THE RETURN TO TRADITION:
An Analysis of the New Measure Movement
In the German Reformed Church

By John B. Frantz*

The main stream of Christianity has flowed consistently through the objective or institutional channel which recognizes the authority of the Church and the validity of its tradition. Although the Roman Catholic Church and its traditions were more significant in the Middle Ages, the Protestant reformers also operated from an institutional basis; and each of the Reformation churches retained some of the traditions of the medieval church.

However, after the reformers had repudiated the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, their spiritual descendants carried the Reformation's inherent individualism to its logical extremes and developed a subjective religion based on the individual's own experience of God which needs no institutionalization and which denies all tradition. In modern church history, German pietism, English Methodism, and American revivalism have embodied these concepts.

Although revivalism has always played an important role in America's churches, its challenge to the traditions of the Church was especially intense in the first half of the nineteenth century. During this period, revivalism gave birth to several significant denominations and caused others to divide into so-called "new school" and "old school" factions. It forced every church to analyze its doctrines and to re-evaluate its methods of evangelism. But in the course of this controversy, the Reformation churches concluded that the new measures of the revivalists were unnecessary and that the infusion of spiritual life into their own traditions would effect a true revival of religion. This development we can see very clearly in the German Reformed Church.

*Dr. Frantz is assistant professor of history at the Pennsylvania State University.

In keeping with its Reformation heritage, the German Reformed Church's doctrinal standard, the Heidelberg Catechism, published in 1563, taught an objective or "churchly" type of Christianity, which emphasized the traditions of the Church, including its rites and sacraments. The German Reformed Palatinate Liturgy revealed the same respect for tradition in its forms of worship.

Although the Church was influenced by German pietism, the basic reason for the introduction of revivalistic new measures in the nineteenth century was its poor spiritual health. In the new world, the German Reformed Church was cut off from its heritage. Most of its members had emigrated from the Palatinate in southwestern Germany, a region which invading armies had devastated repeatedly during the seventeenth century. In time, many of the inhabitants of the Palatinate returned to the Roman Catholic Church. Consequently, the German Reformed people in America received little aid from their Palatinate counterparts. True, the Dutch Reformed Classis of Amsterdam adopted the ecclesiastical orphans; but its assistance was usually too little and too late. As a result, the German Reformed people in America lacked ministers, Bibles, catechisms, and liturgies.

The most serious deficiency in the German Reformed Church of the early nineteenth century was the lack of ministers to indoctrinate the people in their own traditions. Those few ministers who did serve them were less effective than they might have been because they had to cover extremely large parishes. Even in the nineteenth century, few ministers served only one congregation. While the normal charge consisted of three or four congregations, larger charges were not uncommon. The language problem, which affected all non-English denominations, complicated this situation. As the children associated with their English-speaking neighbors, they abandoned the language of their parents. The ultimate result was that in time the ministers had to preach in both the German and English languages. Their inability to preach in one or the other language seriously curtailed their usefulness. Moreover, many German Reformed congregations espe-

---

3 The Palatinate Liturgy, originally published in 1563, translated by Bard Thompson, in Theology in Life, VI (Spring, 1963), 49-67.
cially on the frontier lacked pastoral leadership entirely. The records of the Church contain numerous appeals for ministers from congregations in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Missouri. Even when the Synod did obtain trained ministers for these congregations, the ministers’ academic preparation sometimes caused them to preach sermons over the heads of their frontier congregations. When the Church lowered its standards on ministerial training, all sorts of frauds, misfits, and rascals entered the pulpits and deceived the people.

Under the circumstances, a significant number of the members of the German Reformed Church began to stray from the fold. During and after the German revival of the late eighteenth century, the pietistic elements of the Church turned to the United Brethren, who frequently called themselves “the New Reformed,” and to the Evangelical Association, commonly known as “the Albright people.” Some English-speaking members of the German Reformed Church joined the Presbyterian and Methodist churches. Departing more completely from their religious heritage were those who joined the rationalist societies which were so prominent among the nineteenth-century German immigrants who settled primarily in the towns and cities of the Ohio and Mississippi River Valleys. Of course, many German Reformed people simply lapsed into religious indifference. But, according to some observers, the spiritual condition of those who remained loyal to the German Reformed Church was not far superior. An Ohio minister reported that many of his people imagined that because they had been baptized and confirmed, and received the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, they were acceptable to God. A revival of religion was definitely necessary among the German Reformed people, but what type of revival? That was the question.

