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Repairing The UMC's Episcopacy by Tracking that of Bishop Christian Newcomer

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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]

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 of them, cover 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: The Otterbein Press, 1924), APPENDICES, Correspondence between the United Brethren and the Methodist Episcopal Church, 801. Hard copy accessed at Duke; online via https://archive.org/stream/UBwmHistoryOfTheChurchOfTheUBCByAWDrury/UBwm%20-%20History%20of%20the%20Church%20of%20the%20UBC%20by%20AWDrury_djvu.txt Digitized by the Center for Evangelical United Brethren Heritage, United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH. Through the MEC record of the exchanges between the United Brethren and the Baltimore Conference (MEC) one can see the several

So the 1811 MEC Baltimore Conference received Christian Newcomer. The powerhouse, dominant, 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. 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 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: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, 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. 30th—To-day I stopped for refreshment with Henry Huber; rode to Zanesville and lodged at a public house. 31st—This evening I stopped with a Quaker family and lodged with them for the night.

September 1st—This evening I reached Steubenville; having no acquaintances in the place, I stopped at a public house. 2d—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. 7th—I rode alone all day, came through Cannonsburg and Williamsport; before I reached the

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.” 796.

² *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]), Reading the hardcopy journal, I downloaded quotations and elaborate notes as full text from <https://archive.org/details/lifejournalofrev00newc> *The life and journal of the Rev'd Christian Newcomer, late bishop of the church of the United brethren in Christ by Newcomer, Christian, 1749-1830; Hildt, John* Publication date 1834 Topics: United Brethren in Christ Publisher Hagerstown [Md.] Printed by F. G. W. Kapp Collection newyorkpubliclibrary; americana

Youghogany river, night had overtaken me; I had missed the road and could not discover a house or cabin where I might find a shelter for the night.³

[Long quotations from Newcomer's *Journal* should 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 offer.]⁴

As he noted in his journal and we just read, Newcomer had been elected to 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, this year, we UMCers celebrate the 50th 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 United Brethren stood. Newcomer, after all, sought, espoused and labored for the unity we celebrate this year. We perhaps should have identified 2018 as that for Newcomer-recognition.

Not recognizing Newcomer seemingly has been a long-established Methodist policy. Both 1813 and 1814 Baltimore *Minutes* minuted Newcomer's ambassadorial role but not his new episcopal status.⁵ Very strange—as we shall see in a while—for Bishops Francis Asbury and William McKendree oversaw Baltimore's proceedings. And they had met him repeatedly.

Modeling Episcopacy: Brotherhood (and now Sisterhood)

Newcomer modeled episcopacy. For then, for now. In his exercise of the episcopal office, Newcomer elevated his collegial, unitive passion to another level. And in various other ways he modeled style, commitments, habits and patterns that bishops thereafter ought to have copied and today's episcopacy desperately needs.

If Newcomer joined the episcopal ranks of Asbury, 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. And 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*, indeed 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.

³. *Life and Journal*, 217-18.

⁴. 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.

⁵. "Typescript of the Minutes of the Baltimore Conference, MEC, 1813, 68,70; 1814, 74,78. See DRURY, *History*, 804-07. 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."

[July 1827]

Sunday 22d—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.**

Sunday 29th—I preached in Shank's church.

August 2d—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; I staid here till the 21st, when I rode to Br. Christian Herr's, and lodged for the night. 22d—I preached here, from Matthew 15, v. 22 to 28, 23d—I visited some friends in the neighborhood and staid for the night with Musselman. 24th—I came again to a Camp-meeting in Dauphin county, at Mr. Halleman's.

Sunday 26th—This day it rained incessantly; at night I preached in Middle-town, from Psalm 40, v. 1 to 4, and lodged with Mr. Gross. 27th—To-day I rode through Harrisburg, and staid for the night at Bowman's. 28th—I lodged with Michael Baer. 29th—With Mr. Stam. 30th—This day I came to a **Camp-meeting** at Wegley's, in Cumberland county; I spoke from Psalm 37, v. 37.

