown through the efforts of missionaries to win souls outside of all Church lines. It has ever been a helper of other Churches. Thousands of converts won by its revival preachers have joined other communions. Its influence in cultivating interdenominational fraternity and softening doctrinal asperities has been most salutary. The denomination seems to be entering upon a new era of activity and to have before it a growing mission of usefulness.

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