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A PECULIAR METHODISM

David F. Watson, PhD

This article is an address delivered by David F. Watson at the Next Methodism Summit in Alexandria, Virginia, on January 21, 2022. It was originally published on www.firebrandmag.com on January 25, 2022. David F. Watson is lead editor of Firebrand. He also serves as academic dean and professor of New Testament at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio.

It is my honor to stand before this esteemed group of people for whom I have such great respect and admiration. I am privileged to call many of you friends. A number of you have been my teachers through your books and articles and through conversations we have had. A few of you are beloved thorns in my side. In this group of people, many of us have known one another for years, even decades. We have learned from one another, collaborated on projects, reviewed one another's books, fought with one another, and hopefully reconciled with one another when necessary. By and large, we know each other. And if we don't know each other yet, I hope we will by the end of our time together.

I've prayed about what to say today. I don't take this opportunity lightly. The

work before us is important because we stand at one of those pivotal moments in the history of our tradition. The

world's largest Methodist body is about to divide into at least two denominations, and with this division, the question of identity will arise for each emerging group. Who are we? We know what we've been *against* for the last fifty years, but what are we *for*? What will be our public witness? Other Wesleyan denomina-

tions will have to answer these questions in the years ahead as well. None will be unaffected by the relentless pressures of postmodernity, secularism, and various forms of fundamentalism, which may be progressive, conservative, or even institutionalist. However we address these matters, the Wesleyan-Methodist movement will be different in the days ahead. And we, as scholars of this tradition, must have central roles in shaping its various iterations.

Before I begin in earnest, however, I want to acknowledge something we all know. Were he alive today, it would be Professor Billy Abraham standing before you. I am neither his proxy nor his equal. I think he picked a terrible time to die, and I can't express to you how much I wish we could once again receive his wisdom, which would no doubt be incisive, humorous, and provocative. What I offer today instead are simply suggestions to evoke conversation and hopefully advance our discourse about what it means to be Methodists in this day and age. Please use what is helpful and disregard the rest. As I always tell my students, at least 30 percent of what I teach is wrong. I just don't know which 30 percent it is.

I also want to acknowledge that this is a gathering of scholars who in one way or another find themselves among the "traditionalists" in our neck of the Christian woods. Some people don't

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like the name “traditionalist.” I do. I like tradition. Some don’t like the word conservative, but I think we would all acknowledge that there are important aspects of our tradition that we need to conserve. I should also note that there are excellent scholars who are not here this weekend, some because they can’t make it, some because they represent other theological positions and camps. Our gathering here is neither to diminish them nor to exalt ourselves over them, nor to neglect the significance of their scholarship. It is to gather as a group of scholars who share some important commitments and to think about what the future of Methodism might look like in light of these commitments.

What I will argue for today is what we might call “Methodist particularism,” or something akin to what Kevin Watson has called “[real Methodism](#).” This is not an argument for sectarianism or something like the Benedict Option. It is not a rejection of ecumenism, and it is certainly not a rejection of the Evangelical United Brethren heritage, which I hope we will preserve in any future denominations that emerge from the impending division of the United Methodist Church (UMC). But I want Methodism to mean something—something with teeth to it. And at the moment, among the vast majority of North American churches that bear the name “Methodist” on their buildings, I don’t think it does.

The Paucity of Particularity

I was baptized as an infant at Matthews Memorial UMC in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1971, and I’ve been a United Methodist ever since. I was confirmed in the UMC and attended church and Sunday school weekly growing up (though at one point around age eight or nine I was kicked out of Sunday school for misbehaving). Though they were never on board with the Moral Majority or similar such groups, my parents were

broadly evangelical. They raised me in the faith and I’m grateful for that.

Despite this very churchy upbringing, however, if at any point prior to my time in seminary you’d asked me what it meant to be a United Methodist, I couldn’t have told you. I knew we weren’t Baptists. My parents were suspicious of Southern Baptists and wouldn’t let me attend youth group with my eighth-grade Southern Baptist girlfriend. I knew John Wesley had something to do with being Methodist, but I could not have told you in any detail what it meant to be a United Methodist—or a Methodist of any variety. Growing up in Texas, I don’t think I’d even heard of the EUBs (Evangelical United Brethren Church), though I have of course learned a great deal about them since I began work at United Theological Seminary. Part of what I have learned is that many wish they had never merged with the Methodists, and I can’t blame them.

In my upbringing in the church, the idea of Methodists as constituting a community of difference, a distinct people with their own theological emphases and ways of living, wasn’t in the mix. Methodist particularity was not a going concern. In fact, you might say that our ethos skewed in the opposite direction. The UMC was born out of the ecumenical movement in the late 1960s. We were supposed to de-emphasize our distinctives, not accentuate them.

