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NEW MEASURES: AN ANALYSIS OF AN ARGUMENT AMONG
LUTHERANS IN THE UNITED STATES DURING THE
FOURTH AND FIFTH DECADES OF THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
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by

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PREFACE

I first began to investigate this particular period of Lutheran church history in our United States because I saw some similarities between the controversy over revivals and new measures and current debates within our own circles concerning Church growth, style versus substance, and related issues. While this paper does not make a detailed application of its research to those current topics, I believe that thoughtful readers will notice similarities in the two situations and be able to make their own correlations.

For a while during the course of my research, I had hoped to compare the numerical growth of congregations or synods who used new measures with congregations or synods in the same geographical area who did not. However, after studying materials in Concordia Historical Institute, as well as at the libraries of Wittenberg University in Ohio, Gettysburg Seminary in Pennsylvania, and Wagner College in New York, I concluded that my hope was crippled by at least two realities. One was that most early synodical minutes listed statistical data under the name of the pastor, who almost always served several parishes. Breaking down the numbers under one pastor's name into figures for individual congregations was virtually impossible. Secondly, I found it extremely difficult to isolate the use or non-use of new measures from other factors which also affected a particular congregation's growth. Such factors included the use of different languages by the two congregations

being studied, as well as situations in which the misconduct of pastors or lay people affected the health of the flock.

After giving up the hope of doing such a statistical study, I began to prepare the paper which is now being presented. The time spent researching and writing it has led to some personal and theological growth, for which I am thankful. I have a "Melanchthonian" disposition. Whether confronted by a quarreling couple in the parish or by brethren squabbling in print, my first instinct is to find something good in both sides as a basis for harmony. As I began research for this paper, my first instinct was at work, sure that some common ground existed upon which both parties in the controversy could stand. However, as I continued to search and reflected on the material in greater depth, I came to the conclusion that some of the theological assumptions behind the practice of new measures made such harmony much more difficult than I had first supposed, if not impossible. Such growth has already made the preparation of this paper worth the effort.

Many people have helped me in this work. Four deserve a public word of thanks: my advisor, Dr. Ronald Feuerhahn, for his guidance; Roy Ledbetter of Concordia Historical Institute for his assistance; Louis Voigt of Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio, for his hospitality; and my wife Jean for many and various forms of encouragement. All of their help is deeply appreciated as a blessing from God.

My prayer is that others will receive as much benefit from reading this paper as I have from writing it. To God alone be the glory!

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

This paper is a description and explanation of some aspects of the controversy over revivals and "new measures" which disturbed the Lutheran Church in the United States during the 1830s and early 1840s. Primarily, it is the story of an argument. Secondly, it examines some of the theological assumptions implicit and explicit in the rhetoric of the controversy. The argument, however, was not about theology as much as it was about various practices in the life of the Church. Therefore this paper will of necessity describe some of those practices and attempt to evaluate them.

This opening paragraph should raise some questions in the reader's mind. For one, why begin our study in the 1830s? There is solid evidence that revivals had caused controversy in the Lutheran Church as early as three decades before that time. In his memoirs, the Reverend John Stauch describes a one-week revival which he led in his Fayette County, Pennsylvania parish in 1802. Many in the congregation became subject to fits of fainting, falling, jerking, or dancing, phenomena first displayed in the frontier revivals in Kentucky in 1801.¹ In Stauch's own words, "the results of these exercises and this protracted

¹Cited in C. V. Sheatsley, History of the Evangelical Joint Synod of Ohio and Other States, (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1919), pp. 26-27. (In other sources, Stauch is spelled Stouch and/or Stough).

meeting led to painful divisions of the congregations."² After attempting to resolve these difficulties for four years, Stauch resigned from his parish and moved to Columbiana County, Ohio, becoming the first Lutheran pastor to establish permanent residence in that state. In Ohio Stauch continued his revivalistic practices, but recognized that they were controversial. Again in his own words: "some of the Lutherans approved these meetings and rejoiced greatly, . . . others considered them adiaphoristic, neither good nor bad, . . . while others held them as conventicles, denouncing them as the rankest kind of diabolical heresy and un-Lutheran to the extreme."³

While controversy concerning revivals began in Lutheran circles as early as 1802, it intensified greatly during the 1830s. One major stimulus to the intensification was the success of revivals conducted by Charles G. Finney in north central New York State during the 1820s. In 1831, the Hartwick Synod was formed by Lutheran pastors in territory bordering the area of Finney's greatest success. Their chief reason for separating from the New York Ministerium was a desire to promote revivals.⁴ At least one Hartwick pastor perceived Finney's success as a threat to Lutheran survival in the area, telling the Lutheran Observer: "N. Y. State is literally a land of revivals - the whole Church of Christ is in commotion, and unless we move along with it we shall be dashed to pieces."⁵

²Ibid., p. 27. ³Ibid., p. 30.

⁴Peter A. Strobel, Memorial Volume to Commemorate the Semi-Centennial Anniversary of the Hartwick Lutheran Synod of the State of New York, (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1881), pp. 23-24.

⁵Lutheran Observer, 1 November 1831.

The chief reason for beginning this study at the time it does is pragmatic. The Lutheran Observer, first published in August 1831, offers us a convenient and fairly comprehensive resource. It both describes revivals and new measures in Lutheran congregations and offers most of the arguments for and against such practices. The Observer was one of the earliest Lutheran periodicals published in English. For nearly a decade, it was the only such publication. It will serve as the primary source for this study. For the later years of the period under investigation, the Observer will be supplemented by the Lutheran Standard, first published in September 1842.

It is also reasonable to ask why this study closes in the middle to late 1840s. There are two reasons for doing so. First, there is considerable evidence that during the middle years of that decade, revivals languished in Lutheran circles, as well as throughout the Church at large. In 1846 the Observer passes on the following lament from the Vermont Chronicle: "From the various religious bodies . . . comes up the report - portentous indeed, and sad - no revival."⁶ Two years later the Franckean Synod, even more in favor of revivals than the Hartwick Synod from which it had broken away in 1837, sadly reports that "there have been few revivals, and those few have been circumscribed in their influence."⁷

Secondly, while the practice of revivals in some Lutheran circles can be documented well into the early twentieth century,⁸ the

⁶Observer, 27 November 1846.

⁷Journal of the Franckean Synod, Rush, N.Y., June 1848, p. 19.

⁸E.g., in Frederick Bente, American Lutheranism, II, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1919), p. 80.

controversy concerning the practice was superseded in the 1840s by a related but distinct question, that of doctrinal loyalty to the Lutheran Confessions. A resolution by the Eastern District of the Ohio Synod, passed in late 1846, illustrates the transition between the two controversies: "In our opinion the time has come, when it is absolutely necessary . . . that those who are in future ordained, are sworn on the symbolical writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church."⁹ The District went on to resolve that ministers whose love for new measures violates Paul's injunction to decency and order (1 Cor. 14:20) as well as those who deny the doctrines of Baptismal regeneration and the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, cannot possibly be recognized as genuine Lutheran preachers.¹⁰ The Observer was quick to take strong exception to both resolutions. It expressed amazement that nineteenth century enlightened people could still subscribe to such an understanding of the Sacraments, or demand that others conform to it.¹¹ Later it accused those who passed the resolutions of "hyper-orthodoxy," asserting that no true Lutheran "would substitute Creeds and Symbols for the Gospel."¹² This was one of the earlier exchanges in the controversy that came to a head in the publication of Samuel Simon Schmucker's Definite Synodical Platform in 1855. It marks a point at which arguments about new measures were no longer the most important issue disturbing Lutherans. Therefore it suggests a suitable time at which this study of the controversy can wind down.

⁹In Lutheran Standard, 3 February 1847.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Observer, 26 February 1847. ¹²Observer, 9 April 1847.

Now we turn to what may have been the reader's first question: What, precisely, is meant by the terms "revivals" and "new measures?" For the term "revival," the most basic and succinct definition is offered by Dr. George Lintner, publisher of the short-lived Lutheran Magazine, Pastor of the Lutheran parish in Schoharie, New York, and long-time leader in the Hartwick Synod. According to Lintner, a revival is a time when the Church experiences a "multiplication of individual conversions."¹³ As Lintner sees it, God provides three direct and three collateral blessings through revivals. The direct blessings include: 1. awakening hardened consciences by giving a keener edge to the sword of the Spirit; 2. re-kindling the languid zeal of indifferent Christians; 3. improving the institutional health of local congregations. The indirect blessings include: 1. increased recruitment of ministerial candidates; 2. the impetus for beginning such para-Church organizations as Sunday Schools, tract, Bible, and missionary societies; 3. (the last and greatest benefit) revivals bring forth "the real fundamental doctrines of the Gospel in the boldest relief."¹⁴ A similar but not identical list of the goals and results of revivals is offered by the Observer eleven years later.¹⁵

Everyone involved in the controversy would probably agree with Lintner that the "multiplication of individual conversions" is a desirable goal. Moreover, they would also have agreed with him that revivals could be abused, that it was vital for the Church to distinguish between "revivals themselves - the blessed work of the Holy

¹³Lutheran Magazine, 2, (July 1828): 130.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 158-160. ¹⁵Observer, 11 January 1839.

Spirit - and the human inventions and accompaniments by which mistaken or wicked men too often pervert them."¹⁶ The question in dispute was whether certain activities practiced by some revivalists belonged in the first or second of Lintner's pigeonholes. Were they blessings by which the Spirit multiplied conversions, or were they human inventions which perverted revivals? The activities which were questioned came to be known as "new measures."

Unfortunately, the two sides in the controversy never came to a consensus as to precisely which activities were to be included in that term. With some justification, Simeon W. Harkey states, "We object altogether to the use of the phrases old and new measures as watchwords in this controversy. . . . Perhaps no two individuals use them to mean precisely the same thing."¹⁷ An early contributor to the Observer, using the pen name "Melancthon," agrees. "These persons are using terms to which each of them apply entirely a different meaning."¹⁸ According to "Melancthon," the following activities are not to be included under the "new measure" category: faithful preaching of repentance and faith; regular attendance at prayer meetings, Bible classes and public worship; religious meetings held during several successive days. On the other hand, "Melancthon" considers the following practices to be without good precedent: "calling the mourners mourners up to the anxious seats . . . anxious meetings . . . and

¹⁶Lutheran Magazine, 2, (August 1828): 164.

¹⁷Simeon W. Harkey, The Church's Best State or Constant Revivals of Religion, (Baltimore: Publication Rooms, 1842), p. 107.

¹⁸Observer, 1 October 1832.

other means used for the purpose of raising temporary alarm or excitement."¹⁹ Toward the end of the period under study, the Observer asserts that the term "has at least three significations." Some understand by it "the anxious bench and all its connections." To others, it means "old bible truth applied in a new form, by special efforts and with increased zeal and pungency." Editor Benjamin Kurtz attributed a third understanding of the term to those who opposed his position on new measures:

In "the German field" the idea frequently attached to it embraces protracted meetings, prayer meetings, the close, pointed continuous preaching of the Gospel, temperance societies, anxious meetings, personal and pointed conversations with awakened sinners. (20)

According to the Lutheran Standard, forthrightly opposed to Kurtz's position, his description of the "German field" was inaccurate and unfair. The Fifth Session of the Western Conference of the Eastern District of the Ohio Synod echoed "Melancthon" in its understanding of New Measures:

They are measures intended for the conversion of sinners, but neither commanded in the word of God, nor acknowledged by the symbolical books of our Church. Well conducted prayer meetings, Sunday schools, and missionary societies can therefore not be called new measures, although our adversaries would like to make it appear that we condemn them as such. We understand by them the Anxious Bench, with all its appendages, such as long protracted meetings and other meetings got up for the purpose of rather raising an excitement than to instruct the mind. (21)

While the two parties never agreed on their definition of the term, the material in the previous paragraph gives a fairly thorough summary of the activities which were the subjects of their dispute. The "new measures" which caused controversy included the practice of holding

¹⁹Ibid. ²⁰Observer, 22 March 1844.

²¹In Lutheran Standard, 2 September 1846.

religious meetings for several successive days. In the earlier years under investigation, they were often known as "conference meetings." As time went by, the term "protracted meetings" was used much more frequently. In earlier times, most such meetings lasted three or four days. In short order, however, meetings of ten days to two weeks became fairly common. Such meetings were the framework for a style of preaching described by its proponents as "pungent" and "pointed," but by its detractors as the mechanical manipulation of shallow emotionalism. The goal of such preaching was to "awaken" sinners, that is, to make them "anxious" about their personal salvation. So that such "awakened" sinners might be urged to make an immediate submission to God's will, they were invited to separate themselves from the rest of the congregation in some way. This act of separation, of coming forward to an "anxious bench," or "anxious meeting," was far and away the most controversial of all the new measures. After a chapter in which we examine the theological presuppositions behind considering some persons "awakened" but not yet converted, the use of the "anxious bench" will be the subject of this paper's central and lengthiest chapter.

During the first two years of its existence, under the editorial supervision of John G. Morris, the Lutheran Observer was a reasonably balanced forum for arguments for and against revivals and new measures. A brief survey of those early editions reveals most of the themes that will be repeated in subsequent years.

In the Observer's initial edition, Thomas Lape, a Hartwick Synod pastor, describes a conference meeting at Sand Lake, New York. It is a good paradigm of the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of revival reports

that would fill the pages of the Observer in years to come. The meeting was held from a Tuesday evening through a Thursday evening. Two sermons were given each day. The rest of the time was devoted to "addresses, exhortations, social prayer, and singing." In addition, each day began with a 6:00 A.M. prayer meeting at four different sites, with a general prayer meeting held each evening. As a result, Lape tells us "Saints were refreshed, . . . the lukewarm were roused from their spiritual slumbers, and sinners were convicted of their sins, . . . and it is believed that saints were born into the kingdom of God." There is no mention of an "anxious bench" or "anxious meeting," but "a request was made to those who had resolved to be on the Lord's side, that they should come forward, in order that they might be particularly remembered in the prayers of the congregation." Lape closes with the hope that similar meetings in all Lutheran churches would awaken both members and ministers from spiritual slumber, and initiate a reign of peace, union, and harmony among them.²²

Ten weeks later, Morris felt it necessary to assure his readers that the revivals being carried on in Lutheran circles did not succumb to the abuses found in other churches. "With but one exception . . . none of the religious mechanism of modern days has been put into operation." Not only have decency and order prevailed in their revivals, Lutherans have not separated saints from sinners by calling the latter group to the altar for prayer. According to Morris, "it is believed that persons really under conviction would rather be alone, or

²²Observer, 1 August 1831.

at least prefer private conversation with their minister, than make any such pompous exhibition."²³

In the same article, Morris tells his readers that the New England style of protracted meeting was not yet known in Lutheran circles.²⁴

Six months later, such meetings had become fairly frequent and a cause of concern to many in the Lutheran church. At this point, Morris observes that "it depends altogether on the manner in which they are conducted, whether they become the occasion of much good or much mischief."²⁵ One month later, Morris opened his pages to two writers who sharply criticized his optimism about Lutheran revivals. The first of them, using the pen name "Evangelist," would become a frequent correspondent in the following months. "Evangelist" informs Morris that an altar call is being used in Lutheran revivals more often than the editor may realize. Moreover, the invitations are issued in language "calculated to impress upon the minds of all present, that those who accept not the invitation are obdurate sinners!" What is even worse, according to "Evangelist," those who accept such an invitation because their feelings are excited are considered to be converted while they remain ignorant of most of the contents of the book of life.²⁶

A second correspondent, a Presbyterian minister named Weeks from Paris, New York, echoes the two criticisms levelled by "Evangelist." In addition, Weeks describes other abuses arising at revivals: noise and confusion in public worship, females being allowed to pray in public,

²³Observer, 15 October 1831. ²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Observer, 16 April 1832. ²⁶Observer, 15 May 1832.

and sinners being addressed in a style of language that would not be tolerated in the local barroom.²⁷

In response to both men, Morris assures his readers that Lutheran revivalists are unanimously opposed to such disorder. Moreover, "if we thought that such unpardonable irregularity would ever be witnessed among us, we would at once direct all our feeble energy against them."²⁸ As his autobiography reveals, Morris was sincere and consistent in the position he expressed in the Observer. Throughout his life he remained in favor of revivals "conducted with becoming propriety," but regarded such practices as the use of the anxious bench, disorderly worship, the use of poor hymns, and females praying in public as "unallowable extravagances."²⁹ Half a century later, Morris implicitly admitted that he had been a poor prognosticator. "Such unpardonable irregularity" had been witnessed rather frequently in Lutheran churches.³⁰

Toward the end of Morris' stewardship of the Observer, the argument over new measures took a nastier turn. With gross sarcasm, correspondent "Z" claimed that he was against new measures because they converted people, made them sober, and moved them to conduct family devotions, give more to the work of the Lord, and improve their family life in other ways.³¹ With equal acidity of tone, correspondent "N" claimed that he was in favor of new measures because by their practices "much labor connected with the office of a minister is rendered

²⁷Ibid. ²⁸Ibid.

²⁹John G. Morris, Fifty Years in the Lutheran Ministry, (Baltimore: James Young, 1878), p. 387.

³⁰Ibid. ³¹Observer, 1 January 1833, 15 January 1833.

unnecessary, and the way to heaven is made much easier." Moreover, according to "N," where new measures are practiced, excitement replaces plain truth preaching, and local merchants are pressured to experience conversion in order to retain their recently converted customers.³²

Morris instantly called for a halt to this style of polemic, declaring that "the subject is too important and solemn for irony."³³

In August of 1833 Morris was succeeded as editor of the Observer by Benjamin Kurtz. Together with that change, Morris' evenhanded attitude toward new measures was replaced by Kurtz's forthright enthusiasm for and promotion of revivals. Kurtz's position on new measures evolved noticeably during the period of this study. As the Standard saw it, "Formerly he made but favorable allusions to new measures; now he defends at all hazard . . . and the better to gain his end, makes invidious distinctions between the friends and opponents of the new measure system."³⁴ Morris' attitude toward revivals, on the other hand, re-surfaces in the pages of the Standard. "A genuine revival of religion . . . is a rich blessing for which the Church cannot be too thankful But a system of excitement cannot be too much deprecated."³⁵ "The editor of the Standard is the strong friend of revivals of real religion. Bible religion - but by this he does not mean that low, superficial, evanescent subjectivity, which can only live in the excitement of popular feelings."³⁶

³²Observer, 1 February 1833. ³³*Ibid.*

³⁴Standard, 1 March 1844. ³⁵Standard, 28 June 1843.

³⁶Standard, 22 November 1848, (*italics given*).

As this brief overview suggests, the basic point at issue in this controversy was never really resolved during the period under study. Were the new measures - protracted meetings, practical sermons, and the invitation of convicted sinners to make some sort of immediate decision - what their proponents claimed, a means by which God was at work to convert sinners, sanctify saints, and re-vitalize churches? Or were they what their opponents saw in them, innovations which, by their superficial appeal to shallow emotions, inevitably led to hasty conversions, disorder in public worship, and dissension in congregations? Before that question can be answered adequately, it is necessary to examine some aspects of the controversy in greater depth.

It is not necessary to re-examine aspects of the story which have already received adequate treatment in the secondary literature. For example, David Bauslin has examined the historical background factors which permitted and stimulated the rise of the new measure movement. Bauslin finds three major roots for its birth: 1. the general decline in piety and morals in the United States immediately after the Revolution; 2. as a reaction to the lifeless rationalism which prevailed in Lutheran circles during the same period; 3. the fact that materials teaching a Confessional Lutheran position simply were not yet available in English.³⁷ Nothing in the author's research for this present paper seems to question Bauslin's basic insights.

Aspects of the controversy which do seem to merit greater study

³⁷David H. Bauslin, "Genesis of the New Measures Movement in the Lutheran Church in This Country," Lutheran Quarterly, 40, (1910): 360-391.

will be treated in the subsequent chapters of this paper. In the next chapter, we will examine the theological assumptions with which Lutheran proponents of new measures implicitly or explicitly operated. We will focus in particular upon their understanding of conversion and the "order of salvation." The following chapter will connect the use of the "anxious bench" to those theological assumptions. As has already been stated, it will be the central portion of this paper. In subsequent chapters, other aspects of the controversy will be investigated. One will examine how proponents of new measures understood (or misunderstood) the Lutheran doctrine of the means of grace. Another will investigate a more practical matter, the relationship between the use of revivals and new measures and the more traditional Lutheran practices of confirmation and catechetical instruction.

CHAPTER II
NEW MEASURES AND THEOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS

Regeneration, Conversion, and the "Order of Salvation"

Under the heading "order of salvation," the index to one English edition of the Book of Concord lists only two Confessional citations¹.