Sunday, September 2d—I preached from John 20, v. 15 to 18; the meeting continued to the 5th, we had a blessed time; I have been at no meeting lately, where the grace of God wrought so powerfully; **old and young of both sexes were awakened and happily converted:** unto God be all the glory. I rode to Samuel Huber's and staid for the night. 6th Returned home. 7th, 8th, and

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

Sunday 16th—I was at Schnebly's meeting house; Brother Zahn preached, I exhorted after him.

Sunday 23d—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.

Sunday 30th—A vast concourse of people were this day assembled; Brs. Brown, Sneider and Boring preached with power and unction from above. - October 20—This day the meeting was brought to a close; I rode 37 miles to Henry Gording's and staid for the night.⁶

Actually, the Br. And Brs. identities, traveling together, and staying at brother's homes predominate on most pages of Newcomer's *Journal*, more than in what was just cited. As we

⁶. *Life and Journal*, 314-15. There are close to a hundred Camp-meeting references in the *Journal*.

note below, that teamed ministry Newcomer indicates with the plural “we,” on page after page, line after line. Brotherhood was his passion, agenda, commitment, life.

This year we celebrate the 50th anniversary of what Christian Newcomer strove mightily to achieve over 200 years ago, namely unifying the Methodists, Evangelicals and United Brethren and laboring as well for comity with his old faith, the Mennonites.⁷ (His debt to the Mennonite upbringing and therefore to Pietism generally, we leave to other interpreters.)⁸ 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 United Brethren as 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 United Brethren, 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.”⁹ Convert those nouns to verbs, add other of Newcomer’s leadership roles, and emphasize his experimental bravery, and we

⁷. 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* (October 1986)_ URI: <http://hdl.handle.net/10516/5617>. 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 United Brethren.

⁸. J. Steven O’Malley, “Pietism and Wesleyanism: Setting the Stage for a Theological Discussion,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 63 (Spring 2018), 56-78; *Pilgrimage of Faith: The Legacy of the Otterbeins*, ATLA Monograph Series, no. 4 (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1973); and *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 MECS, 1918); Scott Kisker, “Radical Pietism and Early German Methodism: John Seybert and the Evangelical Association,” *Methodist History* 37 (April 1999): 175–88; Peter C. Erb, ed., *Pietists: Selected Writings* (New York, Ramsey, Toronto: Paulist Press, 1983); the several writings by F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), *German Pietism during the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), and *Continental Pietism and Early American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976). On John Wesley’s relation to Pietism see Martin Schmidt, *John Wesley*, 2 vols. (Zurich, 1953–66), and *John Wesley: A Theological Biography*, trans. Norman P. Goldhawk (London: Epworth Press, 1962–71).

⁹. J. Bruce Behney and Paul H. Eller, *The History of the Evangelical United Brethren Church*, Kenneth W. Krueger, editor (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 64. For an overview of Newcomer’s transformative role, see pp. 97-111. See also older standard histories of the United Brethren cited below. What ought to be cited as an Abingdon book is the dissertation, “Christian Newcomer (1749-1830), Pioneer of Church Discipline and Union Among the United Brethren in Christ, the Evangelical Association, and the Methodist Episcopal Church,” by John Dallas Robertson, Ph.D. 1973, George Washington University. Important and helpful here have been several essays in J. Steven O’Malley and John E. Vickers, eds., *Methodist and Pietist: Retrieving the Evangelical Brethren Tradition* (Nashville: Kingswood Books/Abingdon, 2001). See there especially the essay by Scott Kisker, “Martin Boehm, Philip William Otterbein, and the United Brethren in Christ.”

capture his importance then, now and for our ecclesial future. Again, he represents an episcopacy that Untied (yes Untied) Methodism needs to reclaim.¹⁰

Our Episcopal Plight

Our denominational strains, discord and divisions have worried, indeed, troubled our bishops as long as we have been United Methodism. They consume Council meetings strategizing how to tie together our **untied Methodism**.¹¹

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 in the UMC’s doings; **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.

And 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 the boards 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, 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, its 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 apparently seek to become, they should look back to John Wesley, Francis Asbury AND ESPECIALLY THIS YEAR AND TODAY, Christian Newcomer. These three modeled what bishops once were but today can and must do and be. Wesley, Asbury and Newcomer were truly itinerant general superintendents.

¹⁰. 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, 2018)

¹¹. William B. Oden, *The Council of Bishops in Historical Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014).



