

REPAIRING EPISCOPACY BY TRACKING THAT OF BISHOP CHRISTIAN NEWCOMER

RUSSELL E. RICHEY

From “Wir sind Brüder!” to “Can We become Brothers?”

We invited our beloved Brother Newcomer to a seat in our conference as your messenger, and he is doubly dear to us as the messenger of such joyful tidings of brotherly love from you. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of all the messengers of mercy and love and peace and good will.[”]¹

So the 1811 Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) Baltimore Conference received Christian Newcomer. The powerhouse, dominant, and controlling conference—the Vatican of early Methodism—imbedded this tribute within its formal response to an overture concerning union between the two churches, an overture which Newcomer had conveyed. For the next three years, the Baltimore *Minutes* recognized Newcomer’s ambassadorial role and burdened him with responses to carry back. He had functioned in both message-bearing regards as well in the 1809 and 1810 United Brethren (UB) overtures, though, the Methodist *Minutes* do not so indicate. The encounter for 1813—though it proved to be the last hopeful exchange—effectively ended the Newcomer-led unitive efforts. He described the 1813 events in some detail in his journal:²

[August] 25th—I preached at old Mr. Mohn’s, from Psalm 34, v. 20; rode to Peter Seitz’s, where our Conference is to be held. 26th—This forenoon the session of our Conference commenced; upwards of twenty preachers were present; poor unworthy me was elected their president. The Conference continued until the 28th; all things were done in brotherly love, and the greatest unanimity prevailed throughout the session: bless the Lord, O my soul! for all his mercy. The Conference was concluded,

¹ “Typescript of the Minutes of the Baltimore Conference, MEC,” 1811, 54. The Minutes carry as well the addresses to the Methodists from the United Brethren and the response, 52-54. Copies of the “Typescript of the Minutes,” 428 pages covering the years 1800–1844 are in my possession and used with permission. See also A. W. Drury, *History of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ* (Dayton, OH: Otterbein Press, 1924), 801. Hardcopy was accessed at Duke; available online via archive.org. Through the MEC record of the exchanges between the United Brethren and the Baltimore Conference (MEC) one can see the several appearances of Newcomer and the text of exchanges within the hour-to-hour documented conference activities. The same may be the case for the UB Minutes, as Drury indicates, “The letters following are given as they occur in stitched manuscript placed within the conference record. All are recorded in the English language.” See Drury, 796.

² Christian Newcomer, *The Life and Journal of the Rev’d Christian Newcomer, Late Bishop of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. Written by Himself*, transcribed, corrected, and translated by John Hildt (Hagerstown: Printed by F. G. W. Kapp, Book Printer, 1834) and republished as *Christian Newcomer: His Life, Journal, and Achievements*, Samuel S. Hough, ed. (Dayton: Board of Administration, Church of the United Brethren in Christ [1941]); available online via archive.org.

and I rode 11 miles yet to Jacob Hautz's.

Sunday 29th—This forenoon I preached in Lyday's school-house, in the German and English language; in the afternoon I spoke in Middle-town

September 1st—This evening I reached Steubenville; having no acquaintances in the place, I stopped at a public house. 2^d—The Ohio Conference is here in session. I went this morning to pay a visit to Bishop Asbury, who is present; he lodges with Mr. Wells, where we took breakfast together; I went with him to Conference, and delivered a communication from our Conference. Here I found several brethren to whom I was known; was cordially invited to lodge at Br. Noland's, during my stay, which invitation I cheerfully accepted.

Sunday 5th—Bishops Asbury and McKendree both preached to-day to a congregation estimated at more than 2000 persons. 6th—This forenoon I received a communication from the Conference to the Brethren in our next Conference which is to assemble in Montgomery county, Ohio. After taking an affectionate farewell of the two Bishops and the other Brethren, I dined once more with my kind host Br. Wm. Noland; commended him and his amiable family to God in prayer, and set out at three o'clock in the afternoon; crossed the Ohio river, and staid for the night in a little village.³

As Newcomer noted in his journal (hereafter *Journal*), he had been elected to the episcopacy (presidency) in 1813, indeed only a week before reaching the Methodist conference and meeting with Asbury. The next year, as we explore further below, the dialogue ended. Well, here, today, we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the union Newcomer sought 200 years ago. It has taken a long, long time for Methodists to recognize, embrace, and claim the unity in Christ for which he and the UB stood. Newcomer, after all, sought, espoused and labored for the unity we celebrate this year. We perhaps should have identified 2018 as a Newcomer-recognition. Not recognizing Newcomer has been seemingly a long-established Methodist policy. Both 1813 and 1814 Baltimore *Minutes* recorded Newcomer's ambassadorial role but not his new episcopal status.⁴ This is very strange, as we shall see in a while, for Bishops Francis Asbury and William McKendree oversaw Baltimore's proceedings. Also, they had met Newcomer repeatedly.

Modeling Episcopacy: Brotherhood (and now Sisterhood)

Newcomer modeled episcopacy, for then, for now. In his exercise of the episcopal office, he elevated his collegial, unitive passion to another level. Moreover, in various other ways, he modeled style, commitments, habits,

³ Newcomer, 217–218. These long quotations from Newcomer's journal allow him to speak to us today, to convey through his own words the multi-faceted, day-to-day, and on-the-ground ministry which he exercised, and so permit him to voice something of what leadership, especially episcopacy should continue to offer. I need to add at this point a word of appreciation for the various editions of Newcomer's *Life and Journal*. I would call attention especially to the two Appendices in the version I used. Appendix A FOOTNOTES and Appendix B INDEX offer 50+ pages of names, then indices of Scripture texts, a Newcomer Calendar, a listing of Annual and General conferences, and hardcopy Journal locations. The online *Life and Journal* used for this paper and cited (above) is from the 1834 edition and, of course, lacks such wonderful resources.

⁴ "Typescript of the Minutes of the Baltimore Conference, MEC, 1813, 68, 70; 1814, 74, 78. See Drury, 804–807. Drury also includes the 1813 address from the Philadelphia Conference. His text for the Baltimore 1813 response is fragmentary but the missing first half of is in the Baltimore "Minutes."

and patterns that bishops thereafter ought to have copied and today's episcopacy desperately needs. If Newcomer joined the episcopal ranks of Francis Asbury, William McKendree, and John Wesley (bishop-by-self-ordination), he joined them as well in modeling itinerating general superintendency as few bishops, perhaps none, have since. Also, he sustained that style, on-the-ground, day-to-day, week-in-week-out throughout his exercise of the office. Excerpt after excerpt from his *Journal*, almost any time during his ministry, exhibit his modeling what he advocated. Brotherhood and brotherhood lived and espoused at every level of the church's life. The brotherhood Newcomer sought with the Methodists and on a denominational level characterized the style and pattern with his own ministerial "siblings." Here, from late in his life, we see Newcomer literally on the ground—in camp meetings—and brothering his colleagues and people. Name-after-name jumps to us line-after-line as shown below:

[July, 1827]

Sunday 22^d—I preached at a new Camp-ground near Boonsborough, from Matthew 5, v. 3, 27th—To-day Br. Christian Berger, from the State of Ohio, came to my house

August 2^d—This day our Camp-meeting commenced near Boonsborough, and continued until the 7th; many souls received a blessing. 8th—Rode to Little's-town and lodged with Br. Bishop. 9th—I staid for the night with Mr. Funk in Petersburg. 10th—Came to a Camp-meeting in Cumberland county, Pa. 11th—I tried to preach here, but had very little grace or power.