3 Minutes of the Ohio Classis, 1821, 1823; Minutes of the Ohio Synod, 1835, p. 18; Minutes of the Ohio Synod, 1839, p. 7; and The Weekly Messenger, May 19, 1841.
4 Emil P. Herbruck, Early Years and Late Reflections (Cleveland: Central Publishing House, 1923), p. 27.
5 See article entitled, “Columbiana Classis Right,” in The Western Missionary, September 2, 1850.
6 Minutes of the Ohio Synod, 1827, pp. 12-13; Minutes of the Ohio Synod, 1832, p. 11; The Weekly Messenger, January 15, 1849; Verhandlungen Der Synode Der Hochdeutsche Reformirten Kirche von Ohio und Den Angrenzenden Staaten, 1849; and The Western Missionary, March 15, 1850.
7 Minutes of the Ohio Synod, 1850, p. 32, and The Western Missionary, March 2, 1852.
8 Minutes of the Delegate Synod of Ohio, 1843, p. 13.
Because the Church was in such poor spiritual health, it began to look beyond its own traditions for the answers to its problems. Simultaneously, a wave of revivalism developed in western New York state under the leadership of the Rev. Charles G. Finney. During previous years, the language barrier would have prevented the spread of Finney's influence; but the German Reformed people were making the transition from the German to the English language at the same time that Finney was rising to fame. Considering the need of the Church for a revival of religion and the disappearance of the language barrier, it was inevitable that Finney's influence would affect the Church.

Finney was the product of his times. The first half of the nineteenth century was a period of optimistic activism. Calvin's emphasis on the doctrine of predestination was increasingly unacceptable, for it denied the freedom of the human will in an age when the average American believed that there was nothing which he could not control, including his salvation. Furthermore, Finney believed that by using the appropriate methods, he could lead men to accept the salvation which God offered through Christ. He asserted that in this way sincere preachers could promote a revival of religion.11

One of the first revivals of religion to be reported in the German Reformed Church occurred in the Race Street Church in Philadelphia in 1828-1829 and was promoted by none other than the Rev. Mr. Finney himself.12 As was true of many congregations in the nation which once conducted their services in a language other than English, the transition to the English language in the Race Street Church was not made smoothly. Two sizable secessions, each caused by the language controversy, left the once large and prosperous Race Street Church weak and divided.13 In order to revive and strengthen the languishing church, the congregation invited Finney to preach for them for six months on Sunday afternoons and evenings and on Thursday evenings.14

12 *The Magazine of the German Reformed Church*, May, 1829.
14 Minutes of the Corporation of the German Reformed Church in Philadelphia, August 4, 1928, pp. 160-161. MSS. in Old First Reformed Church (United Church of Christ), Philadelphia.
Finney’s growing reputation as an evangelist attracted many worshippers. The centrally located church, which was the largest in the city in terms of seating capacity, was always crowded; and, according to Finney, approximately three thousand people regularly attended his services there. When the developing revival of religion had reached the appropriate point, Finney introduced several of the so-called “new measures” with which he had promoted revivals in western New York. After preaching pungent sermons, Finney called on those who wanted to be saved to come forward to the anxious bench, which consisted of the front pews of the church. Then Finney led the congregation in public prayer for the conversion of those on the anxious bench. In the case of those whose conversion was not accomplished during the service, Finney held anxious meetings, conferences after the regularly scheduled services, during which he pressed the urgency of “immediate repentance” and warned of the “awful consequences of procrastination.” As a result, many professed conversion during Finney’s Philadelphia revival.

At approximately the same time that Finney was promoting his Philadelphia revival, revivals developed in other German Reformed congregations. Like the one which originated in the Race Street Church in Philadelphia, these revivals developed in congregations which had made the transition from the German to the English language, located usually in geographic areas where the people of English and Scotch-Irish background were numerically dominant. Frequently, the revivals exerted influence especially over the young people who were not familiar with the German language and traditions. For example, when a revival developed in York, Pennsylvania, under the leadership of the Rev. James R. Reily, three hundred persons, mostly young people, professed conversion. Shortly afterward, a revival developed in Frederick, Maryland, under the leadership of the Rev. Jonathan Helffenstein, which resulted in the conversion of eighty persons, again mostly young people. In the following years, as revivals

15 Finney, Memoirs, p. 245.
16 Ibid., pp. 238-245, and The Magazine of the German Reformed Church, May, 1829. See also the Minutes of the Congregational Meeting of the German Reformed Church in Philadelphia, September 8, 1829, p. 83.
17 The Magazine of the German Reformed Church, January, 1828 and May, 1829. See also J. H. Smaltz to James R. Reily, January 18, 1827, MSS. in the Historical Society of the Reformed Church, Fackenthal Li-
increased in the German Reformed Church, this pattern became more distinct.