Itinerant general superintendents, now? No! No more! Functioning individually as diocesan bishops and as a Council as an arch-episcopacy or papacy, how can our bishops offer a grand vision for and model a transformative ministry? To Christian Newcomer, Francis Asbury, and John Wesley our bishops need to look for counsel and inspiration. 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 William Otterbein and Martin Boehm, but perhaps more or more consistently than either of his predecessors—Newcomer modeled itinerant general superintendency.¹²

Suppressing “itinerant general superintendency”

Again, Newcomer, Asbury, Wesley—their grand vision is no more. How so, constitutionally as well as operationally? Check the current *Discipline*. Recall, if you can, that 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.”

However, what we have and what the *Discipline* now prescribes outside the Restrictive Rules are strategies for diocesan bishops endeavoring to make the Council into a papacy.

Turning to Chapter Three one will not find what the Restrictive Rule demands. Note how little Chapter Three: THE SUPERINTENDENCY evokes the language of Article III of our Restrictive Rules. One would have to conclude that someone, somewhere, somehow radically altered the

¹². 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; reprint, Lancaster, Pa.: Abram W. Sangrey, 1982), 372-93.

“part or rule” and indeed destroyed the plan. In Chapter THREE, the introductory “**episcopal task**” gestures grandly, apostolically—“mission of the Church,” “transformation of the world,” “ordering the life of the Church.”

Papal! Regal! Controlling! Not Itinerant general superintendents—NO. Generals superintending the itinerants.

The next section, ¶ 403, **bishop’s role**, elaborates on the seemingly global tasks with six rich, elaborate, 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.” That point brings Council aspirations onto the conference level. Collectively, the six points bring the Council’s grand, transformational vision to the ground and into the conference (or shall we say diocese?).

Framed really for North American episcopacy, The office out of which or really residence from which they 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.¹³ 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, taken John off the saddle and the road, and settled themselves (and Methodism) back at Epworth or like Asbury in the late 1780s have hidden with Judge Thomas White to escape the traumas of today’s revolution.

Not surprisingly, the clergy also now have ‘parished’ or want to ‘parish’ themselves for long, long appointments. And the *Discipline* warrants this congregationalizing of United Methodism by prioritizing “THE LOCAL CHURCH,” placing it first before all our ministries and functions—the ordained (deacons and elders), bishops and district superintendents, conferences, boards and agencies, church property and judicial administration. Annual conferences, the *Discipline* (in Article IV, ¶11) terms “the fundamental bodies of the church”—no longer is the conference “the basic body in the church” but bishops treat them neither as fundamental nor basic. Shoved into ever larger constellations, their clergy are too numerous to know and treat one another as sister and brother (‘brother’ once each ‘man’s’ first name).

Often the bishops summon the state’s or region’s clergy to see or hear these ‘workers’ by having them drive to headquarters. Modeling ministry? The bishops? Living their calling? For true, lived itinerant general superintendency—in all its on-the-ground modeling of ministry—we should look back to John Wesley, Francis Asbury and their UB counterpart, Christian Newcomer. Asbury lived itinerant general superintendency and modeled that ministry, indeed Wesley’s¹⁴ vision, in all its complexity, completeness, particularity and grandeur as John Wigger has recently shown.¹⁵

¹³. Admittedly this is not the first time that I have offered alternatives for episcopacy. See for instance, Richey and Thomas Edward Frank, *Episcopacy in the Methodist Tradition: Perspectives and Proposals* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004).

¹⁴. 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: University of South Carolina Press, 1991) and W. Reginald Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and *Early Evangelicalism: A Global Intellectual History, 1670-1789* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For briefer attention to Pietism and particularly its bearing on American

Newcomer modeled what Wesley modeled and Asbury embodied—itinerant general superintendency. [So did John Seybert, the Evangelical Association bishop—sometimes identified first and Jacob Albright’s organizational/creative roles treated more Wesley-like. Seybert. 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 38 persons. After being elected bishops, 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.”¹⁶] Today’s bishops need only look back AND READ to discover that 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 really shaped the United Brethren the way Wesley did British and Asbury American Methodism.¹⁷

Wesley was nurtured for his ministry by mother, Susanna, and colleague, George Whitefield. Asbury should have--could well have-- learned experimental outreach from Barbara 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 United Brethren, clearly being mentored (mothered one might say) by the two bishops. For the first conference on record, the *Minutes* read:¹⁸

methodisms, see *The Methodist Experience in America: A History*, by Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe and Jean Miller Schmidt, Vol. I (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010), pp. 1-13.

