

Today's *Untied* Methodism

Living with/into/beyond Its Two Centuries of Regular Division

Russell E. Richey

Introduction

Over its first century, American Methodism divided (untied itself) **structurally** every decade.¹ Many of those divisions live on today as separate denominations (as will be noted below). The twentieth-century church, on a first glance, looks to have sought unity and the healing of earlier divisions. In fact, schism continued but in a new mode. Concerns, initiatives, protests, and campaigns found new divisive measures to suffice—first in **conviction** and **cause**, later in **caucus**. Methodism's third century? At least within the United States, it seems to be one of continued conflict, of steady decline, and of exploring our own role in the increasingly post-denominational age. Might there be schemes for reknitting *Untied* Methodism *and* giving structural, organizational, missional space for the differences **between and among United Methodists**? What if—again at least in the U.S.—restructuring along lines of differences as well as geography permitted the keeping **within** the fold, and structurally, those committed—by identity, purpose, or commitment—to sustaining community/communities by language, ethnicity, national origin, missional purpose, organizational function, or ministering openness?²

Divisive issues and the divisional schemes with which our United Methodism struggles represent today's versions of a long, long, indeed, a constitutive pattern. The fact of prior schisms neither excuses separatist antics today nor demands that our church's parties yield on commitments they deem to be biblical or ethical or faithful or prophetic. Today's antagonists—like those who pioneered our many, many prior divisions—each view their cause as deserving a higher loyalty than to the unity of Methodism. Such convictions about **the** cause—my/our sense of what's most vital to faithful Wesleyanism—have dominated our church's story and served as the impetus for one split after another. This essay rehearses the saga of denominational ruptures, not to excuse one today, but rather to suggest that monumental efforts to hold ourselves together have not always succeeded in the past. Looking back at our history of divisions we can see, I think, what incredible costs our dedication to a cause can bring. I conclude with reflections about how to stay together even when we struggle with deep-felt convictions that seemingly demand higher commitment.

This chapter will make four key points:

- Successive eighteenth–nineteenth-century contests over important societal and ethical issues broke Methodism into competitive denominations, encouraged their aggressive evangelistic/missionary outreach, and so faced the separated competitive churches outward, and yielded their overall growth. Denominational differences—**between**.
- In much of the twentieth century, the-to-unite-Methodisms avoided such schisms, indeed sought unity in various ways, permitted difference and disagreement to take conviction

and cause expression, facilitated denominational self-absorption, and so faced the uniting churches inward and helped produce decline. Campaign differences—**within**.

- Caucuses and campaigns—from the 1960s onward—and the gradual polarizing of United Methodism into relatively stable liberal and conservative camps furthered the focus within, eroded support for and reliance upon on general agencies, and perhaps threatens to divide Methodism once again. Caucus differences—**among**.
- For the twenty-first century—and particularly for the US portions of The UMC—strategists might well revisit schemes within our heritage, practice, ordering, and ministry that would permit differences **between and among Methodists** to nevertheless keep us **within** the denominational fold. Conferenced divisions—**between and among**.

Dividing Structurally

In its first American century, Methodism divided **structurally** every decade. Most of those divisions live on today. A few wear fresh denominational disguises, as for instance, James O’Kelly’s in the United Church of Christ. Others bear the facial scars of ethical failure as experienced by Richard Allen and his flock—prejudicial treatment and racism that yielded the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Typically, each party understood its cause as expressive of important central, perhaps even distinctive, Wesleyan values, practices, doctrines, or commitments. Schism might be termed American Methodism’s ecclesial signature, or to change the image, its birthright. Indeed, division predated the release of the colonial Methodists from the Wesleyan womb.

The American Revolution lured or forced out most of the British preachers that Wesley had planted on American shores. Flight of the leaders might not count as schism. Indeed, leaving the little movement in the hands of colonists (and the hiding Francis Asbury) may well have permitted the radical Americanization that made the new church far different from its British mother. Achieving such empowerment, however, produced the first full schism. During the war, the regularly called 1779 conference, met in Fluvanna County, Virginia, and declared American Methodist independence. In the formulaic Wesleyan question-and-answer fashion, it made provision for Word, Order, and Sacraments.

Q. 14. What are our reasons for taking up the administration of the ordinances [sacraments] among us?

A. Because the Episcopal Establishment is now dissolved and therefore in almost all our circuits the members are without the ordinances, we believe it to be our duty.

Q. 19. What forms of ordination shall be observed, to authorize any preacher to administer?

A. By that of a Presbytery.

Q. 20. How shall the Presbytery be appointed?

A. By a majority of the preachers.

Q. 22. What power is vested in the Presbytery by this choice?

A. 1st. To administer the ordinances themselves. 2d. To authorize any other preacher or preachers approved of by them, by the form of laying on of hands and of prayer.³

Word that such a declaration of independence would occur had gotten to the still hiding Francis Asbury. He endeavored to prevent the anticipated revolution by convening an “irregular” conference the prior month in Delaware.⁴ It queried:

Q. 10. Shall we guard against a separation from the church, directly or indirectly?

A. By all Means.⁵

The following year, Asbury's cabal threw the duly-called Americanizers out of Methodism. It queried:

Q. 12. Shall we continue in close connexion with the church, and press our people to a closer communion with her?

A. Yes. . . .

Q. 20. Does this whole conference disapprove the step our brethren have taken in Virginia?

A. Yes.

Q. 21. Do we look upon them no longer as Methodists in connexion with Mr. Wesley and us till they come back?

A. Agreed.⁶

Asbury and colleagues eventually convinced the Americanizers to wait for John Wesley's provision for ecclesial order, and the schism was healed.

This schism is treated with a little detail to show several factors about divisions. First, each side wanted the best for the American Methodist movement and its little body of members. Second, proper protocol in a division or split may well have been with the losers, not the winners, as in this skirmish. Third, in the Fluvanna division, as in a number that followed, the two parties were of comparable size. Finally, some schism words and schismatic tunes seem to "get" forgotten, the losing party is made to appear off Wesleyan key, and Methodism fixes the church's hymnbook-history on the winner's score. So Fluvanna's actions, noted above (and again from the regularly appointed and convened conference), did not make it into *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; From 1773 to 1813, Inclusive*. Instead, only the appointments appear. The following year's *Minutes* begin with Q.1. "What Preachers do now agree to sit in conference on the original plan, as Methodists?" And the *Minutes* then proceed into strategizing, as noted above, at Asbury's directive.⁷

From Christmas Conference to General Conference

If the Asbury-led cabal and later-healed Fluvanna division seems less than a real schism, consider 1784. The Christmas Conference actually effected a threefold breaking of unity: a) from the Church of England; b) from the North American Anglicans, among whom the Methodists had labored, who then also reconstituted as an independent church; and c) from Mr. Wesley and British Wesleyanism. To be sure, these alterations came with John Wesley's blessing, ecclesial provisions, and the duly "ordained" superintendent—the Rev. Thomas Coke, L.L.D.⁸ But each word in its name—Methodist Episcopal Church—signaled one (or more) of the three breaks. The Methodist schismatic tradition had been set.