Sunday 12th—This day a vast multitude were assembled; on the 14th the meeting came to a close: glory be to God, many souls were awakened and converted; I rode to York and lodged with the widow Bentz. 15th—Came to Lewis Hartman's, and staid for the night. 16th—I attended a Camp-meeting in York county. 17th—I preached here, from Luke 11, v. 21, 22; . . . 24th—I came again to a Camp-meeting in Dauphin county, at Mr. Halleman's . . .

30th—This day I came to a Camp-meeting at Wegley's, in Cumberland county; I spoke from Psalm 37, v. 37. . .

Sunday 9th—I attended a Methodist Camp-meeting in Washington county, 11th—Rode to Virginia to visit my children . . .

Sunday 23^d—This day I preached at our school-house, under the trees in the grove. 25th—rode to Valentine Doub's and staid for the night. 26th—I lodged with Bishop, in Little's- town. 27th—This day I came through Hanover, to a Camp-meeting at Moses Herd's, in York county; I preached the first sermon, from John 25, v. 6 to 9. 29th—I preached from Ephesians 2, v. 17 to 20.⁵

The "Br." and "Brs." identities, traveling together, and staying at a certain brother's home predominate most of the pages of Newcomer's *Journal*, more than in what I have just cited. As we note below, that teamed ministry Newcomer indicates with the plural "we," on page after page, line after line. Brotherhood was his passion, agenda, commitment, and life.

Today, we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of what Christian Newcomer strove mightily to achieve over 200 years ago, namely unifying the Methodists, Evangelicals, and UB and laboring as well for comity with his old faith,

⁵ Newcomer, 314–315. There are close to a hundred camp meeting references in Newcomer's journal.

the Mennonites.⁶ His debt to the Mennonite upbringing and therefore to Pietism generally, we leave to other interpreters.⁷ So he sought brotherhood across breakages or lines that others had established. A decade of his unity negotiations, advocacy and inducements came to naught. However, through his unitive endeavors and in various other initiatives, Newcomer shaped the UB as a church.

Through multiple roles—*inventing* and/or borrowing new strategies, *laboring* in German and learning English, *itinerating* daily, *brothering* those with whom he traveled and for whom he ministered, *crisscrossing* middle America, *modeling* what he preached, *engaging* other churches and their leadership, *sustaining* and focusing his effort, *gesturing out* in every conceivable way, *seeking* to bring UB, Methodists and Evangelicals together—Newcomer transformed what had been an ethnic mission into an American denomination. J. Bruce Behney and Paul H. Eller capture his transformative power and effect, noting “his forms of service as preacher, evangelist, pastor, bishop, organizer of Annual and General Conferences, ecumenist, and author of disciplinary and doctrinal statements.”⁸ Convert those nouns to verbs,

⁶ On the latter see Sem C. Sutter, “Mennonites and the Pennsylvania German Revival,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 50 (January 1976): 37–57. See also the several essays by Donald K. Gorrell, including “‘Ride A Circuit Or Let It Alone’: Early Practices that Kept the United Brethren, Albright People and Methodists Apart,” *Methodist History* 25.1 (October 1986): 4–16. Newcomer alluded to the Mennonites and his gravitation away from that community some four times in his brief autobiography (*Life*) and recorded attendance at some fifteen Mennonite meetings in the *Journal*. I could not find in either place description of efforts to achieve unity between Mennonites and UB.

⁷ J. Steven O’Malley, “Pietism and Wesleyanism: Setting the Stage for a Theological Discussion,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 63 (Spring 2018): 56–78; idem, *Pilgrimage of Faith: The Legacy of the Otterbeins*, ATLA Monograph Series, no. 4 (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1973); idem, *Early German-American Evangelicalism: Pietist Sources on Discipleship and Sanctification* (Lanham, MD.: Scarecrow Press, 1994); Harry Yeide, Jr., *Studies in Classical Pietism* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997); K. James Stein, *Philipp Jakob Spener: Pietist Patriarch* (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1986); Arthur Wilford Nagler, *Pietism and Methodism* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal, South, 1918); Scott Kisker, “Radical Pietism and Early German Methodism: John Seybert and the Evangelical Association,” *Methodist History* 37 (April 1999): 175–188; Peter C. Erb, ed., *Pietists: Selected Writings* (New York, Ramsey, Toronto: Paulist Press, 1983); F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden: Brill, 1965); idem, *German Pietism during the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1973); idem, *Continental Pietism and Early American Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976). On John Wesley’s relation to Pietism see Martin Schmidt, *John Wesley*, 2 vols. (Zurich, 1953–1966); idem, *John Wesley: A Theological Biography*, trans. Norman P. Goldhawk (London: Epworth Press, 1962–1971).

⁸ J. Bruce Behney and Paul H. Eller, *The History of the Evangelical United Brethren Church*, ed. Kenneth W. Krueger (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 64. For an overview of Newcomer’s transformative role, see pp. 97–111. See also older standard histories of the UB cited previously. What ought to be cited as an Abingdon book is the dissertation, John Dallas Robertson, “Christian Newcomer (1749–1830), Pioneer of Church Discipline and Union Among the United Brethren in Christ, the Evangelical Association, and the Methodist Episcopal Church,” (Ph.D. dissertation, George Washington University, 1973). Important and helpful here have been several essays in J. Steven O’Malley and Jason Vickers, eds., *Methodist and Pietist: Retrieving the Evangelical Brethren Tradition* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2008). See there, especially, Scott Kisker, “Martin Boehm, Philip William Otterbein, and the United Brethren in Christ.”

add other of Newcomer's leadership roles, and emphasize his experimental bravery, and we capture his importance then, now, and for our ecclesial future. Again, he represents an episcopacy that Untied (yes Untied) Methodism needs to reclaim.⁹

Our Episcopal Plight

Our denominational strains, discord, and divisions have worried, indeed, troubled our bishops as long as we have been The United Methodist Church (UMC). They consume council meetings strategizing how to tie together our *Untied Methodism*.¹⁰ Some of our bishops and their "fellow" papal-like lay co-conspirators have sought to "fix" *Untied Methodism* by destroying the boards and agencies. How? Various! They *demonize* the boards; *push reduction* of their funding; *marginalize* agency staff; *seek* other management, typically their own, of centralized denominational operations; or *participate* in the elaboration of an array of *competitive organizational structures*. Attacks on bureaucracy, to be sure, dominate much of our public, national life. Furthermore, the centralized programming, guiding, and resourcing, which served us well in a world of printed resources, mailed materials, railroad transit, and manual typewriters, certainly struggles to reconfigure itself in our electronic age.

