

# New Forms of Old Measures: Nineteenth-Century New-Measures Revivalists' Understanding of Their Methodologies

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The Second Great Awakening (1790–1840) began with a fresh set of revivals not unlike that of the First Great Awakening (late 1730s–40s); however, out of this new awakening, men like Charles Finney developed a revivalistic movement driven by means such as anxious meetings, protracted meetings, and the anxious seat. This system of means, reaching its peak in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, is popularly known as new-measures revivalism.<sup>2</sup> These new measures, however, were not without opposition. Many opposed Finney and other new-measures revivalists (NMRs) on the basis of innovation and practicing means that had no biblical warrant. More recent historians, too, claim that Finney's revivalism "broke 'The Tradition of the Elders,'" citing one of Finney's own sermons, by introducing radically new innovations to church practice and worship.<sup>3</sup>

Yet what these critics and historians often overlook is the fact that the NMRs defended their practices by actually citing biblical and historical precedent, arguing that their methods were not new at all. The purpose of this paper is to reveal the ways in which the NMRs made the above appeal and to what extent they believed their methods to have precedent. I will not assess whether their practice may, indeed, be defended on biblical and historic grounds; rather, my

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<sup>2</sup> Leonard I. Sweet, "The View of Man Inherent in New Measures Revivalism," *Church History* 45, no. 2 (June 1976): 206–21.

<sup>3</sup> William McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: Ronald Press, 1959), 66.

intent here is to more clearly identify their reasoning so that such an assessment can occur without caricaturing their arguments.

To accomplish this, first, I will give a brief history of the development of new measures along with the controversy that surrounded them, prompting NMRs to defend their practices. Second, I will examine their comparisons of new measures to the Old Testament events of Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles. Third, I will consider their comparisons to the New Testament events of Jesus's ministry, Pentecost, and Paul's ministry. Fourth, I will survey their appeal to the means of the sixteenth-century Reformers, Edwards, Whitefield, Wesley, and other common practices in church history as justification of their own new measures. Having examined the comparisons made in biblical and church history, I will argue that by appealing to biblical and historical precedent for defense of their methods, new-measures revivalists showed that what they believed to be new was the form, not the measures themselves.

## **New-Measures Revivalism**

In the early eighteenth century, during a period that has since been recorded as the First Great Awakening, men like Jonathan Edwards recounted a "surprising work of God" that was taking place in the New England colonies.<sup>4</sup> The work was surprising in that men did not practice means outside of the ordinary ones of faithful gospel proclamation and prayer or attempt to fulfill experiential conditions, yet sinners were awakened in large numbers. Therefore, when this awakening emerged, the work was overwhelmingly attributed to God.

Later that century, a second awakening developed out of the same circumstances of ordinary means, led by men like Francis Asbury, Timothy Dwight, and Seth Payson who had been laboring in

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<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Edwards on Revivals: Containing a Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton, Massachusetts, A.D. 1735: Also, Thoughts on the Revival of Religion in New England, 1742, and the Way in Which It Ought to Be Acknowledged and Promoted* (New York: Dunning & Spalding, 1832).

the work of ministry for years already.<sup>5</sup> This awakening, however, lasted longer, reached further geographically, and affected far more people.<sup>6</sup> With the transition into the nineteenth century, a new phenomenon entered, born out of a practical necessity by the Presbyterians to set aside four or five days for a communion season. The result was the camp meeting. Eventually, Methodists and Baptists participated in these, the most notable being the ones in Logan County and Cane Ridge, KY, where perhaps as many as 21,000 people gathered, a majority of whom were not church members.<sup>7</sup> During these camp meetings, men reported vast numbers of conversions. However, Iain Murray states that a side to these revivals in Kentucky consisted of excess and emotionalism, which began to discredit the work as a whole, leading him to distinguish between revival and revivalism.<sup>8</sup>