One of them is a helpful introduction to this chapter:

For good works do not precede faith, nor is sanctification prior to justification. First the Holy Spirit kindles faith in us in conversion through the hearing of the Gospel. . . . After the person is justified, the Holy Spirit next renews and sanctifies him, and from this renewal and sanctification the fruits of good works will follow. (FC, SD, III, 41)

If we analyze this passage, it suggests that there are three stages in the human situation: A: a state of unbelief before the Holy Spirit kindles faith in us; B: a point at which he kindles such faith through the hearing of the Gospel, C: a state of renewal and sanctification after the person is justified.

When they speak of those three stages in the order of salvation, three terms predominate in the Confessions. They are: "regeneration," "conversion," and "repentance." A brief index study reveals that these three terms are applied to the order of salvation in seven different broad or narrow senses.

¹Theodore Tappert, (Tr. and Ed.) The Book of Concord, (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1959), p. 694. In this chapter, all Confessional citations will be from this edition and will be given in the text.

By their own admission, they use the term "regeneration" in three senses. Sometimes it is used in place of "justification" (that is, it refers exclusively to point "B"). On other occasions, it includes both forgiveness and the renewal subsequently worked by the Holy Spirit (it refers to point "B" and stage "C" simultaneously). Frequently, however, the term describes only the renewal which follows faith (that is, it refers only to stage "C") (FC, SD, III, 18-21).

The term "conversion" is defined rather precisely as "That kind of change through the Holy Spirit's activity in the intellect, will, and heart of a man whereby man through such working of the Holy Spirit is able to accept the proffered grace" (FC, SD, II, 83). In relation to the order of salvation, however, the Formula uses the term in two ways. In close juxtaposition, it asserts that conversion is a broader term than justification (FC, SD, III, 25), and uses them as virtual synonyms (FC, SD, III, 41). Used in the broad sense, "conversion" refers to stages "A" and "B," or perhaps to all three stages. Used in the narrow sense, it refers exclusively to stage "B."

The Confessions recognize that the term "repentance" is used by Scripture in a multivalent manner. At times it denotes the entire conversion process (stages "A" and "B"). On other occasions, it denotes only the recognition of sins worked by the second use of the law (stage "A" exclusively) (FC, SD, V, 7-9).

From the above data and other Scriptural and Confessional materials, Francis Pieper draws two conclusions which can help us clearly understand some new measures assumptions. Pieper's first helpful reminder is that there is no middle state between conversion

and non-conversion, and therefore no third class of human beings between believers and unbelievers. Conversion is instantaneous, taking place the moment the Holy Spirit kindles a spark of faith in the sinner's heart. Pieper forcefully warns against the poor pastoral practice whereby one is "led to treat those who are already converted men as though they are not yet converted, thus distressing them improperly and even causing them to despair."²

In the above section, Pieper uses the term "conversion" in the more narrow of the two senses in which the Confessions employ it. As his second helpful insight, Pieper recognizes that several other terms are used as synonyms of "conversion" in its narrow sense. His warning not to misuse these synonyms by turning them into distinct terms for a chronologically discrete order of salvation is worth presenting at length:

Illumination, awakening or quickening, and regeneration are synonyms of conversion. Presenting the same matter from different viewpoints, these expressions describe the same process, namely the kindling of faith in the Gospel, . . . The "Way of salvation" is hopelessly confused when these acts are made to denote essentially different experiences. Also "calling" is used in most Scripture passages, though not in all, as a synonym of conversion. (3)

In his Elements of Popular Theology, Samuel Schmucker uses the terms "conversion," "regeneration," and "repentance" in a much broader and less precise sense than they are used in our Confessions. The first two terms both signify "the entire change by which the sinner

²Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 3 vols., trans. J. T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 2: 461.

³Ibid., pp. 402-403.

becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus."⁴ Schmucker does acknowledge that regeneration can also be used to "designate a particular point in this progressive change."⁵ For him, however, this instantaneous point is not what it is for Pieper, the moment the Holy Spirit kindles the first spark of faith in the heart. It is instead "That moment, when the habits of the soul, which had before been gradually changing, acquire a preponderance in favor of holiness."⁶ Schmucker's understanding of repentance needs to be seen at greater length:

The term repentance is also used in the word of God to designate the entire change, and especially that voluntary agency, which is required of the sinner himself, in the progress of this change; such as a) to "consider his ways" and direct his attention to the call of God, . . . b) to examine the evidences of that rebellion and moral depravity charged against him in the Scriptures; c) to cherish penitential feelings, and d) to turn to God, that is, to resolve no longer voluntarily to violate the laws of God, but faithfully to fulfil them and daily strive to lead a holy life.(7)

Items "a" through "d" in the citation just given summarize the first five stages of the order of salvation which Schmucker has presented in the previous ten pages of the Elements. It will be helpful to examine his order and definitions of terms closely.

1. "The call, or vocation, is that invitation given to man by God, . . . to forsake his evil ways and accept the offers of mercy."⁸

The call can be mediated through God's Word, our external circumstances, or divine providence.⁹

⁴Samuel Simon Schmucker, Elements of Popular Theology, (Philadelphia: S. S. Miles, 1845), p. 202.

⁵Ibid. ⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., p. 203 (italics given).

⁸Ibid., p. 192 (italics given). ⁹Ibid.

2. "Illumination is that mediate act of God, by which, through the instrumentality of means of grace, he imparts to the inquiring sinner new and spiritual views of divine things."¹⁰ In Schmucker's opinion, this is the only part of the process in which the sinner is the passive recipient of supernatural work.¹¹

3. After illuminating the mind, God works to alter the sinner's feelings. Thereby He brings the sinner to "Conviction, . . . the new and spiritual views of the awakened sinner, concerning his own sinfulness and exposure to the wrath of God, together with feelings of deep concern for his salvation."¹² Such convictions differ in different persons, both with respect to the clarity of the impression made upon the sinner and with respect to the duration of such feelings before the sinner is led to the next step.¹³

4. "Penitence, . . . signifies those feelings of sorrow and remorse, excited in the mind of an (awakened) illuminated sinner by a consideration of his sinfulness and danger."¹⁴ Schmucker distinguishes between legal repentance (the mere dread of sin's consequences) and evangelical repentance, in which the mind perceives how hateful sin truly is and the heart is prepared to understand the plan of salvation.¹⁵

5. "Faith. Justifying faith is that voluntary act of the illuminated and evangelically penitent sinner, by which he confides in

¹⁰Ibid., p. 193 (italics given). ¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., p. 195 (italics given). ¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 196 (italics given).

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 196-197.

the mercy of God through Christ for salvation, on the terms offered in the Gospel."¹⁶ Schmucker defines the exact nature of this "voluntary act" as child-like confidence in God, but immediately breaks that definition down in components of knowledge, feelings, and volition.¹⁷ In Schmucker's view, justifying faith is simply one "stage of our progressive moral improvement."¹⁸

6. "Sanctification is a progressive increase of spirituality and delight in holy things."¹⁹ It is the work of God's Holy Spirit, effected through the means of grace, worked only on believers who cooperate with God by using those means.²⁰

Schmucker's semantics in this section of his work are ambiguous and confusing. On the one hand, Schmucker asserts that there is one point in the process at which people cross an imaginary boundary between a preponderant inclination toward sin and a preponderant inclination toward heaven. Schmucker locates this point immediately before stage five in his order, the first act of justifying faith.²¹ When he speaks of such a boundary, Schmucker seems to be agreeing with Pieper that there are but two kinds of humanity in the world, even though everything else Schmucker says about what happens at that point is clearly contrary to Confessional orthodoxy. On the other hand, Schmucker asserts that all six stages of his order are part of one process of entire change in sinners.²² Moreover, he describes evangelical repentance as among "the noblest and most hopeful exercises

¹⁶Ibid., p. 197 (italics given). ¹⁷Ibid., p. 198.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 199. ¹⁹Ibid., (italics given).

²⁰Ibid., pp. 199-200. ²¹Ibid., pp. 202-203. ²²Ibid.

of the awakened mind."²³ These passages suggest that Schmucker considers those who occupy stages one through four of his order of salvation as being some sort of third class of humanity. They are different from those sinners who refuse to be called, illuminated, convicted, and led to repentance; and yet, they are also different from those who have crossed the imaginary boundary and chosen to enter a stage of justifying faith.

When it comes to a second theological point, Schmucker is in these pages not ambiguous but clearly in error. The Confessional Article which most clearly marks the boundary between justification and sanctification is also most thorough and clear in delineating the relationship between our free will and God's Holy Spirit in the work of conversion:

Holy Scriptures ascribe conversion, faith in Christ, regeneration, renewal, and everything that belongs to its real beginning and completion in no way to the human powers of the natural free will, be it entirely or one-half or the least and tiniest part, but altogether and alone to the divine operation of the Holy Spirit, as the Apology declares. (FC, SD, II, 25)

Schmucker, in clear contrast to this, asserts that the cooperation of our human powers is both necessary and possible at every stage of his order of salvation, with the exception of stage two (illumination). Most disturbing is his definition of justifying faith as our voluntary act of submission and trust.²⁴ Schmucker goes on to assert that this entire process of repentance is a "duty fairly within the sphere of our voluntary agency."²⁵ He draws this conclusion from the common sense dictate that it would be unjust for God to demand

²³Ibid., p. 197. ²⁴Ibid. ²⁵Ibid., p. 205.

anything of us unless that which He demanded lay within our powers.²⁶

It would take us off on a tangent if we were to pause at this point and examine the exact nature of Schmucker's error. Whether his position was Pelagian or one of the more subtle errors, it was clearly not Confessional. It would take us on even more of a tangent if we were to try and find the source of his misconception. Such an error was implicit in the Pietism of his American Lutheran forefathers. It was more explicit in some strands of the Puritanism which shaped Schmucker's theological training and pervaded the spiritual atmosphere in which he lived. It was most explicit in the Arminianism of Methodist revival preachers. Whatever well Schmucker drew this error from, he drank deeply of it himself and passed it on uncritically to his students.

As we have seen in Chapter One of this paper, the Lutheran Observer is filled with reports of revivals. We now examine the material to see if the revival reporters reflect theological pre-suppositions similar to Schmucker's. In particular, how do they understand such terms as "conversion?" Secondly, how do they perceive the relationship between the subjects of their revivals and an order of salvation?

Whereas Schmucker uses the term "conversion" most frequently to denote the entire change God works upon the sinner, the revival reports much more often use the term to point to one particular point in the process. The following examples are typical of the ways in which Observer contributors use the term. Benjamin Kurtz reports on a

²⁶Ibid., p. 204.

revival in Middletown, Pennsylvania: "many of the scholars were brought under conviction and are hopefully converts."²⁷ David Eyster reports of a time when his church in Johnstown, New York was "filled with inquiring souls! . . . Most of those who have thus sought the Lord now give evidence of hopeful conversion."²⁸ Thomas Lape sends in this description of a revival in Athens, New York: "Souls were awakened - repented and converted [sic]. They gave evidence that they were accepted and adopted into the family of God."²⁹ J. B. Hoffman describes the new members of a congregation in Massillon, Ohio as "either hopefully converted to God or are anxiously seeking the pardon of their sins."³⁰ Another phrase for "conversion" is used by Levi Sternberg as he describes a revival in Danville, New York: "As near as we could ascertain 125 had taken the anxious seat, most of whom were cherishing a hope in Jesus, the Savior of sinners."³¹

All of the above examples picture conversion as a distinct stage in the order of salvation. They distinguish conversion from an earlier stage or stages in that order. The earlier part of the order is variously described as being "under conviction," "inquiring," "awakened," or "anxious."

Although conversion is pictured as a distinct stage in the order of salvation, even, at times, as an instantaneous moment, it is never in this material described as the moment at which the Holy Spirit acts monergistically to kindle the first spark of saving faith. It is

²⁷Lutheran Observer, 7 October 1836.

²⁸Observer, 28 April 1840. ²⁹Observer, 12 January 1838.

³⁰Observer, 25 October 1839. ³¹Observer, 17 April 1840.

instead described as "the act of man in turning to God."³² "Repentance must be your own act. Believing on the Lord Jesus Christ must be your own act,"³³ screeches another article. Other material is synergistic rather than flagrantly Pelagian. One such article asks "Are we not capable of acting, and being acted upon at the same time, and with reference to the same object?"³⁴ The erroneous understanding of conversion led to poor pastoral practice and worse pastoral advice. One revivalist is thrilled to report that a profane drunkard came to him and said "I will do anything to have my sins pardoned, and I will serve him the best I can until I die."³⁵ Another advised that, since the anxious sinner is motivated only by unwillingness to submit to God, "we should not hold up promises before he has expressed his consent to accept salvation on God's own terms."³⁶ Other items also make submission to God's will an essential ingredient of conversion. "The voice of mercy from the lips of the Son of God is 'Come unto me, believe on me, submit to be saved by me.'"³⁷ "Awakened sinners . . . should be pressed with the supreme obligation of immediate submission to Him, as a matter of duty and of right."³⁸

As can be seen in several of the passages already cited, those who are in the order of salvation but not yet converted are

³²Observer, 1 July 1842.

³³Observer, 8 April 1842 (italics given).

³⁴Observer, 30 January 1846. ³⁵Observer, 24 January 1840.

³⁶Observer, 7 August 1846.

³⁷Observer, 4 March 1842 (italics given).

³⁸Observer, 12 August 1842.

interchangeably described as "convicted," "awakened," or "anxious." The question is: do the new measure men regard and treat the "awakened" as a third class of human beings, somewhere between believers and unbelievers? The evidence seems to be ambiguous. According to some, revivals are targeted at two types of people. They are variously described as: "the slumbering Christian and the impenitent sinner,"³⁹ "luke-warm professors and . . . hardened and impenitent sinners,"⁴⁰ and those who are in "spiritual death or apparent spiritual death."⁴¹ In items such as these, the goal of a revival is to "awaken" those who are already Christians and convert those who are not.⁴²

Other items, however, clearly describe the awakened as not yet converted, but somehow in a class separate from other sinners. According to one article, "a merely alarmed sinner is in a very different condition from the convicted sinner, and is to be treated differently."⁴³ The alarmed needs to hear the law until "his heart is filled with a sense of its utter enormity and vileness," but "the promises and invitations of the Gospel eminently belong to the convicted sinner."⁴⁴ Elsewhere, the awakened are described as "earnestly seeking an interest in the atoning blood of Christ."⁴⁵ They show a "longing desire to obtain an interest" in his atoning merits.⁴⁶

³⁹Observer, 1 September 1848.

⁴⁰Observer, 15 December 1837.

⁴¹Observer, 3 February 1837 (*italics given*).

⁴²Observer, 1 September 1848. ⁴³Observer, 12 August 1842.

⁴⁴*Ibid.* ⁴⁵Observer, 12 June 1840.

⁴⁶Observer, 23 September 1842.

They are not yet converted, but are "hanging between hope and despair, begging to be remembered in the prayers of Christians."⁴⁷ Therefore the Church should do whatever it can in "assisting the anxious sinner to make the decision the word of God requires of all men."⁴⁸

Kurtz himself describes the situation of the awakened in the following manner:

3. Awakened sinners are in a most interesting condition; they are, as it were, on the turning point, - balancing on a pivot. On the decision they come to in many, very many instances depends their eternal destiny. If they submit - if they resolve to believe in Jesus Christ - . . . their conversion is accomplished and their salvation sure. But if they hesitate and waiver; if they resist God's grace and expel his spirit, . . . then they are thrown further from God and heaven than they had ever been, and their restoration is immensely more difficult and improbable than it was prior to their conviction . . .
4. It is evident then, that awakened sinners require peculiar and uncommon attention from the pastor.(49)

A theological evaluation of the above material can helpfully begin with a thesis from C. F. W. Walther: "The Word of God is not rightly divided when a false distinction is made between a person's being awakened and his being converted."⁵⁰ Walther directs this thesis at the Pietism which plagued his own early spiritual development. In particular, he rejects the Pietistic tenet that those who have not yet experienced a genuine, thorough contrition of the heart are not yet converted, but merely awakened.⁵¹ Such awakened people the Pietists

⁴⁷Observer, 19 August 1836. ⁴⁸Observer, 27 October 1837.

⁴⁹Observer, 12 December 1837.

⁵⁰C. F. W. Walther, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel, trans. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1928), 362.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 364-365.

consider a third class of humanity; Walther asserts that "According to Scripture we can assume only two classes."⁵²

Walther, however, is not totally consistent in his own use of the term "awaken." On the one hand, he asserts that "when Scripture speaks of awakening, it always means conversion."⁵³ On the other, he states that it might be permissible to apply the term to "such persons as occasionally receive a powerful impression of the Word of God, . . . but promptly stifle the impression, so that it is rendered ineffectual."⁵⁴ Herod Antipas, Felix, Festus, and Agrippa are cited as examples of such persons.⁵⁵

The material we have presented in this chapter would seem, to a great extent, to be legitimately subject to Walther's critique. Clearly, the new measure men do not use the term "awakened" as a synonym for "converted." They would probably describe such men as Felix and Festus as "alarmed" rather than "awakened." Some of the items strongly suggest that the anxious are a third class of humanity, but none of them says so in an explicit manner. Putting the best construction on things, it is possible to say that in these items the revivalists were semantically sloppy, that they used "awakened" and its synonyms as the equivalent of what the Confessions call "repentance" in the narrow sense, that is, as the contrition which precedes but is not a part of conversion (FC, SD, V, 8-9).

In one respect, the new measure men were clearly different from the Pietists against whom Walther directed this thesis. The new

⁵²Ibid., p. 363. ⁵³Ibid., p. 364.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 363. ⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 363-364.

measure men did not insist that the awakened had to endure a long period of contrition before they were fit subjects for conversion. They acknowledged the possibility that sinners under conviction could be converted rapidly. In fact, they strongly encouraged the use of any means that would rapidly accelerate the order of salvation. In this connection, it is interesting to note that Schmucker and Walther use the story of the Philippian jailer (Acts 15:19-34), in a similar but hardly identical fashion. To Schmucker, he is one of several Scriptural convicted sinners who "speedily surrendered their hearts to God, and obtained peace."⁵⁶ Walther agrees that the process was rapid. As soon as the jailer was convicted of his wickedness, he was converted by the Holy Spirit through Paul's proclamation of the Gospel.⁵⁷

In this comparison and contrast between Schmucker and Walther, we see the most serious defect in new measure theology. It is not in the way in which some new measure men treated the awakened as a third class of humanity. It is rather in the synergistic and/or Pelagian notions of their theology of conversion. Those defects have already been documented in this chapter, and do not call for any further comment.

⁵⁶Schmucker, p. 196.

⁵⁷Walther, p. 366.

CHAPTER III

ACCELERATING THE "ORDER," THE ANXIOUS BENCH

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Lutheran revivalists, unlike earlier Lutheran Pietists, did not insist that the awakened pass through a lengthy struggle before considering them fit for conversion. In fact, one of the primary purposes of a revival was to accelerate the conversion of awakened sinners. Charles Finney spells this out clearly:

Formerly it had been supposed necessary that a sinner should remain under conviction a long time; and it was not uncommon to hear old professors of religion say that they were under conviction so many months or years before they found relief; . . . We taught the opposite of this. . . . We insisted then, as I have done ever since, on immediate submission as the only thing that God could accept at their hands; and that all delay, under any pretext whatever, was rebellion against God. It became very common, through this teaching, for persons to be convicted and converted in the course of a few hours, and sometimes in the course of a few minutes. (1)

The revivalists soon discovered that one of the most effective tools for hastening the transition from conviction to conversion was the anxious bench or mourners' bench. This tool was originated by the Methodists in the first decade of the nineteenth century. They adapted the altar call which had been used in their frontier camp meetings to the situation of an already established congregation. The exact date for the first use of the bench remains unclear. According to Frank Beardsley, it happened during a revival in New York City during the Winter of 1806 - 1807, when "so

¹Garth M. Rosell and Richard A. G. Dupuis, eds., The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney, The Complete Restored Text, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), p. 191.

large were the congregations and so difficult did it become to pray and converse with seekers, that it became necessary to invite them forward to the front seats, which were vacated for the purpose."² Richard Carwardine, almost certainly referring to the same revival, locates the first use of the bench at the Forsyte Street Church in New York in 1806. He notes that its use eliminated the confusion of several small prayer meetings taking place simultaneously in different parts of the house.³ Reuben Weiser agrees that the bench was first used in New York, but gives the date as 1804.⁴ According to the Lutheran Observer, however, "As early as 1804 it was employed by the Rev. Robert Finley of Bashing [sic] Ridge, New Jersey, with the most salutary effect."⁵

Charles Finney describes the first time he made use of the anxious bench in his revivals. He had been invited to preach an afternoon revival in Rutland, New York. Before the service began, an attractive young woman wearing a bonnet decorated with tall plumes made a fashionable entrance and seated herself just behind Finney. In a low but distinct voice, the evangelist made her writhe by accusing her of

²Frank G. Beardsley, A History of American Revivals, (New York: American Tract Society, 1904, reprinted by American Church History Library, Eden Theological Seminary, St. Louis, date not given, p. 194.