Perhaps the first real schism (one already alluded to) resulted from efforts of James O'Kelly, which for him and his followers would protect the interests and rights of the preachers. His antics came to prominence opposing Asbury's effort to coordinate the legislative actions of the growing number of conferences—each legislating—with a council. For its adherents, the council would coordinate the actions taken in the then eleven annual conferences. Composed of bishops and Asbury's appointees as presiding elders, the council—in the judgment of historian, presiding elder, almost bishop, Jesse Lee—was new, dangerous, unworkable, and not genuinely representative.⁹

The Council, which met in 1789 and 1790, possessed features well devised to doom it. One was the provision that its enactments required unanimity, in effect, allowing Asbury veto power. Another feature, that legislation would be binding only in concurring conferences, Lee thought also a “dangerous clause,” prone to divide the connection.¹⁰ James O’Kelly shared such judgments. His divisive actions became most decisive in the solution adopted by the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) in 1792, a General Conference. James O’Kelly, an erratic but prominent leader, split the church by demanding “democratic” rights for preachers; protesting monarchical behavior by the bishops, especially Asbury; and witnessing against slavery. The break came over a proposal made to the General Conference of that year, which would have given preachers a right of appeal over their appointments, a popular initiative that seemed destined to pass.¹¹ When the legislation failed, O’Kelly’s supporters, later called “Republican Methodists,” walked out.

Three Schisms: What Was and Is at Stake?

Why dwell on Fluvanna, the Christmas Conference, and O’Kelly’s antics? The serious division of the first was healed. The Christmas Conference will not strike many United/Untied Methodists today as schismatic (though a word with Episcopalians might help on that pitch). And the O’Kelly fissure appears to have cost and resulted in little. However, each hovered over an incredibly important central commitment for American Methodism. What commitment? Conceiving of ministry and ecclesiology in terms of WORD, ORDER, AND SACRAMENT.

- Sacrament? Fluvanna registered the centrality of the sacraments and of structures and mechanisms to ordain those who should be authorized to preside.
- Order? The Christmas Conference. Through Wesley’s various constituting deliveries, Coke’s ambassadorial role, *HIS* AND ASBURY’s election to the superintendency, the fashioning of the “Large Minutes” into a *Discipline*, and the conference’s assent in all this, the new American Methodist established order, American order.
- Word? On that platform, albeit with his own strange stage presence, stood O’Kelly. He advocated freedom for the Word, championed the preachers of the Word, and sought mechanisms for appealing punitive, unfair, or inconsiderate appointments. Controversy-driven, schismatically generated, the new church achieved its signal SACRAMENT, ORDER and WORD.

A second point to note is that we United Methodists narrate these divisive episodes—and the array of those noted below—so as to accent and value our side and minimize the causes for which the “schismatics” stood. Of course, when MEC, MECS, and MPC unite, and when EUBC and MC join, the once opposing historical apologies have to be brought into some unitive framework. But in divisions that remain, denominational sagas recall distinctive commitments, honor those who defended them, and engage the longer Wesleyan/Methodist story only far enough to reach their own beginnings.¹²

Third we should underscore the fact that each of these three divisions unfolded in Methodism’s authority center—conference. Conference, from the start, has united AND divided us. Asbury invented and convened the Delaware Conference to counter the appointed one for Fluvanna. Asbury engineered the calling of the irregular Christmas Conference, thereby countering Wesley’s imposition of order by simple mandate, balancing the Wesley-conferred mantle on Coke with the preacher-support for himself, and effectively constituting an American church. And O’Kelly critiqued the first unitive decision-making gathering, the Council, and

traumatized the one that lives with us today, General Conference. The *Minutes* had called for seventeen annual conferences for 1791 and twenty for 1792.¹³ How was Methodism to come to a common mind with actions and bishops migrating through the successive conferences? General Conference was and remains our unitive structure, central authority and decision-making forum. It also invites the staging of our differences and has done so from O’Kelly’s day to the present.

Fourth—and perhaps pertinent to differences we currently face—given the schisms faced, the structure created, authority defined, and nomenclature chosen, we might wish that the 1792 General Conference had thought systematically and ecclesiologicaly and chosen to name every level of Methodist gathering as “conference.” So instead of John Wesley’s crazy nomenclature—class, society, quarterly meeting, conference—might Asbury and colleagues have found some phrase to name the various levels “conference”?

Structuring Our Differences and So Dividing

It might be helpful as we look to current disagreements to be reminded of the incredible number over Methodism’s first American century. Most of the following will be very familiar. A few other smaller, or short-lived, divisions within the several churches below have not been catalogued. The following should suffice to indicate that Methodism divided again and again:

- the Fluvanna schism of 1779–1781 that preceded the organization of the church;
- the founding of the MEC, thereby separating Methodists in 1784, from the Church of England, from their once American Anglicans compatriots, and from Wesley and British Methodism;
- separate “prejudicial” organization also from the 1780s of African Methodists upon whom were imposed: segregated class, chapel, and quarterly meeting seating arrangements; substandard congregational prerogatives; and limited ministerial status (AMEs traditionally date such from 1787);
- the 1792 walk-out of James O’Kelly and supporters to form the “Republican Methodists” and the coalescence of a Primitive Methodist movement around William Hammett in Charleston the same year;
- the United Brethren and Evangelical Association, which took important steps toward denominational identity in the first decade of the nineteenth century;
- the New England-based Reformed Methodists launched by Pliny Brett in 1814, and the formal organization of AMEs in 1816;
- the Stillwellite and AME Zion movements of the 1820s, both launched in New York City;
- the Methodist Protestants, whose reform efforts traumatized successive general conferences in the 1820s and divided Methodism at its heart, in the border states (1830);
- the exiting of abolitionists to form the Wesleyan Methodist Church in 1842;
- the split of the Methodist Episcopalians in 1844, north and south;
- the emergence of the Free Methodists in the late 1850s (formally organizing in 1860);
- the founding in 1864, of the Churches of Christ in Christian Union by MEC southern sympathizers, a church that later would emphasize its holiness, not its Confederacy commitments;
- the extrusion of African Americans from the MECS in 1870, to constitute the Colored (now Christian) Methodist Episcopal Church;
- the founding of the Church of the Nazarene in the 1890s.

So, through our first century, we Methodists broke apart at least once a decade. Typically at stake in the division were issues, commitments, doctrines, or ministries that parties to the dispute viewed as critically important. Banners in the dispute called for reaffirmation of, new foundations for, adaptation of, or alterations for established Methodist/Wesleyan policy and/or practice. To illustrate, after the Civil War and after sending its preachers into chaplaincy-type war roles, the MECS dropped the Rebel flag, lowered the societally transformative banner, and hoisted a placard for the spirituality of the church. Spirituality and segregation shared hymnals and sang well together.

Conflicts could, and often did, then, sharpen and restrict what one or both parties embraced. Division and following “your” banner encouraged warring parties to champion theirs and reject the other’s values. United Methodists now can look over at AMEs or Wesleyans and see ritual practice or ethical commitments or leadership patterns once more broadly shared. And to an extent, conversations between and among the various Methodists do help the several churches reconsider what they are about, claim, or reclaim still-shared values, and identify what may have been lost, forgotten, or rejected. So renewal or recommitment can come from having United Methodist involvement in the World Methodist Council, the Oxford Institute, Wesleyan Studies (in the American Academy of Religion), diverse faculties and student bodies, and so on.