Forgotten are our many denominational boards' overriding missional style—their purpose-driven operations, their commitment to serving the denomination at all levels, and the array of programs they earlier made available to all our churches, from the biggest to the smallest. We old folks remember Sunday school booklets, church bulletins, films on missions and missionaries, and an array of magazines, leaflets, and books, *but* such constituted a minute portion of the varied materials, programs, and services offered to our peoples by their servants the boards and agencies.

Now instead of continuing to trash the agencies, as though they were the sole reason for our problems as a church, perhaps it is time to suggest that we start elsewhere. Might we better address our plight as a church—our continued infighting, and the horrendous membership losses—were the bishops to face the problems by staring into the mirror? Then, after seeing what they have and seek to become, they should look back to Wesley, Asbury, *and especially this year and today*, Newcomer. These three modeled what bishops once were, but today, can do, must do, and be. They were truly itinerant general superintendents.

Itinerant general superintendents, now? No more! Functioning individually as diocesan bishops and as a Council, an arch-episcopacy or papacy, how can our bishops offer a grand vision for and model a transformative minis-

⁹ See my "Today's Untied Methodism: Living with/into its Two Centuries of Regular Division" in *The Unity of the Church and Human Sexuality: Toward a Faithful United Methodist Witness* (Nashville: GBHEM Publishing, 2018).

¹⁰ William B. Oden, *The Council of Bishops in Historical Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014).

try? They need to look for counsel and inspiration from Newcomer, Asbury, and Wesley. Newcomer in particular exemplified commitments, patterns, style, and spirit from which much can be learned and to which our leaders should return. The third UB bishop—following Philip William Otterbein and Martin Boehm but perhaps more or more consistently than either of his predecessors—Newcomer modeled itinerant general superintendency.¹¹

Suppressing the “Itinerant General Superintendency”

Again, Newcomer, Asbury, and Wesley—their grand vision is no more. How so, constitutionally as well as operationally? Check the current *Discipline*. Let us recall, if we can, Article III of our Restrictive Rules specifies, “The General Conference shall not change or alter any part or rule of our government so as to do away with episcopacy or destroy the plan of our itinerant general superintendency.” Note how little “Chapter Three: THE SUPERINTENDENCY” evokes the language of Article III of our Restrictive Rules. The introductory, “episcopal task” gestures grandly, apostolically—“mission of the Church,” “transformation of the world,” and “ordering the life of the Church.” The next section, ¶ 403, “bishop’s role,” elaborates on the seemingly global tasks with six rich, elaborate, and specific visionary paragraphs, *but* mainly framed in diocesan terms, for “the bishop.” To be sure, the third point, “A vision for the Church” imagines our bishop (the singular is used) “to lead the whole Church in claiming its mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” This point brings Council aspirations onto the conference level. Collectively, the six points bring the Council’s grand and transformational vision to the ground and into the conference (or shall we say diocese?).

The office out of which or residence from which bishops operate permits easy access to a nearby airport to fly here and there for their Council gatherings or to view various ministries but they exercise their personal and assigned *episcopē* in a remarkably small orbit.¹² Again, like Anglican bishops ours have become diocesan—eight or often twelve years in one house and one office. Itinerating? Traveling? No. Today’s bishops have heeded Samuel Wesley’s plea—to take John off the saddle and the road—and settled themselves (and Methodism) back at Epworth or like Asbury in the late 1780s when he hid in Judge Thomas White’s home to escape the traumas of the revolution.

For true, lived itinerant general superintendency—in all its on-the-ground modeling of ministry—we should look back to Wesley, Asbury and their UB counterpart, Newcomer. Asbury lived the itinerant general super-

¹¹ For Boehm’s son’s treatment of UB episcopacy and of Martin Boehm’s, see J. B. Wakeley, *The Patriarch of One Hundred Years; Being Reminiscences, Historical and Biographical of Rev. Henry Boehm* (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1875), 372–393.

¹² Admittedly, this is not the first time that I have offered alternatives for the episcopacy. See, for instance, Richey and Thomas Edward Frank, *Episcopacy in the Methodist Tradition: Perspectives and Proposals* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004).

intendency and modeled that ministry—indeed Wesley’s vision¹³—in all its complexity, completeness, particularity, and grandeur, as John Wigger has recently shown.¹⁴ Newcomer modeled what Wesley modeled and what Asbury embodied—the itinerant general superintendency. So did John Seybert, the Evangelical Association bishop—sometimes identified as its first—with Jacob Albright’s organizational and creative roles treated more like those of Wesley than Coke or Asbury. As a presiding elder, Seybert clocked incredible mileage, reporting 3,924 horse-back miles in 1830 and 4,356 miles in 1831, preaching 271 times and baptizing thirty-eight persons. After being elected bishop, he kept the same pace. For 1842, he claimed 5,611 miles and for 1849, 5,629, “preached about three hundred times, besides visiting many hundreds of families, praying with the well and the sick.”¹⁵ Today’s bishops need only look back *and read* to discover that the itinerant general superintendency was lived, day-to-day, year-after-year, on the ground and honoring grueling, not air-conditioned, commitments. Wesley, Asbury, Seybert, and Newcomer preached and demanded what they expected of themselves.

Being Shaped by/in the Brotherhood

Living such purposes, Newcomer shaped the UB the way Wesley did British and Asbury American Methodism.¹⁶ Wesley was nurtured in his ministry by his mother, Susanna and colleague, George Whitefield. Asbury should have, could well have, learned experimental outreach from Barbara

¹³ For Wesley’s vision and model of ministry, see Ted A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart: A Study of European Religious Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Columbia: U South Carolina P, 1991); W. Reginald Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992); idem, *Early Evangelicalism: A Global Intellectual History, 1670–1789* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2006). For briefer attention to Pietism and particularly its bearing on American Methodisms, see Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe and Jean Miller Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience in America: A History*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010), 1–13.

¹⁴ John Wigger, *American Saint: Francis Asbury and the Methodists* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2009).

¹⁵ S. P. Spreng, *The Life and Labors of John Seybert, First Bishop of the Evangelical Association* (Cleveland: Published for the Evangelical Association by Lauer & Mattill), 1888, 120, 122, 246, 290.