³Richard Carwardine, "The Second Great Awakening in the Urban Centers, An Examination of Methodism and the New Measure, "Journal of American History, 59, (1971, 2) 333.

⁴Reuben Weiser, The Mourner's Bench or an Humble Attempt to Vindicate New Measures, (Bedford, PA: n.p. 1844), p. 7. Weiser cites as his authority an 1804 edition of the Christian Advocate and Journal, a source unavailable to this author.

⁵Lutheran Observer, 1 March 1844. It is most likely that Bashing Ridge is a misprint for Basking Ridge.

coming to distract the worshippers. Then he got up to preach. Finney's description of what happened next is an example of one way in which the anxious bench could be used:

The Spirit of the Lord was evidently poured out on the congregation; and at the close of the sermon I did what I do not know I had ever done before, called upon any who would give their hearts to God to come forward and take the front seats. And I cannot remember that I ever did this again anywhere until I did it in Rochester, N. Y. The moment I made the call this young lady was the first to arise. She burst out into the aisle, and came forward, like a person in a state of desperation. . . . She came rushing forward to the front seats, until she finally fell in the aisle and shrieked with agony. A large number arose in different parts of the house and came forward; and a goodly number appeared to give their hearts to God upon the spot, and among the rest this young lady.(6)

As this memoir indicates, there is no evidence that Finney made use of the anxious bench again until the Rochester revival of 1830. Whereas the use of the bench at Rutland seems to have been a spur-of-the-moment decision, its use in Rochester seems to have been planned with some forethought. As Finney recalls it, "I had found, that with the higher classes especially, the greatest obstacle to be overcome was their fear of being known as anxious inquirers."⁷ In order to overcome that great obstacle, Finney concluded that "something was needed more than I had practiced to make the impression on them that they were expected then and there to give up their hearts."⁸ At Rochester, Finney provided that "something more" by using the anxious bench. After describing the many blessings achieved through this revival, and naming several Rochester residents of high social standing who came to the bench during this

⁶Rosell, p. 115. Rosell (p. 306) dates the Rutland revival in late 1824. A close reading of the memoirs, however, suggests that February or March of 1825 is a more likely date.

⁷Ibid., p. 306. ⁸Ibid.

course, Finney gives the following assessment of this particular measure:

I found, as I expected, that this was a great power for good. If men who were under conviction refused to come forward publicly and renounce their sins and give themselves to God, this fact disclosed to them more clearly the pride of their own hearts. If, on the other hand, they broke over all those considerations that stood in the way of their doing it, it was taking a great step; and as I found continually was the very step they needed to take.⁽⁹⁾

In this assessment, Finney makes two claims. One is that refusal of the invitation to come forward to the bench is prima facie evidence that a person is unconverted. The other is that the anxious bench is essential, if not for the conversion of all people, then at least for the conversion of some. With these two claims, Finney differs in a subtle but important way from the description of the bench given in his Lectures on Revivals of Religion. In that work, Finney tells us that "God has established no particular system of measures to be employed and invariably adhered to in promoting religion."¹⁰ Every measure, from Baptism to the bench, was an adiaphoron, "left to the discretion of the Church to determine, from time to time."¹¹ Thus we see that the bench could be understood from two perspectives. It could be viewed as a neutral tool which the Church may or may not use as it sees fit. Or it could be regarded as an essential element of every revival, since every audience almost certainly included some people who, like the Rochester elite, would not be converted without it. For such people the bench

⁹Ibid., pp. 320-321.

¹⁰Finney, Lectures on Revivals of Religion, (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1868), p. 238.

¹¹Ibid.

was, in Finney's words, "the very step they needed to take."

Many Lutheran revivalists made it clear that they regarded the anxious bench as a neutral tool, not essential to the conversion of the awakened. The earliest reference to the bench in the Lutheran Observer is critical in nature. A correspondent using the pen name "Melancthon" warns that several of the new measures are without good precedent. Among them he lists "calling the mourners up to the anxious seats . . . anxious meetings . . . and other means used for the purpose of raising a temporary alarm or excitement."¹² The specific issue of the anxious bench does not seem to arise again in the the Observer for over four years. Then Benjamin Kurtz assures an "Inquirer" from Ohio that the anxious bench and calling out the awakened "are not essential features in the revival. They are collateral and subordinate exercises, and may or may not be introduced."¹³ From then on, references to the bench are more frequent. Jonathan Ruthrauff, a prominent new-measures man in central Pennsylvania, agreed with Kurtz. "I do not approve of the Anxious Seat on every occasion: yet there are seasons when it is good. . . . In our late revival, there were some souls converted who did not come forward to the Anxious Seat; but notwithstanding this it was advantageous to others."¹⁴ One month later, Kurtz went to great length to assure another Ohio correspondent that Lutherans could agree to disagree over minor matters such as the use or non-use of the bench. "What in one church would seem almost indispensable to complete success, might in another . . . at once blight the fairest prospects of extensive

¹²Observer, 1 October 1832. ¹³Observer, 3 February 1837.

¹⁴Observer, 5 January 1838.

usefulness."¹⁵ Correspondent "S" assures the readers that "If any brother have conscientious scruples as to the propriety of the anxious seat and yet labors faithfully, to build up his congregations in holiness and piety, . . . the warmest new measure man would bid him God speed."¹⁶ Still another contributor, "M," reports that "the great mass of those who are stigmatized as new measure men do not employ nor encourage the anxious bench, though they do not think that a brother is guilty of a very heinous crime" when he directs an anxious sinner to such a seat.¹⁷ In 1843, the year-old East Pennsylvania Synod summed up this attitude in a series of resolutions on new measures. After declaring themselves in favor of protracted meetings, of prayer meetings, of trying to detect which members are awakened, and of urging the awakened to immediate submission, the Synod then resolved:

5. We wish to be distinctly understood, that we have never regarded what is usually denominated the "anxious seat" as essential to the great work of converting sinners or carrying on revivals. But whilst we most readily make this admission, we as strenuously contend for the object contemplated, . . . the discovery of those who are religiously impressed in order that they may be personally urged to their duty without delay and receive the instruction called for by the peculiarity of their condition.(18)

During the same years, however, other Observer correspondents vehemently declared that God was accomplishing great things through this particular tool. Samuel Lybrand says of the converts from a Tarlton, Ohio, revival: "I must confess that they were invited to the 'Mourner's Bench,' so offensive to some; but I thank God that it is not offensive to him for he then blessed them with Gospel measure full, pressed

¹⁵Observer, 9 February 1838. ¹⁶Observer, 26 March 1841.

¹⁷Observer, 17 September 1841. ¹⁸Observer, 3 November 1843.

down and running over."¹⁹ With equal enthusiasm, J. H. Hoffman describes another Ohio revival: "We had no 'mourner's bench,' but we had anxious seats. We invited all who were convinced of sin . . . to occupy the front seats in the church."²⁰ While describing this revival as an interesting and refreshing time of unspeakable satisfaction with God's blessings, Hoffman also assures his readers that "the most perfect order and harmony prevailed."²¹ To other correspondents, however, too great a stress upon decency and order was a gratuitous concession to opponents of the bench. According to one, to impose restraint upon weeping penitents was to run the risk of sinning "against the strivings of God's grace."²² Since "The noise consisted in lamentations over sin, . . . it was no noise to us, it was music to our ears."²³ In a similar manner, W. J. Sloan justifies the events at an Ashland, Ohio, revival: "We had no confusion, but considerable noise - and dear br. how could it be otherwise? Fifty and sixty souls crying to God for mercy."²⁴ An even more extravagant claim for the bench is made by "M. S.," reporting on a revival in Lewistown, Pennsylvania: "God blesses only one way, which is the right way; he has blessed this way, therefore it is the right way."²⁵

Until 1843, the use of an anxious bench remained one of several issues in the debate over new measures. For several months in 1843-1844, however, the bench became the central focus of all new

¹⁹Observer, 18 May 1838. ²⁰Observer, 13 March 1840.

²¹Ibid. ²²Observer, 11 November 1842.

²³Ibid. ²⁴Observer, 14 April 1843.

²⁵Observer, 17 February 1843.

measures debate. The focus was provided by a pamphlet entitled The Anxious Bench, A Tract for the Times, published in the Spring of 1843 by John Williamson Nevin.

Nevin (1803-1886) grew up in a pious Presbyterian family in the Cumberland Valley of Pennsylvania. He remembered his boyhood religious upbringing as one which "proceeded on the theory of a sacramental, educational religion, . . . the catechism stood in honor and use everywhere."²⁶ Then, while he was a student at the Union College in Schenectady, New York, Nevin was among the last of his classmates to struggle through to a conversion experience during a series of anxious meetings held at the school.²⁷ Appel describes Nevin's subsequent spiritual development in this way:

Dr. Nevin was conscious of a dualism in his religious experiences from the time he left Union College in 1821, which continued to harass him more or less at Princeton, and for awhile afterwards also at Allegheny. The old Reformed faith or conception of religion gradually grew stronger over against the Puritan or Methodistic tendency of the day.(28)

In 1840 Nevin left his post at Western, a small Presbyterian seminary in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, and began to teach theology at the Reformed seminary in Mercersburg, Pennsylvania. In 1842 he had an experience which abruptly and permanently jolted him out of his dualistic attitude. The struggling, somewhat moribund Reformed congregation in Mercersburg needed a pastor of its own in order to grow out of its dependence upon Nevin and the other college professors. After several candidates failed to arouse the congregation's enthusiasm,

²⁶Theodore Appel, The Life and Work of John Williamson Nevin, (Philadelphia: Reformed Church Publication House, 1889), pp. 30-31.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 38-39. ²⁸Ibid., p. 157.

Nevin recommended Rev. William Ramsey, who had recently returned from work in China and was known to Nevin from their student days at Princeton. Ramsey made a favorable impression with a series of sermons which, according to Appel, steadily increased in emotional intensity. Then, one Sunday evening, perhaps on the spur of the moment, Ramsey brought out the anxious bench. Nevin, who was also in the chancel, was amazed by the ensuing excitement and confusion. Toward the end of the meeting, when Nevin was asked to speak, he earnestly warned the worshippers to remember that coming to the altar in public was not necessarily the same as true penitence and faith.

The congregation immediately elected Ramsey as their Pastor. Despite some reservations, Nevin was at this point still in favor of the choice, thinking that the congregation could be blessed by a measure of controlled enthusiasm. Nevin then wrote a letter to Ramsey, encouraging him to accept the call, but telling him that it would be necessary to dispense with new measures and adopt the catechetical system, if the two men were to have a harmonious relationship. Instead, Ramsey wrote a lengthy, rather strong letter, declining the call and giving Nevin's letter as his reason for doing so. At first, Ramsey's letter caused considerable turmoil and dissension in the congregation. However, as Nevin went on to explain his position more thoroughly, most of the members gradually came to agree with him. Nevin also sensed strong sympathy for the anxious bench among the seminary students. To counter it, he refined and enlarged his objections in a series of classroom lectures. Realizing that vague rumors of his stand were filtering out to the larger Church, Nevin edited his lectures and published them in

the Spring of 1843.²⁹

Nevin's pamphlet merits a fairly thorough summary and evaluation. He states his goal quite clearly in Chapter I: "My object will be to show that the measure is adapted to obstruct rather than to promote the progress of true godliness."³⁰ In the rest of the chapter, Nevin attempts to define his terms and to outline the scope of his argument. To him, "the Anxious Bench is made to stand . . . as the type and representative of the entire system of what are technically denominated in our day New Measures."³¹ As Nevin sees it, the following phenomena are also included in the system:

revival machinery, solemn tricks for effect, decision displays at the bidding of the preachers, genuflections and prostrations in the aisle or around the altar, noise and disorder, extravagance and rant, mechanical conversions, justification by feeling rather than faith, and encouragement ministered to all fanatical impressions;(32)

Nevin makes it quite plain that he is not merely opposing the possible abuses of a neutral tool. "The whole system contemplated in the tract is an abuse."³³ At the same time, however, he quite forcefully asserts that he is in favor of the following practices: "Protracted meetings, prayer meetings, the doctrine of the new birth, special efforts for the salvation of sinners, revivals in the true and proper sense, tract societies, missionary societies, and benevolent operations generally."³⁴

²⁹The above summary is from Appel, pp. 157-161.

³⁰Charles Yrigoyen and George Bricker, eds., Catholic and Reformed, The Selected Writings of John Williamson Nevin, (Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1978), p. 17.

³¹Ibid. ³²Ibid., p. 30. ³³Ibid., p. 14.

³⁴Ibid., p. 27.

In the rest of the tract, Nevin provides a heading for each chapter which accurately summarizes its content. Chapter II: "The Merits of the Anxious Bench not to be Measured by its Popularity; nor by its Seeming Success. . . . No Spiritual Force Required to Give it Effect."³⁵ Nevin not only rejects success as a valid criterion for evaluating the bench. He also claims that, even if true and lasting conversions are accomplished through this measure, the price is too high. "We must not do wrong, even to gain a soul for heaven."³⁶ Nevin demonstrates that it takes no special spiritual power to use the bench by claiming that such diverse groups as the Campbellites, Winebrennerians, and Universalists all seem capable of using it effectively.³⁷

Chapter III: "'New Measures' a Substitute for the True Strength, Where They are in Honor, Ample Space is Found for the Novices and Quacks."³⁸ In this chapter, Nevin takes proponents of the bench to task for lacking faith in ordinary pastoral ministry, and for being suspicious of converts gained through Catechetical instruction.³⁹ He goes beyond that to claim that the bench tends to offer "a refuge for weakness and sloth in the work of the ministry,"⁴⁰ since it offers every practitioner a strong temptation to a "'short method of doing God's great work,' and a sort of royal road , at the same time, to ministerial reputation."⁴¹

In chapter IV, Nevin's critique of the bench moves from ad hominem arguments to a more serious theological level. "It Creates a False Issue

³⁵Ibid., p. 33. ³⁶Ibid., p. 37. (italics given)

³⁷Ibid., p. 43. ³⁸Ibid., p. 45. ³⁹Ibid., p. 49.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 52. ⁴¹Ibid., p. 55.

for the Conscience, Unsettles True Seriousness, Usurps the Place of the Cross."⁴² According to Nevin, sinners awakened at a revival need to be confronted with the important question of whether or not they will repent and yield their hearts to God. The use of the anxious bench obscures this. In revivals where it is employed, "The question is not, will he repent and yield his heart to God, but will he go to the anxious bench, which is something different altogether."⁴³ Nevin acknowledges that many bench proponents do not completely identify coming to the bench with conversion. Nevertheless, in view of the intense emotional excitement pervading such services, it is almost inevitable that awakened sinners be distracted and confused. "The genuine religious feeling that may exist is likely to be overwhelmed in a great measure by the excitement that must be involved."⁴⁴ According to Nevin, those who claim that the act of coming to the bench is not conversion per se but merely a decision in favor of religion are making a distinction without a difference. "The coming is not accepted at once as conversion, . . . but still it is taken practically for something closely bordering on conversion. . . . The Anxious Bench is made still to be the laver of regeneration, the gate of paradise; the womb of the New Jerusalem."⁴⁵

The same line of theological argument continues in Chapter V. By the numbers, Nevin refutes as insufficient several of the grounds by which proponents have sought to vindicate the use of the bench.

1. While those who use the bench compare themselves to Peter on the first Pentecost, they are not calling those who are awakened to the same

⁴²Ibid., p. 59 ⁴³Ibid., p. 60. ⁴⁴Ibid., p. 62.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 67.

decision as Peter required. The decision to come to the bench is a "decision that decides nothing."⁴⁶ 2. If it is argued instead that the bench involves the sinner in a committal rather than a decision, Nevin replies that such a committal does not proceed from intelligent reflection but from momentary emotional intoxication. Most of those who make such a committal, says Nevin, fall back openly into the world, and their last state is worse than the first.⁴⁷ 3. If his opponents again shift their ground and argue that the bench merely serves as a prop and support to the anxious sinner's resolve, Nevin warns them not to compare what happens at the bench with a drunkard's temperance pledge. "The one is fully within the compass of the human will and strength; the other is beyond it entirely."⁴⁸ Those, like Finney and James Davis, who claim that both actions are equally within our capacity, are guilty of an error "rotten as Pelagianism itself."⁴⁹ 4. To those who recommend the bench as a means of penitential discipline, Nevin responds that the bench is often used in as ex opere operato a manner as any Romish penitential practice.⁵⁰ 5. If the claim is made that the bench can provide an opportunity for instructing the awakened, Nevin replies that deep, meaningful instruction simply does not occur. "But when we look a little into the matter we shall find this object of instruction reduced to a perfect farce."⁵¹ 6. If it is said that the anxious should be called out in order to make them the subjects of prayer, Nevin answers that this is completely unnecessary. Prayer which can only be spoken in the sight of

⁴⁶Ibid. p. 77. ⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 78-79.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 80-81. ⁴⁹Ibid., p. 81, n.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 82. ⁵¹Ibid., p. 83.

those for whom it is raised "is a suspicious kind of prayer at best."⁵²

The headline claim of Chapter VI is that "The Anxious Bench tends naturally to disorder."⁵³ Once again, Nevin makes it quite plain that he is not merely criticizing potential abuses but serious theological errors. "Error and heresy, I repeat it, are involved in the system itself, . . . A low, shallow, pelagianizing theory of religion runs through it from beginning to end."⁵⁴ What is even more serious, the system's concept of justification "is wholly subjective, and therefore visionary and false."⁵⁵ Nevin therefore rejects the possibility that the Church can in some useful way adapt some aspects of the bench system. "A false theory of religion is involved in it which cannot fail to work itself out and make itself felt in many hurtful results wherever it gains footing in the Church."⁵⁶

As an alternative to the system of the bench, Nevin proposed what he called the system of the Catechism. It included: "A ministry apt to teach, sermons full of unction and light, faithful systematic instruction, . . . catechetical training, . . . patient perseverance in the details of the ministerial work."⁵⁷ These, states Nevin, "are the agencies, by which alone the kingdom of God may be expected to go steadily forward."⁵⁸ In his seventh and final chapter, Nevin explains and describes his catechetical system. Its advantages over the bench system include: a deeper and much more accurate understanding of the doctrine of sin,⁵⁹ a more serious interest in children, who are to be treated as members of the

⁵²Ibid., p. 88. ⁵³Ibid., p. 89. ⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 97-98.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 99. ⁵⁶Ibid., p. 100. ⁵⁷Ibid., p. 101. ⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 106-107.

Church from infancy,⁶⁰ a greater emphasis upon religious instruction within the family circle.⁶¹ Nevin also makes it plain that his system "gives no encouragement to religious torpor or sloth,"⁶² and is not opposed to all "extraordinary forms of action in the work of the Gospel."⁶³ However, when the system of the Catechism is correctly understood and faithfully applied, it can be expected to produce the proper sort of revivals.⁶⁴

One measure of the impact made by The Anxious Bench is the response to it found in the Lutheran Observer. Kurtz considered the pamphlet a serious challenge and a "dangerous publication,"⁶⁵ so dangerous, in fact, that Kurtz responded with ten somewhat lengthy articles, published serially from November 10, 1843 through January 12, 1844. His rebuttal also deserves a fairly thorough summary and evaluation. Part I is a general introduction to the subject. Kurtz criticizes Nevin for two general weaknesses: a "vagueness and tendency to generalize," and "the almost entire absence of Scriptural proof."⁶⁶ As Kurtz sees it, Nevin must be thinking only of "the most ultra movements, extravagant excesses, and glaring absurdities" of a few revivalist sects.⁶⁷ Moreover, Kurtz is sure that Nevin's outlook would be different if he had spent eight to ten years as a parish pastor.⁶⁸

In Part II, Kurtz attacks Nevin's contention that the bench is to be taken as the representative of the whole system of new measures. According to Kurtz, this is both a historical fallacy and doctrinally

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 111. ⁶¹Ibid., p. 113. ⁶²Ibid., p. 116.

⁶³Ibid., p. 118. ⁶⁴Ibid., p. 119.