The mandate of the early Methodists, by contrast, was both distinct and specific. It was to spread a scriptural holiness across the land. This was their singular focus. And somewhere along the way, Methodism, or at least its largest body, became something utterly different than the Methodist movement was created to be.

No doubt we can all agree that there are many points where we Methodists have stepped on the proverbial rake. Some might say that our departure

from Anglicanism was a massive error. Perhaps Wesley overstepped in modifying the 39 Articles. Others might identify the demise of class and band meetings as a chief contributor to the decline of Methodism. We could point to the disproportionate representation of liberal theology within Methodist seminaries, beginning with the colossal influence of Borden Parker Bowne, as a corrosive development in the history of our tradition. Certainly, we would all agree that it was a grievous sin for Methodists to compromise on the owning of slaves and that the establishment of the Central Jurisdiction in 1939—a structural change with transparently racist motivations—was utterly unchristian. In fact, some in this room have argued that the UMC today is ungovernable mainly because of our [jurisdictional system](#), which began with the intention of segregating black pastors and congregations. I would be among those who suggest that the development of the so-called “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” and its subsequent entrenchment across various Methodist traditions has been a slow-acting poison that threatens to kill the patient today. Still others might suggest that

our common embrace of principles of the church growth movement, while well intentioned, have not ultimately served us well.

Were we to poll the room with the question, “What went wrong?” there would likely be almost as many answers as there are people here, and no doubt there would be elements of truth in each of these answers. A lot has gone wrong. But as Billy would say, there are no problem-free situations. Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Pentecostals could all

tell you what has gone wrong with their own traditions, and the ways they have erred would likely be at least as numerous as the ways we Methodist folk have. Methodism is not a uniquely problematic tradition.

A Saltier Methodism

But I want to suggest one overarching issue that encompasses many of our problems in the era following Wesley: we have time and again compromised our particularity by accommodating our beliefs and practices to the spirit of the age. We no longer know who we are, what we stand for, or even why we exist.

Our Lord taught, “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot” (Matt 5:13). Has Methodism lost its saltiness? For a variety of reasons, we have sacrificed what makes us unique as a people of God. And if Methodism is to continue as a movement, we must recover our distinctiveness.

The Wesleyan-Methodist tradition is a beautiful heritage. It connects us on multiple levels to the faith once and for all entrusted to the saints. It offers powerful resources for growth in faith and holiness. It draws upon the heart-religion of Pietism. It is ecumenical in that it can receive the wisdom of other streams of the Christian tradition. And yet historically we lifted up certain beliefs and practices that set us apart, and through these we were able to offer a compelling vision of salvation, beginning with that first moment when the work of the Holy Spirit begins to dawn in our souls and culminating in our eternal life with our beloved savior in the age to come.

Unfortunately, our heritage and our current reality are at this point starkly dissimilar. In most of its contemporary forms, at least in the U.S. and Western

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Europe, Methodism is indistinguishable from either (a) other forms of progressive mainline or African-American Protestantism or (b) a kind of generic evangelicalism.

If we have no distinctive witness, no particular offerings to bring to the larger body, it is hard to see why we would continue to maintain a connection and institutions (such as theological schools) and identify as a collection of denominations. We are in danger of becoming the Golden Corral of religious movements: we will offer warmed-over, sometimes-mushy comfort food where everyone can find something at least palatable, but no one leaves saying, “If I don’t come back, I’m really going to be missing something.”

The saltiness of the church is that which sets us apart. It is our inherent distinctiveness. It is what makes us, us. Christians should be different. We should be a peculiar people as the King James Version renders 1 Peter 2:9, and the people called Methodist should be a peculiar subset of this peculiar people.

I once attended a presentation by the General Commission on Interreligious Concerns and Christian Unity called, “What would be missing without the General Commission on Interreligious Concerns and Christian Unity?” And—I kid you not—after a thirty-minute PowerPoint presentation, the answer was, “Open hearts, open minds, and open doors.” And I left that meeting feeling rather dyspeptic. “That’s it?” I thought. “An ineffective advertising campaign?” This was not an intellectually serious endeavor.

Interreligious concerns and Christian unity are actually very important matters. We need to be talking about these kinds of things. But this committee, or at least its leadership at the time, seemed to have lost sight of the potential importance of its mandate, and therefore fell back into a warm bath of vacuous

sloganeering. In so doing, I suggest, it was simply following a larger denominational ethos according to which we don’t wish to become too specific, too particular, in our assertions because, were we to do so, we would realize that we have differences so vast they cannot be held within the same denominational container. This is sometimes called the “elephant in the room,” but it’s really more like a parade of elephants standing in the midst of rubble.