¹⁶ William J. Abraham and James E. Kirby, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009); Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., ed., *T & T Clark Companion to Methodism* (London: T & T Clark International, 2010); Jason E. Vickers, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism*, (New York: Cambridge UP, 2013); Rex Matthews, *Timetables of History for Students of Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007); William Gibson, Peter Forsaith and Martin Wellings, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to World Methodism* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2013); W. Harrison Daniel, *Historical Atlas of the Methodist Movement* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009); Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., and Susan E. Warrick, eds. *Historical Dictionary of Methodism* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005). Older encyclopedias remain invaluable, especially the now digitized, Nolan B. Harmon, ed., *Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, 2 vols. (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1974), available in archive.org; John McClintock and James Strong, eds., *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, 12 vols. (New York: Arno Press, 1970; reprint of the 1867–1887 edition), still standard for the nineteenth century; and Matthew Simpson, *Cyclopedia of Methodism* (New York: Gordon Press, 1977; reprint of 1876 edition, also useful for the nineteenth century).

Heck and the Strawbridges. So, Newcomer was shaped by his fathers in the faith—Otterbein and Boehm. Quite strikingly, Newcomer found himself in a leadership position among the UB, clearly being mentored (mothered, one might say) by the two bishops. For the first conference on record, the *Minutes* read:

September 25, 1800, the following preachers assembled at the house of Frederick Kemp in Frederick County, Maryland: William Otterbein, Martin Boehm, John Hershey, Abraham Troxel, Christian Krum, Henry Krum, George Pfrimmer, Henry Boehm, *Christian Newcomer*, Dietrich Aurand, Jacob Geisinger, George Adam Geeting, Adam Lehman.¹⁷

The next few years, however the *Minutes* accord Newcomer a placement indicating prominence and/or a special relationship to Otterbein and Boehm, and leadership expectations:

September 23, 1801, we again assembled at Peter Kemp's in order to counsel together and instruct one another how we might be pleasing to God and useful to our fellow men.

The following preachers were present: William Otterbein, Martin Boehm, *Christian Newcomer*, . . .¹⁸

[1802] At Cronise's, in Frederick County, [Maryland,] we, the following preachers, came together to hold counsel: William Otterbein, Martin Boehm, *Christian Newcomer*, . . .¹⁹

October 5, 1803, as assembled at David Snyder's in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania. The preachers present were the following: William Otterbein, Martin Boehm, *Christian Newcomer*, . . .²⁰

October 3, 1804, the conference met at David Snyder's. Few preachers came, however, on account of the prevailing sickness and mortality. Present, *Christian Newcomer*, Martin Boehm, Frederick Schaffer, David Snyder, Matthias Bortsfeld, . . .

May 29, 1805, we, the following preachers, assembled at the house of *Christian Newcomer*. Both our [superintendents] were present—Otterbein and Boehm. John Hershey, George Adam Geeting, . . . Abraham Mayer, *Christian Newcomer*, . . .²¹

His place in the *Minutes*, as we have just indicated, did vary some but generally was accorded some “presidential” recognition. So, for instance:

May 21, 1806, we held our conference for this year at Lorenz Eberhart's. The following preachers were present: John Neidig, Lorenz Eberhart, Joseph Hoffman, . . . *Christian Newcomer*, Jacob Baulus, Henry Krum, George Adam Geeting. O God,

¹⁷ A. W. Drury, trans. and ed., *Minutes of the Annual and General Conferences of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, 1800–1818* (Dayton: United Brethren Publishing House, 1897), 9 (emphasis added). Early excerpts can also be viewed in *The Methodist Experience in America: A Sourcebook*, Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe and Jean Miller Schmidt, eds. vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000). For our treatment of the UB, see *Methodist Experience in America*, vol. 1 and *American Methodism: A Compact History* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2012).

¹⁸ Drury, *Minutes*, 10 (emphasis added).

¹⁹ Drury, *Minutes*, 14 (emphasis added).

²⁰ Drury, *Minutes*, 12 (emphasis added).

²¹ Drury, *Minutes*, 17 (emphasis added).

make they servants very faithful. . . .

George Adam Geeting.
Christian Newcomer.²²

Our yearly conference began at Abraham Niswander's, in Virginia, May 25, 1808,
. . . The following preachers were present: *Christian Newcomer*, . . .

George Adam Geeting.
Christian Newcomer.²³

This the 10th of May, 1809, we preachers assembled at Christian Herr's in Lancaster County. The following preachers were present: Martin Boehm, *Christian Newcomer*, . . .²⁴

June 6, 1810, our preachers' meeting began at the house of John Cronise in Frederick County, Maryland. The following preachers assembled: George Adam Geeting, *Christian Newcomer*, . . .²⁵

The conference journal and Newcomer's own exhibit, page after page, what historian Daniel Berger observed comparing Newcomer with Asbury in "the constancy and extend of his travels," and being "seldom out of his saddle, except to eat, to sleep, to preach, or to hold a conference."²⁶ Also, more than either Asbury and Wesley, Newcomer sought to heal divisions, to move slowly on formalization, and to cross lines of difference—denomination, language, region, practice, and context (camp meetings).²⁷ Strangely, given his leadership roles, close "brotherly" ties to Otterbein and Boehm, and interaction with Methodism's bishops and other key leaders, Newcomer does not figure in their journals. The lack of mention by Asbury is striking, indeed strange.

Christian Newcomer and Francis Asbury

Bishop Asbury's keen eye for promising leadership strangely missed that of Newcomer. His omission in his journal of meetings with Newcomer and of Newcomer's agency in the several overtures for unity is striking, indeed strange. Perhaps, Asbury's oversight had led Methodist historians to neglect Newcomer's importance. By Newcomer's journaling, he encountered As-

²² Drury, *Minutes*, 19 (emphasis added). On Geeting, see Behney and Eller, 57–59, and elsewhere.

²³ Drury, *Minutes*, 21–23 (emphasis added).

²⁴ Drury, *Minutes*, 23 (emphasis added).

²⁵ Drury, *Minutes*, 24 (emphasis added).

²⁶ Daniel Berger, *History of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ* (Dayton: United Brethren Publishing House, 1897), 146. Berger spreads treatment of Newcomer through seven chapters—VIII–XIV. Similarly spreading attention to Newcomer was John Lawrence in his *The History of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ*, 2 vols. (Dayton: United Brethren Printing Establishment, 1868, 1861)—yes, with that ordering of dates and with each volume, now bound together consuming over 400 pages. The first volume dwells on the history pre-1812 and the second carries the narrative up to 1861. For an account drafted closer to Newcomer's own, see Henry G. Spayth, *History of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ* (Circleville, OH: Published at the Conference Office of the United Brethren in Christ, 1851).