In response to the report of many conversions in the camp meetings, men wanted to continue the work and therefore sought to promote revival by replicating and further developing certain means. Calvin Colton, a Presbyterian minister and proponent of new measures, remarked that revivals of religion had grown into a system of calculation, with the promotion of means having become as equally a subject of study as that of prayer.<sup>9</sup> Although Charles Finney was not the innovator, his *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* owns the most popular instruction on this system in what has become known as new-measures revivalism. While a variety of new measures existed, Finney specified and gave instruction on three that he found particularly helpful: protracted meetings, the anxious seat, and anxious meetings.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Iain Hamish Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism, 1750–1858* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 127.

<sup>6</sup> Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, 118–19.

<sup>7</sup> Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, 151–13.

<sup>8</sup> Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, 163. In his introduction, Murray makes the distinction by contrasting Edwards's language of a "surprising work of God" with the nineteenth-century notion of strategically planned evangelistic meetings that guaranteed results (xvii–xviii).

<sup>9</sup> Calvin Colton, *History and Character of American Revivals of Religion* (London: Frederick Westley, and A. H. Davis, 1832), 58.

<sup>10</sup> Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1835), 232–55. Other new-measures revivalists sometimes used different terms (inquirer meetings, mourner's bench, etc.) when referring to specific new measures. Throughout this paper, I will use Finney's terms for consistency and to avoid confusion.

Protracted meetings, Finney said, were a series of days devoted to religious services in order to impress spiritual things upon the minds of the people.<sup>11</sup> According to James F. White, they eventually contained a liturgy that included a song service, a sermon, and a harvest of new converts.<sup>12</sup> This harvest of new converts is where the NMRs employed the anxious seat. It, Finney said, was a “particular seat in the place of meeting, where the anxious may come and be addressed particularly, and be made subjects of prayer, and sometimes conversed with individually.”<sup>13</sup> The hope was that through the sinners’ determination to be Christians, coming to the anxious seat would result in their immediate conversion.<sup>14</sup>

The third new measure, and frequent partner to the anxious seat, was the anxious meeting. Its purpose was to have a setting in which ministers could hold personal conversations with anxious sinners. They held the meetings either ahead of a protracted meeting as a means to become familiar with the anxious or following a protracted meeting so as to continue pressing the anxious towards an immediate decision.<sup>15</sup> In this system, NMRs found a methodology that would produce the intended fruit, thus providing the primary justification of their new measures.<sup>16</sup>

New measures, even with their success, were not without opposition.<sup>17</sup> Many opposed them on the basis of innovation apart from biblical warrant and excessive manipulation.<sup>18</sup> John Nevin, in response to an attempt by a visiting preacher to employ new measures in the German Reformed church in Mercersburg, PA, wrote *The Anxious Bench*, going as far as to identify new measures as heresy.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Charles Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 242. Because the description of a protracted meeting in its most basic understanding also matches that of a camp meeting, I will be treating camp meetings as a form of protracted meetings.

<sup>12</sup> James F. White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 177.

<sup>13</sup> Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 247.

<sup>14</sup> Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 248.

<sup>15</sup> Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 242.

<sup>16</sup> Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 12.

<sup>17</sup> Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, 163.

<sup>18</sup> E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 372.

<sup>19</sup> John W. Nevin, *The Anxious Bench*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., rev. and enl. (Chambersburg, PA: German Reformed Church, 1844), 14.

Likewise, Asahel Nettleton and Lyman Beecher in a series of letters and later in person condemned Finney's revivalistic practices on the basis of excess and a lack of warrant.<sup>20</sup> Nettleton viewed Finney's new measures as a work of Satan and a deviation from scriptural order and wisdom.<sup>21</sup>

In defense, NMRs reached beyond their typical pragmatic argument<sup>22</sup> and claimed that their measures were "not new, but have always been practiced in some form or other."<sup>23</sup> Reuben Weiser, a Lutheran minister, replying to John Nevin's *The Anxious Bench*, said that new measures were "as old as the Bible" and that the anxious seat was simply a form of a bench system that has always existed.<sup>24</sup> Finney similarly stated that the new measures of the day had been arrived at by degrees, with each new measure throughout history only being a succession of a previous measure and simply an adjustment in form.<sup>25</sup> They showed this by appealing to precedent in the OT, NT, and church history. In the three main sections that follow, I will show this appeal, revealing their belief that their measures were new in form, not in substance.