¹⁵. John Wigger, *American Saint: Francis Asbury and the Methodists* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁶. 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, 127, 246, 290.

¹⁷. William J. Abraham and James E. Kirby, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Charles Yrigoyen Jr., ed., *T & T Clark Companion to Methodism* (London and New York: T & T Clark International, 2010); Jason E. Vickers, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 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, Eng.: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 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; Now online: <https://archive.org/details/encyclopediaofwo1harm>; John McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, 12 vols. (New York: Arno Press, 1970; reprint of the 1867-87 edition, still standard for the 19th century; and Matthew Simpson, *Cyclopedia of Methodism* (New York: Gordon Press, 1977; reprint of 1876 edition, also useful for the 19th century).

¹⁸. 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: Published for the United Brethren Historical Society, 1897. Early excerpts can also be viewed in *The Methodist Experience in America: A Sourcebook*, Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E.

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. . . .

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**, . . .

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

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**, . . .

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. . .

His place in the *Minutes*, as 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, make they servants very faithful. . . .

George Adam Geeting.
Christian Newcomer.¹⁹

We held our conference May 13, **1807**, at Christian Herr's in Pennsylvania. The following preachers were present: **Martin Boehm, Christian Newcomer**, David Snyder, Isaac Niswander, Abraham Mayer, Christian Krum, John Neidig, Frederick Schaffer, Christian Smith, Joseph Hoffman, **George Adam Geeting**,

Our yearly conference began at Abraham Niswander's, in Virginia, May 25, **1808**, in

Rowe and Jean Miller Schmidt, eds. vol. II (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000). For our treatment of the United Brethren see *The Methodist Experience in America: A History* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010) and *American Methodism: A Compact History* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2012).

¹⁹. On Geeting, see Behney and Eller, *History*, 57-59 and elsewhere.

the afternoon. We read the fifth chapter of First Peter. There was a short exhortation, singing, and a fervent prayer.

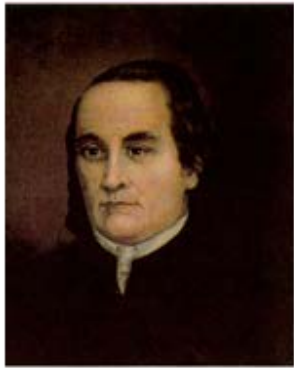
The following preachers were present : **Christian Newcomer**, . . .

George Adam Geeting.

Christian Newcomer.

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** . . .

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, . . .



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."²⁰ And 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).²¹ Strangely, given his leadership roles, close 'brotherly' ties to

²⁰. 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*, in two volumes (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 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).

²¹. *The Life and Journal of the Rev. Christian Newcomer, Late Bishop of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. Written by Himself. Containing his Travels and Labours in the Gospel from 1795 to 1830, A Period of*

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

“No man has left a larger mark on the United Brethren than Christian Newcomer.”²²

Bishop Asbury's keen eye for promising leadership strangely missed that of Newcomer. And Asbury's 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 have led Methodist historians to neglect Newcomer's importance. By Newcomer's own journaling, he encountered Asbury 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.

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. . . .²³

Again in 1809 and in successive Methodist Baltimore conferences (and one Philadelphia) as United Brethren's official bearer of overtures for unity, he deserved Asbury's notice. By contrast, Asbury's journaling registered Otterbein over twenty times and Boehm a dozen or more.²⁴ Asbury (and William McKendree) actually wrote to Otterbein in 1809 responding

Thirty-Five Years, Transcribed, Corrected and Translated by John Hildt (Hagerstown [Md.] Printed by F. G. W. Kapp, 1834), 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), 260-61.

²². Frederick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 108.