During the next decade, the 1830's, revivalism spread through much of the Church. The periodicals of the Church and the records of its administrative bodies were full of reports on revivals of religion in German Reformed congregations. By the early 1840's, every sector of the Church, East, West, North, and South, had experienced revivals.

At first, revivals of religion proceeded more or less spontaneously from the life of the Church. Spiritual awakenings spread from services at which the sacrament of the Lord's Supper was administered, from classes of instruction called "catechetical classes" which preceded the administration of the rite of confirmation, and from prayer meetings which were increasing in the Church at this time. However, Finney's belief that new measures could initiate revivals soon became dominant in the minds of the German Reformed revivalists.

A universally popular method of promoting revivals was the protracted meeting. If a particular service aroused an extraordinary interest in religion, the minister would protract the service and conduct additional meetings in an attempt to promote a revival. During the protracted meetings, services were sometimes held three times a day for several weeks at a time. Among the German Reformed in North Carolina, the camp meeting also became especially popular. Hundreds of people lived and worshiped together for days at a time on the various camp grounds. Regardless of the type of revival service, the anxious bench played a prominent role, for the revivalists consistently emphasized the necessity of repentance and immediate conversion.

In the wake of the subjective approach to religion characteristic of the revivalists came extreme emotional enthusiasm. Some worshippers groaned during the morning prayers and beat out the tunes with their feet during the singing of the hymns. Others

---

18 The Weekly Messenger, November 29, 1837, and December 16, 1840.
19 See J. H. Good to Philip Schaff, February 24, 1847. MSS. in RCHS.
20 The Weekly Messenger, February 17, 1837.
screamed and clapped consistently during the services. Still others jumped and tumbled about on the floor. Since they believed that God inspired their congregations to respond in this way, some ministers encouraged and participated in this type of activity. In time, the revivalists began to evaluate their services on the basis of the amount of emotional feeling which they had aroused.

Following revivals of religion, the enthusiasm of the converts frequently led them to form organizations to perpetuate the effects of the revival. In some cases they formed new congregations. Where congregations were already established, they frequently formed Sunday Schools. The congregations which had experienced revivals also revealed an enthusiasm for social reform, so typical of early nineteenth-century society. In denominations with larger Northern constituencies, this enthusiasm led to the organization of abolition societies. Some congregations emphasized missionary societies, while others concentrated on tract societies. However, the temperance movement attracted the most attention among the German Reformed people, and innumerable congregations formed temperance societies during or immediately after they had experienced revivals. The correlation between revivals of religion and Sunday Schools, missionary, tract, and temperance societies is supported by the fact that in the German-speaking regions of eastern Pennsylvania, revivals of religion were rare; Sunday Schools had not yet been organized to any significant extent.

---

22 See John Winebrenner, *The Truth Made Known: Or a Fair and Correct Account of Facts Which Have Transpired in the German Reformed Congregation of Harrisburg since the Fall of 1822* (Harrisburg, 1824), p. 8; John C. Guldin, "Directions and Advice in Reference to Revivals of Religion," in *The Weekly Messenger*, October 7, 1840; *The Weekly Messenger*, April 15, 1840; June 30, 1840; December 21, 1842; and January 11, 1843; Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Susquehanna Classis, November 5, 1844; Minutes of the Lebanon Classis, May 17, 1844, 2 and 6, June 4, 1844, 10-11, and J. H. Smaltz to James R. Reily, January 18, 1827, MSS. in RCHS.


24 See Minutes of the Virginia Classis, 1843, p. 59.

25 Minutes of the Lebanon Classis, 1844, pp. 13 and 16; Minutes of the Maryland Classis, 1829, p. 45; Minutes of the Philadelphia Classis, 1841; and *The Weekly Messenger*, February 9, 1837, January 9, 1839, February 23, 1842, January 4, 1843, February 15, 1843, April 5, 1843, and January 24, 1844.
extent; and missionary, tract, and temperance societies were practically unknown. Consequently, the revivalists concluded that there was a cause and effect relationship between revivals and the increasing activity in the congregations which had experienced revivals.