²⁷ Newcomer, 223, 232. John H. Ness gives attention to the publication of the journal in *One Hundred Years: A History of Publishing in the Evangelical United Brethren Church* (Dayton: Board of Publication of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, 1966), 260–261.

bury a number of times, on some ten different occasions. The first was in 1801.

[April, 1801] 30th—This day I rode to Pipe Creek, where the Methodist Annual Conference is to be held; put up at Br. Cassel's, and had meeting at night.

May 1st—This forenoon I attended the Conference. Bishops Asbury and Whatcoat, and about fifty travelling preachers, were present.²⁸

The next year, Newcomer reported:

[July, 1802] Sunday 16th—This day I was in Frederick-town: at 9 o'clock I heard Br. Geeting preach: at 12 o'clock I heard Bishop Asbury speak from 1st. Corinth. 1; v. 23, 24. In the afternoon Br. Williams spoke from Matthew 7; v. 24 to 27; staid for the night at Byerley's. 16th—I returned home.²⁹

Again in 1809 and in successive Methodist Baltimore conferences (and one Philadelphia) as UB's official bearer of overtures for unity, he deserved Asbury's notice. By contrast, Asbury's journaling registered Bishop Philip William Otterbein over twenty times and Bishop Martin Boehm a dozen or more.³⁰ Asbury (and William McKendree) actually wrote to Otterbein in 1809 responding officially to that year's Newcomer-carried overture to unite Methodists and UB. In one of his valedictories, Asbury recalled Otterbein's participation in his 1784 "ordination."³¹ The next year, in 1814, Asbury preached in a memorial service for Otterbein, having actually preached at the 1812 service for Boehm.

Newcomer attended the 1814 Otterbein service, noting such in his *Journal* and, by then having been selected as Otterbein's successor as bishop. And Asbury had another encounter with Newcomer at the 1815 Baltimore conference. Newcomer noted meeting with Bishops Asbury and McKendree during this conference. The encounters were more than casual. Newcomer recorded:

[March] 22^d—I set out for Baltimore, to the Methodist Conference, came to Mr. Barsh's and staid for the night. 23^d—I reached the city and lodged with John Hildt. 24th—This morning I paid a visit to Bishops Asbury and McKendree, went with them to the Conference room. At 11 o'clock Enoch George preached an ordination sermon, Bishop McKendree gave an exhortation; seven Brethren were then solemnly ordained.

Newcomer minuted attending the Methodist Conference each day.

²⁸ Newcomer, 80–81.

²⁹ Newcomer, 95.

³⁰ Only in a letter to Asbury from William P. Chandler in 1805 does the name "Newcomer" make it into the almost 600 pages of correspondence. *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, ed. Elmer T. Clark, 3 vols. (London: Epworth, and Nashville: Abingdon, 1958), 2: 330. Hereafter *JLFA*. By contrast, William Otterbein figured in Asbury's life and record significantly. Most dramatically, Otterbein participated in the "ordaining" of Asbury as bishop at the Christmas Conference. See also the exchange between Otterbein and Asbury reproduced by Nathan Bangs in *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 12th ed., 4 vols. (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1860), 2: 374–375; see 364–376 on the deaths of Boehm and Otterbein.

³¹ *JLFA*, 3: 478–479.

27th—I was again at the Conference; Br. Hoffman preached in Light street meeting house at 11 o'clock, I exhorted after him; in the afternoon the session of the Conference was brought to a close. 28th—This day I bid Bishops Asbury and McKendree farewell; . . .

Several days later, Newcomer enlarged his and the 'Brethren's agenda:

April 1st—I attended a meeting of the Albright Brethren, near Conewago, and returned to Navlor's.

Sunday 2^d—This day I was in York; Bishop McKendree and Henry Smidt preached in the meeting house; I spoke after them in German, . . .

The next day, he specified the ecumenical mandate under which he functioned:

I rode with Br. Henry Smidt to Jacob Kleinfelter's; the Albright Brethren had their Conference here; about 14 or 15 preachers were assembled. I made another attempt to effect a union between the two societies, but in vain. 5th—I left them, rode to Bishops in Little's-town, and staid for the night. 6th—I felt the love of God powerfully in my soul; rode all day long joyfully and serene.³²

Newcomer's Agendas: Unity, Revival, Reform, and Order

Unity in Various Forms

I dwell on Newcomer's accounts of the interactions with Asbury to underscore what I have alluded to and documented in several ways, namely that Newcomer conceived unity between and among the denominations as a goal to be achieved, birthed the project, clothed the newborn "agenda," nurtured the project within the family (of UB, Methodists, Albright Brethren, and Mennonites), and sustained familial relations even after the denominational "children" had gone their separate ways.³³ Conceiving, birthing, clothing, nurturing and sustaining unity—what an incredible, multi-faced, and sustained individual effort towards Christian brotherhood/sisterhood. Again, we celebrate now, here, in 2018 for our fifty years together, what Newcomer sought two centuries ago.

Moreover, structural, organizational comity/unity/relations constituted but a part of Newcomer's ecumenism. His interactions with the Methodists long preceded his efforts to conceive and birth unity. For in 1798, he journalized, "25th—Christmas Day, I rode in company with a Methodist preacher to Carroll's Manor; here we both preached and had a good meeting . . ." ³⁴ Early the next year, he noted, "I rode in the afternoon to Chambersburg; spoke at night in the Methodist meeting house, in the English language . . ." ³⁵ Newcomer's English language ministries doubtless owed to some extent to his being mentored by Bishop Martin Boehm and occasionally by Martin's

³² Newcomer, 232–233

³³ See Robertson, *Christian Newcomer (1749–1830)*, especially chapter 4, "Newcomer's Pioneering Role in Union Negotiations with the Methodists," and chapter 8, "The Last Years and the Lasting Contributions of Christian Newcomer."

³⁴ Newcomer, 49

³⁵ Newcomer, 50.

son Henry. Henry Boehm functioned in both German and English. He became a probationary member of the MEC in the Philadelphia Conference in 1800. For five years, from 1808 to 1813, he served as Asbury's traveling companion. For the German cause, he translated the MEC *Discipline* which appeared in 1808.³⁶ As Newcomer reported on August, 1800:

30th—This day Boehm returned home with me. Sunday 31st—This forenoon father Boehm preached in Hauser's meeting house; his son Henry spoke after him. In the afternoon they spoke at Geeting's meeting house. We tarried together at Jacob Hess's. September 1st—This morning my soul was particularly drawn out in secret prayer, for sanctifying grace: O Lord!—sanctify me wholly and cleanse me from all sin, for Jesus' sake. We set out for Virginia, came to Chr. Crum's, where we staid for the night. 2^d—This day a great congregation was assembled here. Father Boehm preached first, I followed him; the friend of sinners was present at the meeting. At night we held a meeting at Dr. Senseny's, in Winchester; father Boehm preached with great power; a Methodist Brother spoke after him in the English language . . .