On the face of it then, the twentieth century may appear to have reversed the separatist spirit and put us together. On the **structural** plane, unification does indeed seem to have been our cause. Think—the Methodist Ecumenical Conference (1881) and its successor the World Methodist Council; the 1939 and 1968 unions (though the former divided the church racially with the Central Jurisdiction and yielded a Southern Methodist Church); full communion agreements between The UMC and Black Methodism (AME, AMEZ, African Union, and CME churches); century-long leadership in and funding of ecumenical endeavors (local, state, national, global); efforts to unite nine white and black denominations through the Consultation on Church Union (1968–1970); gradual embrace by The UMC of its global nature; and full communion with the ELCA and in current exploration with our American mother denomination, the Episcopal Church.

Dividing by Convictions and Causes

In reality, division took different forms in the twentieth century. **Conviction, cause, and caucus** have served to align Methodists to a banner, sometimes with non-Methodists to that banner. Others heralded the opposing cause. Our press, group gatherings, radio, and now the web bring together those who share conviction, rally to the same cause, and caucus, whether together physically or online. Each movement has found ways to gather and to raise its banner and to carry cause and banner into General Conferences.

Over the century, we pushed and fought, again almost raising a new banner each decade—holiness and Pentecostalism; conference membership, organizational structures and ordination for women; the social gospel; fundamentalism; labor rights; World War I; the peace cause; FDR’s depression programs; the 1939-unity-through-national-church-wide segregation; World War II; Communism; the Great Society; and ending segregation within and without the church.

Just to illustrate. The attrition to the Church of the Nazarene we noted; but more ongoing, extensive, and costly were continued losses by the MEC and MECS to the several holiness denominations and then, quite severely, to the various Pentecostal movements. Less obvious were the ways in which the several Methodist churches struggled with their women’s calls into

ministry. Histories (including my own) typically herald the founding (and MEC/General Conference recognition) in the 1860s and 1870s of the Ladies' and Pastor's Christian Union, the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and an array of similar separate orders by the MEC, MECS, MPC, UBC, and EA—gender divisions within denominations.

Typically treated positively, as well, was the establishment by the 1888 General Conference (MEC) of a separate ministerial office for women, deaconess. While that represented a way to recognize calls to ministry, it nevertheless structured women's ministries differently, without full ordination or being accorded a place in annual conferences. Tellingly, the same General Conference refused to seat five women elected as delegates. It took mainline Methodism until 1956 to fully ordain women.

Women's organizations functioned (and still function) as church-within-the-church, separations or divisions within. Tellingly as well, United Methodist Women chose recently to remain in New York City and not to flee south with the General Board of Global Ministries.

On many of the other great campaigns mentioned briefly above, Methodists could be found among supporters OR opponents/critics. The causes drew fervid commitment, significant disagreements, and severe advocacy. "Difference" and conviction took internal structural or movement form and arrayed itself in banners, publications, movements, impulses.

Division has always had its cost. The cost of the nineteenth-century divisions should be clear. In split after split, portions of the once-united church went into separate denominations. The array of Methodisms and the membership statistics in each exhibit the cost of schism. How much greater a united Methodism would be if the Nazarene, Christian, Free, Wesleyan, AMEZ, AME, and United Methodist churches would be one. But ironically, division also encouraged competition, at home and abroad. Consequently, multiple Methodisms fought one another in and through evangelism, mission, nurture, and church planting. Methodisms competed and focused *outward*. Division and competition gained membership for the warring Methodist denominations. However, division cost nineteenth-century, *outward-oriented* Methodism the visibility, influence, power, and prestige that a united church might have achieved.

Not so clear, perhaps, is that in not dividing and facing *inward*—in the late nineteenth and for much of the twentieth century—Methodism suffered more insidious and perhaps much, much higher costs, especially in membership numbers and societal influence. The most dramatic and serious of the *inward* events? The successive unions of MEC/MECS/MPC→MC→EUB→UMC! On various scores, they certainly can be celebrated. However, the difficult and controversial unitive processes focused significant dimensions of the leadership in the several churches *inward*, on the denomination.

The 1939 unification, in particular, exhibited most dramatically the costs of the twentieth-century Methodist pattern of handling difference and dispute. In the new church and via the Central Jurisdiction, Methodism elevated segregation from practice into policy and principle. White southerners had their way. Blacks knew, and many northern women came to grasp, that Methodism was transforming its polity, governance procedures, judicial arrangements, and conference structures to accommodate southern racism. The new Methodist Church segregated Blacks nationally, structurally, visibly, and constitutionally. Unification turned Methodism in on itself (despite important parts it would continue to play in ecumenical and Protestant endeavor).

Costly in less dramatic and ongoing terms were the various other twentieth-century controversies mentioned above. Each dispute or difference encouraged Methodists to focus on themselves—really on their allies and their opponents. The various causes above—*inwardly*

orientated—cost Methodism as they established parties, and the church permitted them to recruit, to champion their causes, to build supportive structures, to seek agency and General Conference support, and to deem their campaign as real Wesleyanism or Methodism. What suffered? Only missions, Sunday school, church-planting, adaptation to and use of newer media, influence in American society. Internal ecclesial issues took center stage in the twentieth century and for the denominational players now constituting United Methodism.

Until the 1960s/1970s, most of the divisions itemized above—from issues posed by the holiness/Pentecostal cause and women’s place in denominational affairs to those framed by World War II and Communism—brought new teams onto the denominational court. One controversy’s players and coach sat when that game ended. And new teams launched their campaigns to guide the denomination. So Methodism divided afresh into newly created school rivalries. (I played basketball, so perhaps can be forgiven for the BB metaphor.)

Caucus: Methodism Untying Again and Again

The 1960s–1970s conflagrations over segregation, poverty, feminism, abortion, and homosexuality, and our 1968 denominational unity birthed the array of caucuses with which The UMC lives today. Divided into one advocacy group or another, untied, it seems, we are and have long been. Or we should say that we connected and connect now in relation to one or more of our convictions or causes and, for some of us, in our caucuses, careers, and contexts.

A new and different contest and more disabling inwardness came to full expression in the caucuses and in the divisive issues faced in church and society in the 1960s and 1970s. Instead of reconstituting and rearranging itself into successive freshly created, issue-framed, and newly created campaigns—as Methodism had done previously—the church gradually created within itself two relatively stable, ongoing, parties. Liberal and conservative parties or wings slowly stabilized; in churches as in society and American politics, centrist positions became increasingly untenable and denominations generally became contested terrain. Currently, serious disagreements over homosexuality—to which we will turn below—divide, untie Methodism. Those demand attention but so, as well, do the ways in which the numerous official and unofficial caucuses and the various policy campaigns to direct United Methodism continue our *inward* orientation (see the chapter appendix on the currently and officially recognized caucuses). An overview, then, of the ecclesial world that caucuses have created, and with gratitude for recent Pew studies and other accounting as noted above:¹⁴

- Membership in mainline Protestant denominations generally has eroded (and aged) over the last half-century; and the salience, prestige, and power of mainline denominational leadership are now contested, often bested.
- Recent sociological and demographic scholarship has found membership in a specific denomination to be less revealing of attitudes, commitments, and behavior than the larger religious family in which a specific denomination might be located. In its “Religious Landscape Study,” the Pew Research Center grouped denominations and findings thereon as families:
 - Christian (Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant and Historically Black Protestant, Catholic, Mormon, Orthodox Christian, Jehovah’s Witness and Other), Non-Christian Faiths (Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Other World Religions, and Other Faiths), Unaffiliated (Atheist, Agnostic, and Nothing, in particular) and Don’t Know.¹⁵