Methodism has a history and heritage, which you know very well. Historically, it involved certain emphases, such as sanctification (indeed, entire sanctification), assurance of salvation, sacramentalism, and both support and accountability through class and band meetings. Its original purpose was to spread scriptural holiness across the land. Its focus was the salvation of sinners, meaning not just that they would receive eternal life but that they would be transformed into holier people in the here and now. There were expectations for Methodists: that their lives would be different, that in the midst of a sinful world the love of God would be shed abroad in their hearts. They would strengthen one another in the faith. They would hold one another accountable. They would give to the poor. They would avail themselves of the means of grace. They would live differently. They would be a peculiar people.

Opposition to the Methodists

Within the General Rules, Wesley instructs that Methodists are to do good, “By running with patience the race which is set before them, denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily; submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth and offscouring of the world; and looking that men should say all manner of evil of them falsely, for the Lord’s sake.”

Early Methodism was distinct. Methodists knew who they were. And at times they faced intense opposition because of their particular way of being Christian.

Gabriel Groz, in an essay called [“Violent Stability: Methodism, Moderate Politics, and Persecution in Great Awakening England,”](#) writes “Methodists in the eighteenth century could expect to suffer mob violence wherever they went. Mob violence is a constant theme in Wesley’s personal journals” (67). Nevertheless, he argues, mob violence was not the most significant threat to these early Methodists. “Here the antagonists were elite members of the powerful English establishment, ecclesiastical and political figures alarmed at the astounding growth of the Methodist preaching circuits and suspicious of the new sect’s influence on English religious life” (67).

Eric Baldwin, in an article titled [“‘The Devil Begins to Roar’: Opposition to Early Methodists in New England,”](#) writes about opposition to the Methodists in America a few decades later:

In the several decades after their arrival in the New England states in the late 1780s, Methodists were the objects of a wide variety of attacks, some of them mutually contradictory.

Their preachers were accused of being pickpockets, horse thieves, and sexual predators,

while on the other hand some converts were mocked for their excessive moral seriousness. They were suspected alternatively of being agents of the English crown, spies for the French government, and Jeffersonian radicals. Further, to some it seemed that their episcopal form of government and

ecclesiastical tribunals functioned as a sort of shadow government undermining the political institutions of the nation. They were attacked for their Arminian theology, in defense of which they vigorously condemned Calvinist doctrine. They were mocked as enthusiasts and fanatics whose preachers, pretending to an immediate divine calling, inflamed the passions of their listeners and whose gatherings degenerated into bedlams of disorder, confusion, and moral scandal. They were disturbers of churches, transgressing parochial boundaries, sowing disorder, and fracturing the covenant relationship between minister and flock, all of which recalled memories of the upheaval accompanying the awakenings of the 1740s. They were unlearned rustics not fit to instruct people in divinity, but they were also sly enough to worm their way into the hearts and minds of people by shrewdly hiding their true intentions and prejudicing their hearers against the standing ministers. In short, it is little exaggeration to say that they were “a sect which was everywhere spoken against.”

The Methodist movement in the U.S., however, would grow quickly in both numbers and influence, and eventually we would become respectable. Methodism would become something like a state religion. The identity of the movement changed from misfits to milquetoast. We maintained the form of religion, but what about the power? Where were the people falling out under the power of the Holy Spirit, as is commonly reported in Wesley’s prayer meetings? Where were those gritty, indefatigable circuit riders who often didn’t live to see their thirtieth birthday? Where were the anguished cries of those who fell under conviction of sin before a just and merciful God?

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They were, by and large, pushed out of Methodism's main body, and they formed their own communions of faith and practice: the Holiness Movement, Pentecostalism, and the African-American Methodist traditions.

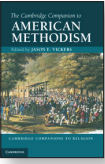
I'm not suggesting we invite persecution. I don't want that. I have no desire to face an angry mob. I've chaired enough faculty meetings to have some idea of what that's like. But at the same time, we need to face the fact that perhaps Methodists in the United States so rarely face opposition for their faith because there is so little to oppose. In my own experience, the greatest opposition I've faced for my faith has come from other Methodists. My recalcitrance in refusing to sacrifice the faith once and for all entrusted to the saints on the altar of "progress" has evoked reactions ranging from the cold shoulder to the fire and brimstone of Facebook avengers. Perhaps you yourself can relate to this feeling.

At the core of Methodism is holiness—the transformation God works in the hearts of believers that manifests itself outwardly through justice, mercy, and piety. Without the emphasis upon holiness, there is no proper Methodism. And no, not all expressions of Methodism have to be exactly alike. There is of course room for a breadth of expression, but without some coherence between these expressions, Methodism is not a tradition. It is simply the flotsam and jetsam left behind after a once-great movement was shipwrecked on the rocks of modernity.