Because they thought they saw the Church rising to prosperity under the system of new measures, many of the leaders of the German Reformed Church endorsed the wave of revivalism which was sweeping over the Church. The editor of The Messenger, the leading periodical of the Church, the Rev. Lewis Mayer, asserted that he had no doubts about the reality of revivals. He assured his readers that they were the work of God and prayed that their influence might become even more extensive.²⁶

Likewise, the highest administrative bodies of the Church, the Eastern Synod and the Ohio Synod, expressed their approval of revivalism. The Eastern Synod went so far as to call revivals “the only hope of the Church.”²⁷ Synodical endorsement reflected in acceptance of reports favorable to revivalism and specific endorsement of new measures is very significant, since the Eastern and the Ohio Synods included the entire membership of the Church, numbering approximately 150 ministers and 41,000 lay members.²⁸

Revivalism also won the approval of the local administrative bodies, known as “classes.” Those located in the predominantly English and Scotch-Irish regions were the first to express their approval and did so most enthusiastically. The Maryland Classis instructed its ministers and laymen to form teams to conduct at least two protracted meetings each year in each important congregation in the classis, and it petitioned the Eastern Synod to enjoinder the same measure on every classis in the church.²⁹

²⁶ The Messenger, March, 1832.
²⁷ Report on the State of Religion, Minutes of the Eastern Synod, 1831, p. 63. See also the Minutes of the Ohio Synod, 1840, p. 9; Minutes of the Second District of the Ohio Synod, 1842; and Minutes of the General Synod of Ohio, 1842, p. 25.
²⁸ In 1838, the Eastern Synod reported 96 ministers and 15,643 communicants. However, 54 of the ministers made no report. Since approximately half of the ministers reported almost 16,000 members, we can add an additional 16,000 members to the roll of the Eastern Synod. Minutes of the Eastern Synod, 1838; Statistical Reports, pp. 56-63. In 1838, the Ohio Synod reported 43 ministers and 8,625 communicants. Minutes of the Ohio Synod, 1838, pp. 21-23. In contrast to the Eastern Synod, each of the Ohio Synod ministers returned statistical reports.
²⁹ Minutes of the Maryland Classis, 1833, p. 93.
Carolina Classis sponsored annual camp meetings and required the attendance of every minister of the classis. The Philadelphia Classis, which included three of the most active revivalists in the Church, the Rev. Messrs. John C. Guldin, Jacob Helffenstein, and Joseph F. Berg, was equally emphatic in its endorsement of revivalism. In the early 1840's one of the most conservative classes of the Church, the East Pennsylvania Classis, commented favorably on a revival in one of its congregations. By 1843, practically every classis in the Church had included in its minutes an official pronouncement expressing its endorsement of revivalism. Truly, the Church had lost the spirit of the Heidelberg Catechism.

The increasing popularity of revivalism brought the German Reformed Church to a crisis in its history. A significant number of the conservative German-speaking ministers, such as the Rev. Messrs. Pomp, Hoffeditz, Becker, Wolff, Helffrich, Dubbs, Leinbach, and Herman, all of whom served in the heavily German regions of eastern Pennsylvania, adamantly opposed the innovations. They charged that the adoption of new measures would pervert the German Reformed Church. In support of their warning, they pointed apprehensively to the Presbyterian Church, wherein the subjective emphasis on individual salvation and immediate conversion had overshadowed the institution of the Church and its rites and sacraments, thus contrasting sharply with the heritage of the Reformation.

The leaders of the Church in eastern Pennsylvania saw no need for abandoning their heritage. Writing in The Weekly Messenger, one prominent minister described the history of the German Reformed Church as embodying a vital spirit of its own, including principles and ideas worthy of being cherished as a precious legacy.

Minutes of the North Carolina Classis, 1840, in The Weekly Messenger, July 15, 1840. See also Welker, Historical Sketch, p. 17.
Minutes of the Philadelphia Classis, 1844, p. 4; 1845, p. 5; and 1846, pp. 3-4.
For additional evidence, see the Minutes of the Virginia Classis, 1841, p. 34; Minutes of the Lebanon Classis, 1843, in The Weekly Messenger, June 21, 1843; Minutes of Zion's Classis, 1839, pp. 182-183; Minutes of the Mercersburg Classis, 1843, p. 70; and Minutes of the Susquehanna Classis, 1837 and 1844.
He urged the members of the Church to commune “familiarly and freely” with the spirit of the Reformation in order to find light in their present darkness. The solution offered by such men was to infuse spiritual life into the forms which they had inherited from the venerable fathers of the Church.