⁶⁵Observer, 10 November 1843. ⁶⁶Ibid. ⁶⁷Ibid. ⁶⁸Ibid.

erroneous.⁶⁹ To Kurtz, "'New Measures' is a relative phrase, designating no specific measures in particular."⁷⁰ In some circles, the phrase refers to a limited number of measures. In others, it includes such things as protracted meetings and tract societies, even Bible societies and Bible classes.⁷¹ Here the two men definitely seem to be talking past each other. As we have seen,⁷² Nevin plainly states that he is in favor of the second set of activities and does not include them in his definition of the bench system. For Kurtz not to notice this, or to deliberately ignore it, was at best careless and at worst dishonest. In Part II Kurtz also takes up the question of noise and confusion. While he agrees with Nevin in opposing noise which is avoidable, Kurtz is gratified by "That which is the sincere expression of devout and holy feeling and does not materially interfere with the devotions of those who are convened."⁷³

Part III of the rebuttal may be summarized more succinctly. Whereas Nevin states that the bench is not to be evaluated by its popularity or apparent success, Kurtz in effect replies that it is. He goes to great length to demonstrate that when new measure congregations are compared with others, "Their increase of members has been more rapid; the attendance on the public ordinances of religion more numerous."⁷⁴ In addition to the pragmatic argument from success, Kurtz here also claims that revival preachers are among the most diligent in the use of the Catechism.⁷⁵ As will be seen in another chapter of this

⁶⁹Observer, 17 November 1843. ⁷⁰Ibid. ⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Above, p. 38. ⁷³Observer, 17 November 1843.

⁷⁴Observer, 24 November 1843. ⁷⁵Ibid.

paper,⁷⁶ Kurtz sincerely encouraged catechetical instruction. However, he seemed unaware until about four years later of the great extent to which Lutheran revivalists ignored the Catechism. In this respect, Kurtz seems to have occupied an armchair even more isolated than the one in which he here accuses Nevin of sitting.⁷⁷

In Part IV, Kurtz attempts to base the calling out of the awakened upon Biblical precedent. He mentions the Lord's word "come unto me" (Matt. 11:28) as one instance of such a call, and claims that the Apostolic invitation to repent and be baptized "involved the precise principle in that day that the anxious bench does not; it afforded an opportunity for a public manifestation of those who submitted to it of their determination to be Christians."⁷⁸ In a later chapter, we will more thoroughly investigate the sacramental theology implicit in this claim. For now, we note that Kurtz here finds the bench necessary in many cases to induce anxious sinners to show that they are seriously concerned about their salvation, and to prevent their leaving the meeting with false hopes.⁷⁹ In this section, Kurtz does not refute Nevin's claim that coming to the bench creates a false issue. He simply ignores or denies it.

In Part V Kurtz simply reiterates the argument from results made in Part III, claiming that the best and brightest of the German Reformed Pastors are all new measure practitioners.⁸⁰ Part VI in the Observer deals point by point with Chapter V of Nevin's pamphlet. Kurtz charges

⁷⁶Below, pp. 74-87. ⁷⁷Observer, 24 November 1843.

⁷⁸Observer, 1 December 1843. ⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Observer, 8 December 1843.

Nevin with setting up a straw man when Nevin assumes that some revivalists equate coming to the bench with conversion. "No man in his sober senses ever maintained that," states Kurtz.⁸¹ Since coming to the bench is not per se any kind of decision, Nevin is mistaken to call it a decision which decides nothing. In the rest of this essay, Kurtz shifts the ground of his argument and simply attempts to vindicate the bench by asserting that the grounds which Nevin rejects are not insufficient. Kurtz ignores Nevin's contention that the awakened sinner needs to make an intelligent committal, stating that "we should take advantage of their condition while the Spirit is at work," and that "the "convictions of an awakened sinner are always the result of divine grace."⁸² Here Kurtz begs the question of whether the revival service has produced a genuine or spurious awakening. In response to Nevin's assertion that instruction at the bench is superficial, Kurtz contends that "the cases of the truly awakened are always sufficiently near alike," so that one well-trained worker can deal with them all at once.⁸³ In response to Nevin's statement that it is not necessary to call out the anxious in order to pray for them, Kurtz compares the anxious coming to the bench to Christ coming to us in the Eucharist. In the latter, Christ comes to the aid of our infirmity; in the former, the sight of the anxious around the rail stimulates believers to more fervent prayer on their behalf.⁸⁴ Here, in one sentence, Kurtz both hints at a Zwinglian understanding of the Eucharist and comes close to elevating anxious sinners to the level of a means of grace.

Kurtz mistakenly labels his essay in the December 22 issue as VI,

⁸¹Observer, 15 December 1843. ⁸²*Ibid.* (italics added).

⁸³*Ibid.* ⁸⁴*Ibid.*

when it is actually the seventh in the series. The chief issue dealt with here is Nevin's contention that the bench creates a false issue for the conscience. Here, as often in this series, Kurtz does not come to grips with Nevin's deeper theological objections. Instead, he sidesteps the deeper issue by refining what Nevin has said. He agrees with Nevin that the important point is whether or not an awakened sinner will repent and yield his heart to God. Then Kurtz claims that the real object of the bench is to persuade the sinner to do that "in the most prompt and effective manner."⁸⁵ In other words, Nevin sees the bench as an obstacle which obscures the cross; Kurtz sees it as a means to the cross, but does not really deal with Nevin's objection. In the rest of this essay Kurtz, as he has done previously, perceives Nevin as objecting only to abuses which are not of the essence of new measures.

In Part VIII, Kurtz becomes ad hominem once more and also continues to sidestep Nevin's assertions. While Kurtz concedes that in the Lutheran Church new measures are opposed by some "good and no doubt converted men," they are resisted especially by "multitudes of unconverted."⁸⁶ When Nevin uses the observation that the bench is of most appeal to ignorant girls and boys to support his claim that the system makes the feelings a trap for the judgment, Kurtz responds with two irrelevancies. He somewhat sententiously states that such people also have souls to be saved, a truth which Nevin had never denied. Then Kurtz quotes Jonathon Edwards and Matthew 21:15-16 as a reminder that we are all spiritual babes,⁸⁷ another truth never denied by Nevin.

⁸⁵Observer, 22 December 1843. ⁸⁶Observer, 29 December 1843.

⁸⁷Ibid.

Part IX was much more on target. Kurtz takes Nevin to task for his claim that Edwards and George Whitefield, two giants from the First Great Awakening, would not have endorsed the anxious bench system. Kurtz quotes Edwards at some length to demonstrate that Edwards was favorable to such measures as children's prayer meetings, singing of hymns in the streets, lay-exhortation, and what Kurtz here calls the principle of the anxious bench.⁸⁸ Kurtz also cites some quite legitimate parallels between Nevin's criticisms of revival noise and objections raised by opponents of Edwards a century before.⁸⁹ All mention of Edwards and Whitefield disappears from the second edition of Nevin's pamphlet, a hint that this particular criticism by Kurtz may have been effective.

Part X wraps things up. Whereas Nevin hints that the German Church would practice other new measures if they were separated from the bench, Kurtz claims that the German Church was opposed to the other new measures long before the use of the bench became widespread. Again becoming ad hominem, Kurtz states that opponents of the bench are like the Gadarenes who rejected Christ when His ministry affected them too personally. Kurtz closes with another citation from Edwards, that "ministers who preach sound doctrine but show suspicion of revivals do more harm than good."⁹⁰

During and shortly after Kurtz published his ten-part series, two other new-measure men wrote in support of the bench from somewhat different perspectives. Rev. Peter Rizer at that time served as Pastor

⁸⁸Observer, 5 January 1844. ⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Observer, 12 January 1844.

of the Somerset, Pennsylvania parish of the newly-formed Allegheny Synod. His perspective needs to be seen at some length:

And let me tell you, sir, that whatever Prof. Nevin may, (in the abstraction of his study) have written to the contrary, I am nevertheless strongly convinced, as a pastor, that the so-called "anxious bench" is the lever of Archimedes, which by the blessing of God can raise our German churches to that degree of respectability and prosperity in the religious world, which they ought to enjoy. I use term in a general sense for so-called new measures. (91)

Scarcely a month later,⁹² Rizer, with some justification, complains that the Standard has sensationalized his "lever of Archimedes" phrase by taking it out of the context of his qualifier, that he is using the term in a general sense. Rizer's phrase is so vivid, the secondary literature has occasionally succumbed to the temptation to take it out of context in a similar manner.⁹³ Something else is more important in helping us understand the controversy. When Rizer states that he uses the term in a general sense, he agrees with Nevin that the bench can be used as the representative of an entire system, something that Kurtz goes to great lengths to deny.

Reuben Weiser, at the time Rizer's colleague and neighbor in the Allegheny Synod, helps to clarify things somewhat. On the one hand, he calls the use of the bench "a mere circumstance, an adventitious appendage of the system."⁹⁴ On the other, he tells us that "the principle involved in the mourner's bench is as, old as, the doctrine of human depravity and the doctrine that requires the repentance and

⁹¹Observer, 17 November 1843. ⁹²Observer, 15 December 1843.

⁹³E. g. Frederick Bente, American Lutheranism, ? vols., (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1919), 2: 81. Bente mistakenly attributes the quotation to Kurtz.

⁹⁴Weiser, p. 4.

conversion of sinners."⁹⁵ Based on that distinction between a tool to be used in some circumstances and a timeless principle, Weiser, echoing Finney, tells us that the one great object of the bench is to "expedite the work of salvation in the awakened sinner's heart."⁹⁶ Weiser also speculates that if the bench had been available to the awakened in past generations, Luther would have been spared his long years in the monastery, while John Wesley would not have needed his agonizing Atlantic crossing to Georgia.⁹⁷

After Kurtz's ten-part series, the use of the bench again becomes one aspect of a larger controversy. To his credit, Kurtz seems to recognize the validity of one criticism of the bench. He writes:

It is absolutely important to be at great pains to guard the people against supposing a protracted meeting is essential to their salvation. And the altar and mourner's bench must cease to be regarded as essential to the conversion of the convicted. (98)

Like Weiser, Kurtz contends that the bench is not essential, provided that the principle of giving special attention to the awakened as soon after preaching as possible is maintained.⁹⁹ At the same time, he continues to deny that the bench is in itself an abuse. In response to Nevin's assertion that noise and disorder inevitably result from the use of the bench, Kurtz claims somewhat irrelevantly, that he has heard similar sounds of sobbing and rejoicing on Confirmation days and at Communion observances.¹⁰⁰ Some time later, a contributor pen-named "Allegheny" attempts to close the debate. According to him, the use or non-use of the bench and/or of the Catechism should be left to the judgment of

⁹⁵Ibid. The puzzling punctuation is Weiser's.

⁹⁶Observer, 26 April 1844. ⁹⁷Ibid. ⁹⁸Observer, 9 February 1844.

⁹⁹Observer, 8 March 1844. ¹⁰⁰Observer, 15 March 1845.

each individual pastor. "One man has no right to dictate to another what measures he shall use, nor has a Synod a right to do it."¹⁰¹

The opposition of the Lutheran Standard to the use of the bench shows some evidence of theological growth and development. Before the publication of Nevin's pamphlet, the use of the bench was criticized by the Standard on such grounds as the following: that only ten to twenty percent of the conversions produced by the bench turn out to be lasting; that the churches are thereby filled with "unconverted, ignorant, and presumptuous persons;"¹⁰² that the bench attracts rash young men to the ministry, men lacking "the power, and perhaps the piety, of their teachers."¹⁰³ As a consequence, "Churches have become the sport of division, disorder, and distraction."¹⁰⁴ During the same months as Kurtz published his rebuttal of Nevin, the Standard printed excerpts of Nevin's pamphlet with little commentary but with obvious approval. It declined an offer from the Observer to reprint Kurtz's series, claiming that Kurtz was more zealous for the bench than the Methodists themselves.¹⁰⁵ According to the Standard, any good derived from the bench was a result of the "faithful, earnest preaching of the Word of God," not from the new measures.¹⁰⁶ Here Kurtz most definitely agreed with what the Standard affirmed, while disagreeing with what it denied.

A few months later, the Standard deals with an even more serious aspect of the debate. After relating an anecdote of someone being told

¹⁰¹Observer, 12 December 1845.

¹⁰²Lutheran Standard, 11 January 1843. ¹⁰³*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.* ¹⁰⁵Standard, 1 December 1843.

¹⁰⁶Standard, 29 December 1843.

to go to the mourner's bench if they want to get religion, the Standard's response was: "Go to Christ, brother. We fear that this is not the only instance in which an inquiring soul has been directed to the mourner's bench instead of to Christ."¹⁰⁷ As we have already seen,¹⁰⁸ Kurtz himself had already agreed, quite clearly and vehemently, that the bench was not to be regarded as the object of salvation. The two periodicals would almost certainly have disagreed, however, as to how widespread and deep that misunderstanding was, both among revival preachers and revival audiences.

By 1850 a Standard contributor with the pen-name "Quintus" spelled out, in a much clearer fashion, the position that the use of the bench could in no way be reconciled with Confessional Lutheranism:

No one can take part in its disorderly abominations without rejecting doctrines that are vital to our system. It materially affects our whole view of regeneration and conversion, as it is taught in our symbols, and as it was held from the beginning. A member of our church cannot present himself there and remain true to his principles. In the very act he virtually denies a portion of that truth, which he has pledged himself faithfully to hold fast.(109)

According to Philip Schaff, Nevin's colleague at Mercersburg, "One might make a book on the anxious bench controversy in the German Church of America . . . ; though the task would hardly be a very profitable or interesting one."¹¹⁰ Schaff's observation raises a question for our consideration and analysis: How might the anxious bench controversy have been made more profitable and edifying for the Church?

¹⁰⁷Standard, 17 May 1844. ¹⁰⁸Above, p. 50.

¹⁰⁹Standard, 25 September 1850.

¹¹⁰Philip Schaff, America, A Sketch of the Political, Social, and Religious Character of the United States of America, (New York, Scribners, 1855, repr., Cambridge, Belknap Press, 1961), p. 158.

The bench controversy might have been more profitable if the protagonists had spent less time with the issue of noise and confusion at public worship. On this particular question, Kurtz may have slightly the better of the argument. While the God whom we worship is "not a God of confusion but of peace" (1 Cor. 14:33), He also exhorts His followers to "make a joyful noise unto the Lord." (Ps. 100:1) In the opinion of the author of this paper, Scripture does not provide a thorough set of standards by which we can with complete confidence differentiate godless confusion from joyful noise in every worship situation. To a certain extent, those criteria must remain both subjective and variable. For example, what God might accept as joyful noise from Sunday School children on Christmas Eve He might very well reject as confusion from a trained seminary chorus. An illustration from the author's personal experience might also be helpful. In his first parish, he was asked to solemnize a marriage in a migrant labor camp. That congregation was edified when worshipers said "Amen" and "That's right, brother" as the Scriptures were read. In the author's regular parish, the same behavior would have been an unedifying cause of discord and contention. Therefore it may go too far to claim, as Nevin seems to, that every occurrence of emotional excitement at a revival proves that the scene is one of godless confusion.

In the second place, the bench controversy might have been more profitable if Lutheran critics of its use had not relied as heavily as they did upon Nevin as their chief spokesman. It is, of course, grossly unfair to expect a man with such deep Presbyterian roots and solid Reformed convictions to think and write like a Confessional Lutheran.

From the Lutheran perspective, however, Nevin's pamphlet suffers from some serious flaws.

For one thing, Nevin agrees with his opponents in accepting the false distinction between awakening and conversion. "When any sinner begins to be sensible (of his guilt before God) he is so far awakened and under conviction."¹¹¹ As we have already seen,¹¹² our Confessions implicitly deny that there is a third class of human beings intermediate between believers and unbelievers. According to Nevin, the awakened sinner must then be confronted with one important question, "will he repent and yield his heart to God or not?"¹¹³ Here Nevin implicitly agrees with his opponents in defining conversion as surrender or submission. Such a definition differs subtly but significantly from the Confessional definition: "that kind of change . . . whereby man through such working of the Holy Spirit is able to accept the proffered grace" (FC, SD, II, 83). The former definition confuses justification and sanctification; the latter does not.

Nevin also confuses justification and sanctification when he tells us "The sinner is saved then by an inward living union with Christ."¹¹⁴ According to our Confessions, "this indwelling of God is not the righteousness of faith of which St. Paul speaks" (FC, SD, III, 54). As a result of this error, Nevin, again in common with his opponents, assumes that a genuine conversion can be reliably detected by the

¹¹¹Yrigoyen, p. 59.

¹¹²Above, Chapter II, pp. 15 - 17.

¹¹³Yrigoyen, p. 60.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 107.

external evidence of change in a person's behavior.¹¹⁵ Both Nevin and his opponents ignore the apt insight of their contemporary, Wilhelm Loehe, that holiness of life cannot serve as a certain sign of the true Church.¹¹⁶

In short, both Nevin and his opponents agreed, to some extent, about the message they proclaimed. Awakened sinners were to be told to yield their hearts to God and give evidence of a genuine conversion in changed behavior. They disagreed over one of the measures to be used in communicating that message. Nevin vehemently asserted that the bench (broadly defined) hindered and obscured that message, even usurping the place of the cross. With equal vehemence, his opponents maintained that the bench (narrowly defined) clarified the message and led the awakened to the cross swiftly and surely. From a Confessional Lutheran perspective, the real problem should have been with the message rather than the measure. According to the available evidence, Lutheran opponents of the bench were not yet making that point in the early 1840s. The Standard's less than critical use of Nevin's pamphlet may have delayed their doing so.

In other respects, Nevin's theology was superior to that of his opponents. Nevin deplored the shallow description of sin as "the offspring of a particular will,"¹¹⁷ a view which he attributes to Nathanael Taylor and regards as at the soul of the bench system.¹¹⁸ Nevin's own view describes sin as "a general and universal force which

¹¹⁶Wilhelm Loehe, Three Books Concerning the Church, trans. Edward T. Horn, (Reading, PA, Pilger Publishing House, 1908), p. 139. (The German edition was published in 1844).

¹¹⁷Yrigoyen, p. 106. ¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 107n.

includes and rules the entire existence of the individual man from the very start,"¹¹⁹ a position Nevin finds in Article II of our Augsburg Confession.¹²⁰ Moreover, Nevin reverses the individualistic understanding of the Church implicitly held by most revivalists. "The Church is in no sense the product of individual Christianity . . . but individual Christianity is the product, always and entirely, of the Church."¹²¹ When this viewpoint prevails, infants born in the church are treated as members from the beginning, while the Christian nurture of children and families is conducted much more faithfully and effectively than it can be under the bench system.¹²²

This leads us to consider a third and final item of evaluation. The bench controversy would surely have been more profitable if the protagonists had come to grips more clearly with the following question: What is the Church's primary purpose and reason for existence? Both sides plainly stated different answers to this question; neither side developed their answers to an adequate depth. Simeon Harkey clearly articulates the new measures understanding of the Church's mission: "We have one great and glorious object in view . . . the regeneration and sanctification of souls; . . . and if this grand and glorious object be only accomplished to the utmost possible extent, we care but little by what means."¹²³ Nevin's response is shorter but

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 106. ¹²⁰Ibid., p. 106n.

¹²¹Ibid., p. 111. ¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Simeon W. Harkey, The Church's Best State or Constant Revivals of Religion, (Baltimore: Publication Rooms, 1842), p. 108. (italics given).

equally clear: "We must not do wrong, even to gain a soul for heaven."¹²⁴

These two statements epitomize one of the most important issues of the bench controversy, a question with which Lutherans and other Christians of the late twentieth century continue to wrestle. Harkey's statement implies that one phrase from the great Commission, "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19), is of paramount importance. It is THE organizing principle for any and all ecclesiastical activity, the real reason for the Church's existence. If this premise is accepted, virtually any means to the God-pleasing goal of making disciples can be and has been justified. Living, as we do, in a culture permeated by pragmatism and infected with an excessive success orientation, it is understandable that sincere, well-meaning revivalists made use of the bench and concomitant measures as a means for reaching their God-pleasing goal. It worked. That they became upset, bewildered, and somewhat defensive when the bench was attacked by men who professed to share their goal of revival is equally understandable. In their opinion, the argument was strictly about means to the same end, and, to repeat ourselves, the bench "worked."

Nevin's line reminds us that the command to make disciples must not be torn from its context. The Lord specified two means by which the church is to accomplish her mission, Baptism into the Name of the Triune God and "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). The implication is clear. The Church must not attempt to make disciples by any words or deeds which contradict the clearly revealed whole counsel of God.

¹²⁴Yrigoyen, p. 37. (italics given)

Confessional Lutherans might have elaborated on Nevin's terse line in the following manner: We must not torture any of the souls who hear our proclamation of law and Gospel by treating them as awakened but not yet converted - even though the Spirit, in undeserved mercy, often converts those whom the revivalists treat in such a manner. We must not give anyone who hears our message the impression that they can, or must, make a self-determined decision to submit to Christ and convert themselves - even though the Spirit, in undeserved mercy, often moves those who have responded at the antique bench or modern altar call to genuine faith in Christ and not to trust in themselves. We must not tell our hearers that they are justified by the life of Christ in them, or make any legalistic demands that they validate their conversion by some specific changes in behavior - even though the Spirit, in undeserved mercy, may sanctify and keep in true faith those brought into the Church by heterodox preachers hawking such errors. The primary reason for the Church's existence is faithful hearing of and worshipful response to the whole counsel of God. When this is primary, we will not succumb to temptations to do wrong in order to win souls. We will do right, and we will make disciples, by God's grace, guidance, and power.