- Comparable, if not identical, judgments come in other imaginatively researched and carefully crafted overviews of the religious scene.¹⁶ Such scholarly assessments do indeed document the dramatic decline in the individual denominations and the religious families that once constituted mainline Protestantism and the flowering of an array of new or renewed religious groupings. These “landscaping” assessments raise implicitly, if not explicitly, questions about the utility of “denomination” as an analytical category and even the viability of denominationalism.
- Conservative, evangelical, and fundamentalist bodies and their leadership have experienced corresponding growth, vigor, visibility, and political prowess; their collective membership exceeding that of the mainline and constituting over a quarter of the overall American population.
- Membership growth outside the U.S. (for us in Africa and Asia) and stagnation or decline in North America threatens long-standing patterns of assembly, governance, ethos, worship, and morality (on homosexuality especially).
- Methodist ethos, values, commitment, and cohesion now contend with the fact of “switching,” adults shopping for a religious home after moves or childbearing, and of membership raised in other traditions or denominations—a quarter of adults no longer a part of the religion that nurtured them, a pattern that reaches 44 percent, if switching among Protestant bodies is traced.
- Marriages across religious, confessional, and denominational lines (37 percent); persons retaining a sense of being Methodist but no actual membership; disaffiliation in younger age cohorts; and adherents experimenting with various individualistic, face-to-face, or media spiritualities and meditative practices also attest the weakening of denominational identity and allegiance.
- United Methodism contends with similar patterns of congregational independence or diffidence, reflected in selection of non-standard educational materials or hymnals, diversion of collections to local or non-denominational projects, resistance to denominational programs, and the removal of denominational signage.
- Competing for our congregations’ business and competing with the United Methodist Publishing House, GBHEM, and GBOD are an array of independent and para-church publishing houses, curricula suppliers, music licensors, bookstore chains, program franchisers, consultants, and training outfits.
- Megachurches, many independent or non-denominational, some loosely United Methodist, now boast resources comparable to small denominations, with sophisticated broadcast, internet, and digital presence and the capacity to meet needs heretofore supplied by denominations (training, literature, expertise, missions, new church-planting).
- Coalitions of mega-congregations and/or their church-plantings coalesce into denomination-like entities or function more loosely as quasi-denominations, offering training events and inspiration gatherings that United Methodist wannabe clergy attend.
- Single-purpose, lobbying, humanitarian, and mission organizations and more occasional movements, gatherings, and events claim the interest, involvement, commitment; and resources once channeled through congregational structures and through denominations and denominational programs (Focus on the Family, Bread for the World, Habitat for Humanity).

- Similar single-purpose, ideological, or caucus groups within denominations, especially within mainline denominations, turn assemblies and conferences into contentious culture-war gatherings; tend to align into broad progressive or conservative camps; and effect connections to similar camps in other denominations and through religious-political-action or coalition-forming entities like the Institute of Religion and Democracy.
- Older interdenominational organizations to which we still belong and that remain financially dependent on us—state, National, and World Council of Churches—once harmonizing the leadership of the mainline, function now within the ambit of culture wars, tending to retain the allegiance of the more progressive, and to function as foil for the more conservative, denominational leaders.
- Marginal membership attachment, congregational independence, culture-war sentiments, and societal prejudices engender indifference, suspicion, sometimes hostility toward the centers and symbols of our denominational identity—the regional and national headquarters and leadership—sometimes resulting in tax-resistance or other forms of revolt.
- Media ministries, newer virtual alliances, and political action efforts that trade on religious sensibilities enlarge the marketplace within which religious expression and affiliation occur and induce consumption or invite appropriation of multiple beliefs, value systems, and ethical practices.
- Such public or digital visualizations of North America and of the world heighten awareness of American religious diversity, test tolerance levels, stimulate post-9-11 fears, and erode faith in or adherence to putative societal norms within which Protestant denominationalism has functioned (a Christian culture, public or civil religion, Judeo-Christian tradition[s]).
- And because denominational loyalty is tested on so many fronts, United Methodist leaders, boards of ordained ministry, and seminaries find themselves forced to accent confessional particularities, resulting in the strange phenomena of hyper-denominationalism contending with post-denominationalism.

Campaign causes also came to function—in media treatment if not internally—as the “why,” “what for,” “how,” and “what to do” of the whole denomination. As a result, liberal and conservative, or comparable labeling contrasts, came to be applied generally to religious adherents. Campaign causes live on. Its great beginning? The late 1960s and the 1970s.

Caucus (or was it Cactus) Blooming?

For campaign causes, the support and advocacy system, surfacing within the mainline in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, was the caucus.¹⁷ National, formed by/on its own, and intent on reshaping American society, a caucus gathers those who affirm a shared, hyphenated causal identity. Caucuses and causes—*for* Hispanics, gays, lesbians, various Asian peoples, Native Americans, and ordaining of women; *or against* abortion, empowering of homosexuals, constraints on missions, and ordination of women—offer their own within the church a platform and a campaign to make sure that its demands and needs get denominational attention, acquiescence, funding, and staffing. Sometimes identity and agenda come through the name explicitly, as in Black Methodists for Church Renewal (1968). The archetypical caucus, Good News, had been founded the prior year, launching the journal bearing its name and thereafter furthering an array of preservation/conservative causes. Good News formed alliances with those

sharing its convictions; established strong bonds with key Methodist/Wesleyan seminaries and colleges; created an array of institutions, serving effectively as a shadow denomination; staged events, sought publicity, and eventually went on the web; monitored general agencies and sought membership thereon; elected delegates to General Conference and provided them with legislation and counsel; and pursued a variety of redemptive causes.¹⁸ To pursue a diverse agenda, Good News helped birth an array of organizations—the Confessing Movement, the Mission Society for United Methodists, Aldersgate Renewal Ministries, the Foundation for Theological Education, Lifewatch, RENEW, Transforming Congregations, the Association for Church Renewal, and United Methodist Action (the latter, the United Methodist wing of the Institute of Religion and Democracy, or IRD.) The caucus countering Good News with respect to gays and lesbians, Affirmation, emerged in 1975, joining the ranks of The UMC’s agenda-framed groups.

(For the array of twenty-eight caucuses recognized quite recently in the quasi-official *United Methodist Studies: Basic Bibliographies*, see the chapter appendix. Campaign, cause, concern, identity, ethnicity, and commitment have generated an array of ways of being Methodist. A separate list of periodicals for twenty-four “Affiliated” groups points to yet another way in which United Methodists tie themselves. To such listing might well be added the focused programs and ventures mounted by general agencies and by various annual conferences.)

On neither the Good News coalition nor that supportive of Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns will this essay focus.¹⁹ Instead, here we look at what caucus politics rendered early in the way of the judgments and attitudes toward United Methodist structure and authority. To that end, we examine the way in which caucus politics sabotaged—at times deliberately, more often inadvertently—what had once been Methodist glory: board and agency resourcing, capable professional leadership, national standards, centralized production, efficiencies of scale, common resourcing, proportional fiscal obligations, unified decision making, coherent denominational policy, easily recognized packaging, familiar products, dependable quality. Unless an agency could be viewed as on your caucus’s side, it was to be ignored, pilloried. And the latter was what grabbed attention. *Bureaucracy* became a slur word.