## Precedent in the Old Testament

Two of the three most frequent references to biblical precedent for new measures are in the OT. NMRs consistently pointed to the Passover Feast and the Feast of Tabernacles as examples of God's desire for them to continue protracted meetings. Barlow Gorham, a Methodist minister, argued that if God did not want them to practice

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<sup>20</sup> Lyman Beecher and Asahel Nettleton, *Letters of the Rev. Dr. Beecher and Rev. Mr. Nettleton on the "New Measures" in Conducting Revivals of Religion* (New York: G. & C. Carvill, 1828).

<sup>21</sup> Bennet Tyler and Andrew A. Bonar, *Nettleton and His Labours: The Memoir of Dr. Asahel Nettleton* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 339, 449.

<sup>22</sup> Showing NMRs pragmatic argument is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is thoroughly evident in their writings. For an example, see Finney's chapter "When a Revival Is to Be Expected" in his *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*. In it, he says the right means can accomplish revival as assuredly as a farmer can produce a crop (30).

<sup>23</sup> Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 242.

<sup>24</sup> Reuben Weiser, *The Mourner's Bench or an Humble Attempt to Vindicate New Measures* (Bedford, PA, 1844), 29.

<sup>25</sup> Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 238.

protracted meetings, he would not have ordained the annual week-long festivals of the Jews.<sup>26</sup> Finney, while acknowledging that the Jewish festivals were conducted differently than protracted meetings in his day, claimed that foundationally they were the same.<sup>27</sup> Not only were they acceptable for the church's use, Gorham urged, but needed.<sup>28</sup> Below, I will show how the NMRs made the comparison of protracted meetings to the Jewish festivals.

## The Passover Feast

While the Israelites were still in Egyptian captivity, God gave them instructions on what they must do to avoid the consequences of the tenth and final plague that would leave the firstborn in the land of Egypt dead and lead to the Israelites' release (Exod 12:1-13, 29-32). In the midst of their preparations, God also instructed them in how to memorialize this event. Beginning on the fifteenth day of the first month, they were to set aside seven days when they would eat only unleavened bread, culminating in a feast on the twenty-first day of the same month (Exod 13:3-10).

Many NMRs saw the similarity between this event and their own protracted meetings as a legitimate defense against the accusation of unbiblical innovation. Gorham attributed the same foundational goal to both: "to reach a higher altitude in the divine life."<sup>29</sup> However, NMRs did not appeal simply to the motives of the meeting, but more specifically to the circumstances of the feast. James Gallaher, a Presbyterian minister, noted its protracted nature, as seen in 2 Chronicles 30:23, when the assembly kept the initial feast seven days but then decided to protract it by seven more.<sup>30</sup> Weiser, in describing this event, combined the motive and the circumstances, going further in detail:

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<sup>26</sup> Barlow W. Gorham, *Camp Meeting Manual: A Practical Book for the Camp Ground* (New York: H. V. Degen, 1854), 46.

<sup>27</sup> Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 242.

<sup>28</sup> Gorham, *Camp Meeting Manual*, 29.

<sup>29</sup> Gorham, *Camp Meeting Manual*, 46.

<sup>30</sup> James Gallaher, *The Western Sketch Book* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1850), 141.