Opposition to the new measure men aroused a controversy, and schismatic so-called “new measure” and “old measure” factions appeared in the Church. Because of his revivalism and the doctrinal deviations and insubordination into which it had led him, the Eastern Synod in 1828 excommunicated the Rev. John Winebrenner, minister of the German Reformed congregations in and around Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. However, he had practically withdrawn from the Church prior to this time; and in 1830 he organized his followers, including many former members of German Reformed congregations in central Pennsylvania and elsewhere, into what he called “the Church of God.” In Pennsylvania some of the “new measure” men withdrew and formed a separate denomination; in eastern Ohio the “old measure” faction of the Columbiana Classis seceded from the Classis and from the Ohio Synod, pledging itself to maintain this separate existence until satisfied that the Synod had corrected the abuses of revivalism.

Naturally, the controversy also affected local congregations. In its search for a minister, the German Reformed congregation in Mahoning, Pennsylvania, stipulated that the applicants be advocates of prayer meetings, protracted meetings, and the anxious bench. On the other hand, the Carrollton, Ohio, congregation specifically requested a minister of “the old school.” However, more typical than conflicting attitudes toward revivalism between the congregations was the development of controversies within the congregations; and many split over the issue of new measures.

In the German Reformed Church in East Vincent Township,
Chester County, Pennsylvania, the difference of opinion developed into a conflict when the old measure faction issued an ultimatum that there were to be "no more protracted meetings and no night meetings" in the church. The old measure men indicated their determination by assigning twenty men to guard the church with rails and clubs in case the revivalistic minister, the Rev. John C. Guldin, and his followers attempted to hold any such services. This congregation eventually divided into two congregations, one old measure and the other new measure; and each has maintained its separate existence in close proximity to the other for over a century.

The turning point in the controversy in the German Reformed Church came in 1843 when the Rev. John W. Nevin published *The Anxious Bench: A Tract for the Times*. Nevin was a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian who had studied at Union College and Princeton Seminary. For ten years, he served as a professor in the Presbyterian Western Theological Seminary in Allegheny, near Pittsburgh. During this period, he read widely in German theology and church history. Consequently, when in 1840 the Eastern Synod called him to become professor of theology in its seminary at Mercersburg, Nevin moved with ease from the Presbyterian to the German Reformed Church.

As a Presbyterian, Nevin had observed the rise of new measures to the point where conversion on the anxious bench overshadowed that denomination's traditional dependence on the sacraments and rites of the Church. When he entered the German Reformed Church, Nevin noticed a similar tendency at work. Immediately, he began to urge the German Reformed ministers and people to maintain their own significant Reformation heritage rather than adopt the subversive system of new measures. However, it was not until after a revivalist had introduced the anxious bench into the German Reformed Church in Mercersburg that Nevin struck his decisive blow.

In his tract, Nevin condemned the type of revivalism that was manufactured by human efforts through the use of new measures.

---

41 Document No. 4, January 17, 1837, Minutes of the Philadelphia Classis, 1837, MSS. in RCHS.
43 John W. Nevin, *Inaugural Address* (Chambersburg, 1840).
He pointed out that extensive noise, physical activity, and crowds of people on the anxious benches did not necessarily indicate the presence of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, he asserted that such noise and confusion might obstruct rather than promote religion. Deep and abiding religious convictions, he believed, were seldom developed in the midst of excitement.

According to Nevin, the revivalists actually created a false issue for the conscience. Their appeals called upon the penitent to decide whether or not he should come forward to the anxious bench, whereas the revivalists should have asked him to submit his life to Christ. The question of going forward to the anxious bench obscured the question of whether or not he should yield himself to Christ. The anxious bench merged the higher question in one that was lower. Essentially, Nevin believed that the entire system of new measures which revolved around the anxious bench was based on the Pelagian heresy of a man-centered religion. According to the revivalists, it was man who “got religion” rather than God who influenced man. Nevin called the results of the system of new measures “mock revivals,” “bastard imitations of the truth,” the “mushroom product of feeling and fancy.”