That negative reading surfaced powerfully after the 1960s—after the Civil Rights and Anti-War campaigns, and for United Methodists, after the 1968 union and 1972 restructuring. It has continued ever since. One of the early denunciations came from my good friends, and once Duke colleagues, Paul A. Mickey and the late Robert L. Wilson. Mickey is associated, as I recall, with Good News. Wilson shared the mind-set, if not membership. In their *What New Creation? The Agony of Church Restructure*,²⁰ they looked at bureaucracy and denominational reorganization efforts in the American Baptist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, United Presbyterian, and United Methodist churches. What they found were crises, engulfing the denominations as a whole and focused on their agencies.

Their findings or indictments proved sufficiently numerous to become something of a litany. In the 1968 union, national bureaucracies had been dismantled, reassembled, reshuffled, physically relocated with attendant chaos, confusion, and lowered morale among executives and staff. Funding decreased as membership plateaued and dropped or as congregations withheld monies in anger over policies. Grassroots anger increasingly focused on a number of controversial and high-profile initiatives. Programs on which congregations and conferences depended were cut. Distrust toward national and regional offices grew. Pointed attacks on bureaucracy, far more trenchant than those of Mickey and Wilson, resulted. Proposed

remedies—sometimes concretized in term limits or other thinly disguised punitive efforts—produced morale problems in the agencies. Caucus attempts to gain footholds on boards and in their staffs intensified the political struggles by which leadership identification took place. Agencies demonstrated confusion and a lack of clarity about purposes and goals. The entire connectional scheme seemed in crisis, a crisis that Mickey and Wilson insisted, derived from underlying crises of denominational belief and purpose.

Since Mickey and Wilson, a whole industry grew up producing books diagnosing the problems of United Methodism (and mainline Protestantism generally). Prescribing various antidotes, studies of the new United church treated bureaucracy as a problem and echoed the Mickey-Wilson indictments, if not always their vivid conspiratorial style. The critique of central denominational structure echoed from within denominational apparatus in the General Council on Ministries series “Into Our Third Century.” Two of the treatises, *Images of the Future* by Alan K. Waltz and *Paths to Transformation: A Study of the General Agencies of The United Methodist Church* by Kristine M. Rogers and Bruce A. Rogers,²¹ treated anti-centralization attitudes more as problem than norm, but thereby added to the indictments. Bishop Richard Wilke in *And Are We Yet Alive? The Future of The United Methodist Church* found plenty of blame to spread around, but certainly called for overhauling, stripping down, streamlining, and reorienting of our structures.²² Again, Methodist problems were designated as bureaucratic. Further, long-time church researchers, Douglas W. Johnson and Alan K. Waltz, in their volume with the colorless title, *Facts and Possibilities: An Agenda for The United Methodist Church*, pointed to the lack of coordination at the national level among the Council of Bishops, General Conference, and general agencies. Such indictments, it should be noted, came despite the creation in the United church of the coordinating agencies, the General Council on Finance and Administration, and General Council on Ministries.²³ And then, the whole Council of Bishops waded in with their prophetic study and episcopal letter, *Vital Congregations, Faithful Disciples: Vision for the Church: Foundation Document*.²⁴ They too treated central agency structures as problems and would continue to do so in the programs, studies, emphases, and imperatives that followed. Moreover, since that point, the local church has effectively replaced conference as United Methodism’s basic body and been placed up front in treatment of ecclesiology.

Such critiques, voiced in far less measured tones by activists and given organized expression in the caucuses, permitted the latter to become the church’s action centers, direction setters, center-stage actors, and proposal makers. Caucuses effectively *Untied* Methodism. Or, to put it more charitably, they made caucusing the way to do business—for bishops, conferences, and general agencies as well as themselves. And ironically, the efforts to encourage the church to claim and live into its global dimensions have only enhanced and further empowered the US caucuses. Particularly on homosexuality, conservatives can look to African *Untied* Methodists for support. To that point, I heard from a person slated to give one of the opening addresses at General Conference: Why insist on keeping Jurisdictional and Central Conferences in one church? So that, I was told by this person I knew well, we can count on their negative vote on changing homosexuality strictures. Caucuses work across *Untied* Methodism.

Dividing Adjectivally: Staying United by Differing Between and Among

Might Methodism stay **United** by recognizing and permitting the differences **between and among us** to be sufficiently affirmed, be given structural expression, and be accorded conferencing authority and powers so as to keep us all **within** the denominational fold?

Over two centuries, differences divided Methodists successively, as we've seen, into separate denominations, into champions of various causes, into caucuses. In each stage, leaders struggled with diversity. In keeping African Americans loyally within, the MEC finally, in 1864, did establish Black annual conferences, but without full status (lacking representation in General Conference and effectively segregated).²⁵ Similarly, women's missional commitments garnered separate and zealously monitored organizations tellingly baptized as Ladies' or Women's. And women called to ministry could adorn themselves with the deaconess habit. Only in 1956, did the MC fully ordain a woman. Full gender parity took decades more. The third phase accorded diversity structurally formed in caucuses. However, these affirmed identity among those joining. Some caucuses developed elaborate communication systems and programming but did not experience these as embraced by and integrated into United Methodism's governing structures. These differences-within do not, to this observer, seem promising for the twenty-first century.

More promising? Perhaps yet another late nineteenth-, early twentieth-century (and seemingly separatist) pattern. Namely, the conference missionary structures permitted the several national and language groupings within the MEC and WITHIN the U.S. The 1904 *Discipline*²⁶ exhibits Methodism's holding together and giving conference recognition to peoples of differing language, ethnicity, and national origin (but not, or not explicitly, to missional purpose, organizational function, or sexual orientation). This was a way to be united and yet divided, permitting diverse immigrant populations to have their own conferences staffed and to lead their own people. So, again, WITHIN the U.S., the MEC structured itself along language-ethnic-national-origin lines. And English-speaking conferences, districts, and parishes overlapped those that spoke, sang, and read in German, Norwegian/Danish, Swedish, Finnish, Italian and Spanish.

Most striking? The adjectives. Adjectives identified the conferences for non-English-speaking peoples. One can experience the MEC's linguistic structuring in the 1904 *Discipline* in several ways. "Boundaries of Conferences" exhibits geographically both language empowering and racially segregating diversity. Some examples are below (There are edited for brevity's sake):

EAST GERMAN CONFERENCE shall embrace all the German work east of the Alleghany Mountains and include all the German work in the State of New York.
EAST MAINE CONFERENCE . . .
EAST OHIO CONFERENCE . . .
EAST TENNESSE CONFERENCE shall include the colored work in the State of Tennessee not in the Tennessee Conference . . .
EASTERN SWEDISH CONFERENCE shall include all the Swedish work in the six New England States, [plus N.J. Del., NY, NY East and Philadelphia territory].
FORIDA CONFERENCE shall include the colored work in the State of Florida except that portion lying west of the Apalachicola River.
FOOCHOW CONFERENCE shall include the Fokien Province in China, excepting so much as is included within the Hinghua Mission Conference.²⁷

Adjectival designations—"German" and "Swedish"—the use of nominative for mission conferences and the adjectival for those in the U.S. is clearer several pages over.

NORTH CHINA CONFERENCE shall include that portion of the Chinese Empire including and north of the Provinces of Shantung and Honan . . .
NORTH GERMANY CONFERENCE shall include all that part of Germany north of . . .
NORTH INDIA CONFERENCE shall consist of the United Provinces of Agra and Oude east of the Ganges . . .

NORTHERN GERMAN CONFERENCE shall include the German work in the States of Minnesota and North Dakota . . .

NORTHERN SWEDISH CONFERENCE shall include all the Swedish work in Minnesota, Northern Michigan, and Wisconsin except Racine.