Here we see good king Hezekiah appointing a meeting at Jerusalem, which was to last seven days. But behold! When the work of God was revived among the backsliding Israelites, they “took counsel to keep other seven days” [2 Chr 30:23], “and they kept other seven days with gladness.” Was not this a protracted meeting! And what was the result? It is said that there was great joy in Jerusalem. Many were no doubt brought from sin to holiness. Did not God himself appoint protracted meetings? Did he not command all the male population of Israel to appear . . . and there engage in religious worship for a number of days in succession? Were not these protracted meetings? Who will say they were not? . . . No doubt, many a glorious revival of religion commenced in Jerusalem during these seasons of grace.<sup>31</sup>

For Weiser and others, the similarities were close enough to justify their protracted meetings as a present-day form of the Passover Feast. However, they would make a stronger connection in the Feast of the Tabernacles.

## **The Feast of Tabernacles**

Of the two OT feasts to which the NMRs compared their new measures, they most frequently pointed to the Feast of Tabernacles/Booths. The feast was a seven-day event that commemorated the Israelites’ deliverance from Egypt and their time in the wilderness. Beginning on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, they would cease from work and dwell in booths, as they had in the wilderness, presenting a food offering to the Lord on the final day (Lev 23:33–36, 39–43).

Douglas Gorrie, a Methodist Episcopal minister, when describing a camp meeting, a form of protracted meeting, presupposed it to be a Feast of Tabernacles:

Camp Meetings. These are usually held annually in the summer season, in a grove or forest, in some central and convenient place. The members from the different parts of the

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<sup>31</sup> Weiser, *The Mourner’s Bench*, 29.

presiding elder's district, and from a distance of even fifty miles, assemble to enjoy this feast of tabernacles. . . . On the morning of the last day of the meeting (which usually lasts about a week) a love feast is held.<sup>32</sup>

Gorham further connected the camp meeting to the Feast of Tabernacles by pointing to the tents in which the people would temporarily dwell.<sup>33</sup>

Because they saw the camp meeting to be at minimum a form of the Feast of Tabernacles, to oppose this new measure was to encourage idolatry. To show this, Gorham and Gallaher both referenced King Jeroboam who established a feast in opposition to the Feast of Tabernacles out of fear that it would cause the people to return to the Lord, kill him, and make Rehoboam their king.<sup>34</sup> Gorham and Gallaher believed that Jeroboam understood the power of influence that a protracted meeting had and thus could only prevent the people from submitting to it by leading them into idolatry.<sup>35</sup> Because the form of the protracted meeting had precedent in this feast, any opposition, likewise had precedent in Jeroboam's idolatry.

In summary, NMRs appealed to the OT feasts of Passover and Tabernacles as precedent for their new measures because of what they perceived to be similarities in motives and circumstances. They understood that God had not only commanded the OT feasts to fulfill a purpose of a simple commemoration, but the feasts were also events purposed to revive the people of God and impress the divine things upon their minds. Additionally, the OT feasts shared common circumstances of being protracted for several days, concluding with a feast, and in the case of camp meetings, temporary dwelling spaces.

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<sup>32</sup> Douglass P. Gorrie, *The Churches and Sects of the United States* (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman, and Co., 1856), 40.

<sup>33</sup> Gorham, *Camp Meeting Manual*, 30-31.

<sup>34</sup> Gorham, *Camp Meeting Manual*, 31; Gallaher, *The Western Sketch Book*, 141-42.

<sup>35</sup> Gorham, *Camp Meeting Manual*, 31; Gallaher, *The Western Sketch Book*, 141-42.



## **Precedent in the New Testament**

The third of the three most frequently referenced annual gatherings is the account of Pentecost in the NT discussed below. In addition to Pentecost, NMRs also appealed to certain events in the ministries of Jesus, Paul, and other apostles as new measures. Generally, NMRs saw private evangelistic conversations as forms of the anxious meeting, sermons which ended with conversions as forms of the anxious bench, and consecutive gatherings as forms of protracted meetings. To show this I will view the events chronologically, beginning with Jesus's ministry, followed by Pentecost and the events leading up to it, and concluding with Paul's ministry.