Nevin proposed that the German Reformed ministers and people replace the system of new measures with what he called the “system of the catechism” which emphasized the role of the Church. Nevin asserted that if man were to be saved, he would be saved in the traditional manner, by God acting through the institution established by Him for that purpose. This institution was the Church. Since Nevin believed that the Church was the very body of Christ, he stated that in the Church, man joined in a “living union with Christ.”

The revivalists held that the Church was the product of individual Christianity, that man was converted and then joined the Church. Nevin asserted that individual Christianity was “always and entirely” the product of the Church. The individual members do not impart life to the Church, said Nevin, but “she imparts life to them.” As physical children develop gradually through the nourishment given by their mothers, so the children of God grow in His image through the spiritual nourishment given them by


their spiritual mother, the Church. This spiritual nourishment consists of the sacraments and rites of the Church and the continual instruction and inspiration of the Church rendered through the patient perseverance of faithful ministers. Nevin confidently asserted that under the consistent application of this system a revival of true religion would soon develop.⁴⁶

Although the revivalists immediately denounced his book,⁴⁷ in time the Church supported Nevin. The ministers of heavily German eastern Pennsylvania praised Nevin for expressing so forcefully what they had believed throughout the controversy over new measures.⁴⁸ Even the Ohio Synod, in which new measures had been especially popular, endorsed Nevin’s book and recommended that the members of the synod aid in its circulation.⁴⁹

Nevin’s influence was decisive in turning the German Reformed Church from its reliance on new measures. The Rev. Theodore Appel, a student at the Mercersburg Seminary when Nevin published *The Anxious Bench*, asserted that the tract ended the Church’s vacillation on new measures. He described Nevin’s publication of the tract as “a turning point in the history of the Reformed Church which determined in a large degree its subsequent history.”⁵⁰ A correspondent to *The Weekly Messenger* observed that Nevin had knocked new measures “all to pieces.”⁵¹ Another asserted that Nevin’s “bold and masterly blow . . . gave the finishing stroke” to the system of new measures in the Reformed Church.⁵² A prominent Lutheran revivalist, the Rev. Reuben Weiser, explained that although others had attacked new measures,

---


⁴⁷ Nevin’s most vociferous opponent in the German Reformed Church was the Rev. Jacob Helffenstein, minister of the large Germantown, Pennsylvania, congregation. Since *The Weekly Messenger* (October 4, 1843) supported Nevin, Helffenstein attacked Nevin in *The Lutheran Observer*, March 1, 1844, March 18, 1844, and April 19, 1844.


⁴⁹ *Minutes of the Ohio Synod*, 1844, p. 20.


⁵¹ *The Weekly Messenger*, February 9, 1848.

⁵² *The Weekly Messenger*, March 18, 1846.
especially the anxious bench, "no decisive stroke was given until J. W. Nevin . . . took the matter in hand."\textsuperscript{55}

Within the next decade, the Eastern Synod rejected revivalism.\textsuperscript{54} The process required a few more years in the Ohio Synod, but the eventual result was the same.\textsuperscript{55} Notices of spectacular revivals of religion practically disappeared from The Weekly Messenger between 1843 and 1850. They faded from The Western Missionary more gradually but just as surely. Ministers such as the Rev. Messrs. Samuel R. Fisher and Henry Harbaugh, who once used the anxious bench in their congregations turned against it.\textsuperscript{56} The Rev. Jacob B. Shade, one of Guldin's converts, serving as an agent for the American Tract Society, refused to distribute The Lutheran Observer because of Editor Kurtz's violent condemnation of Nevin's book.\textsuperscript{57}