NORTHWEST GERMAN CONFERENCE shall include the German work in the State of South Dakota and . . .

NORTHWEST INDIA CONFERENCE shall consist of the United Provinces of Agra and Oude . . .²⁸

A second place within the 1904 *Discipline* to quickly access the MEC's adjectival inclusion of its US-based ethnicity and its foreign missions is in the listing of "General Conference Districts" and their delegate counts.²⁹ Here are some examples:

Tenth District—Rock River, 14; Central Illinois, 10; Illinois, 16; Southern Illinois, 8; Central Swedish, 2; South India, 2; Malaysia, 2; Northern Swedish, 2; total, 56. . . .
Fourteenth District—Montana, 2; Idaho, 2; Columbia River, 4; Puget Sound, 6; Oregon, 4; Western Norwegian-Danish, 2; California, 10, Southern California, 8; Japan, 2; Foochow, 2; total 42.

The "Thirteenth" contained twelve districts, identifying the first nine adjectivally as "East German, 2 . . . California German, 2." Nouns covered the last three: "North Germany, 2; South Germany, 4; Switzerland, 2." In that district were all the German-speaking conferences. Similarly and tellingly, the "Sixth" and "Seventh" districts included the Black conferences. The "Sixth," with 16, included "Delaware, 6; Washington, 6" covering much of northern and segregated Negro Methodism, but also Liberia.

The MEC's agenda projected further *adjectival* ethnic/language expansion "In the United States and Territories" and *nominative* abroad "In Foreign Countries." The former included sixteen entries, among them:

5. CHINESE MISSION shall include all the Chinese work on the Pacific Coast, except the work in Oregon and Washington.
9. NEW MEXICO ENGLISH MISSION shall include . . .
10. NEW MEXICO SPANISH MISSION CONFERENCE shall include . . .
12. NORTH PACIFIC GERMAN MISSION CONFERENCE shall include . . .
13. PACIFIC JAPANESE MISSION shall include all the Japanese work on the Pacific Slope.
14. PORTO RICO MISSION shall include . . .

The boundaries "In Foreign Countries" again illustrate the use of nouns for foreign missions. So among the fourteen missions: "Central China Mission, "South Japan Mission Conference," "Korea Mission Conference," "Denmark Mission Conference," and "Finland and St. Petersburg Mission Conference shall include our work in the Russian Empire."³⁰

A fourth indicator? Another section in the *Discipline*, "Enabling Acts," outlined twenty-five missional projects, the terrain they were authorized to cover, and the noun or adjective covering their endeavor. General Conference outlined procedures by which "The **Burma** Mission Conference" might "be organized into an Annual Conference." Similar instructions were provided for "The New Mexico **Spanish** Mission Conference" to gain annual conference status. And "The Norwegian and Danish Conference" was envisioned dividing "into two Conferences."³¹

Fifth, and most dramatic, were the specifications the *Discipline* appendix outlined for the "Courses of Study."³² Here most clearly, specifically, concretely, and yes dramatically, the

adjective and adjectival pointed to the MEC's scheme for unity. The Courses? Thirty pages outlined the English Courses, German Courses, Norwegian and Danish Courses, Swedish Courses, Finnish Courses, Italian Courses, and Spanish Courses. The *Discipline* employed the language of ministry to specify the reading and identified the titles in that language to be read. (There are instances where an English title seemed mandated, and for the Finnish, the instructions are given in English, but most titles are not).

The adjectival language courses for North America were not identical. The "English Courses" covered an array of ministerial options: Traveling Preachers, License to Preach, Local Preachers, Local Preachers who are Candidates for Orders, Class Leaders, and Deaconesses. The six non-English Courses specified the five years of reading "For Rese-Predikanter" (for Swedish Traveling Preachers), and the multiple years' worth for "Lokalpredikanter" (number of years varied).

The *Discipline* did make one provision for a Course beyond the U.S., namely that "For Preachers in Bulgaria Mission Conference." The use of the nominative, not the adjectival "Bulgarian" indicated that this Course of Study traveled abroad. A final three lines in this appendix even more dramatically illustrate the use of nouns and adjectives:

¶85 OTHER COURSES.

For prescribed Courses in Languages of Africa, India, Malaysia, China, Japan, and Korea, see the Yearbooks of Conferences and Missions in these lands.³³

What's in a word? A noun or an adjective to identity a ministry or congregation? A conference in Japan or Japanese conference?³⁴ Gay and lesbian, at least to this observer, function adjectivally.

Conferences Differing but Occupying the Same US Space

In 1904, Ohioan Methodists might worship across the square or across town in one of the several white, English conference churches, or in one served by a minister of the Central German or Central Swedish, Norwegian-Danish, or Lexington conference. The last option—for the MEC's Black Ohioans—indicates the less-than-perfect character of the 1904 model of ethnic/linguistic/racial dividing adjectivally. Yet it did offer a "staying united **by** differing-between-and-among." So, if the language conferences do not constitute a perfect model, they provide a clue that Methodism did structure itself for difference.

Permit me to offer several, less-than-perfect ways of permitting United Methodists, at least in the U.S., to live with strong differences on homosexuality, abortion, healthcare, and other societally significant issues. I can think of vocational, conferencing, connectional, and programmatic schemes for radically altering how The UMC does its US business. Each re-ordering would restructure or rethink our basic body of the church, the conference. In so doing, it would offer new schemes for organizing and ordering conferences or conference-like accountability structures. And each, in slightly differing ways, would permit today's Spanish-, Italian-, Finnish, Swedish-, Norwegian-, Danish-, German- and English-speaking peoples—that is Gay and Straight—space to worship and authority to lead.

Below are four models. The schemes could be only suggestive, but they represent varying ways of reordering The UMC's operations and commitments.

Vocational

This model, in ‘adjectival’ fashion, calls for adding, especially in the US, new annual conferences defined not as in 1904 by country of origin but hereafter by vocation. Like 1904, however, annual conferences might overlap. New criteria, purposes, causes or identities might function alongside of and in addition to the current geographical ones in defining ‘conference.’ What about establishing some conferences defined by vocation or calling? Such a model (illustrated below) seems doable, natural, even redemptive for one like me whose occupation has been teaching and who has ministered for half-a-century in and out of an academic context. Vocation differentiates where, how, for whom, and to what ends the church undertakes its tasks. Diverse callings and identities our denomination handles sometimes well, sometimes not. Our present conference structure does not.

For me, the portion of my conference, North Georgia, that has meaning and relevance is the breakfast for extension ministers which precedes formal opening. After that we academics, military and hospital chaplains, campus ministers, and others serving beyond the local church no longer count. Proceedings thereafter concern the local church. Seminary faculty and indeed the ten groups listed below lack conference-like, UMC accountability, resourcing, identity-enhancing, and community-forming structures. The conference to which this and other papers in this volume were presented is the first instance in my half-century of UMC faculty experience in which faculty from the array of disciplines were brought together.³⁵

The current structuring, great for Methodism in its truly itinerant and class-meeting days, needs rethinking and reforming given the sheer complexity of current ministerial forms. So why not entertain adding to the current geographical conference ordering separate conferences for

- Seminary faculty?
- Chaplaincies?
- Ministries and communities in college settings?
- Deacons and others serving ministries beyond the local church?
- Missional, outreach, experimental ministries and communities?
- Staff on our agencies or interdenominational associations?
- Other specialized, beyond-the-local-church ministries and ecclesial communities?
- Megachurches and other specialized/stylized ecclesial orderings?
- Our various language, ethnic or nationality communities, their congregations and clergy?
- Churches and ministries committed to leadership by, ceremonies for, and ministries to “self-avowed practicing homosexuals”?