### **Jesus's Ministry**

Jesus's three years of ministry were filled with evangelistic conversations and religious meetings remote from the synagogues and Temple, which NMRs saw as earlier forms of their own anxious meetings. Charles Thompson, a Presbyterian minister, considered any conversation between a Christian and a sinner on the subject of personal religion to be an anxious meeting.<sup>36</sup> Regarding such conversations of Jesus, he explained:

Christ and Nicodemus had such a meeting. It was the first of a series of influences that changed the timid Jew into a brave Christian. Christ and the woman at the well had such a meeting, the fruits of which brought a great company of Samaritans to the feet of Jesus. The young man came to the Savior with the world's oldest question: "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" and there was an inquiry meeting, though alas so far as we know, without saving result.<sup>37</sup>

Thompson did, however, consider the anxious meetings of his day, which were technically a private meeting following a public revival

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<sup>36</sup> Charles L. Thompson, *Times of Refreshing: A History of American Revivals from 1740 to 1877, with Their Philosophy and Methods* (Rockford, IL: Golden Censer Co., 1878), 378.

<sup>37</sup> Thompson, *Times of Refreshing*, 378.

meeting, to be different in form from Jesus's meetings.<sup>38</sup> What connected them, for Thompson, was the common practice of identifying the state of the sinner through instruction and offering him counsel towards an immediate decision for salvation.<sup>39</sup>

NMRs also saw in Jesus's ministry what they perceived to be protracted meetings. In the same way that Gorham understood that the annual festivals of the Jews were God's approval of protracted meetings, he believed that Jesus's frequent withdrawals with the multitudes away from their homes into desert places for successive days engaged in the worship of God were also an affirmation of protracted meetings, specifically camp meetings given their remote nature.<sup>40</sup> Simeon Harkey, a Lutheran minister, noting that Jesus was constantly engaged in meetings day and night, exclaimed, "Indeed the Savior's whole ministerial life was one of intense excitement among the people. He held a 'protracted meeting' of more than three years continuance!"<sup>41</sup>

## Pentecost

Enoch Pond, a Congregational minister, believed that during the period between Christ's ascension and Pentecost, approximately eight to ten days, the disciples held a protracted prayer meeting as they "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication" (Acts 1:14).<sup>42</sup> Following this period, the day of Pentecost arrived, and the believers gathered there were all filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). They then began to speak in the tongues of other languages so that all present could hear in his own tongue. Some were amazed, but others presumed them to be drunk (Acts 2:5-13). This prompted Peter to preach to the crowd, resulting in about three-thousand conversions (Acts 2:14-41). On another day Peter preached resulting in

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<sup>38</sup> Thompson, *Times of Refreshing*, 379.

<sup>39</sup> Thompson, *Times of Refreshing*, 383.

<sup>40</sup> Gorham, *Camp Meeting Manual*, 38.

<sup>41</sup> Simeon W. Harkey, *The Church's Best State; Or Constant Revivals of Religion* (Baltimore: Lutheran Book Company, 1843), 54.

<sup>42</sup> Enoch Pond, *The Young Pastor's Guide; or Lectures on Pastoral Duties* (Bangor, ME: E. F. Duren, 1844), 175-76. All Scripture references, as it was the translation used by NMRs, are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

about five-thousand conversions (Acts 4:4). NMRs like Harkey considered Peter's sermons on the day of Pentecost and afterwards to result in "the greatest revival ever known."<sup>43</sup> Weiser said that it was protracted at least ten days.<sup>44</sup> Even after Pentecost, Pond considered the believers' continual daily gathering "with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house" (Acts 2:46) to be a protracted meeting.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to viewing the events at Pentecost as protracted meetings, Weiser argues that the apostles during Peter's sermon obviously made use of the bench system, to which the anxious seat belongs. It is unreasonable, he said, to think that Peter responded to those who had been awakened in Acts 2:37 with simply "repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."<sup>46</sup> To those who would argue that the Bible does not say the bench system was used, Weiser responded, "But does the Bible say it was not used?" He considered this to be an incompetent call to conversion if not more words than these were used; therefore, he assumed Peter along with the disciples must have included a form of the anxious seat for it to have had so much success.<sup>47</sup>