The Church's administrative bodies which earlier supported revivalism now just as consistently condemned it. The Eastern Synod denounced the "temporary and short-lived excitements" and referred to its former preference for revivalism as "folly."\textsuperscript{58} The Independent Synod of Ohio, popularly known as "the Herbruck Synod," observed that "the wildfire of a few years back," which glowed so brightly that it nearly killed the old church, "now burned as a slow, steady flame which kindles true religion."\textsuperscript{59} The Mercersburg Classis explained that the quiet and gradual operation of the Holy Spirit developed in many of its congregations "a deep internal Spirituality to which they had been strangers even in former seasons of revival."\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{54} Reuben Weiser, The Mourners Bench (Bedford, 1844), p. 2.
\textsuperscript{55} Philip Schaff, a professor at the Mercersburg Seminary, observed that the Reformed Church had "within the last twelve years, at least in the eastern states, almost entirely come back from these wild extravagances. . . ." Philip Schaff, America: A Sketch of the Political, Social and Religious Character of the United States of North America (New York, 1855), p. 175.
\textsuperscript{56} Emanuel V. Gerhard, Inaugural Address (Tiffin, 1851), p. 71, and Isaac H. Reiter, The History of the Rise, Progress and Present Condition of Theological Seminary in the West (Dayton, 1860), p. 23.
\textsuperscript{58} The Weekly Messenger, December 30, 1843. See Kurtz's comments concerning Shade's support of Nevin's tract in The Lutheran Observer, February 16, 1844.
\textsuperscript{59} Minutes of the Eastern Synod, 1845, pp. 33-34 and 1846, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{60} Minutes of the Independent Synod of Ohio, 1849.
\textsuperscript{61} Minutes of the Mercersburg Classis, 1844, p. 109.
As the Church rejected revivalism, it returned to its own traditions, one of the most important of which was its adherence to the Heidelberg Catechism. The North Carolina Classis asserted that the catechism was "the doctrinal basis on which our German Reformed Zion must arise if she is to arise at all to that honor and usefulness which is her duty and privilege." The Eastern Synod urged its use as the basis for indoctrination of the youth. The Ohio Synod asserted its confidence in the Heidelberg Catechism, which, it explained, expressed the distinctive features of the German Reformed Church. From all parts of the Church came reports that persistent instruction in its doctrines was replacing the system of new measures as the Church's primary method of evangelism.

In keeping with the spirit of the Heidelberg Catechism and in contrast to its former reliance on new measures, the Church began to place greater emphasis on the means of grace, the rites and sacraments of the Church. Increasingly, the Church admitted new members, not through conversion on the anxious bench, but by the administration of the sacrament of baptism and the rite of confirmation, the latter of which followed a period of indoctrination in the Catechism. Reception of the rite of confirmation enabled the church member to participate in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which resumed its central role in the worship of the Church.

Simultaneously some ministers demanded a type of worship more in keeping with the traditions of the German Reformed

---

62 Minutes of the Eastern Synod, 1844, p. 30, and 1845, p. 31.
63 Minutes of the Ohio Synod, 1851, p. 45.
64 For evidence, see the Minutes of Zion's Classis, 1845, p. 292; Minutes of the Mercersburg Classis, 1849, p. 245; Minutes of the Virginia Classis, 1846, p. 102; Minutes of the Ohio Synod, 1845, p. 40; Minutes of the Westmoreland Classis, 1846, in The Western Missionary, November 20, 1856; and Minutes of the Sandusky Classis, 1856, in The Western Missionary, December 4, 1856.
65 For evidence, see the Minutes of the Eastern Synod, 1846, p. 36; Minutes of the Virginia Classis, 1846, p. 52; Minutes of the Lebanon Classis, 1846, p. 11; Minutes of the Goshenhoppen Classis, 1848, p. 86; Minutes of Zion Classis, 1850, p. 48; Minutes of Ohio Synod, 1850, p. 43; Minutes of the Lancaster (Ohio) Classis, in The Western Missionary, June 22, 1852; and Minutes of the Westmoreland Classis, in The Western Missionary, November 20, 1856.
In 1847, the East Pennsylvania Classis petitioned the Eastern Synod to reprint the almost-forgotten Palatinate Liturgy. In 1851, the Eastern Synod commissioned a committee chaired by Nevin's Mercersburg Seminary colleague, the Rev. Philip Schaff, and including such prominent ministers as the Rev. Messrs. Bernard C. Wolff, John H. A. Bomberger, and Henry Harbaugh, to prepare a liturgy for the Church. The publication of the "Provisional Liturgy" in 1857 symbolizes most clearly the Church's return to tradition, for it included not only the traditional German Reformed forms of worship but also the rich liturgies of the medieval church, thus stressing the historic continuity of the Church throughout the centuries.

Ultimately, the controversy over revivalism led the Church to a new appreciation of its past. Instead of abandoning its heritage for revivalistic new measures, the German Reformed Church infused spiritual life into its own traditions, a development which John W. Nevin described as a "real reformation, one without parallel in the history of the Church."

— Minutes of the Eastern Synod, 1847, p. 23.
— Verhandlungen der Synode der Hochdeutsch Reformierte Kirche in der Vereinigten Staaten, 1851, p. 86.
— A Liturgy or Order of Christian Worship (Philadelphia, 1858).
— John W. Nevin to Philip Schaff, April 18, 1846, MSS. in RCHS.