Sunday 8th—This forenoon father Boehm preached first, in the German language; his son Henry followed in the English. . . . rode to Mr. Bender's, where I spoke from Romans 8; v. 17; H. B. preached also, but to all appearance without any effect. . . .

9th— . . . I preached from Luke 18; v. 29; father Boehm followed me, and Henry spoke in the English language; the word made great impression. At the close of the meeting the people would not depart, but were standing about in groups, crying and mourning; indeed some cried aloud for mercy.³⁷

Newcomer enjoyed in-their-saddles relationship, extensive traveling with, and mentoring by Henry—over a hundred Boehm mentions in the *Journal*. The times together with Henry, though infrequent and for short durations, doubtless helped Newcomer appreciate the importance of both languages. Newcomer sought to be both Henry and Martin.³⁸

Unity Across the Language Barrier

Until a year before he died, Newcomer continued to indicate preaching or leading worship in English. The computer found some 150 accounts of (or entries) for his or colleague's preaching or exhorting in English, mostly those of Newcomer's. (Newcomer entered "Methodist" more in his *Journal* than he entered either name of his predecessor bishops—roughly a hundred for Otterbein and Boehm. Of course, they died in 1813 and 1812 respectively and the Methodist count goes on for another fifteen years).

Given the thousands of entries about preaching or speaking when no language is stated or can be inferred, his continued notations of English use is interesting and worth underscoring as we think about his work towards unity within and beyond denominational lines.³⁹ He took care to record minis-

³⁶ See the entries for Henry and Martin Boehm in Russell E. Richey, James Kirby, and Kenneth E. Rowe, *The Methodists* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996). A student edition published two years later lacks the biographies.

³⁷ Newcomer, 70–71.

³⁸ See the entries for the two Boehms also in Nolan B. Harmon, ed., *Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, 2 vols. (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House), 1974.

³⁹ For his retrospective account of labors in English, see the brief autobiography, "Life of Rev. Christian Newcomer," towards the last of which he noted an early occasion of being requested to preach in the English language which, he recalled he "could speak but very broken" (Newcomer, 16).

try in English, with whom he partnered, whether the word was delivered in both languages and by whom. Language use captures only a portion of Newcomer's unitive agenda. The "Methodist" entries covered, as above, preaching with a Methodist or to a Methodist congregation, exercising leadership in a meeting or camp meeting, being present with key leaders, attending (Methodist) annual or general conferences, *and*, of course, reaching English-speaking UB folks. Half of such English notations in his *Journal*, some seventy, occurred before Newcomer carried the unity banner to the 1809 Baltimore Conference.

Newcomer doubtless found attendance at Methodist camp meetings encouraging relations across language lines. He described his first, for August 1804:

[August, 1804] 10th—I left home to attend a Camp-meeting in Berkely county, Virginia, lodged at my son's-in-law . . . I found a large open place in a close and thick forest of trees. In a circle around the space a number of tents were pitched, enclosing the area, where the preachers stand or pulpit was erected, and seats for the congregation prepared. In and around the tents, and all around the camp-ground, I saw men, women and children, in swarms, busily engaged in preparing for the occasion. O! how was my heart filled with gratitude to the most high, that I live in a land of liberty, where every individual is permitted to worship God and serve, under his own vine and fig tree, according to the dictates of his own conscience, and none dare to disturb him. Full of wonder and astonishment, I entered the preachers tent with a joyful heart, where the brethren gave me a cordial welcome. Here I saw before me a large extensive circle, encompassed by the tents; in this circle seats of boards were placed, under the shade of the trees, to accommodate a very large assembly, and where many hundreds could take their seats during the time of public worship. Presently a horn or trumpet was sounded, when the people from all sides came into the circle, and silently took their seats as in a meeting house or church; . . .

Newcomer continued the detailed account through Sunday the 19th. For Monday the 13th he described the day beginning with his hearing "the people in every tent singing and praying, and offer(ing) up to God family worship." He summarized the week and his own involvement: "I was often requested to exhort, to sing and to pray, and who should not, on such an occasion, joyfully lend a helping hand."⁴⁰

For his apparently next camp meeting, in July, 1805, Newcomer provided less detail and indicated only a modest role of his own. He reported reaching "the place where we saw many tents erected, some made of boards and others of linen, in a beautiful grove; 27 preachers were present. Br. Jesse Lee delivered the first sermon, John Chalmers exhorted after him; Br. Chambers preached in the afternoon, I gave an exhortation."⁴¹ In his *Short History of the Methodists*, Lee termed this the "first Camp Meeting that was ever held on the Eastern-shore" and claimed sixty-eight Methodist preachers, the conversion of two hundred white people and many of the blacks, and thousands present. Newcomer counted 3,000 the second day and at least 10,000 on

⁴⁰ Newcomer, 125–126.

⁴¹ Newcomer, 136.

Sunday the 28th.⁴² A few days after the ending of that camp meeting, Newcomer attended another and recalled his earlier role “on the same ground where I had attended last year. We were happy to meet each other again.” His role consisted of “singing, praying, and encouraging the mourners.”⁴³ At yet another that year, the first week in October, Newcomer played leadership roles, named eleven preachers “and poor unworthy me.”⁴⁴

His attendance at and participation in Methodist camp meetings constituted a small but highly visible manner in which Newcomer crossed language, confessional or denominational, ethnic, racial, class, and purposive boundaries. He sought to be, and Methodists often made him family. He exercised and relished his cross-denominational role, identity and vocation.

Unity with Other Denominations

Newcomer’s relations with either of the other possible unity partners never came anywhere close to those he had with the Methodists. He noted just a single meeting with Jacob Albright in 1806, some dozen with “Albright Brethren,” and a comparable number of interactions with Mennonites. Typically he named those with whom he interacted or preached, sometimes identifying their denominational identity. He entered “Methodist” in his *Journal* some 150 times, as we have already noted, but many more encounters are implicit, sometimes with leaders.

In addition to his Asbury relations, which we have covered already, Newcomer recorded interactions with then and future Methodist bishops: half dozen with Richard Whatcoat: over twenty with William McKendree and Enoch George, only one after his election to the episcopacy; and a couple of early entries with Robert Roberts. Newcomer met Methodism’s first self-consecrated bishop, Robert Strawbridge, at least twice (in 1806 and 1811).⁴⁵ Counting his UB predecessors, Boehm and Otterbein, and colleagues in the UB office, Andrew Zeller and Joseph Hoffman, Newcomer had familial ties to all the early bishops listed in *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* save for Thomas Coke (about ten if we count right, eleven if we include his compatriot Henry Kumler, Sr.).