## **Paul's Ministry**

Weiser found another form of the bench system in the NT in Paul's ministry. He says that the jailer who was holding Paul and Silas in Acts 16 was in the same mind as the five thousand converts after Pentecost.<sup>48</sup> After Paul and Silas had been singing and praying, an earthquake occurred, opening the prison doors and unfastening the prisoners' bonds. When the jailer rushed in upon hearing Paul's voice, he fell down before Paul and Silas, brought them out, and asked them what he must do to be saved. They instructed him and

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<sup>43</sup> Harkey, *The Church's Best State*, 54.

<sup>44</sup> Weiser, *The Mourner's Bench*, 29.

<sup>45</sup> Pond, *The Young Pastor's Guide*, 176.

<sup>46</sup> Weiser, *The Mourner's Bench*, 5.

<sup>47</sup> Weiser, *The Mourner's Bench*, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Weiser, *The Mourner's Bench*, 6. Interestingly Finney argues that it was the practice of new measures that resulted in Paul's and Silas's arrest (Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 248).

his household to believe in the Lord Jesus for salvation and be baptized at once (Acts 16:25–34). Because of the jailer’s prostration and the immediacy of conversion, Weiser said that this was another form of the bench system.<sup>49</sup> Here he makes it clear that one can find precedent for the anxious seat in any event where an anxious sinner takes a physical posture of prostration and a charge towards immediate conversion is given.

On this occasion, Paul and Silas instructed the jailer and his family to be baptized. Finney stated that the church has always needed something to serve the purpose of an immediate profession of faith. In instructing on the anxious seat, he reasoned:

The church has always felt it necessary to have something of the kind to answer this very purpose. In the days of the apostles, baptism answered this purpose. The gospel was preached to the people, and then all those who were willing to be on the side of Christ were called on to be baptized. It held the precise place that the anxious seat does now, as a public manifestation of their determination to be Christians.<sup>50</sup>

Finney’s explanation reveals that he understood the anxious seat to be synonymous in function to baptism in the first-century church.

One last connection the NMRs made to Paul was his ministry in Ephesus in Acts 19, when he preached in the Jewish synagogue for three months and the hall of Tyrannus for two years. “Here was an Apostolical protracted meeting, continuing, not for a few successive days,” Pond said, “but with little cessation for two whole years.”<sup>51</sup>

In summary, the NMRs saw precedent for all three new measures in the NT. The evangelistic conversations between Jesus and Nicodemus, the woman at the well, and the rich young ruler were forms of their own anxious meetings because of the two-fold goal of inquiring of their spiritual state and then instructing them to make an immediate decision. The times of gathering in Jesus’s ministry, at Pentecost, and in Paul’s ministry were forms of protracted meetings because of the successive nature of the meeting to discuss religion. The public calls to salvation in Peter’s sermons following

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<sup>49</sup> Weiser, *The Mourner’s Bench*, 6.

<sup>50</sup> Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 248.

<sup>51</sup> Pond, *The Young Pastor’s Guide*, 176.

Pentecost and in Paul's and Silas's instructions to the Philippian jailer were forms of the anxious seat because of the posture of prostration and the immediacy with which they urged conversion. Even when no example of the anxious seat was given in Scripture, they assumed it was used because words alone were insufficient.

## **Precedent in Church History**

The type of precedent in which the NMRs saw their new measures in church history differed from that which they saw in the OT and NT. Whereas they understood their forms to be more closely related to the biblical events, their appeal to church history was in relationship to a precedent for successive degrees of new measures. In other words, the sixteenth-century Reformers and leaders of the First Great Awakening all practiced new measures with opposition to some degree, but by the early-to-mid-nineteenth century their methods were considered acceptable with the NMRs' methods now facing opposition.

