This is the first volume in a projected three volume work derived from a 5-year Lilly endowed research project on United Methodism based at Duke University and directed by Dennis Campbell, Russell Richey, and William Lawrence. The project focused on three aspects: “(1) to provide a careful, fresh estimate of the history of Methodism in America, with particular attention to its 20th-century experience, (2) to attempt a portrait of United Methodism at the dawning of a new century, and (3) to explore policy issues, with a view to the church’s effective participation in American society and the world in the future” (vii). The three volume work will focus primarily on the first two aspects. This first volume is on that most used and least understood concept for Methodists, connectionalism. The subtitle, Ecclesiology, Mission and Identity, shows how broadly the net is cast in treating this subject. The volume contains Richey’s thoughtful introduction and 12 essays from scholars on various topics designed to illuminate the concept of connectionalism. There are essays of purely historical focus, such as Wesley’s idea of itinerancy, the founding of Methodist universities, the significance of late 19th century Methodist church architecture, the settlement house movement in the late 19th and early 20th century among the Methodists, and assessments on attitudes toward the various mergers United Methodism has passed through this century. In addition there are also essays on sociological topics such as analysis of the funding crisis of denominational programs at the local church level, the different types of congregations within the United Methodist church, and different types of individuals, which make up, or don’t make up, a local church. This volume is a rich resource for wrestling with the idea of what we mean when we speak about a connectional denomination.

However, the volume actually raises as many questions as it answers. Despite Richey's introductory essay, as well as his other writings, which indicate that connectionalism has a relational component as well as a structural component, none of these essays in this volume grasps that issue. With the single exception of Sara Kreutziger’s essay on the deaconesses and their settlement house programs, all the essays deal on a structural level when considering connectionalism. That is to say, they focus on connection in space, how we are organized, and not across time. After reading this volume one is left with the aching question of why people remained Methodists from generation to generation. Kreutziger’s essay is able to communicate what must have been the excitement and commitment for at least one part of the denomination across time. Monk’s essay on the Methodist Student Movement (MSM) is interested in the same concern as he explores why the
MSM dissolved, but sees the failure in programming (structure again) and does not raise the interesting question of why increasingly Methodist students came to college with a low commitment to Methodism; a fact which is confirmed by Marler and Hadaway in their essay which comments on adults of the same generation as Monk's students, as not being very interested in church attendance.

Most of these studies bring us face to face with the various issues of structural connectionalism, but fail to answer why we are connected from one generation to another in time. The first volume gives a wonderful sense of Methodism's involvement in higher education (Longfield), in the denomination's understanding of worship as proclamation (Rowe and church architecture), and the types of individuals which fit into the different types of local churches (Zech, Becker and Marler and Hadaway). The volume is a significant addition to United Methodist studies.

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Despite its rather striking title, which attempts to pack too much information into too few words, this second volume of the United Methodism and American Culture series has several remarkable chapters. The volume is divided into two sections: one deals with the overall character of American Methodism and the second deals with the diversity within the denomination. If the first volume focused on the structural elements of the connection, the second volume deals with the descriptive elements of the connection. This portrait of United Methodism is essential reading for the current leadership within the denomination or those wishing to acquire an understanding of the denomination's character. Two excellent essays by John Green and James Guth and the other by Jackson Carroll and Wade Roof characterize the membership of the denomination. The Green/Guth article identifies the 'types' of individuals within the denomination (conservative, liberal, moderate, socially active) and the Carroll/Roof article argues that these types are found universally across the denomination. There are significant articles on what motivates local churches to give, the impact of the pastor's ideas upon her/his congregation, and the retention rate for pastors since the creation of United Methodism. Most interesting is the analysis by Patricia Chang about the status of women pastors within United Methodism. While finding that women pastors tend to receive less pay and less significant positions of leadership than their male counterparts within United Methodism, she notes that when
compared with women pastors in other denominations United Methodist women pastors have a higher pay scale and are more likely to pastor mid-size churches. She attributes this slightly higher status to the itinerant system within United Methodism. In the section on diversity within United Methodism, we find a variety of assessments of United Methodism’s commitment to pluralism and diversity. Each author makes the point that United Methodism would do well to listen to and learn from the variety of voices within the denomination. The volume ends with a thoughtful summary essay by Donald Mathews which reminds us that United Methodists need to listen to each other as well as to speak to each other. These two volumes by Richey, Campbell, and Lawrence have taken a solid step toward allowing the denomination to listen to itself.

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