Had the Methodist Protestants had bishops, one of their surely would have been Nicholas Snethen with whom Newcomer interacted a dozen or more times (though spelling the name Sneethen). During one of his encounters with Sneethen and while attending the Baltimore conference of 1803, Newcomer first acted—or tried to act we might say—on his inspiration or vision that Methodists and UB could and should unite.

[March 31, 1803] From this, I pursued my course towards Baltimore, to attend the Methodist Annual Conference. . . .

⁴² Jesse Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America* (Baltimore, 1810; Rutland: Academy Books, 1974), 308; Newcomer, 136.

⁴³ Newcomer 136–137.

⁴⁴ Newcomer, 139. His account indicates his own agency but without making it seem unusual.

⁴⁵ Newcomer, 149, 181.

April 1st— . . . I rode to Baltimore; at night I attended a class meeting at Otterbein's, where I lodged. 2^d—This forenoon as well as in the afternoon I sat in the Conference room, where my poor soul received considerable encouragement. 3^d—This forenoon Br. Roberts preached at Otterbein's church; in the afternoon Nicholas Sneethen. This was truly a blessed day for my poor soul. 4th—This day I was again in the Conference room 5th—This forenoon I attended the Conference again; in the afternoon I met a Sister's class. At night Nicholas Sneethen preached in Light street meeting house 6th—it was my intention to make a proposition to the Conference this day, in order to ascertain whether it was possible to point out and adopt a plan of operation, by which the English and the German Brethren could be more united together, and have a better understanding with each other. I imparted my design to one of the members of the Conference, but he advised me to defer the proposition until the meeting of the next general Conference; he stated as his reason that they were at present too much engaged with other matters, and it was impossible to receive and act on my proposition at this time. I took his advice, and was silent on the subject. Sometime during the afternoon the Conference concluded, and the brethren separated to fill their respective appointments. In a short time I repented of having complied with the advice given me by the Brother; my mind became exceedingly troubled, and I felt inwardly accused of not having done my duty: may the Lord pardon my neglect, and over-rule in his wisdom all injury, it any should thereby be created to his kingdom and glory.⁴⁶

For the next decade, Newcomer led the UB in pursuing the unity he had glimpsed. From 1809 to 1814, he carried messages back and forth. In the last exchange, that in 1814, the UB promised the self-ordering, including the adoption of rules and a Discipline, but the Methodists decided five years of promissory hints were insufficient and terminated the dialogue. So they wrote:

To the United Brethren Assembled in Conference.

Beloved Brethren: By this we acknowledge the receipt of your letter, by the hands of your messengers, our brethren, C. Newcomer and Baulus. We are pleased to find that our common interest actuates us in our efforts to establish a permanent union, and that so far the good resulting justifies the measure. Furthermore, we rejoice that you are progressing in the work of organization and discipline. This we are ever willing to help forward, being convinced that all real union and friendship must be founded in truth and order. To this end, brethren, we must keep in view the items specified in a former letter from this conference, as terms of union. Being thus harmonious in sentiment and interest, we think it unnecessary to continue the ceremony of annual letters, etc., believing [it] sufficient to leave the door of friendly intercourse open, that, if in the progress of time and experience anything of importance should occur, there may be a free communication. Thus impressed with the importance of cultivating brotherly love, we join with you in praying that the Divine Spirit may accompany us in our mutual endeavors to promote the general cause of truth and virtue.

Signed in behalf of the conference.

March 22, 1814. Beverly Waugh, Secretary.⁴⁷

Newcomer continued laboring for and advocating the denominationalizing measures that the Methodists sought and thought the UB needed.

⁴⁶ Newcomer, 104–106.

⁴⁷ Drury, *History*, 807; "Typescript of the Minutes of the Baltimore Conference, MEC, 1814, 74, 78.

Unity Within the Fold

Laboring across middle America, from Pennsylvania and Virginia west to Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky, Newcomer traveled evangelistically, programmatically, and organizationally with his UB brothers. Naming them, as we have noted he typically did, he provides a UB who's who. This is readily accessible via the index of the English version of his *Journal*. George Geeting, secretary of the conference, interacted with Newcomer in various ways, including traveling together, and minuted Geeting some 220 times; John Neidig, sixty; and John George Pfrimmer (Fremer in his *Journal*), twenty.⁴⁸ Also, Newcomer bothered to identify compatriots whom historians name as well as those who have escaped much attention. Over a hundred times, he interacted with a Bowlus (or Baulus according to the *Minutes*), mostly Jacob (the others probably family) and did so from January 29, 1798, to June 5, 1829. He stayed with Bowlus again and again, preached along with him or at his house, held a conference, great meeting, and quarterly meeting there.⁴⁹ Newcomer's *Journal* does not capture Bowlus serving as secretary of the conference with Newcomer and their joint bearing of one of the overtures to the Methodists or functioning similarly with the Albright Brethren.

Some fifty times, Newcomer lodged with a Valentine Doub, from January 2, 1808, until September 23, 1829. Similarly, from 1802 to 1828, he stayed with, preached at, held quarterly, sacramental, and two-day meetings at the Fetherhoff family, and bunked there with the widow after his death in 1819 (strangely neither first name is given). Similarly, a hundred stops to preach, hold meetings, and occasionally stay at the Hauser's from January 13, 1799, to August 2, 1829. He did not distinguish chapel from residence and very rarely added a first name. The array of on the ground, daily, ongoing brotherly or family-like relationships can be seen on virtually every page of his *Journal* and extend to hosts and hostesses as well as traveling companions. The next passage doubtless is deemed most important because it moves Newcomer towards the meeting of and formation of the Ohio Conference. But note the "we" and the names in the following narrative—"we" denotes his traveling with Christian Crum, and the names identify the folk with whom he (or they) stayed. Contrast the "we" and names with incredibly brief reference of the conference over which he presided:

[August, 1810] 7th—We lodged at Mr. Kremer's, a Justice of the Peace. 8th—This morning we had to ride 24 miles to our Appointment at Adam Malo's; a large congregation was assembled, I preached from Psalm 2, v. 17, 18, 9th—We preached at John Kohr's. 10th—We rode to a Camp-meeting near Chillicothe; I spoke first, Br. Crum followed me; . . . We had to leave the camp-ground to attend a Sacramental meeting at old Mr. Creider's. This evening I preached at Musselman's.

Sunday 12th—This morning we had our Love-feast; I then reached from John I, v. 11, 12, 13. We then administered the sacrament; many came with streaming eyes to the Lord's table . . . 13th—To-day I held a little Conference with the Brethren; 15 preachers [How I write—preachers! Indeed—we are not worthy the appellation]

⁴⁸ On the roles played by Geeting, Neidig and Pfrimmer, see Behney and Eller, 57–61.