Gallaher, in his fictional sketch "The Living and the Dead Prophets" based on true historical events, displays this shift well. In the first scene, set during Jesus's ministry, Annas and Caiaphas are venerating the prophet Elisha while deriding Jesus's works as disorderly, fanatical, extravagant, and unacceptably innovative.<sup>52</sup> The second scene, set in a church in Scotland in the sixteenth century, is a conversation between three churchmen, all of whom are troubled by the innovations of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Knox, which undermine the past. The churchmen reminisce over the great work of the leaders of the NT church like Stephen, Peter, John, and Paul.<sup>53</sup> The third scene moves further ahead to 1742 to find three ministers critical of the modern excitements of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield who "wish to take the conversion of sinners into [their] own hands," while praising the previously mentioned men of the Reformation.<sup>54</sup> The final scene is set in the 1840s, about the time that Gallaher is writing this, and is a conversation between a young man and an aged man. The young man begins by venerating the men who

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<sup>52</sup> Gallaher, *The Western Sketch Book*, 177–83.

<sup>53</sup> Gallaher, *The Western Sketch Book*, 183–85.

<sup>54</sup> Gallaher, *The Western Sketch Book*, 185–86.

were at the forefront of the First Great Awakening but speaking derogatorily of the “modern revivals.” The aged man, portrayed as being wise, speaks up and admonishes the young man by saying, “You have fallen into the common error of mankind, who eulogize and build the sepulcher of the prophet that is dead, while they stigmatize and reject the prophet that is living.”<sup>55</sup> The aged man further explains that this pattern is of the same type that led the Jews to reject Jesus.<sup>56</sup> The point Gallaher attempts to make with this sketch is that the revivals of his day are no different in substance than those throughout the history of the church, therefore they should be accepted.

In response to Nevin’s objection that the anxious seat, being only forty years in use, should be rejected as an innovation, Weiser said that to carry this principle out is to claim that the labor of Luther, Calvin, and Knox were all a farce and in vain.<sup>57</sup> In defending protracted meetings, Pond mentioned that it had long been a tradition for large churches to hold religious services every day throughout the season of Lent.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, he stated that revivalists of the seventeenth century would preach daily in successive meetings in the same place.<sup>59</sup>

Finney, likewise, in explaining that new measures have arrived by a succession of degrees shows that the apostles uprooted the Jewish system, Luther and others reformed the Catholic Church, Wesley and Whitefield introduced new measures to the Episcopal Church, and Jonathan Edwards refused to baptize the children of ungodly parents.<sup>60</sup> He concludes by saying, “I mention it merely to show how identical is the opposition that is raised in different ages against all new measures designed to advance the cause of religion.”<sup>61</sup>

Colton saw the new measures of the day so closely connected to that of a hundred years previous that he made no distinction between the revival that began in New England in the 1730s, claiming

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<sup>55</sup> Gallaher, *The Western Sketch Book*, 187.

<sup>56</sup> Gallaher, *The Western Sketch Book*, 186–93.

<sup>57</sup> Weiser, *The Mourner’s Bench*, 14.

<sup>58</sup> Pond, *The Young Pastor’s Guide*, 176.

<sup>59</sup> Pond, *The Young Pastor’s Guide*, 177.

<sup>60</sup> Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 240–42.