Had Lutheran opponents of the bench come to grips with this issue at greater depth, the controversy might have been more profitable. As members of a Church still struggling with the same issues one and one-half centuries later, it would be unfair to criticize them too much for their failure to do so.

CHAPTER IV
NEW MEASURES AND THE MEANS OF GRACE

According to Article Five of the Augsburg Confession, the Holy Spirit works through the Gospel and the Sacraments, as through means, to effect justifying faith, when and where He pleases, in those who hear the Gospel. The article condemns those who teach that the Holy Spirit comes to us through our own preparations, thoughts, and works without the external word of the Gospel. The Article implies that the means of grace are both necessary and sufficient for accomplishing the mission of the church.

In his Lectures on Revivals of Religion, Charles G. Finney expresses a much different understanding of the means of grace. "Under the Gospel dispensation, God has established no particular system of measures to be employed and invariably adhered to in promoting religion."¹ Instead, "it was left to the discretion of the Church to determine, from time to time, what measures shall be adopted, and what forms pursued, in giving the Gospel its power."² Later in the same work, Finney makes it plain that he includes Baptism among those measures which the church is to use at its own discretion. According to Finney, the apostles used Baptism for the same purpose as

¹Charles G. Finney, Lectures on Revivals of Religion, (New York: Fleming H. Revel, 1868), p. 238 (Italics given).

²Ibid.

nineteenth century Evangelists used the anxious bench. When those who heard the apostolic proclamation were baptized, "It held the precise place that the anxious seat does now, as a public manifestation of their determination to be Christians."³ To sum things up, the Confessional position is that Christians are created by the Spirit working through the Gospel and Sacraments. Therefore the Church's discretionary wisdom is bound by and subordinate to those means of grace. For Finney the means of grace are tools subject to the Church's discretionary wisdom, tools in the same category as protracted meetings, the anxious bench, and other new measures.

On this issue, Lutheran theologians who supported new measures tended to agree with Finney rather than with the Confessions. They differed from the Confessions in at least two ways. First, they altered the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Sacraments. As a result, they also confused the divinely appointed means of grace with the ways of human wisdom by which people either have their interest in hearing the Gospel aroused or are encouraged to respond to it.

Even a work whose stated purpose is to sustain the Augsburg Confession, Samuel Schmucker expresses both errors. In his words: "Means of grace are all those things which God employs to present divine truth to the minds of men, and urge them to obey it, and in connection with which he bestows the immediate influences of his Holy Spirit."⁴ Once

³Ibid., p. 254.

⁴Samuel Simon Schmucker, Lutheran Manual on Scriptural Principles, or, The Augsburg Confession, Illustrated and Sustained, (Philadelphia, Lindsay and Blakiston, 1855), p. 101.

the Spirit does His work in connection with the Sacraments rather than through them, the Sacraments are reduced to "symbolic exhibitions of divine truth."⁵ Baptism merely exhibits "the doctrines of natural depravity and the purifying influence of the Holy Spirit." The Lord's Supper is "a symbolic and affecting exhibition of the facts of the atoning death of the Son of God."⁶ Schmucker summarizes his position in two general propositions on the means of grace.

- 1) The means of grace do possess a natural tendency to produce the changes requisite for salvation. . . . but they cannot exert a sufficiently powerful influence on the impaired powers of fallen man.
- 2) The Scriptures teach us that these means are not sufficient to awaken, convert, and sanctify the soul, without the superadded immediate influences of the Holy Spirit.(7)

If the work of the Spirit is "superadded" to the Sacraments, rather than presented in and through them, Schmucker is able to raise such activities as church discipline and prayer to the level of the sacraments and preaching as exhibitions of truth.⁸ A similar category mistake is made by three of Schmucker's contemporaries. In Why Are You A Lutheran, Benjamin Kurtz lumps together the divinely appointed means and the responses of believers under the heading of "means of edification

⁵Ibid., p. 102.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., p. 104. Schmucker expresses the same position in his Elements of Popular Theology, (Philadelphia: S. S. Miles, 1845) pp. 176-178. A thorough defense of the position that the work of the Holy Spirit is "superadded" to the means of grace is found a generation later in Samuel Sprecher, Groundwork of a System of Evangelical Lutheran Theology, (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1879), pp. 390-424.

⁸Schmucker, Lutheran Manual, p. 102.

and usefulness."⁹ Simeon W. Harkey, as we have already seen,¹⁰ cared little by what means the church accomplished her great goal of regenerating and sanctifying souls. He also regarded prayer and individual effort as means which God has promised to bless in bringing about revivals, means on the same level as the preaching of the word.¹¹

This understanding of the Sacraments is connected more clearly with new measures in the series "Thoughts on Revivals," which appeared in the July and August 1828 editions of Lutheran Magazine. The series had the whole-hearted endorsement of George Lintner, a leader in the founding of the revivalistic Hartwick Synod, long-time Pastor of the Lutheran congregation in Schoharie, New York, and editor of Lutheran Magazine.¹² Lintner recognizes that it is necessary to distinguish between "revivals themselves - the blessed work of the Holy Spirit - and the human inventions and accompaniments, by which mistaken and wicked men too often pervert them."¹³ He draws that distinction between those who suppose that extraordinary measures are absolutely necessary for revivals, and those who consider ordinary means sufficient, if they are used with extraordinary zeal and

⁹ Benjamin Kurtz, Why Are You A Lutheran?, (Baltimore: Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1844), pp. 141-149.

¹⁰ Above, Ch. III, p. 56.

¹¹ Simeon W. Harkey. The Church's Best State, or, Constant Revivals of Religion (Baltimore: Publication Rooms, 1842), p. 117.

¹² For the founding of the Hartwick Synod and its publication of Lutheran Magazine, see Harry J. Kreider, History of the United Lutheran Synod of New York and New England, 2 vols., (Philadelphia, Muhlenberg Press, 1954), 1: 70-94.

¹³ Lutheran Magazine, II, (2 Aug 1828): 164.

faithfulness.¹⁴ Lintner speaks a strong warning against making any extraordinary means more important to revivals than divine ordinances. He is forcefully in favor of "using the ordinary means of grace with extraordinary diligence and faithfulness."¹⁵ Unfortunately, when he lists those ordinary means of grace, Lintner displays the same confusion which we have found in Schmucker, Kurtz, and Harkey. His list includes not only the sacraments and the preaching of the word, but also "the observance of the Sabbath, the public service of the sanctuary, reading the Scripture, the communion of saints, and secret prayer."¹⁶ That such a list assumes a sub-Lutheran understanding of the means of grace is made explicit when Lintner tells us: "Many of the ordinary means of grace are evidently of divine appointment."¹⁷

We should not be surprised to find a similar confusion between the means of grace and the measures of men among pro-revival contributors to the Lutheran Observer. On the one hand, we find a sincere desire to give all of the credit for revivals to the Spirit and the Word. "Nothing but the word of God, faithfully preached, will prove effectual in producing a real conversion of the sinner."¹⁸ Revivals are produced "By the agency of the Spirit of God through the instrumentality of a faithful and persevering administration of the ordinances of his house."¹⁹ "A genuine revival of religion is not the work of man, but of God's Holy Spirit."²⁰ Unfortunately, the authors

¹⁴Ibid., p. 162. ¹⁵Ibid., p. 163. (italics given)

¹⁶Ibid., p. 162. ¹⁷Ibid. (italics added)

¹⁸Lutheran Observer, 1 August 1832. ¹⁹Observer, 3 February 1837.

²⁰Observer, 9 October 1840. (italics given)

of the last two citations reveal some confusion by including prayer among the means of grace. A later article asserts that, while the Church relies for revivals wholly on preaching and prayer, and looks "to the Holy Spirit for efficiency and to God for the blessing," at the same time means and measures employed are to be seen as "incidental and subordinate matters," and left in the realm of Christian liberty. "Any measures recommended by wisdom and sanctioned by the Bible may be resorted to by ministers and people."²¹

Such confusion was communicated to lay-people in Lutheran parishes. As evidence, consider the following set of resolutions on new measures, adopted by the elders and deacons of the parish in the area of Bloody Run, (now Everett) Pennsylvania:

- 3) We believe that no man can "work out his salvation" without the aid of the Holy Spirit
- 4) We believe that the Spirit operates through the instrumentality of means, and that we have no right to expect his influence without the use of means.
- 5) We believe that the means which the Spirit employs are very numerous and diversified, and that Christians, to obtain the influence of the Spirit, may make use of any means which are not contrary to the holy Scriptures.

In resolutions 6, 7, and 8, the parish gives its whole-hearted approval to protracted meetings, prayer meetings, and the mourner's bench respectively.²² The resolutions make it plain that the three activities endorsed are regarded as means through which the Holy Spirit accomplishes his saving work.

Other Observer correspondents do not trust that the means of grace will be efficacious without the aid and support of new measures.

²¹Observer, 12 September 1845. ²²Observer, 24 January 1845.

One correspondent, from North Carolina, applauds the following assertion by John George Schmucker: "more permanent good is to be effected during one well conducted Special Conference than by ordinary preaching during six months."²³ Another, using the pen name "Schwartz," wonders why so many Lutherans join the Methodists. Part of his answer is that, while orthodox ministers do a good job of preaching the Word, that is not sufficient. "They do not follow up their preaching with such other means as are essential to complete the work of a sinner's recovery and reformation."²⁴ Still another article, lifted without one word of disapproval from the periodical Puritan, blatantly reduces the means of grace to the level of purely human activity. "Anxious sinner, lean not upon any man. Trust not in any of the means of grace. . . . You will never be saved so long as you lean on the prop of human strength. . . . Trust no longer in man, but go directly to Jesus."²⁵

The confusion which the new measure men display when discussing the means of grace in general is revealed even more clearly when they treat Baptism in particular. According to our Confessions, "Baptism is not a work which we do but is a treasure which God gives us and faith grasps." As God's work, the water to which the Gospel Word is attached saves, delivers from sin, death and the Devil, and regenerates. Therefore the water incorporated with God's Word is itself an "object to which faith is attached and bound." As God's work, Baptism demands faith, and is of no use without it. Nevertheless, even if it is not

²³Observer, 16 August 1839.

²⁴Observer, 2 July 1841. (*italics added*)

²⁵Observer, 8 April 1842.

received in faith, Baptism itself remains "an infinite, divine treasure" (LC, IV, 23-37).

Schmucker's Baptismal theology is consistent with his position that the work of the Spirit is "superadded" to the Sacraments, rather than present in and through them.²⁶ To him, Baptism "figuratively represents the process of spiritual purification."²⁷ While Schmucker acknowledges that Baptism is termed "the washing of regeneration" and "represented as a means to attain the pardon of sin," he attributes these great advantages to the "immediate influences of the Holy Spirit."²⁸ Schmucker is sure that such influences work upon the sincere adult subject, but is not sure of the extent to which they are exerted upon infants before the years of discretion.²⁹ Schmucker finds no Scriptural explanation of the precise connection between Baptism and forgiveness, but is sure "the sincerity of the adult subject must be regarded as essential to any such result."³⁰ In this section, it is not completely clear whether Schmucker is agreeing with the Confessions that Baptism is of no use without faith, or denying that Baptism is a genuine offer of grace prior to and apart from faith. In the next section, however, Schmucker echoes Finney in reducing Baptism to the level of a method "Adopted to elicit the immediate decision of the awakened and penitent sinner."³¹ In the final analysis, Schmucker also

²⁶Above, p. 61.

²⁷Schmucker, Elements, p. 241.

²⁸Ibid., p. 273, (Italics given) ²⁹Ibid., pp. 273-274.

³⁰Ibid., p. 274. ³¹Ibid., p. 276.

reduces Baptism to a tool subject to the Church's discretionary wisdom, rather than seeing it as a means of grace to which the Church is bound.

While Schmucker affirms that some sort of regeneration is effected by the Spirit through the means of Baptism, contributors to the Observer, perhaps picking up on Schmucker's echoes of Finney, often explicitly deny that Baptism is an efficacious means of regeneration. "Schwartz," for example, wonders whether there has ever been a case in which "Baptismal regeneration has proved efficacious in the salvation of a soul independent of all other means?"³² As proof that his question cannot be answered positively, he points to all the baptized adults whose daily lives reveal that they have not been renewed. Such persons can only be regenerated by "the direct and special agency of the Holy Ghost."³³ Kurtz himself expresses amazement that Episcopalians of the modern nineteenth century still believe that infants are regenerated by "the sprinkling of a little water on their faces."³⁴ Observer correspondents also echoed Schmucker³⁵ in denying that infants exercise faith. One of them writes: "If it can be shown that infants are capable of understanding the Gospel, so that it produces faith in their hearts, then we will say that they may be regenerated in Baptism." He goes on to relate an anecdote about two children of an orthodox Lutheran pastor who got into a spat while their father was defending Baptismal regeneration to a new measures man. The correspondent considered such behavior an argument against infant

³²Observer, 30 July 1841. ³³*Ibid.*

³⁴Observer, 18 February 1842.

³⁵Schmucker, Lutheran Manual, p. 139.

baptism "too powerful to be resisted."³⁶

As the above citations suggest, the weakness of new measure men in their Baptismal theology was connected to deficient definitions of faith and regeneration. Their definition of faith restricted it to those who are capable of cognitive understanding. Their concept of regeneration seems to have totally ignored the truth that during this age believers remain simul justus et peccator. Ignoring this truth made it temptingly easy to see in every lapse into sin proof that the sinner was not regenerate, thus confusing justification and sanctification.

There is also some evidence that the weakness of new measures men in their baptismal theology had a baneful effect on the practical life of their congregations and synods. As early as 1839, President Jacob Senderling of the Hartwick Synod laments that there has been a steady decline in the number of infant baptisms throughout the eight-year history of that revivalistic church body. The decline has been accompanied by a great neglect of the Christian training of baptized children.³⁷ The possibility that new measures might be the cause of that decline, rather than the cure, does not seem to have occurred to Pastor Senderling. However, it is probably unfair for us who evaluate his situation from a later time and place to expect that he would come to such a conclusion.

By the mid-1840s, as the new measures controversy began to be overshadowed by a larger issue, the rising tide of Confessional

³⁶Observer, 13 August 1847.

³⁷Observer, 8 November 1839.

loyalty also lifted the boat of Baptismal regeneration. As we have already seen,³⁸ in 1846 a district of the Ohio Synod resolved that those who denied baptismal regeneration could not be recognized as genuine Lutheran preachers. A brief but fairly thorough defense of the doctrine was published by the Standard several months later.³⁹ The Observer attempted to resist the rising tide with a variety of arguments that lack complete consistency with each other. One correspondent charges proponents of baptismal regeneration with "fundamental errors."⁴⁰ He asserts that none of Luther's exegetical writings on the doctrine of justification by faith alone mention baptism in connection with that work,⁴¹ an argument from silence which ignores all that Luther asserts in the Large Catechism. Another article charges those who affirm baptismal regeneration with the Roman error of ex opere operato.⁴² On the other hand, there were contributors who regarded baptismal regeneration as a non-essential doctrine on which Christians could with a clear conscience agree to disagree.⁴³ They professed that they were "by no means violent" in condemning those with whom they disagreed on this subject.⁴⁴

During most of the period under investigation, there is no evidence of controversy concerning the doctrine of the Lord's Supper between proponents of new measures and other Lutherans. E. Clifford

³⁸Above, Ch. I, p. 4.

³⁹Lutheran Standard, 15 November 1847.

⁴⁰Observer, 13 August 1847. ⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Observer, 6 August 1837. ⁴³Observer, 7 January 1848.

⁴⁴Observer, 2 August 1844.

Nelson's description of Communion practices during the Colonial period is probably accurate for the first decades of the nineteenth century. The Sacrament was offered rather infrequently, one or two times a year in rural parishes, three to six times a year in city and small town congregations. Moreover, as a fruit of their European Pietistic heritage, a very strong emphasis was placed upon self-examination by the communicants. Only when they were sure that they had attained a true change of heart could they consider themselves worthy guests at the Lord's table. Pastors frequently counselled those whom they considered unworthy, as well as their spouses, to postpone participation in the Sacrament.⁴⁵ While Nelson claims that intercommunion between Lutheran and Reformed Christians was rare, even in union congregations,⁴⁶ Matthias Loy asserts that "promiscuous Communion troubled no one's conscience" early in the period this paper is studying.⁴⁷

Throughout the period, Lutherans, such as those in the Joint Synod of Ohio, who were growing in their opposition to new measures, also tended to move toward a stricter practice of close Communion.⁴⁸ New measures proponents, on the other hand, tended to persist for a longer time in the weaknesses of the earlier Eucharistic understanding

⁴⁵E. Clifford Nelson, ed., The Lutherans in North America, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), pp. 70-71.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 70.

⁴⁷Matthias Loy, Story of My Life, Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1905), p. 96.

⁴⁸Willard Allbeck, A Century of Lutherans in Ohio, (Yellow Springs, Ohio: Antioch Press), 1966, p. 173.

and practice. Rather frequently, they used a congregational "Communion season" as the launching pad for a protracted meeting.⁴⁹ On other occasions, a large Communion service was the climax of a protracted meeting.⁵⁰ The Observer encouraged unionistic cooperation between Lutheran and Reformed pastors in organizing special conferences for revivals.⁵¹ It reported several instances of unionistic protracted meetings,⁵² and a few of unionistic Communion services.⁵³ Kurtz regarded the blessings which flowed from one such revival as strong proof that no important differences existed between the Lutheran and Reformed churches.⁵⁴

The new measure men also persisted in the Pietistic emphasis upon the worthiness of the communicant. For at least one of them, a fear that people might regard the Sacrament and its elements as the objects of faith far outweighed his desire that they receive its benefits. Rev. Ezra Keller reports refusing the Sacrament to a dying man who requested it "because I believed that he might be injured by it, inasmuch as he would probably base all his hopes of salvation upon that ordinance."⁵⁵ Later in his career Keller expressed concern that the

⁴⁹Observer, 6 October 1837, 17 January 1840, 23 February 1849.

⁵⁰Observer, 15 January 1841. ⁵¹Observer, 25 November 1836.

⁵²Observer, 31 July 1835, 12 February 1841, 4 December 1846.

⁵³Observer, 14 April 1837, 8 May 1846.

⁵⁴Observer, 15 December 1837.

⁵⁵Michael Diehl, Biography of Rev. Ezra Keller, D.D., (Springfield, Ohio: Ruralist Publishing, 1859), p. 163. Diehl, a pupil of Keller's at Wittenberg, composed this Biography from Keller's journals, interspersed with a few comments of his own. The incident cited occurred while Keller was pastor of Hagerstown, Md., in 1842.

German distribution formula used at an old measure congregation near Wooster, Ohio, "might be calculated to make the impression on their minds that the elements themselves were the blessing of the feast."⁵⁶ In this attitude, Keller is consistent with the Sacramental theology he learned from Schmucker at Gettysburg. If, as Schmucker claimed, the work of the Spirit is "superadded" to the Sacrament rather than present in and through the elements by God's promise, then it is more important that people be kept from idolizing the elements than it is that they receive blessings which may or may not be present.

Toward the end of the period under investigation, the increase in Confessional loyalty also revealed that there were doctrinal differences concerning the Lord's Supper among Lutherans in America. On this front, as on others, the Observer and Standard were used as polemical artillery pieces. In 1846, the Observer published an abstract of the doctrines of the Maryland Synod affirming the position of one party: "Neither do the Scriptures warrant the belief that Christ is present in the Lord's Supper in any other than a spiritual manner."⁵⁷ The position of the other party was epitomized in the Standard several months later: "the Lutheran Church . . . asserts the substantial, real (not physical or local) sacramental presence of the body and blood of Christ, which are received by all the communicants, whether worthy or unworthy."⁵⁸ As the earlier controversy became absorbed and overshadowed by the later issue, new measure men tended to

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 239. (italics given)

⁵⁷Observer, 26 November 1846.

⁵⁸Standard, 15 September 1847. (italics given)

adopt the first position. Since the Sacrament was a tool subject to the Church's discretion, they agreed with Schmucker that, with respect to understanding the manner and significance of our Lord's Eucharistic presence, freedom to disagree must be granted.⁵⁹ Those who opposed new measures tended to come around to the position that such "freedom" was an intolerable indifference to and apostasy from God's Word, and displayed a preference for human reason to Scripture.⁶⁰

⁵⁹Standard, 15 April 1846. ⁶⁰Ibid.