⁴⁹ See Newcomer, 35, 324, 105, 128, 134 and 159.

were present: bless the Lord for the brotherly love and unanimity of mind which pervades throughout.⁵⁰

What a modest, self-effacing, strange notice by Newcomer of his quasi-episcopal role in further organizing the UB. Creating the second conference in 1810 and a third, the Muskingum in 1818 with episcopal colleague Andrew Zeller, Newcomer participated dramatically in moving the UB into a full-fledged denomination.

A week later, after yet another camp meeting, Newcomer embraced once again his brotherly relations across denominational lines. He reported two days hearing and apparently preaching with Bishop McKendree. In late August, he “met Bishop Asbury on the road” and noted “we stopped and had a conversation of about half an hour, commended each other to God and pursued our journal.”⁵¹

A few days after the encounter with Asbury, he noted, “My travelling companion, Br. Crum left me this morning, taking his way home through Virginia; Br. Hiestand accompanied me.” Christian Crum and Newcomer traveled, ministered, and stayed together—brothers for much of both careers, from the 1790s to the 1820s. Newcomer might well have been as much, perhaps more, of a brother to Crum than was Crum’s twin, Henry, also an itinerant and who was also with Newcomer a number of times. In October, 1798, Newcomer reported on his interaction with both Crum’s: “I rode in the evening to Br. Henry Crum’s, and staid for the night. 8th—This day I preached at Christian Crum’s from Romans 8; v. 17”⁵² The close to a hundred mentions of a Crum fails to capture the extent of their being with Newcomer. Especially when Christian Crum served as his traveling colleague, Newcomer indicates their bonds with the simple “we” and, occasionally, “us.”

Ordering the United Brethren

For various reasons—time among them—I will not pursue what many here know well and others somewhat, namely Newcomer’s various activities, roles, responsibilities and commitments that made the UB into a church in the American mode. Behney and Eller and their predecessor historians effectively convey this narrative. What they convey and I would but reiterate is that Newcomer’s collaborative, brotherly, inventive, low-keyed leadership helped turn the movement into a denomination.⁵³ On formative development after development, Newcomer teamed with other leaders—culminating in

⁵⁰ Newcomer, 190–191. For a fuller record of that conference and that also of the Muskingum, see Drury, *Minutes*.

⁵¹ Newcomer, 192.

⁵² Newcomer, 46.

⁵³ *Denominationalism*, Russell Richey, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010); *Reimagining Denominationalism*, co-editor and co-author with R. Bruce Mullin (New York: Oxford UP, 1994; paper edition 2010); *Denominationalism Illustrated and Explained* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013); and an array of article including an article cluster: “Denomination,” “Review of the Literature,” “Primary Sources, Further Reading, and Links to Digital Materials on Denominations and Denominationalism,” and “Summary,” forthcoming in *Oxford Encyclopedia of Religion in America*.

the crafting of a *Discipline*, drafting of a Confession of Faith, and calling of a General Conference in 1815.⁵⁴ To be sure, the brief “Minutes” noted that an accusation leveled at Newcomer was from a “misunderstanding.” The next General Conference in 1817 chose Andrew Zeller as well as Newcomer as bishops. In its last action numbered eight: “Resolved that three hundred Disciplines be printed in the German language and one hundred in the English language.”⁵⁵

Modeling “Itinerant General Superintendency”

Before, during, after, and retrospectively, Newcomer journeyed and inscribed in his journal—what? Not the achievements and major actors in that momentous General Conference. Not Zeller joining him in the episcopacy. Not actions taken. Not a separate section detailing the events and actors as he done for camp meetings. No. He embedded the account in his week-to-week itinerancy. He remarked on the necessity of “discipline and regulation in the society. Also, he noted that his/and Zeller’s superintending resolved the “difficulty.” Itinerant general superintendency:

Sunday, June 1st—We had a Sacramental meeting at Stickler’s, on Jacobs’ creek; I spoke from John 6, v. 23, 24. 2^d. Our general Conference commenced in Mount Pleasant; we had considerable trouble with a few of the Brethren to convince them of the necessary discipline and regulation in society; they would not come into any order or regulation, and still desired others to coincide with them. The difficulty was at last surmounted: may the Lord grant unto each of us more wisdom from above. 7th—We had meeting at Stecher’s, in Washington county; I preached from Romans 5, v. 1, 2

Sunday 15th—We had a Quarterly meeting at Benedum’s; a great many people were collected; Br. Froemmer spoke first from Jeremiah 30, v. 21, 22, 23, Hoffman spoke from Psalm 132, v. 15, 16, 17, I spoke from Romans 5, v. 1, 2. The grace of God wrought powerfully among the people; at night we had meeting at Henry Doub’s, where I tarried for the night. 16th—This forenoon we held our usual Love-feast; it was truly a blessed and joyful time, many were in great distress: we prayed with the mourners until 3 o’clock, when I rode to the widow Kremer’s, where our Annual Conference is to be held. 17th—This morning our Conference commenced and continued in love and unanimity until the 19th, when we closed the session with fervent prayer about 12 o’clock; rode to Mr. Ross’s and staid for the night. 20th—Came to Lewis Kesler’s. 21st—To Lewis Kemp’s.

. . . 26th—Came to Cincinnati, received a cordial welcome and friendly entertainment with Mr. Bebinger, a baker by trade. 27th—This evening we held meeting in the Methodist meeting house; Brother Hoffman spoke in the German, I followed him in the English language. The word spoken had considerable effect; 10 or 12 preachers came spontaneously forward and desired an interest in our prayers; the meeting was protracted till 2 o’clock in the morning.⁵⁶

Itinerant general superintendency for Newcomer meant living, modeling, encouraging, facilitating, strengthening brotherhood. He entered name after name of fellow preacher and host or hostess. He noted his episcopal col-

⁵⁴ Behney and Eller, 97–111.

⁵⁵ Drury, *Minutes*, 67.

⁵⁶ Newcomer, 248–249.

league's sermon and home, leaving implicit their traveling together. The momentous General Conference and the subsequent annual conference simply surface in the *Journal* between the "Sacramental meeting at Stickler's, on Jacobs' creek" and the "meeting in the Methodist meeting house; Brother Hoffman spoke in the German, I followed him in the English language."

"Can We become Brothers?" Indeed Became "Wir sind Brüder!"

Through multiple roles—*inventing* or borrowing new strategies, *laboring* in German and learning English, *itinerating* daily, *brothering* those with whom he traveled and for whom he ministered, *crisscrossing* middle America, *modeling* what he preached, *engaging* other churches and their leadership, *sustaining* and focusing his effort, *gesturing out* in every conceivable way, *seeking* to bring UB, Methodists and Evangelicals together—Newcomer transformed what had been an ethnic mission into an American denomination.

The Methodists could not live into the brotherhood they preached. Newcomer, however, remained committed to pursuing his vision and enlarging the missional witness across language and denominational lines. Now the unity he sought of United Brethren, Evangelicals, and Methodists has been achieved.