<sup>61</sup> Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 242.

that for one hundred years revival has been uninterrupted.<sup>62</sup> If anything, the only difference he would attribute to the revivals of the day was that the current leaders have gained “the wisdom of a century’s experience”<sup>63</sup> and are now “more educated and experienced in how to promote them.”<sup>64</sup>

Not only did NMRs point back to leading figures in the church, but they also pointed out various practices that could be considered new measures as well: Sabbath-schools,<sup>65</sup> education and missionary societies,<sup>66</sup> reading sermons,<sup>67</sup> preaching without notes,<sup>68</sup> hymn and psalm books,<sup>69</sup> lining the hymns,<sup>70</sup> choirs,<sup>71</sup> pitch pipes,<sup>72</sup> instrumental music,<sup>73</sup> extemporaneous prayer,<sup>74</sup> and kneeling in prayer.<sup>75</sup>

In summary, NMRs saw the leaders and practices throughout church history as precedent for their new measures. While they often viewed their methods as forms of those that came before them, such as protracted meetings in the eighteenth century and in Lenten seasons and forms of the anxious seat in the Reformers and the First Great Awakening, most often they appealed to practices that were unlike their new measures, yet had the same qualification of innovation of their own practices and were found acceptable.

## Conclusion

Throughout this paper I have sought to show that the NMRs’ appeal to biblical and historical precedent as a defense of their new

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<sup>62</sup> Colton, *History and Character of American Revivals of Religion*, 159–60.

<sup>63</sup> Colton, *History and Character of American Revivals of Religion*, 192.

<sup>64</sup> Colton, *History and Character of American Revivals of Religion*, 83–84.

<sup>65</sup> Harkey, *The Church’s Best State*, 110.

<sup>66</sup> Harkey, *The Church’s Best State*, 111.

<sup>67</sup> Weiser, *The Mourner’s Bench*, 22.

<sup>68</sup> Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 238.

<sup>69</sup> Weiser, *The Mourner’s Bench*, 22; Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*,

236.

<sup>70</sup> Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 236.

<sup>71</sup> Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 237.

<sup>72</sup> Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 237.

<sup>73</sup> Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 237.

<sup>74</sup> Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 238.

<sup>75</sup> Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 238.

measures revealed that they believed them to be new in form only. Often, they would argue that their measures were not novelties or innovations, that they “have been continued, in one form or another, through almost every period of the church’s history.”<sup>76</sup> To demonstrate this I have shown their appeal to the OT, NT, and church history.

The NMRs saw forms of their protracted meetings in the feasts of Passover, Tabernacles, and Pentecost. They also believed the preaching ministries of Jesus, the apostles, Paul, and the First Great Awakening to be protracted meetings. The successive nature of these events, with consecutive gatherings of days, weeks, and even years, is the form that caused them to claim precedent for their own protracted meetings. Because they understood the anxious meeting to include the actions of discerning the state of the anxious and to instruct the individual towards immediate conversion, they believed any evangelistic conversation to be a form of the anxious meeting; therefore, Jesus’s many conversations with unbelievers served as a form of this meeting. The current form of the anxious seat for the NMRs was a section of seats or pews set aside within the public evangelistic meeting for the purpose of calling the anxious forward so that they could be led to immediate conversion. The form in which they found precedent was in the context of a public evangelistic meeting and the purpose of calling the sinner to immediate conversion. According to the NMRs, this form could be seen in Peter’s sermons following Pentecost, the apostles’ practice of Baptism, and in Paul’s and Silas’s instructions to the Philippian Jailer and his family. The NMRs appeal to church history primarily served to show how their new measures arrived by a succession of developments over time and how they have always existed in a variety of forms. These defenses of their new measures based on precedent indeed shows that the NMRs believed their measures to be new in their current form only, having been practiced with a common foundation throughout biblical and church history.

My intent here was to more clearly elucidate the NMRs’ argument in defense of their measures so that the measures may be honestly assessed. Such a careful assessment is important since, as McLoughlin rightly observes, NMRs’ methods “transformed ‘the

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<sup>76</sup> Pond, *The Young Pastor’s Guide*, 175.



new system' from a minority to a majority religion. By mid-century it was in fact the national religion in the United States."<sup>77</sup> Churches that have inherited practices from NMRs but that wish to remain faithful to biblical prescription need to carefully consider whether these new measures actually find precedent in Scripture and church history.

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<sup>77</sup> McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 66.