Clearly, monumental funding and fundraising as well as structural challenges would be posed by giving structural conference status to the above ministering/ministerial vocational array. In particular, the first six expend rather than gather dollars. And such radical restructuring goes far beyond addressing the issue at hand. But why not new conferences for the last or even the last four listed above? Why not rethink budgeting on a national basis and let the megachurches, those serving various language communities, and congregations committed to open ministries constitute new, trans-geographic conferences? Korean-language conferences should have been established a half-century ago. They, new immigrant populations, and peoples who define themselves in relation to openness should be accorded conference status. With that, of course, would go all the fiscal and accountability burdens as well as the missional opportunities. This ordering, then, focuses on vocation, reminds us that, historically, Methodism ordered itself around ministries (class/class leader, society/preacher, circuit/presiding elder and

conference/bishop), and suggests new conference or conference-like structures led by those committed to openness.

Conferencing

A second scheme focuses on membership and membership openness. An electronic age offers new ways in which caucuses, megachurches, boards and agencies, seminaries, colleges, experimental ministries, and various other ecclesial and professional endeavors might find expression, support, connection, and status. Caucuses, as the head of one told me quite recently, receive virtually no welcome to the General Conference floor, into the action, and for the common good. They merit no entry in text, index, or table of contents in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016*—at least on this reader’s scrutiny. *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 2016* accords MARCHA and BMCR index entries but none for Affirmation, RENEW, The Confessing Movement, Good News, and the array of our caucuses (see chapter appendix below). Yet the caucuses can contribute, and in instances do offer far more training, ministering, affirming, connecting, programming, and advocacy than some conferences. In fact, Good News and its array of kindred caucus or caucus-like organizations replicate much of what The UMC, its conferences, and the boards and agencies offer. And for a retrospective rather than prospective agenda, note how BMCR has functioned to recall the diverse ministries and services rendered under the Central Jurisdiction and through its nationwide annual conferences. What if caucus or caucus-like groups, peoples, ministries, and missions, which met various rigorous criteria, were to be recognized as conferences? They might convene regularly (annually?) but conduct much of their planning, oversight, training, deploying, and financing through electronic, teleconference and US mail services. Ministerial formation might use the web and seminaries. Assessment and credentialing might take new forms, as could episcopal oversight. Conferences then, much like those of 1904, constituted by their commitment to ministries.

Connectional

This scheme, I believe, has been proposed. It would take advantage of our US ecclesial structure and empower each jurisdiction, with appropriate alterations in the *Discipline*, to determine how key texts respecting homosexuality are to be interpreted. Further alterations would permit annual conferences, districts, or perhaps even churches to shift out of one jurisdiction and align with another. (I suppose if it did not recall and enliven racist sentiments, we could, à la 1939, re-establish a Central Jurisdiction.) Acknowledging the current principle of cross-boundary transfers, commitments, identity, ministries, services including seminaries, and episcopal elections—conferences and districts in the SEJ would be permitted, for instance, to align with one of the northern jurisdictions. And vice versa. The current jurisdictional legislation could be revised to accommodate transfers of entities affirming rights and privileges of gay-and-lesbian-friendly entities. Membership transfers would be elective rather than mandated. Transferring conferences or districts would require some super-majority vote. Procedures and principles would need to be developed to deal with populations and leadership that refused to accept the new affinities. Transferring conferences would doubtless concede the right of one or more of its districts to remain. And if the transferring prerogative extended to districts, they too would permit congregations to stay. Episcopal deployment and oversight and various other issues would, as in the previous scheme, need attention. Much of the existing UMC apparatus and its

institutions could continue to function as now. Such operations would continue in the next option. Jurisdictions, in this scheme, would be defined by commitment as well as geography.

Programmatic

A last model would recognize how prevalent across northern United Methodism a “live and let live” policy, in fact, operates. Here, the appeal might be to the Church of England and its centuries of living with high church, broad/inclusive, and liberal/activist parishes, clergy, and bishops. The program would require that conferences, congregations, and clergy recognize and affirm the radical differences on a variety of issues, policies, concerns, and practices—ecclesial, social, political, and economic. Many, in fact, already do and have long done. Why not include sexual orientation and practice among differences to be lived with, even celebrated?

A Path or Paths Ahead?

Could the above schemes or others from within our heritage, practice, ordering, and ministry permit differences **between and among Methodists** to nevertheless keep us **within** the denominational fold? Can we restructure or reform or reimagine our conferencing so to live with, even celebrate, divisions **between and among**?

We could, of course, see the twenty-first century ecclesial divisions over human sexuality and abortion as yet another chapter in **conviction, cause, and caucus** denominational disunity—despite-formal unity. Or perhaps it could combine and convert the twentieth-century patterns into the nineteenth-century pattern of yet another **structural** division. My hunch—and here the historian has to give way to better analysts of the current scene—is that living as so many of us do online, we now witness a new stage in how churches live or don’t live with divisive commitments. The century-old hierarchical organizational structures and patterns—with replicated ordering at local church, district, conference, and general levels; with materials and program flowing from agency down; with general superintendents really itinerating among conferences (not just their own); with our colleges actually attracting our people and equipping our lay and clerical leadership; with our seminaries filled with Methodist faculty and students—have been rupturing over the last several decades. What tells that story symbolically? Perhaps, moving GBGM out of the nation’s greatest city, out of what was once Protestantism’s Vatican and into a local church. Now some of our congregations boast more in professional staffing, highly schematized programming, national visibility, and global profile than our agencies. We are, as a church, always reinventing ourselves.

How might we live as Methodists *Untied* over human sexuality and abortion? I don’t have a perfect or easily adopted solution but have suggested four thought experiments. I do think that the electronic, online, web-based world already connects us, albeit around concern and interest rather than generally, inclusively, openly. Perhaps we can find a way of living in the tension between 1) our structural ecclesial machinery and 2) our denominational convictions, causes, and caucuses. In the first, we United Methodists order, unite, ordain, program. In the second, we witness, explain, champion, reform. In the first, we link through our connectional structures and offices with churches across the globe toward the day-to-come and back through the centuries to Pentecost. In the second, we live in the brokenness of today’s world and urge today’s Methodism towards its biblical, Wesleyan, creedal, and ethical commitments. By the first, we remind ourselves of Trinitarian oversight of all that we’re about. By the second, we claim afresh—if in diverse, sometimes competitive, fashion—our quadrilateral witness. Oh well, we’ll see.

Appendix³⁶

Christopher J. Anderson, ed., *United Methodist Studies: Basic Bibliographies*, 6th ed. (Madison: Drew University Library, 2014), ix, viii.