²³. Newcomer continued, “The session of the Conference continued till about 4 o'clock, when Br. Roberts preached a most excellent sermon. At night we had preaching again; the people were very zealous. 2d--To-day I was again at Conference; many tears owed during the examination of the preachers. At 5 o'clock Br. Waters preached, and Bishop Asbury gave an exhortation. At night we had meeting again at Cassel's; after English preaching I had to speak in the German.”

Sunday 3d--Bishop Asbury preached this forenoon; his dis- course was very pointed and impressive. When the sermon was concluded, six preachers came forward to receive Ordination. Bishop Asbury requested every individual in the congregation who was able to pray, to humble themselves and beseech God to pour out on these brethren, the gift of the Holy Ghost. *Life and Journal*, 80-81, 95.

²⁴. 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), II (Journal), 330. [Hereinafter 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

officially to that year's Newcomer-carried overture to unite Methodists and United Brethren. In one of his valedictories, Asbury recalled Otterbein's participation in his 1784 "ordination."²⁵ The next year, in 1814, Asbury preached in a memorial service for Bishop William Otterbein, having actually preached at the 1812 service for Bishop Martin 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 the Newcomer, at the 1815 Baltimore conference.

Newcomer noted the meeting with Bishops Asbury and McKendree. The encounters were more than casual. Newcomer recorded:

[March] 22d— I set out for Baltimore, to the Methodist Conference, came to Mr. Barsh's and staid for the night. 23d-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.

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 ; rode a short distance out of the city to Kalbfus's, and staid for the night.

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 Naylor's.

Sunday 2d—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. Hemy 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.²⁶

That disinterest included a probable encounter at a memorial service

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

First, unity in various forms.

by Nathan Bangs, Nathan Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 12th ed., 4 vols. (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1860), 2: 374-75; 364-76 on the deaths of Boehm and Otterbein.

²⁵. *JLFA*, III (Letters), 478-79.

²⁶. *Life and Journal*, 232-33

Newcomer's accounts of the interactions with Asbury should underscore what has been 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 United Brethren, Methodists, Albright Brethren, and Mennonites), and **sustained** familial relations even after the denominational 'children' had gone their separate ways.²⁷ Conceiving, birthing, clothing, nurturing and sustaining unity—what an incredible, multi-faced, sustained individual effort towards Christian brotherhood /sisterhood. Again, we celebrate now, here, in 2018, and for our fifty years together what Newcomer sought two centuries ago.

And 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 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"²⁸ 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"²⁹ Newcomer's English language ministries doubtless owed to some extent to his being mentored by Bishop Martin Boehm and occasionally by Martin's son Henry. Henry Boehm functioned in both German and English. He became a probationary member of the MEC in 1800 (Philadelphia Conference). 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 1808.³⁰

For August 1800, Newcomer reported

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'

²⁷. See Robertson, *Christian Newcomer (1749-1830)*, especially chapters IV, "Newcomer's Pioneering Role in Union Negotiations with the Methodists," and VIII, "The Last Years and the Lasting Contributions of Christian Newcomer." Illustrating Newcomer's unitive passion is this description he gives of a quarterly meeting:

[October 1802] 21st—This day the congregation was still more numerous than the day before ; Br. Geeting spoke first with great power, from 1st. Corinth. I; v. 23, 24; I followed him. The power of God was again signally displayed; the love of Jesus shed abroad & united all hearts in the bonds of brotherly love. At the administration of the Sacrament, you could perceive all distinction of sects lost in christian love and fellowship. Lutherans, Presbyterians, Mennonites, Baptists, and Methodists, all drew near the Lord's table, and united in commemoration of the dying love of the Redeemer; many were not able to avoid shouting and praising God for his unbounded mercy and goodness. With difficulty we parted from the people, but we were compelled to leave them in order to fill our appointment at Mr. Hivener's, about 10 miles distant, . . . *Life and Journal*, 99.

²⁸. *Life and Journal*, 49

²⁹. *Life and Journal*, 50.