CHAPTER V
NEW MEASURES AND CATECHETICAL INSTRUCTION

"The spirit of the anxious bench is at war with the spirit of the Catechism."¹ So John W. Nevin asserts in the polemical pamphlet which we examined at some length in Chapter III. Toward the end of that work, Nevin shares his vision of the system of the Catechism. It included "A ministry apt to teach, sermons full of unction and light," and "patient perseverance in the details of the ministerial work" as well as catechetical instruction itself.² Nevin strongly encouraged Christian families to employ such instruction faithfully, in accordance with the injunction recorded in Deuteronomy 6.³

Unlike Nevin, leading Lutheran proponents of new measures did not find such practices incompatible with catechetical instruction. In fact, the first generation of such leaders strongly urged their followers to continue the practice. According to Samuel Schmucker, "the fathers would not sanction the neglect of catechization."⁴ An editorial in Lutheran Magazine regrets that a few pastors have given up the custom because of criticism from other denominations. While the

¹Charles Yrigoyen and George Bricker, eds., Catholic and Reformed Selected Writings of John Williamson Nevin (Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1978), p. 101.

²Ibid. ³Ibid., p. 113.

⁴Schmucker Papers 3450.0001, in the archives of Lutheran Theological Seminary, Gettysburg, Pa., (not dated).

pastor may make exceptions once in a great while, "He should act upon the general principle of admitting none to church membership, without having previously passed through a regular course of catechetical instruction."⁵ The editorial goes on to claim that "Our ministers, generally, are found diligent and faithful in the catechetical instruction of the youth of their congregations."⁶

Benjamin Kurtz takes direct issue with Nevin on the relationship between catechization and new measures in a lengthy article in the Observer. Describing Nevin's position as an "absurdity," Kurtz asserts that the two systems "are intimately connected and mutually support each other." He describes their reciprocal relationship in the following manner: "The Catechism opens the way for a resort to new measures; and new measures prepare and incline the people to welcome the Catechism and submit to its teachings." Kurtz also claimed that "those of our ministers who are most favorable to . . . new measures, prize the Catechism as highly, and use it as faithfully and successfully, . . . as any others."⁷

Two claims in this article call for deeper examination and evaluation. First, when Kurtz talks about catechetical instruction, he does not understand its audience or purpose in the same way as Nevin does. For Nevin, "Infants born in the Church are regarded and treated as members of it from the beginning."⁸ In their case, instruction quietly and gradually quickens and nurtures a living relationship to

⁵Lutheran Magazine, 4, (July 1830), 63.

⁶Ibid. ⁷Lutheran Observer, 2 July 1847.

⁸Nevin, The Anxious Bench, in Yrigoyen, p. 111.

God which precedes it.⁹ Kurtz, on the other hand, seems to claim that the only purpose of religious instruction is to awaken a person's heart and produce in him "a sincere desire to consecrate himself to God."¹⁰ Harkey makes this more explicit. To him the chief, if not the only, object of catechetical instruction is "to awaken and convert sinners and bring them to Jesus Christ."¹¹ Thus both men reveal that they are operating with a Pietistic understanding of the purpose of catechetics and Confirmation.¹²

The same Pietistic understanding (or misunderstanding) of catechetics and Confirmation is reflected in several of the reports and articles submitted to the Lutheran Observer. In some cases, the reports indicate that revivals preceded the organization of a catechetical class. For example, after a revival in Ray's Hill, Pennsylvania, twenty-four people volunteered for the pastor's next class. The reporter came to the following conclusion "Thus you see the anxious seat does not supersede the necessity of catechizing, but only prepares the way for it."¹³

In many more cases, however, the process was reversed.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Benjamin Kurtz, Why Are You a Lutheran? (Baltimore: Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1944), p. 184.

¹¹Simeon W. Harkey, The Church's Best State, or, Constant Revivals of Religion (Baltimore: Publication Rooms, 1842), p. 124.

¹²For a thorough treatment of the Pietistic approach to catechetics and Confirmation, and of its practice in the United States during the period under discussion, see Arthur C. Repp, Confirmation in the Lutheran Church, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), pp. 68-76 and 95-106.

¹³Observer, 26 January 1844.

Catechetical instruction was used to prepare the way for some sort of revival service and conversion experience. In some reports, the period of instruction was lengthy. F. Heyer indicates that he labored sporadically at catechesis for ten months (September 1818 - June 1819) before "it pleased the Lord to pour out his spirit upon some of the catechumens."¹⁴ A report from another congregation indicates that the Pastor began catechization three months before a planned revival.¹⁵ Other reports do not specify a length of time for the process, but do say that "we are in the habit of holding catechetical instruction a convenient length of time previous to the time of our communion."¹⁶ Whether the period of instruction precedes or follows the revival meeting, however, no contributor to the Observer reports confirming or communing catechumens who have not participated in some sort of revival experience.

Other revival reports strongly suggest, even if they do not explicitly state, that revival converts were confirmed and/or admitted to Communion after a minimal or virtually non-existent period of instruction. N. Van Alstine reports that a protracted meeting began in Summit, New York in November of 1837 and resulted in the confirmation of twenty members in December of the same year.¹⁷ J. P. Shindel reports that a four day protracted meeting in Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania resulted in the communication of some fifty or sixty people who had had no intention of coming to the Lord's Table before the meeting began.¹⁸ William Thomson reports the unusual practice of holding two Communion

¹⁴Observer, 16 April 1841. ¹⁵Observer, 11 February 1848.

¹⁶Observer, 24 December 1841. ¹⁷Observer, 26 January 1838.

¹⁸Observer, 15 January 1841.

services during one protracted meeting so those who had joined the church after the first service might also receive the Sacrament.¹⁹ In all of these instances, it is possible that the communicants had participated in a more lengthy period of instruction before the revival commenced, but it is far from clear that they did so. Similar ambiguity can be found in reports of revivals from St. Thomas, Pennsylvania;²⁰ Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania;²¹ Taneytown, Maryland;²² and Iredell County, North Carolina.²³

Now if, as the revivalists perceived it, new measures and catechesis both have the same object, namely the awakening and conversion of the sinner, it was possible to conclude that in those situations where new measures accomplished that objective all by themselves, catechetical instruction was completely unnecessary. It was not long before practitioners of new measures acted on that conclusion. Already in 1841, an account of a revival in Washingtonville, Ohio, admits that converts from such meetings "who possess the qualifications required by our discipline . . . are received whether they have been attending a course of instruction or not."²⁴ In 1844 "Solomon" (almost certainly Solomon Ritz, a pastor in the English Synod of Ohio) admits that he no longer uses the catechism for three reasons, the first of which is that people out west are not inclined to learn it.²⁵

Kurtz seems to have been quite sincere in his conviction that

¹⁹Observer, 4 February 1848. ²⁰Observer, 14 November 1834.

²¹Observer, 29 May 1835. ²²Observer, 28 October 1836.

²³Observer, 24 November 1837. ²⁴Observer, 24 December 1841.

²⁵Observer, 16 August 1844.

catechization was to be encouraged. He finds Solomon's reasons for neglecting it "rather lame" and suggests that Solomon and his brother pastors must shoulder much of the responsibility for the poor attitudes of their parishioners.²⁶ Kurtz, however, did not seem to realize how deep-seated and widespread the neglect of the Catechism had actually become. In response to the report by William Thomson that he had confirmed and communed some converts one week after they came to faith,²⁷ Kurtz reminded his readers that "true religion and stability in its service require Light in the head as well as love in the heart."²⁸ He encouraged Thomson to lose no time in gathering the converts for a thorough course of instruction.²⁹ Apparently, however, Kurtz considered Thomson's practice a rare exception to the faithful practice of catechesis by new measure men. The editor of the Lutheran Standard, Christian Spielman, was quick to set him straight. In a lengthy article,³⁰ he claims that it would be far easier to enumerate the few new measure men who were faithful to the Catechism than to list all those who were not. Without naming names, Spielman cites two examples of clergy who upon examination revealed that they were totally ignorant of the meaning of confirmation and the contents of the Catechism. He closes by saying that "It appears to us to be high time for the Observer to examine more closely the actual state of things in the places where the modern spasmodic religion has had full sway."³¹

Why were some new measure men indifferent toward if not hostile

²⁶ Ibid. ²⁷ Observer, 4 February 1848.

²⁸ In Lutheran Standard, 1 March 1848. (italics given)

²⁹ Ibid. ³⁰ Standard, 29 March 1848. ³¹ Ibid., (italics given)

to the system of catechetical instruction? The most important answer seems to be that they did not, like Nevin, perceive catechetical instruction as one ingredient in a life-long system of painstaking pastoral care.³² Instead, they saw it as a hasty, shallow method of admitting into the Church members who were not changed in heart and life. Charles Finney describes his acquaintance with the catechetical customs of the German church in his Memoirs:

A little way from the Village of Evan's Mills was a settlement of germans, . . . once each year they were in the habit of having a dutch minister come up from the Mohawk valley, to administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. He would catechize their children, and receive such of them as had made the required attainments in knowledge. This was the way in which they were made Christians. They were required to commit to memory the catechism, and to be able to answer certain doctrinal questions; whereupon they were admitted to full communion in the church. After receiving Communion they took it for granted that they were Christians, and that all was safe.(33)

Finney's perception that catechesis could be an easy and wide path into the Church for folks who found false security in their head-knowledge was shared by Pietistic Lutherans in all parts of the country. As early as 1832 one Observer correspondent asserts that "The Lutheran practice of confirming and admitting to the Sacrament, all the youth, after a course of catechetical instruction, without regard to religious character, is disastrous to vital godliness."³⁴ The same attitude is seen most clearly and consistently, however, in the Franckean Synod. The territory in which this Synod labored adjoined,

³²Nevin, The Anxious Bench, in Yrigoyen, p. 101.

³³Garth M. Roselle and Richard A. G. Dupuis, The Memoirs of Charles Finney, the Complete Restored Text (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), p. 74.

³⁴Observer, 2 April 1832.

and to some extent overlapped, the region of upstate New York in which Finney conducted his earliest revivals.³⁵ Philip Wieting, one of the most prominent leaders and revivalists of the Synod, claimed that he had been converted by one of Finney's sermons during his years at the Hartwick Seminary, in spite of the fact that in early life he had been instructed and confirmed by his own father.³⁶ In 1844, the Synod's President rejoiced that the anxious seat "is not used as a substitute for the catechism, to afford unconverted persons an entrance into the Church."³⁷ His implication is that unconverted persons can slip into the church by means of instruction and confirmation, but not by means of the revival experience. Beginning in 1845, the Franckean Synod reflected that attitude by changing the rubric under which parishes reported their gains in membership. The heading "by confirmation" was altered to "by profession of faith."³⁸

There is other evidence that Kurtz's hope that new measures and catechesis would work hand in glove was seldom if ever accomplished in the actual life of the Church. We find that evidence in a personal reminiscence, in the Lutheran Standard, in the history of one Synod in

³⁵For a thorough treatment of the Pietistic roots of German Lutherans in that area, see Paul Kuenning, American Lutheran Pietism, Activist and Abolitionist, Ann Arbor, University Microfilm International, 1985.

³⁶Peter A. Strobel, Memorial Volume to Commemorate the Semi-Centennial Anniversary of the Hartwick Synod of the State of New York (Philadelphia: Luthern Publication Society, 1881), p. 116.

³⁷Journal of the Franckean Synod, Parishville, NY. 6 - 10 June 1844, p. 7, (italics given)

³⁸Harry J. Kreider, History of the United Lutheran Synod of New York and New England (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1954), p. 163.

favor of new measures, and in two congregational histories.

Matthias Loy, a leading Lutheran pastor in the Joint Synod of Ohio throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, began to attend the Lutheran congregation in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania while in his teens. He recalls a revival which broke out in 1844 or 1845 while C. W. Schaeffer was pastor. "With many others I presented myself at the 'anxious bench.' But what was offered there was not what I needed." When Loy got up enough nerve to complain to Pastor Schaeffer about the nonsense being fed to him by the revival workers, he was surprised to find that Schaeffer agreed with him and proposed a class of instruction as a better way to meet Loy's spiritual needs. The class was an improvement, but remained, in Loy's view, inadequate. While reluctant to criticize a pastor to whom he owed much, Loy states as a fact that he was confirmed with "no knowledge of Luther's Catechism, or of any catechism." The course was limited to Scripture passages committed to memory by the pupils and explained by a pastoral monologue. "The method was not good, but the work was done well, and we learned the essentials of the way of salvation."³⁹ Here we see that, in at least one case, even when a "moderate" new measure man sincerely tried to combine the revival with instruction, the catechesis was in some respects inadequate.

The pages of the Lutheran Standard suggest that the relationship between new measures and catechesis was one which deteriorated rather rapidly. In the very first issue, Editor Emmanuel Greenwald ranks

³⁹ Matthias Loy, Story of My Life, (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1905), pp. 50-53.

catechetical instruction of youth and children right after faithful preaching of the Gospel and administration of the Sacrament as old measures which build up the Church "wherever they have been faithfully used."⁴⁰ One month later,⁴¹ the Standard grants that catechesis has not been conducted as well as it could be. The deficiency of such instruction was attributed to the fact that pastors had to spread themselves too thin in order to serve several widely scattered parishes. In 1844, as the Standard sees it, "even the revivalists, in general, retain the use of Luther's catechism and other evangelical formulas in the instruction of the young."⁴² By 1847, however, the President of the Joint Synod's English District regrets the growing indifference of many young people toward catechetical instruction. He blames the revivalist notion that people may obtain immediate instruction from the Holy Spirit, if only they "pass through a certain process of highly wrought excitement."⁴³ One year later, as we have already seen,⁴⁴ Editor Christian Spielman claims that only a small minority of new measure men are still serious about catechesis. Later in that same year,⁴⁵ the Standard laments the shameful neglect of the young in large sections of the American Lutheran Church. Not only are the lambs of the flock unfed, some ministers seem to treat them like wolves or little devils. Such ministers, says the Standard, throw away

⁴⁰Standard, 21 September 1842, in Willard Allbeck, A Century of Lutherans in Ohio, (Yellow Springs, Ohio: Antioch Press, 1966), p. 96.

⁴¹Standard, 26 October 1842. ⁴²Standard, 6 April 1844.

⁴³Standard, 3 March 1847. ⁴⁴See above, p. 79.

⁴⁵Standard, 2 August 1848.

their Church's brightest glory, and glory in the shame of reducing their young people "to the level of ignorance and stupidity occupied by the most unscriptural and radical sects in the land."⁴⁶

In 1830, the Western Conference of the New York Ministerium became the independent Hartwick Synod. One of the motives for the separation was "a desire on the part of its founders to conduct revivals."⁴⁷ While the leaders of the Synod seem to have had the good intention of "adhering to the good old Lutheran custom of catechization,"⁴⁸ synodical minutes reveal that those good intentions were seldom fulfilled. While the 1836 Minutes claim that the catechism was recited every week in Sunday School, both the 1845 and 1855 Minutes lament the growing indifference to such instruction.⁴⁹ As late as 1876, the Synod admits that the custom "is among the churches of this Synod largely disregarded" and strongly recommends "an immediate return to this ancient and invaluable custom."⁵⁰

We see a similar pattern in the history of one particular Hartwick Synod congregation, St. Paul Lutheran Church of Berne, New York. Pastor Crownse, who served Berne as part of a multiple parish from 1827 to 1846, customarily gave "a short and concise course of instruction" to new members before admitting them to the Lord's altar.⁵¹ However, "After the year 1846, catechization, in a regular and connected way, was entirely abandoned for more than thirty years, when it was again

⁴⁶Ibid. ⁴⁷Strobel, p. 23. ⁴⁸Ibid., p. 42.

⁴⁹Kreider, pp. 164-165.

⁵⁰Hartwick Synod Minutes, Canajoharie NY 28 Sept. - 3 Oct. 1876, p. 14.

⁵¹Strobel, p. 202.

restored as far as possible in 1877."⁵² During that same thirty-one year period, Berne's several pastors report that their revivals have gained a total of 528 new members.⁵³ At the end of the period, however, the congregation reported a membership of "a little more than two hundred."⁵⁴ That indicates a surprisingly high number of what are known in contemporary jargon as "back door losses." As we have already seen,⁵⁵ George Lintner, one of the most prominent leaders of the Hartwick Synod in her first twenty years, felt that no one should be admitted to Church membership without a regular course of catechetical instruction. Synodical minutes suggest that there was a swift and widespread decline from the diligence which Lintner encouraged. The history of the Berne congregation suggests that his wise counsel should not have been ignored.

Another St. Paul Lutheran Church, this one in Bucyrus, Ohio, made more of an effort to keep new measures and catechesis in a cooperative relationship, but was not completely successful. The congregation was organized in January of 1833 by Rev. Francis J. Ruth.⁵⁶ According to his biography, which is for the most part a compilation of his own journal entries and recollections, Ruth followed the pattern of using catechesis as a preparation for revivals wherever he labored.⁵⁷ Ruth served the Bucyrus congregation until 1852. In that same year his

⁵²Ibid. ⁵³Ibid., pp. 207-211.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 211. ⁵⁵See above, p. 74

⁵⁶J. Crouse, H. L. Wiles, D. W. Smith, (edd.) The Life and Work of Rev. Francis Jacob Ruth, A Pioneer of Lutheranism in Northwestern Ohio, (Plymouth, Ohio: Advertiser Steam Printing House, 1888), p. 44.

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 49, 66.

successor, A. R. Howbert, wrote a constitution which the congregation adopted. Chapter 4, Section V of that document stipulates that Confirmation must be preceded by a course of lectures "unless the Pastor should be satisfied that the applicants' attainments are adequate without this attendance."⁵⁸ Howbert's successor, Rev. J. Crouse, seems to have been too easily satisfied with the attainments of his applicants. On October 4, 1859, the Church Council resolved "that our Pastor be requested to commence a course of catechetical instruction for the benefit of the youth of the church, and all others who may see proper to attend, and that said course begin as soon as convenient."⁵⁹ Pastor Crouse found it convenient to begin on the second Sunday of November, and reported that he had confirmed four people on February 12 and 19, 1860.⁶⁰ On March 15, 1862, the Council resolved to accept into membership all of the applicants who had just been converted at a protracted meeting, with one exception. It was recommended that this one person first attend Sunday School and catechetical lectures.⁶¹

It is noteworthy that Crouse was a protege of Francis Ruth, one of a number of men who began to prepare for the ministry almost immediately after being converted at one of Ruth's revivals.⁶² Their respective attitudes toward catechetics follows a pattern which has been suggesting itself throughout this chapter. The older generation of new measure proponents, men such as Kurtz, Lintner, and Ruth, had

⁵⁸Handwritten History, in the archives of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Bucyrus, Ohio.

⁵⁹Ibid. ⁶⁰Ibid. ⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Crouse, p. 53.

been brought into the Church through catechetical instruction not connected to a revival.⁶³ They sincerely thought that revivals and catechesis could re-enforce each other and encouraged their brethren to retain the time-honored catechetical system. The younger generation of new measure men, brought into the Church by means of a revival, or at least in the atmosphere of revivals, held the practice of catechesis in much less esteem, if they did not reject it as intrinsically lifeless and mechanical.

Toward the end of his life, Francis Ruth gave the following thought-provoking assessment of his own career:

I wish to endorse the utility of protracted meeting . . . securing the revival of believers, and the awakening and conversion of sinners.
But I do believe that more substantial and lasting good can be accomplished by the regular catechization of the young, by instructing them carefully in the doctrines and duties of our holy Christianity, as has been the time-honored custom in the Lutheran Church.(64)

A student of the period can safely speculate that the Church in those days would have been much more strongly edified if Ruth had published that sound advice earlier in his career, and if his proteges had heeded it.

⁶³Ibid., p. 9.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 92.

CHAPTER VI
NEW MEASURES AND THE "OLD ADAM"

Beginning with the dispute between the Hellenists and Hebrews recorded in Acts Chapter 6, every controversy in the Church militant has reminded us that the believer remains simul justus et peccator during this present age. The row over new measures is no exception to that rule. The "old Adam" got the best of saints on both sides of the issue. Members of both parties indulged in invective that demonized all opponents with sweeping generalizations. The sharpest of these arguments tended to center around one of two focal points: the search for the "right kind of" Church member and the search for the "right kind of" pastor.