6.5 Caucus Websites

Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns	190
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Today’s *Untied* Methodism: Living with/into/beyond Its Two Centuries of Regular Division—Russell E. Richey

¹ The topic of division has been treated in our overview volumes: *American Methodism: A Compact History*, Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe and Jean Miller Schmidt (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012) and *The Methodist Experience in America*, Richey, Rowe and Schmidt, 2 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000, 2010), vol. 1. Footnotes in the latter point to the various studies on which the arguments contained herein rest. Specific chapters in my *Methodist Connectionalism: Historical Perspectives* (Nashville: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 2010) and *Doctrine in Experience: A Methodist Theology of Church and Ministry* (Nashville: Kingswood Books/Abingdon, 2009) treat the topic of unity and division. See in the latter, for instance, “Methodist Culture Wars” and in the former “Methodism as Machine.” Division has been really a career-long interest, as indicated in an array of articles and in three books: *Denominationalism Illustrated and Explained* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, Wipf & Stock, 2013), *Reimagining Denominationalism*, co-editor and co-author with R. Bruce Mullin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994; paper edition 2010), and *Denominationalism*, editor and co-author (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977; WIPF & Stock, 2010). A number of my articles treat the topic, as for instance, “United Methodism: Its Identity as Denomination” in *Denomination: Assessing an Ecclesiological Category*, eds. Paul Collins and Barry Ensign-George (London & New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 67–85; and the forthcoming “Denomination” in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Religion in America*.

² See the final section for the detail and specificity of these generic groupings.

³ Minutes of a Conference held at Roger Thomson’s in Fluvanna County, VA, May 18, 1779, in “Minutes of Conference from the year 1774 to the year 1779,” *Western Christian Advocate* 4/5 (May 26, 1837), 18–19. This version of the minutes was kept by Philip Gatch.

⁴ “Quest. 8. *Why was the Delaware conference held?* Ans. For the convenience of the preachers in the northern stations, that we all might have an opportunity of meeting in conference; it being unadvisable for brother Asbury and brother Ruff, with some others, to attend in Virginia; it is considered also as preparatory to the conference in Virginia” (*Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; From 1773 to 1813, Inclusive* [New York: Published by Daniel Hitt & Thomas Ware for the Methodist Connexion in The United States, 1813], 19).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 25–26.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 21–22, 23–24.

⁸ See John A. Vickers, ed., *The Journals of Dr. Thomas Coke* (Nashville: Kingswood Books/Abingdon Press, 2005) for his account and for a fine list of Coke’s writings and of scholarship about him.

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- ⁹ Jesse Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists* (Baltimore, 1810; Rutland, VT: Academy Books, 1974), 149–50; *Sketches of The Life and Travels of Rev. Thomas Ware . . . Written by Himself* (New York: G. Lane & P. P. Sandford for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1842), 181–82.
- ¹⁰ Jno. J. Tigert, *A Constitutional History of American Episcopal Methodism*, 3rd ed., revised and enlarged (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1908), 244–45; Lee, *Short History*, 150–59; *The Proceedings of the Bishop and Presiding Elders of the Methodist-Episcopal Church, in Council Assembled, at Baltimore, on the First Day of December, 1789* (Baltimore, 1789) and *Minutes Taken at a Council of the Bishop and Delegated Elders of the Methodist Episcopal Church: Held at Baltimore in the State of Maryland, December 1, 1790* (Baltimore, 1790).
- ¹¹ For a firsthand treatment, see Lee, *Short History*, 178–80.
- ¹² For illustration of that problematic pattern, see narratives that this writer has produced, narratives that track the MEC→MC→UMC trajectory and that limit interest in other Methodist denominations to their departure sagas. This storytelling pattern is common. See “official” versions of the “our own” focus in the historical prefaces that Methodist denominations typically feature. We include the UB, ME, EA, MP, and MES churches in our *Methodist Experience in America*. We had wanted to include prefaces from churches on the other side in divisions but were discouraged by Abingdon, essentially for space reasons. The several narratives are offset on the Table of Contents in *The Methodist Experience in America: A History*.
- ¹³ For those projected for the two years, see *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Annually Held in America; From 1773 to 1813, Inclusive*, 107, 119.
- ¹⁴ The following bulleted list draws on a chapter in my *Methodist Connectionalism* and is used here with GBHEM permission, granted by Kathryn Armistead. An earlier version appeared in “Denominationalism” in the *Encyclopedia of Religion in America*, eds. Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2010).
- ¹⁵ See the ongoing posted releases based on the 2014 Religious Landscape Study. Particularly pertinent to this enquiry is that for May 12, 2015, “American’s Changing Religious Landscape.”
- ¹⁶ For comparable judgments, see the portrayal of the religious panorama by my colleague Mark Chaves in *American Religion: Contemporary Trends* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), drawing on two national studies. See as well Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), based on their 2006–2007 “Faith Matters” survey and utilizing an overall pattern similar to that of the Pew Research Center. For ongoing studies assessing the place of religion in American life, see the array of books by Robert Wuthnow, including *Remaking the Heartland: Middle America since the 1950s* (Published: Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).
- ¹⁷ Consult our *The Methodist Experience in America: A Sourcebook* and documents 1966a, 1970, 1972a, 1972d, 1973, 1976, 1978, 1985, 1988a for a representative but hardly exhaustive list of caucus groups and their organizing declarations.
- ¹⁸ On Good News and its place in the larger Methodist story, see Riley B. Case, *Evangelical and Methodist: A Popular History* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004). For a critique of Good News and related organizations and a treatment dwelling more on recent developments, see Leon Howell, *United Methodist @ Risk: A Wake-Up Call* (Kingston, NY: Information Project for United Methodists), 2003. For listing of currently recognized caucuses see the chapter appendix here or the *United Methodist Directory*.
- ¹⁹ For my/our treatment, see *The Methodist Experience in America: A History*, chaps. 14, 15.
- ²⁰ (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977).
- ²¹ (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980) and (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982).
- ²² (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986). See especially 57–64.
- ²³ (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987).
- ²⁴ The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church (Nashville: Graded Press, c1990).
- ²⁵ See *Methodist Experience*, 1: 217–18, 257–61.
- ²⁶ See in library or online *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church 1904. With an Appendix*, ed. Bishop Andrews (New York: Eaton & Mains; Cincinnati: Jennings & Graham, 1904).
- ²⁷ *Discipline 1904*, 264.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 272–74.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 367–68.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 283–84.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 285–88.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 430–63.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 463.

³⁴ There are significant issues for today's United Methodism in the way that the MEC handled US-based and international membership and leadership that go beyond this essay and serve, perhaps, as lessons or warnings rather than solutions. Here, as will be noted, the point is that Methodism did and can structure itself to deal with societal, ethical, commitment, cause, conviction and identity commitments.

³⁵ Given the need for radical rethinking, it seems worth noting that North Georgia breakfasts the first six styles of ministry and thereafter does **nothing** with, for, by, or through them. Doubtless, conference attendees think that UM faculty have their own accountability, outreach, and support systems. Not so! At least, not specifically United Methodist. In my half-century of serving three successive UM seminaries, I have not been to or known of a gathering until the Colloquy that brought together United Methodists of the various disciplines. Wesleyan studies events—the two sessions annually at the AAR, the WTS meetings, and the periodic Oxford Institutes serve the global array of Methodist/Wesleyan denominations. The quadrennial workshop for those teaching UM studies does not include our church's faculty in Old and New Testament, Ethics, Theology, Pastoral Care, Preaching, Sociology, and Christian Education. Our seminaries and colleges need new accountability and support systems for faculty—lay and ordained—who are United Methodist. The creation of such will benefit the schools as well as the professors.

³⁶ Both the list of "Caucus Websites" and of "Affiliated Group Periodicals" come from the "Table of Contents from Christopher J. Anderson, Comp. and ed., *United Methodist Studies: Basic Bibliographies*, 6th edition (2014), http://depts.drew.edu/lib/methodist/UMStudies_Bibliography.pdf and are used here with his permission.