³⁰. See the entries for Henry and Martin Boehm in our, *The Methodists*, Richey with James Kirby and Kenneth E. Rowe (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press), 1996. A student edition published two years later lacks the biographies.

sake. We set out for Virginia, came to Chr. Crum's, where we staid for the night. 2d--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. The grace of God appeared to be visible in almost every countenance. . . . After the meeting closed, and the people were dismissed, they seemed loathe to depart; we prayed once more with them, and then 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—This morning we started very early; came to a Mr. John Peters', where we found a house full of people already assembled. 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.³¹

Newcomer enjoyed in-their-saddles relationship, extensive traveling with, and mentoring by Br. Boehm—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.³²

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 names 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.³³ He took care to record ministry 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)

³¹. *Life and Journal*, 70-71.

³². 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).

³³. 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." *Life and Journal*, 16.

annual or general conferences, AND, of course, reaching English-speaking United Brethren folks.

Half of such English notations in his journal, some seventy (70), occurred before Newcomer carried the unity banner to the 1809 Baltimore Conference.

Newcomer doubtless found attendance at Methodist camp meetings encouraging relations across the 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. 11th—This morning I had to ride 18 miles to the camp-ground, the place was a hand- some grove. I could hear the people singing some distance; my heart felt a joyful sensation before I reached the spot. All at once a prospect opened before my eyes, the like I never beheld before; here 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:

This camp-meeting continued in this manner from day to day, during the whole week; daily more people assembled, and it was really a harvest time. I could not of course remain idle when so much work was to be done, and the grain ready for the sickle, I was often requested to exhort, to sing and to pray, and who should not, on such an occasion, joyfully lend a helping hand.³⁴

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.”³⁵ 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, conversion of two hundred white people and many

³⁴. *Life and Journal*, 125-26

³⁵. *Life and Journal*, 136.

of the blacks. He claimed thousands present. Newcomer counted 3,000 the second day and at least 10,000 on Sunday the 28th.³⁶ 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.”³⁷ At yet another that year, the first week in October, Newcomer played leadership roles, named eleven preachers “and poor unworthy me.”³⁸

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. So Newcomer exercised and relished his cross-denominational role, identity and vocation.

Efforts at uniting denominations.

Newcomer’s relations with neither of the other possible unity partners came anyway close to those 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. “Methodist” he entered in his journal some 150 times, as already noted, but many, many more encounters are implicit, sometimes with leaders.

Relations with Asbury we have covered already. In addition to his Asbury’s relations, Newcomer recorded interactions with Methodist bishops’ and bishops-to-be, a half dozen for Richard Whatcoat, over twenty for William McKendree and Enoch George (only one after his election to the episcopacy, and a couple of early entries for Robert Richard Roberts. Newcomer met Methodism’s first self-consecrated bishop, Robert Strawbridge, at least twice (in 1806 and 1811).³⁹

Counting his United Brethren 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 (some ten if counted right, eleven if we include his compatriot Henry Kumler Sr.)

Had the Methodist Protestants had bishops, one of their surely would have been Nicholas Sneethen 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 United Brethren could and should unite.

³⁶. Jesse Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America* . . . (Baltimore, 1810; Rutland: Academy Books, 1974), 308; *Life and Journal*, 136.

³⁷. *Life and Journal*, 136-37.

³⁸. *Life and Journal* 139. His account indicates his own agency but without making it seem unusual.

This morning I was not able to speak above my breath, yet my heart is rejoicing. Who would not cheerfully sacrifice bodily health, and even life itself for the salvation of poor immortal souls? The preachers present were Ower, Cassel, Gruber, Birch, Emmet, Steel, Wells, Neidig, Sneider, Fordenbach, Benedum, and poor unworthy me; two reverend gentlemen, one a Lutheran, the other a German Reformed minister, were also present. I invited them to come on the preachers’ stand, but they refused and declined the invitation; the reason for doing so is best known to themselves.

³⁹. *Life and Journal*, 149, 181.

[March 21st 1803] I pursued my course towards Baltimore, to attend the Methodist Annual Conference. Whilst riding along on my journey this afternoon, I had sweet intercourse with my blessed Redeemer; tears of gratitude flowed plentifully down my cheeks for the Love shed abroad in my soul. . . .