"Charity leads me to hope," wrote George Lintner, "that the friends of revivals intend to advocate the genuine conversion of souls to Christ; and that their opposers . . . are directing their attacks solely against the abuses and evils" that may accompany revivals.¹ Both the Observer and the Standard expressed their sincere intention to occupy the middle ground delineated by Lintner. Benjamin Kurtz acknowledged that measures which negated the plain instructions of the Bible or ignored the voice of reason "do not come from God but are to be

¹Lutheran Magazine, 2, (1828): 130.

regarded as the effusions of a phrensied brain.² The Standard, for its part, numbered itself among those moderate men who "have always fared badly between ultra partisans." On the one hand, the Standard sensed "the absolute necessity, of purging out fanaticism from our Zion, by all allowable means." On the other hand, said the editor in the same editorial, "we have quite as little sympathy for the means resorted to by some advocates of the Old measure system."³

Despite the best intentions of both publications, the charity with which Lintner wrote and for which he hoped was too easily forgotten. Advocates of revivals were tempted to label all opponents as empty of living faith. According to one of Lintner's Hartwick Synod brethren, such men commonly "apply enthusiasm and fanaticism to anything that looks a little like earnestness and zeal in religion, but they have no names for cold formality and dead stupidity."⁴ Such sweeping generalizations intensified in response to John Nevin's pamphlet against the bench. According to Reuben Weiser, "Few men, but Infidels, or Formalists will be found in the present day, fighting against revivals."⁵ In fact, said Weiser, Nevin's position made him a brother to the rabble which resisted Paul in Thessalonica, and to the Vatican which opposed Luther at the time of the Reformation.⁶ To the Standard, such charges were grossly unfair. "Why always associate with old

²Observer, 2 March 1838.

³Standard, 11 December 1844. ⁴Observer, 8 February 1834.

⁵Reuben Weiser, The Mourner's Bench, or, An Humble Attempt to Vindicate New Measures (Bedford, PA: n.p., 1944), p. 1. The punctuation and capitalization are Weiser's.

⁶Ibid., p. 2.

measures 'lukewarmness,' 'cold indifference,' and 'deadness' in religion?" it asked.⁷ To the Standard, such unfair attacks upon old measures were a clear indication that the new measure system was "weak and rotten."⁸

On the other hand, some old measure men assumed that all Lutheran revivalists indulged in the wildest emotional excesses of the frontier camp meeting. Acting on that assumption, they were carried away at times by polemical prose which shed more heat than light upon the issue. The nadir of such invective was reached by a correspondent who told the Observer:

Instead of less of that disgusting stuff about got-up Revivals, Screaming, Clapping of Hands at the Hypocrite's Bench, you have more of it every week. . . . Alter, for the Lutheran Church's sake, the name of your paper; call it New Measure, Fanatical, Methodistical, Anti-Lutheran Engine, or Advocate of Screaming, Falling, Clapping of Hands, of Hypocrisy and Lies. (9)

When the author, whose signature was deleted, went on to label all Lutheran revivalists as "Judases," deliberately out to lead people astray,¹⁰ he displayed even less of the charity which Lintner had hoped would govern the discussion.

Quite understandably, the Observer regarded any such description of a Lutheran revival as "a monstrous chaos of exaggeration; . . . there is not a friend of new measures in all the church who would subscribe to it."¹¹ On the contrary, new measure men "with scarcely an exception, entirely repudiate all unnecessary noise and disorder."¹² Such expressions of concern for decency and order were expressed frequently.

⁷Standard, 1 March 1844. ⁸Ibid.

⁹Observer, 30 March 1838. (Italics given) ¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Observer, 18 August 1843. ¹²Observer, 17 September 1841.

They seem to have been more than a mere rhetorical reaction to criticism. In material which may not have originally been intended for publication, Ezra Keller tells of a protracted meeting in his Hagerstown, Maryland, parish which died when he resisted the desire of those attending to sing unsuitable tunes.¹³ Later, as he observed a protracted meeting in Ohio, Keller lamented that "the people have unfortunately run into an excess of extravagance in their religious exercises. They are in the habit of groaning aloud, shouting, falling over, etc."¹⁴

Other unedifying arguments in this controversy centered on what may be called the "search for the right kind of members." The seeds for such a search were sown in the General Synod's Formula for Government and Discipline of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The Formula distinguished between the invisible Church, "the collective body of all those . . . who are in a state of grace,"¹⁵ and the visible Church, "the collective body of those who profess the Christian religion."¹⁶ From such definitions the Formula derived the following criterion for membership in a local congregation: Applicants: "shall be obedient subjects of divine grace - that is, they must either be genuine Christians, or satisfy the church council that they are sincerely endeavoring to become such."¹⁷ That criterion assumes that such genuine

¹³Michael Diehl, Biography of Rev. Ezra Keller, D.D. (Springfield, OH: Ruralist Publishing 1859), p. 161.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 241.

¹⁵In Samuel Simon Schmucker, Elements of Popular Theology (Philadelphia: S. S. Miles, 1845), p. 422.

¹⁶Ibid. ¹⁷Ibid., p. 426.

sincerity can be measured by others with a great deal of reliability. Kurtz makes that assumption explicit when he tells us that "holy tempers and affections, and holy living cannot be counterfeited."¹⁸ At any rate, says Kurtz, immediately modifying this extreme claim, the fruit of holy living is "the most conclusive evidence of conversion, . . . the least likely to subject us to mistake or deception."¹⁹

Making external holiness a reliable mark of the Church, and admitting to membership those who were still "endeavoring" to become Christians subjected the proponents of new measures to at least two serious temptations. First, it tempted them to assume that some, if not most, of their externally decent members still needed to be converted by means of a revival. Some rejoiced to report that a revival had converted several in the congregation who were already serving faithfully as Sunday School teachers.²⁰ Jonathan Ruthrauff reported the conversion of "many of our most excellent members" at a revival in Lebanon, Pennsylvania.²¹ J. H. Hoffman claimed that a revival in Wayne County, Ohio had led some "old professors, who had been members of the Church for more that twenty years," to grasp the Gospel for the first time.²²

Some revivalists strongly suggested that only those fruits of holy living which arose after a revival experience could be considered reliable evidence of conversion. In 1843, Simeon Harkey gave the

¹⁸Kurtz, Why Are You A Lutheran? (Baltimore: Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1844), p. 94. (Italics added)

¹⁹Ibid., (Italics added)

²⁰Observer, 12 January 1838, 28 December 1838.

²¹Observer, 12 February 1841. ²²Observer, 13 March 1840.

following assessment of his Frederick, Maryland congregation:

Six years ago when I took charge of this congregation, there were not six persons in it who professed to know anything about a change of heart, and only two men who even prayed in public. Now we have something like 400 converted members, and between 40 and 50 males who lead in prayer. (23)

Emmanuel Greenwald, who had grown up in the Frederick congregation, found Harkey's claims extremely hard to believe. At the time Greenwald served as a parish pastor in Ohio and as Editor of the Standard. In a lengthy article entitled "Lamentable, If True," he recalled the past glories of the Frederick congregation: how the largest house of worship in the city was filled every Sabbath, the crowded Communion table, the well-attended Wednesday evening lecture, as well as a number of thriving auxiliary agencies. Greenwald went on to ask Harkey to consider the possibility that he had imitated the mistake made by Elijah when the prophet badly underestimated the number of faithful Israelites. Greenwald also suggested that Harkey was moved by a desire to glorify his favorite measure or set of measures, and therefore distorted his assessment of the congregation.²⁴

In defense of Harkey, a correspondent using the pen name "Schwartz" asserted that the signs of spiritual life which Greenwald saw in Frederick "do not furnish prima facie [*sic*] evidence of the prevalence of correct moral principle."²⁵ The implication is that new measures can produce such reliable evidence. In his own defense, Harkey charges Greenwald with undermining his ministry and giving glee to every

²³Observer, 7 April 1843.

²⁴Standard, 28 June 1843. ²⁵Observer, 28 July 1843.

infidel and universalist in Frederick.²⁶ At the same time, Harkey admits that "whenever I go into a community to become the Pastor of a Christian people, I am in the habit of seeking closely for the truly pious among them."²⁷ According to Harkey, such an approach is necessary in order to fulfill his pastoral responsibility for the salvation of every soul entrusted to his care.²⁸ Harkey admitted that he could not read the hearts of men, and that the congregation may have been in better shape when Greenwald was growing up in Frederick, and that some of his members may have been converted without going through his revival. At the same time, he claims that the congregation had almost fallen apart before he arrived in 1837, and that all of the congregation's best members professed that they had first been converted at revivals conducted by Harkey.²⁹

During the period under investigation, only one new measure man can be found who warned the Observer of the danger in Harkey's approach. According to this anonymous contributor, one reason revivals are opposed is that "some inconsiderate men insult the members by telling them they are unconverted, merely because their experience may not be so cheering as that of others."³⁰ In contrast, this new measure man states that "In the discharge of my pastoral duties I take it for granted that my people are Christians, although I know that many are not as good as they ought to be."³¹ Exactly how many new measure men approached their congregation with Harkey's attitude, and how many took the approach

²⁶Observer, 18 August 1843. ²⁷Ibid. ²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Observer, 1 August 1843.

³⁰Observer, 11 August 1843. ³¹Ibid.

expressed here, would be difficult to determine.

In addition to the temptation to think that some of their own members were in need of conversion, new measures men were strongly tempted to regard all members of an old measure congregation as indubitably unconverted. Revivalists who served in Ohio seemed especially prone to such an attitude. "Many . . . who were taken into the Church years ago are unconverted, and one great object of our protracted efforts is, to have the church converted first,"³² according to W. J. Sloan. J. Seidle claimed that, when he started another revival, "none of those who professed themselves to be 'Lutherans' could conscientiously say that they had passed from death to life."³³ Solomon Ritz was among the most outspoken in expressing such attitudes. According to him, pastors who merely catechize the young "fill the church with unconverted monsters who will always resist the Holy Ghost as their fathers did."³⁴ Therefore "We have to labor for the conversion of many old Lutherans."³⁵ Ritz also felt, however, that once German Lutherans were converted they made the best kind of church members.³⁶ As proof that old measure Lutherans needed conversion, revivalists often pointed to the offensive behavior of parishioners led by pastors opposed to new measures. Such behavior included activities which most of us would today regard as adiaphora, and others which were clearly sinful. "Schwartz" describes the members of one old measure parish as follows: "You may judge what kind of Christians some of them were, when I inform you, that they frequented the ball room,

³²Observer, 14 April 1843. ³³Observer, 19 November 1841.

³⁴Observer, 9 November 1838. ³⁵Observer, 16 August 1844.

³⁶Observer, 25 February 1842.

the shooting match, and other scenes of sinful amusement."³⁷ Abraham Reck took aim at one of the revivalists' favorite targets, the congregation in Germantown, Ohio, led by Andrew Henkel. "It is common for very many members of these spurious Lutherans to dance and frolic, to curse and swear, to gamble and defraud, . . . and never be called to account for such demeanor."³⁸ As the evidence just given indicates, from the premise that holiness of living is a sure mark of the Church, many new measure men had come to the conclusion that sins of weakness were a sure signal that people were unconverted.

The nadir of slander toward Lutherans in an old measure congregation may have been reached by Jeremiah Livengood in 1843. In a report to the East Ohio Synod, he evaluated the condition of the churches in his current residence, Tiffin, Ohio. According to Livengood, "The German Lutherans have a congregation here, but their members are nearly all dissipated and grocery keepers."³⁹ As might be expected, such a remark provoked a sharp response from both the pastor and church council of the German Lutheran congregation. Neither reply did a great deal to raise the level of discussion. The church council declared that "the only grocery keeper, belonging to our society, would do honor to any society," and suggested that Livengood's lies, abuse, and slander might typify "the last method of the newly invented English

³⁷Observer, 2 July 1841.

³⁸Observer, 27 March 1846.

³⁹Minutes, English East Ohio Synod, 1843, p. 29. The author of this present paper finds it very difficult to be objective about Livengood's remark. Among a series of careers for both men, one of his grandfathers was a grocer, the other a saloon keeper.

Lutheran (?) Church."⁴⁰ In his reply the pastor, John J. Beilharz, wondered whether such remarks were typical of the spirit of new measures. Beilharz claimed that his congregation "consists of members, whose moral deportment cannot be questioned." At the same time, he conceded the possibility that every flock might contain at least "one scabby sheep." Beilharz also claimed that Livengood's work in Tiffin had been completely fruitless, and that the new measures man had also intruded upon another nearby congregation under false colors, but that the members of the Adams congregation promptly closed the doors against him, once they had ascertained his true character.⁴¹ In his rebuttal to Beilharz, Livengood claimed that his remarks about the Tiffin congregation were "made without any design whatsoever to injure the society." While Livengood now admitted that some members of the flock were of good moral character, he stood by his original assessment of the majority. Livengood also corrected Beilharz concerning the success of new measures in Tiffin. "We number among us some of the most respectable, wealthy and influential farmers in the surrounding country, who have stood aloof from the Lutheran church . . . in consequence of the loose administration of the present incumbent." Moreover, Livengood asserts, he was not locked out of the Adams congregation. On the contrary, "myself and the better half of the congregation withdrew" in order to preserve peace.⁴²

In the exchange we have just summarized, we see that both Beilharz and his council accepted a major premise of their opponents, namely, that holiness of living was a reliable mark of the Church. In like

⁴⁰Standard, 31 May 1844.

⁴¹Ibid. ⁴²Observer, 19 July 1844.

manner, in his debate with Harkey, Emmanuel Greenwald does not deeply question that assumption. As long as both sides took it for granted that you could discern true believers by their external sanctification, they would use the virtues of their own members and the blemishes of their opponents as proof that their particular system of measures was most desirable. However, the Confessional revival was about to offer the old measure men a deeper insight into the nature of the Church. In the same year as Beilharz and Livengood sniped at each other over the right kind of members in Tiffin, Wilhelm Loehe was teaching the young men he was sending to America that Holiness of life "cannot serve as a certain sign of the true Church."⁴³ If it is internal, men cannot detect it. If it is external, it may very well be "hypocritical sheep's clothing."⁴⁴ Loehe's insight, however, does not seem to have elevated the debate over the right kind of church members until after the period under investigation.

Now if the "right kind of" church member can best be produced through conversion at a revival, it followed that such results could be achieved only through the "right kind of" minister, one who endorsed and practiced new measures. In their criteria for the office of the ministry, a Pietistic emphasis on heart and life at the expense of the head is frequently expressed by supporters of new measures. "We would much rather give up learning than piety,"⁴⁵ wrote Kurtz. He went on to claim that people could profit from hearing "a converted and pious preacher of meager attainments." On the other hand, Kurtz regarded the

⁴³ Wilhelm Loehe, Three Books Concerning the Church trans. Edward T. Horn (Reading, PA: Pilger Publishing House, 1908), p. 139.

⁴⁴ Ibid. ⁴⁵ Observer, 31 August 1838. (Italics given)

use of dignified, out-of-touch pulpit eloquence as certain proof that the preacher was unconverted.⁴⁶ Kurtz hints at a Donatistic attitude toward such "unconverted" preachers when he writes on the duty of giving religious instruction. "By unconverted ministers this duty, like all others will be performed as a mere formality and confer little benefit on those who attend it."⁴⁷ Samuel Sprecher made such Donatism explicit in his inaugural address as President of Wittenberg. Unless a man is an experimental Christian, claimed Sprecher, "he cannot be permanently and abidingly the instrument of awakening sinners."⁴⁸ The Standard promptly called Sprecher to task for this statement on the basis of AC VIII.⁴⁹ In response, Sprecher claimed that the Standard had taken its Confessional citation out of context, and quoted Luther to the effect that a man is not yet a good theologian until he lives in a holy and theological manner.⁵⁰ The Standard promptly pointed out that Sprecher had not retracted the statement cited above. While agreeing that the absence of piety in a preacher embarrasses the proclamation of God's truth, the Standard reminded its readers that " 'Zeal without knowledge' is no less anti-biblical than knowledge without zeal." In their opinion, the former problem was much more serious than the latter in their time and place.⁵¹

The theory that only a certain kind of pastor could truly be effective had some sad practical results in the relationships between brethren in the ministry. Even in a synod where support for revivals

⁴⁶Ibid. ⁴⁷Kurtz, Why Are You A Lutheran, p. 187.

⁴⁸Standard, 21 November 1849. ⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Standard, 30 January 1850. ⁵¹Ibid.

was virtually unanimous, there is evidence of some stress and strain between pastors. As early as 1840, President Jacob Senderling of the Hartwick Synod felt the need to warn those who were invited to lead a protracted meeting in another man's flock not to "steal away, Absalom-like, the hearts of the people, and aim at the supplanting of the pastor." Instead, they are to build up the pastor loci, and remember that his faithful labor in sowing God's Word was most probably the reason their revival had been blessed.⁵²

In Ohio, an area deeply divided on the issue of new measures, stress and strain between brethren in the ministry was much more open. From that State the Observer received requests for a Lutheran minister "of the right spirit." Such requests were made both by new measures pastors, such as J. B. Hoffman,⁵³ and by new measures laymen, such as Mr. Abraham Bowers.⁵⁴ The Standard took strong exception to Mr. Bowers' request, claiming that the parish which Bowers described as in a deplorable condition was in fact being served by "one of our most worthy, zealous, and useful ministers."⁵⁵ The Standard went on to describe Bowers as a young troublemaker who had been asked by the pastor for help in starting a prayer meeting, but who had instead "used his utmost endeavors . . . to promote dissatisfaction in the church."⁵⁶

As far as the Standard was concerned, the situation just described was only one instance of deplorable interference by new measures men in

⁵²Minutes, Hartwick Synod, Brunswick NY 5 - 9 September 1840, pp. 22-23.

⁵³Observer, 25 October 1839. ⁵⁴Observer, 23 February 1844.

⁵⁵Standard, 1 March 1844. ⁵⁶Ibid.

old measures ministries and congregations. Three months later, the Standard complained about such unwelcome intrusions at considerable length:

But the worst feature in the conduct of new measure Ministers, is the disposition so constantly exhibited, to intrude into old and long established congregations that are served by pious and good pastors, and by low and dishonorable machinations to create disturbance and set brethren at variance. . . . Brethren who had knelt together at the same altar, and communed in love at the same table, . . . are now alienated from each other, and meet to contend instead of to pray . . . Is there not room enough in this great western valley for all to cooperate and do good, without cutting up and dividing our little congregations, . . . ? (57)

Similar complaints about fanatical Lutheran ministers intruding without a call into congregations already being served persisted through the end of the period under investigation.⁵⁸

As might be expected, the new measures ministers saw the same situations from a diametrically different perspective. As far as they were concerned, they were responding to legitimate calls to preach in English to people who would otherwise be lost to the Lutheran church. What the old measure men saw as resistance to unwarranted interference, the new measure men described as "a bitter and obstinate persecution of English services, revivals, prayer-meeting, temperance measures, &c." In such situations, the new measure men had "no doubt of the propriety of interposing a counter-influence," both to preserve English-speaking Lutherans for the church and to exert a positive influence on old measure congregations.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Standard, 31 May 1844.

⁵⁸ Standard, 17 March 1847, 17 July 1850.

⁵⁹ Minutes, English East Ohio Synod, Washington OH 14 - 20 October 1842, p. 20.

Too often, in order to resist the influence of new measures, congregations turned to the tactic of locking their building, both to new measure men and to their fellow-believers. Parishes in the area of Wooster, Ohio, witnessed a series of such lockouts, beginning as early as 1835. According to a later historian, the chief reason for locked doors was "opposition of the German Lutherans to the English language."⁶⁰ To Solomon Ritz, who had endured one of the lockouts personally, language was not the only reason for such actions. Those who spoke English were also the "intelligent and pious members,"⁶¹ the kind of folk we have been describing as the "right kind of" people for a revival. Ritz went on to observe that "it is becoming quite customary in Ohio to lock meeting houses." However, he gloated, "wherever they lock us out, we have a revival of religion."⁶² Accounts of other lockouts indicate that they were due to the introduction of revivals and prayer meetings, not to the language issue.⁶³ As might be expected, old measure men told the tale of such lockouts from a much different point of view. As we have seen in the sniping between Beilharz and Livengood in Tiffin,⁶⁴ the old measure men felt that congregations had a right to exclude ministers who had come into their midst under false colors.

The accounts of lockouts are not thorough enough to let us adjudicate which side was in the right in such disputes, neither in general nor in particular cases. In some situations, it may have been

⁶⁰Arthur H. Smith, A History of the East Ohio Synod of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1924), p. 140.

⁶¹Observer, 19 February 1841. ⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Smith, pp. 98-99, 106-107. ⁶⁴Above, p. 97.

true that English was the only or principal "new measure" to which established congregations objected. In such cases, there could have been a constituency with a genuine need to hear the Gospel in a language they could understand. Under such circumstances, new measure men who attempted to meet that need could legitimately feel that they were responding to a valid call.