April 1st—This morning I felt my heart drawn out in prayer for a blessing to myself; concord, union, and brotherly love for the conference: O' Lord Jesus, may thy impartial, disinterested love towards all mankind, pervade every soul of the brethren assembled. . . . I rode to Baltimore; at night I attended a class meeting at Otterbein's, where I lodged. 2d—This forenoon as well as in the afternoon I sat in the Conference room, where my poor soul received considerable encouragement. At night I attended meeting in Light street. An aged Brother sat beside me, his heart grew warm during preaching. Presently, (although an entire stranger to me,) he took my hand and gave it a hearty squeeze. To my question, do you love the Lord Jesus? he replied, with tears streaming down his furrowed cheeks, "Yes, O ! yes; I do, indeed," and embraced me in his arms. I lodged at Peter Hoffman's.

Sunday 3d 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. At 11 o'clock we had preaching; the old Br. mentioned above, came to me after meeting closed, and insisted on my going home with him to dine. He conducted me to his carriage, where we found his companion already seated. Both of them related to me immediately, with such childlike simplicity; what the Lord had done for their souls, that I could not otherwise but love them with all my heart. We alighted at an elegant house, most splendidly furnished, and everything around proclaimed the owner to be a man of distinction and wealth; and yet I found them to be true disciples of the meek and lowly Jesus. The name of the old Brother is H. Gough.⁴⁰ I was truly happy in the society of this kind and loving people: O God! never suffer me to forget this day, 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.

We had a glorious time, several mourners came to the altar and cried for mercy; others sung hymns of praises and adoration; so it continued till after midnight. 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

⁴⁰. Perhaps Harry Gough who hosted Asbury and Coke prior to the Christmas Conference and whose funeral sermon Asbury preached (in 1808), though not so identified in Appendix B.

my neglect, and over-rule in his wisdom all injury, it any should thereby be created to his kingdom and glory.⁴¹

For the next decade, Newcomer led the United Brethren 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 United Brethren promised the self-ordering, including adoption of rules and a Discipline but the Methodists decided five years of promissory hints 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.⁴²

The denominationalizing measures that the Methodists sought and thought United Brethren needed Newcomer had been and continued laboring for and advocating.

Newcomer on/for 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. That is readily accessible via the index of the English version of his journal.

George Geeting, secretary of the conference, Newcomer interacted in various ways, including traveling together, and minuted Geeting some 220 times, John Neidig 60, John George Pfrimmer (Fremer in his Journal), 20.⁴³

And 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

⁴¹. *Life and Journal*, 104-06.

⁴². Drury, *History*, 807; "Typescript of the Minutes of the Baltimore Conference, MEC, 1814, 74,78.

⁴³. On the roles played by Geeting, Neidig and Pfrimmer, see Behney and Eller, *History*, 57-61.

according to the *Minutes*), mostly Jacob (the others probably family) and did so from January 29th 1798 to June the 5th 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.⁴⁴ The *Journal* did not capture Bowlus serving as secretary of conference with Newcomer, 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 2nd 1808 until September 23rd, 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 given). Similarly, a hundred stops to preach, hold meetings, and occasionally stay at the Hauser's—from January 13th 1799 to August the 2nd 1829—do not distinguish chapel from residence and very rarely add 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 indicating his traveling with Christian Crum, the names identified the folk with whom he (or they) stayed. Contrast the “we” and names with incredibly brief reference of the conference over which he presided:

Sunday 5th [August 1810]—We had a two-days' meeting at Lewis Kemp's, near Dayton. Here the Lord met with us in mercy; the whole congregation melted into tears: may the seed sown with weakness produce fruit unto eternal life. 6th—We had meeting at Herring's. , 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; at night Br. Winter and Dreyer addressed the congregation. The people treated us remarkably friendly, and exercised all loving kindness towards us: may the Lord recompense them. 11th—This forenoon I preached again, from Luke 15, v. 24; the word was attended with power and produced a good effect. 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. I gave an invitation to all penitent sinners to come forward and signify their distress of soul by kneeling down and praying for mercy. A goodly number accepted the invitation; we prayed with them for some time: may the Lord bless their souls and grant them the pardon of their sins. Lodged with Michael Creider, and rested well. 13th—To-day I held a little Conference with the Brethren; 15 preachers [How I write —preachers! indeed --we are not worthy the appellation] were present: bless the Lord for the brotherly love and unanimity of mind which pervades throughout.⁴⁵

⁴⁴. See *Life and Journal*, 35, 324, 105, 128, 134 and 159.