What was never legitimate was the slander which questioned the faith and behavior of brethren in the ministry, slander which found its way into public print far too frequently. In this respect, the new measure men seem to have been the worse offenders. Too often they treated opposition to new measures as proof that brethren in the ministry were unconverted. "The Voice of a Brother in the Wilderness" (Ohio) told the Observer that such unconverted ministers were "an indescribable curse to a denomination," as well as a "deadweight hanging on the church and keeping back the converted ministers in their labors."⁶⁵ In the same less than brotherly tone, he later described such ministers as "dumb dogs and too lazy to bark," except to growl against revivals.⁶⁶ In his Presidential sermon to a meeting of the East Ohio Synod, W. G. Keil stated that "Some men seem to abhor what are called new measures and revivals more than the old monster sin, . . . all we have to say of such is, we wish they may be speedily converted to God."⁶⁷ In a footnote to the printed version of

⁶⁵Observer, 10 February 1837.

⁶⁶Observer, 27 April 1838.

⁶⁷Minutes, English East Ohio Synod, Zanesville OH 31 Oct. - 4 Nov. 1840, p. 20.

the sermon, Keil protested that he did not mean to insinuate that all new measure opponents were unconverted. At the same time, he refused to retract what he considered the "solemn truth" about some of them.⁶⁸ In a similar vein, Reuben Weiser denied the possibility that a brother could sincerely be in favor of practical piety and opposed to the anxious bench.⁶⁹

One of the more judgmental of the new measure men was Ezra Keller. By the time he began work in Ohio, the old measure men were becoming more solidly Confessional. Regarding the Confessions as mere human opinion, Keller felt free to make the following sweeping generalizations about the difference between new and old measure ministers: "Our form of doctrine is the rock of ages; theirs is the shifting sand. We contend for a religion internal, spiritual; they for a religion external, formal."⁷⁰ Keller also had extremely high standards for the character of ministerial candidates. No one should even be considered for the office whose life had ever been "grossly vicious, especially licentious, . . . however sincere their repentance and entire their reformation."⁷¹

After settling in Springfield, Ohio, both as a parish pastor and as professor of theology in the newly opened Wittenberg, Keller went beyond sweeping generalizations to personal attacks upon old measure pastors to the south and north of Springfield. To the south was Andrew

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Observer, 26 April 1844.

⁷⁰Diehl, p. 232. (Italics given)

⁷¹Ibid., p. 253. (Italics given)

Henkel, pastor of Germantown for most of the years between 1825-1870, and an "uncompromising enemy of the anxious bench revival system."⁷² In 1840, Henkel had reportedly overwhelmed a new measure man named John Zerfass (Surface) in a debate conducted in Henkel's sanctuary.⁷³ After Henkel moved to Goshen, Indiana in 1844, Keller felt free to join Abraham Reck, a veteran new measure man, in attacking both Henkel and his congregation. Henkel's personal life seems to have fallen well short of the Pietistic standard for ministers prevalent at the time. According to Keller, in Germantown "the pastor himself will step up to the bar of the grogshop, and take a drink with the besotted herd."⁷⁴ For such a man, Keller saw only the least possible hope for salvation.⁷⁵ In Henkel's absence, Keller helped Reck with a protracted meeting in Germantown. When Henkel's congregation refused him the pulpit because he did not belong to the Joint Synod, Keller and Reck "organized a small English congregation of pious people, to serve as a light in that darkness."⁷⁶ In a letter describing those events to the Observer, Keller charged Henkel with leading the Germantown flock into "dangerous error and shameful immoralities," as well as prejudicing them against other Lutheran ministers, thus making them "priest-ridden."⁷⁷ In the same letter, Keller

⁷²J. P. Hentz, Twin Valley, Its Settlement and Subsequent History, (Dayton, Ohio: Christian Publishing House, 1883), pp. 176-179.

⁷³Hentz, History of the Evangelical Lutheran Congregation in Germantown, Ohio and Biographies of its Pastors and Founders, (Dayton: Christian Publishing House, 1882), pp. 51-52.

⁷⁴Diehl, p. 253. ⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 311.

⁷⁷Observer, 15 May 1846.

mentions two visits to the area of St. Paris, north of Springfield. Keller described the Joint Synod pastors who had previously served in that area as "cold, heartless ministers, who, instead of leading souls to Christ, are constantly exhorting carnal men to continue in the good, old way, and be guarded against prayer meetings, wild fire and fanaticism."⁷⁸

Two years before Keller's letter, the Standard had deplored the tendency to "speak in strains so uncharitable to the memory of those heralds of the cross, who bore the heat and burden of the day," simply "because they had no new measures and wild confusion and excitement in their churches."⁷⁹ Such remarks by newcomers to the Ohio field were "another lamentable exhibition of the spirit of new measures which is usually manifested in this censorious, arrogant, and self-complacent manner."⁸⁰

Four months after Keller's letter, the local conference of the Western District of the Joint Synod met at St. Paris. The members of the larger Lutheran congregation in St. Paris entered a letter into the minutes, describing Keller's charges as "untrue, false, and fictitious." They also accused Keller of obtaining a call to the other St. Paris congregation in "a clandestine, un-constitutional manner." In a similar vein, the council and members of Henkel's congregation called Keller's remarks "a falsehood, an uncharitable malicious slander." The Conference Secretary added the wish that Professor Keller would treat his opponents "with more lenity and Christian sympathy," in view of the hardships they had endured when opening up Ohio for the Church in the

⁷⁸Ibid. (Italics given)

⁷⁹Standard, 5 April 1844. ⁸⁰Ibid.

previous generation.⁸¹ A year later, Henkel sent a letter from Indiana to the Western District, regretting the fact that Keller and Reck had not acted like brethren and written to him first. Henkel also offered to appear at the Synod to defend himself. The synod resolved that no such defense from Henkel was expected, and confidently commended him to the Lord's righteous judgment.⁸²

To borrow a phrase from Mark Twain, it is tempting to "draw the curtain of charity" on this chapter without further comment. Still, it might be wise to remember that even the worst of the words and deeds we have just recorded sprang from fine motives. At its best, the call for the right kind of minister was the call for a man "who is prompted to action by no other motives than love to his Lord and Master, and a longing desire to be abundantly useful to the Church of the Redeemer."⁸³ Keller's memoirs breathe the spirit of a man guided by a life-long conviction that revivals were "the hope of the Church."⁸⁴ Impugning the motives of those who do not share your firmest convictions is a trap into which Keller, his co-revivalists, and their opponents fell far too easily.⁴ From their example, conscientious Churchmen of every era can learn to become more wary of the same temptation.

⁸¹Standard, 28 September 1846.

⁸²Standard, 1 September 1847.

⁸³Observer, 25 October 1839.

⁸⁴Diehl, p. 356. (Italics added)

CHAPTER VII
WINDING DOWN AND EVALUATING THE STORY

During the period under investigation, several Lutheran Synods attempted to curb the excesses of the "Old Adam" described in the previous chapter. Those who favored revivals recommended that they be conducted as conservatively and inoffensively as possible. For example, the 1842 convention of the English East Ohio Synod resolved that its members see the importance of "conforming, as much as possible, . . . to the customs, manners, forms and usages of our fathers, without injuring the cause of vital Godliness." Such customs included catechetical lectures, "where it is expedient," as well as uniformity of worship and revivals conducted decently and in order. At the same time, the resolution stated "that we highly approve of extraordinary efforts to awaken sinners, and bring them to the knowledge of truth, as it is in Christ."¹ In the same year, at its organizing convention, the East Pennsylvania Synod expressed similar sentiments. They resolved both to "disapprove of all disorderly and fanatical proceedings in religious worship" and to "cordially commend the most decisive and energetic measures for the conversion of sinners and edification of the Church."²

¹Minutes, English East Ohio Synod, Washington OH 14 - 20 October, 1842, p. 14.

²In Charles A. Hay, History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of East Pennsylvania, (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1892), pp. 18-19.

Other synods seem to have hoped that the controversy over new measures would diminish, perhaps even disappear, if the individual pastors were free to follow their consciences with respect to such activities. In 1845, the Pittsburgh Synod was organized upon such a basis:

With the express understanding that each minister and church shall be at perfect liberty to support such literary, theological, and benevolent institutions as may best accord with his own view of duty; and also, that as a Synodical body we recognize no such distinction as "old" and "new" measures. (3)

In the same year the Synod of New York expressed its hearty disapproval of the controversy over new measures, condemning as two extremes "a superstitious veneration for antiquity" and "a fondness for novelty." The Synod resolved "to regard it as the true policy of the Lutheran church for each pastor to adopt such measures in his own charge as he conscientiously believes to be consistent with the Bible, and likely to prove useful."⁴

Also in 1845, the Miami Synod was organized in southwestern Ohio, an arena of some of the most acrid controversy concerning new measures. According to her first President, Charles Schaeffer, it was Miami's mission "to speak peace to all" of the "heterogeneous mass of materials which are, collectively, styled the Lutheran Church."⁵ President Daniel P. Rosenmiller repeated those hopes three years later, describing Miami as an "olive branch" held out to all the conflicted parties among Ohio Lutherans, aiming at "the preservation of the unity of the spirit in the

³In George H. Gerberding, Life and Letters of W. A. Passavant D. D., (Greenville, PA: Young Lutheran Company, 1906), pp. 125-126.

⁴Lutheran Observer, 12 December 1845.

⁵Minutes, Miami Synod, Dayton OH 18 - 22 April 1845, p. 10.

bonds of peace."⁶ Unfortunately, Rosenmiller's remarks go on to indicate that, in his view, "peace" meant something less than genuine reconciliation of the opposing viewpoints. In order to effect "peace" in Miami, "the terms old and new measures are never heard in our discussions." In Rosenmiller's opinion, pastors of differing viewpoints in Miami were equally determined "that upon these minor points they will bear and forbear with each other, agree to disagree in opinions about these things, and provoke each other to nothing except love and good works."⁷

However, at least one member of Miami, the ever-outspoken Solomon Ritz, was determined to provoke his opponents and promote his own point of view. Ritz decried Rosenmiller's olive branch as a "sledge hammer, by which all our good beginnings would be knocked to smash."⁸ He went on to express the opinion that Miami's President would have compromised with the Jewish and Gentile enemies of Christianity, had he lived in the days of the apostles.⁹ A forceful reply to Ritz's outburst came forth swiftly, from a correspondent who signed his letter "Miami." "Miami" takes Ritz to task for slandering the Synod's President, comparing Ritz to a peeved juvenile delinquent who gets a thrill from throwing stones at his betters. The correspondent goes on to reject Ritz's partisanship and re-state the Miami Synod's hopes for peace.

The Miami Synod will not go with him in placing old measure men on the same level with Jews and Gentiles, nor will it unite in idolizing the anxious bench as the grand lever by which persons must needs be helped into the kingdom of heaven. . . . We believe there are good men in both parties, men who honestly differ, and we

⁶Minutes, Miami Synod, Hamilton OH 17 - 20 April 1848, p. 14.

⁷Observer, 21 May 1848. ⁸Observer, 28 July 1848. ⁹Ibid.

think it is better for them to differ in peace, than in contention and turmoil. (10)

This tempest in the Miami Synod is an appropriate episode with which to conclude this study of the new measures controversy. It reminds us of something suggested at the start of our investigation. The argument about new measures was never settled in any definitive, decisive manner. Instead, it was overshadowed by, and became one aspect of, the subsequent controversy between Confessional and "American" Lutheranism.¹¹

The tempest in the Miami Synod, upon closer inspection, echoes a theme that has recurred several times in the course of this study. The "peace" of "agreeing to disagree" was possible for those participants who perceived this controversy as an argument about differing means toward an agreed-upon end. The correspondent pen-named "Miami" definitely saw the issue from such a perspective. While describing himself as a new measure man, "Miami" felt that old measure men agreed with him in favoring revivals, prayer meetings, and temperance. The chief point at issue, in his eyes, was "the use of the anxious bench and the toleration of noise."¹²

"Miami" here echoes the sentiments expressed earlier by John Morris¹³ and George Lintner¹⁴: that revivals should be promoted but abuses opposed. He also agrees with those who regarded the anxious bench as a tool to be used on suitable occasions,¹⁵ but disagrees with those who idolize the bench as the one right or essential way to revive

¹⁰Observer, 18 August 1848. ¹¹Above, p. 4.

¹²Observer, 18 August 1848. ¹³Above, pp. 10-11.

¹⁴Above, p. 88. ¹⁵Above, pp. 33-34.

the Church and regenerate sinners.¹⁶ It has also been shown¹⁷ that new measure proponents confused the means of grace with the measures of men, regarding the Sacraments as tools to which the powers of the Holy Spirit were superadded, rather than as means through which the Holy Spirit effected grace. Such new measure men felt free to agree to disagree on the doctrines of Baptismal regeneration and the real presence in the Lord's Supper.¹⁸

There were, however, two sets of participants in the debate who could not find peace by agreeing to disagree. At one extreme were men such as Ritz and Reuben Weiser. To them, the rejection of any measure was equated with resistance to God's greatest work, proof positive that the pastor was unconverted,¹⁹ or at least willing to compromise with the forces of unbelief.²⁰ At the other extreme were those who agreed with John Nevin that the system of the bench was inextricably intertwined with error and heresy, that we must not do what is wrong, not even if it gains a soul for heaven.²¹ Toward the end of the period under investigation, new measure opponents became increasingly forthright in their defense of the Confessional position on the Sacraments.²² Eventually, they came to the conclusion that the use of the bench could not possibly be reconciled with Confessional Lutheranism.²³

Thus this controversy illustrates the truism that people find it possible to compromise on matters which they perceive to be of lesser

¹⁶Above, pp. 35, 110. ¹⁷Above, p. 60

¹⁸Above, pp. 69, 73. ¹⁹Above, p. 103. ²⁰Above, p. 110.

²¹Above, pp. 42, 57. ²²Above, pp. 4, 69, 73.

²³Above, p. 52.

importance, but not on those issues which they consider vital. This is NOT a suggestion that those in the new measure controversy who sought peace by agreeing to disagree were lacking in personal integrity. On the contrary, anyone who reads the memoirs of Francis Ruth and Ezra Keller will readily sense that these men lived lives intensely focussed on service to God and his Church. The problem was that new measures men integrated their hearts and minds around the assumption expressed by Simeon Harkey: that the Church's one grand and glorious aim is the regeneration and sanctification of souls, to be accomplished by any means whatsoever.²⁴ Integrating their work around that assumption, new measures men did not question the errors concerning conversion and the order of salvation which they shared with Samuel Schmucker. As a result, they failed to recognize that the use of the anxious bench was, in some respects, inescapably connected to those errors. Integrated around the assumption that revival was the goal of the Church, new measures men debased the Sacraments into human tools to be utilized at the Church's discretion. The same assumption led them, despite some sincere good intentions, to neglect catechization as a means through which God's Word sustains the new life begun in Baptism. Sadly, at times they were so well-integrated around the aim of revival, they yielded to the flesh and slandered all who disagreed with them as enemies of God. In this respect, however, they were certainly not the only sinners in the controversy.

In the final analysis, the new measures controversy was clouded by confusion on the part of all involved concerning the distinction between

²⁴Above, p. 56.

means and ends in the life and work of the Church. In different forms and various settings, the same confusion between means and ends still pops up periodically to plague the Church militant.

One setting rife with potential for such confusion is the issue of whether or not the "Church Growth Movement" of Evangelicals can be adopted or adapted for use by Confessional Lutherans. Two Lutherans who answer that question in the affirmative are Kent R. Hunter and David S. Luecke. In books written by each of these men, echoes of the earlier controversy under study can be detected. Two of these echoes stand out in particular. One is a strong tendency to make an aspect of sanctification into a mark of the Church. The other is the confusion of the divinely appointed means of grace with human means to sanctification. As a result, both men affirm the necessity of the divine means but denigrate their sufficiency.

In his Foundations for Church Growth, Hunter defines Church Growth as a science which studies churches "as they relate to the effective implementation of the Great Commission."²⁵ Not only is the Church accountable to God for such effectiveness, according to Hunter,²⁶ her success "is always measured in terms of those who are incorporated as responsible members of God's kingdom."²⁷ "The goal of evangelism," Hunter states, "is reached only when the person becomes a maturing disciple," again defined in terms of responsible church membership.²⁸

Hunter's clearest echo of the earlier debate comes in his comments

²⁵Kent R. Hunter, Foundations for Church Growth (New Haven, MO: Leader Publishing, 1983) p. 23. (Italics added)

²⁶Ibid., p. 30. ²⁷Ibid., pp. 42-43. (Italics added)

upon 1 Cor. 9:20-23. Paul's "end, or goal, is to reach people with the Gospel. That end justifies the use of any strategy as long as it is not sinful. St. Paul was flexible in his communication for the sake of results."²⁹ Hunter's last sentence leaves the door wide open for raising results to the level of the pure preaching of the Gospel as a mark of the Church. This is a clear echo of Simeon Harkey's "we care not by what means" the great goal of regeneration is reached.³⁰ A more careful commentator might point out that Paul was flexible "for the sake of the Gospel," and left the results of growth of God (1 Cor. 3:6).

In his treatment of the means of grace, Hunter's clear affirmation of Baptismal regeneration³¹ is a quantum-leap improvement upon the denial of that doctrine by many nineteenth century new measure men. Nevertheless, he explicitly denies the sufficiency of God's means of grace when he tells us that "the church must do more than provide the Word and the Sacraments . . . the Christian must be trained in the school of discipleship."³² Apparently, such training must use something more than or other than God's means. The same denial of their sufficiency is implicit when Hunter strongly warns us not to assume that children brought up on the means of grace are automatically Christians.³³

David S. Luecke's attempts to combine Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance shows tendencies similar to those found in Hunter's

²⁸Ibid., p. 80. (Italics added)

²⁹Ibid., p. 94. (Italics added)

³⁰See above, p. 56. ³¹Hunter, p. 41. ³²Ibid., p. 63.

³³Ibid., p. 86.

work. To his credit, Luecke displays a much deeper awareness of Church history than any nineteenth century proponent of new measures, as well as a much stronger desire to remain Confessionally loyal. Nevertheless, in his desire to obtain for Lutherans the benefits apparently accruing to the Church from Evangelical "style," Luecke attempts to combine things that remain theologically incompatible.

This is seen most clearly in his treatment of the Sacraments. On the one hand, Luecke boldly affirms Baptismal regeneration, stating that "the initiation of faith through infant Baptism will never be just a matter of style for Lutherans."³⁴ On the other hand, Luecke also affirms Evangelicalism's "consciousness" of being born again as the only reliable basis for initiating fellowship in Christ.³⁵ When he states that "Scripture allows both ways"³⁶ of viewing Church membership, he in effect negates the fine things he has said about Baptism and reduces it to a matter of style, even though he almost certainly does not intend to do so.

Similar confusion is displayed in Chapter Eight of the book. There Luecke says that "A sacrament is God's use of human senses to establish contact."³⁷ This is a subtle but potentially dangerous distortion of what Augustine said about the Word approaching the element. More precisely, a sacrament is God's attachment of His promise of grace to three quite specific created items. God uses these specific items to contact us through our senses. Because Luecke has shifted his

³⁴David S. Luecke, Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance, Facing America's Mission Challenge (St. Louis: Concordia, 1988)

³⁵Ibid., p. 55 (Italics added) ³⁶Ibid. ³⁷Ibid., p. 85.

attention from the water, bread, and wine to the human senses, he once again tries to combine the incompatible. On the one hand, he affirms that the Lord's Supper and Baptism must remain central for Lutherans.³⁸ In the next breath, he maintains that Evangelical "style can show how sacramental thinking might be extended."³⁹

What does Luecke mean by this "extension" of sacramental thinking? The theme of his eighth chapter is that our "touchpoint" to Evangelicalism might be Lutheranism's earlier strain of "experiential contact pietism!"⁴⁰ As Luecke sees it, Pietism and Confessionalism lived together much more comfortably in the early days of Lutheranism in America. Back then, he states, "Right teaching was kept in perspective as a necessary means of developing the Christian's life of response to God's saving presence."⁴¹ The statement implies that means other than the right teaching of God's Word can be used to reach the goal of Christian sanctification. It suggests that such right teaching may be necessary, but might not be sufficient, for reaching that goal. Moreover, probably without intending to do so, Luecke here leaves the door wide open for once again making the response of Christians a mark of the Church.

To sum up, Luecke and Hunter have transposed the earlier music into a more euphonious Confessional key. Nevertheless, echoes of the new measures dispute, with its confusion about means and ends in the Church, as well as its confusion of God's means of grace with man's means of receiving them, can still be detected.

³⁸Ibid. ³⁹Ibid. ⁴⁰Ibid., p. 92.

⁴¹Ibid. (Italics added)

As has already been observed, the earlier dispute was never definitively "settled." Perhaps, however, a deeper understanding of it may serve to illuminate and clarify some of our present confusion.

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