⁴⁵. *Life and Journal*, 190-91. For a fuller record of that conference and that also of the Muskingum, see Drury, *Minutes of the Annual and General Conferences*.

What a modest, self-effacing, strange notice by Newcomer of his quasi-episcopal role in further organizing the United Brethren. 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.

[As an aside, 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.”⁴⁶]

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, 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 Christian’s twin, Henry, also an itinerant and a number of times with Newcomer. In October 1798, Newcomer reported on 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. . .”⁴⁷ 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.”** Note in the long passage just read the **we** and occasional **us** by which Newcomer recorded the collegial character of his ministry.

[September 1806] his morning I felt very unwell, for all this I set out to attend a Quarterly meeting in Shenandoah county, Virginia; lodged for the night at Ewi's. 23d---This evening I arrived sick and fatigued at Chr. Crum's; an appointment had been published for me, and the house was full of people. After I had rested a short time, I tried to speak from Matth. 11; v. 28, 29, 30; had great liberty to speak. By the exercise a perspiration was created, which proved to be of great advantage in my present situation. , 24th---This morning I felt considerably better, and set out in company with Br. Crum and Ambrose, on my journey; we reached J. Senseny's, where we had a blessed meeting.⁴⁸

Ordering the United Brethren

For various reasons, we don’t pursue here what many here know well and others somewhat, namely Newcomer’s various activities, roles, responsibilities and commitments that made the United Brethren into church in the American mode. That narrative is effectively conveyed by Behney and Eller and their predecessor historians. What they convey and is here reaffirmed is that Newcomer’s collaborative, brotherly, inventive, low-keyed leadership helped turn movement into denomination.⁴⁹ On formative development after development, Newcomer

⁴⁶. *Life and Journal*, 192.

⁴⁷. *Life and Journal*, 46.

⁴⁸. *Life and Journal*, 150.

⁴⁹. *Denominationalism*, editor and co-author (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977; (Eugene, OR: WIPF & Stock, 2010); *Reimagining Denominationalism*, co-editor and co-author with R. Bruce Mullin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994; paper edition 2010); *Denominationalism Illustrated and Explained* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, Wipf & Stock, 2013); and an array of article including an article cluster: “Denomination,” “Review of the

teamed with other leaders—culminating in the crafting of a *Discipline*, drafting of a Confession of Faith, and calling of a General Conference (in 1815).⁵⁰ To be sure, the brief “Minutes” noted that an accusation leveled at Newcomer was from a “misunderstanding.” The next General Conference, that of 1817 chose Andrew Zeller as well as Newcomer as bishops. Its last action, that numbered 8, “Resolved that three hundred Disciplines be printed in the German language and one hundred in the English language.”⁵¹

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 society. And 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. 2d. **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 8th—This day **Br. Zeller** and Hoffman addressed the congregation; rode to Washington and lodged with Harnish. 9th—This forenoon we preached at Winter's; rode to Mr. Hudman's, who received us very friendly: may the Lord reward him. 10th—We crossed the Ohio river and lodged at a public house for the night. 12th—We came through Zanesville to Martin Rohrer's. 13th—To Jacob Mechlin's. 14th, and

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

Literature,” “Primary Sources, Further Reading, and Links to Digital Materials on Denominations and Denominationalism,” and “Summary” forthcoming in *Oxford Encyclopedia of Religion in America*.

⁵⁰. Behney and Eller, *History*, 97-111.

⁵¹. Drury, *Minutes of the Annual and General Conferences*, 67.

Kemp's.

Sunday 22d—Preached here in a school-house; rode to Peter Lehman's and staid for the night. 23d—Reached Andrew Zeller's. 24th—I preached here in the meeting house, from Psalm 43, v. 3, 4, 25th—Lodged with Daniel Ewi. 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.⁵²

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

If the Methodists couldn't live into the brotherhood they also preached, Newcomer remained committed to help the United Brethren enlarge what that denominational unity would have then and has now achieved:

From "Wir sind Brüder!" to "Can We become Brothers?"

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 United Brethren, Methodists and Evangelicals together—Newcomer transformed what had been an ethnic mission into an American denomination.

⁵². *Life and Journal*, 248-49.