Prior Critiques

What I'm suggesting here is nothing especially original, and I'm happy to be unoriginal. Scott Kisker has made the case in *Mainline or Methodist* that "real Methodism declined because we replaced those peculiarities that made us Methodist with a bland, acceptable, almost civil religion, barely distinguish-

able from other traditions also now known as 'mainline.' Like the Israelites under the judges, we wanted to be like the other nations. We no longer wanted to be an odd, somewhat disreputable people. And we have begun to reap the consequences."

I thank Jason Vickers for his discussion of George Wilson's critique of liberal Methodism in Vickers' essay called "[American Methodism: A Theological Tradition](#)" in *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism*. In the year 1904, in a work entitled *Methodist Theology v. The Methodist Theologians*, Wilson argued, in Vickers' words, "that Methodist theologians such as Borden Parker Bowne, D. W. C. Huntington, and W. F. Tillett had abandoned the theological sensibilities that had made the Methodists 'a distinctive people.'" 

Wilson's argument, as his title suggests, was with the theologians. He believed that Methodism had become a university religion—a speculative religion of scholars—and had lost the revivalistic fire that had once so characterized its core identity. I quote from Vickers again:

Wilson concluded by suggesting that to recover from the "abyss" of liberal theology, "Methodism needs only to be true to herself." Methodists, he urged, needed once again to 1) "preach explicitly, strongly, constantly, believingly its glorious doctrines"; 2) "return to the simplicity of the Gospel"; 3) "develop its affectional life which in spiritual life is superior to reason"; 4) "encourage holy enthusiasm"; and 5) "live in the supernatural." He then added, "Perfect love," and not "perfect reason," had given the Methodists their "hold upon the masses," and it would "do so again."

My appeal today is different from Wilson's, however. Wilson pitted the scholars against the church. This is a crucial mistake. I'm suggesting that scholars have something important to contribute to the church. Many years ago—back before the flood—I was a graduate assistant to an evangelism professor named Scott Jones at Perkins. And I remember sitting in Professor Jones's office as he spoke to me about his passion for "scholarship in service to the church." That made an impression on me. It shaped my sense of vocation even to the present day. Perhaps you also have had such experiences. We are scholars, but we are Christian scholars. And Christians have one Lord, by whose sacrifice on the cross we may be adopted into the Father's household and become children of God. Once we know Christ, nothing can be the same—not our sense of self, our relationships, our ethics, or our vocations.

We scholars who have embraced the faith once and for all entrusted to the saints have our work cut out for us. And I believe that as Methodism moves into the

future, we will have an important role to play.

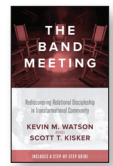
We Methodists have not entirely lost our saltiness, but we are in danger of losing it.

Future Endeavors

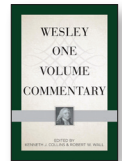
Now I want to push a bit farther. I want to suggest not only that there are crucial elements of our tradition that we must recover for the purposes of our calling as a people of God but also that some of these elements require further development through scholarly inquiry.

Over the past half-century scholars have produced an impressive body of work on the history, theology, and

practice of the Wesley brothers and the early Methodists. In my own recent work on Wesley and the Bible, I've been particularly illuminated by the work of Professor Ken Collins. We have an outstanding foundation as we continue the work of developing constructive proposals for Wesleyan theology and praxis in our current moment. An example of such work that comes to mind is the book on the [band meeting](#) by Kisker and Watson. I suggest that there are a great many other topics that could illuminate the particularity of our belief and practice as Methodists.



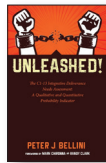
One area where we need more work is in Methodist readings of Scripture. There has been strong work in this area. For example, Joel B. Green and Robert W. Wall have both provided very helpful resources for us. We do have the [Wesley One Volume Bible Commentary](#) and the *Wesley Study Bible*.



We have other works as well. It would, however, be good to see some consensus arise on what exactly Wesleyan biblical interpretation involves. I would like to see us reclaim Wesley's notion of the analogy of faith in reading the Bible. To what extent can the doctrines of original sin, justification by faith, and present inward salvation serve as a normative hermeneutical lens for the interpretation of Scripture? Many of us were taught that the theology of the church is an impediment to responsible interpretation of Scripture, and that the meaning of the text resides in something like authorial intent, or perhaps the authorial audience. But why should that be the case? The Bible is the church's book, and reading the Bible in concert with established doctrine does not preclude the use of historical and literary resources. Wesley certainly made use of them, even as he read Scripture in unapologetically theological ways.

We scholars who have embraced the faith once and for all entrusted to the saints have our work cut out for us. And I believe that as Methodism moves into the future, we will have an important role to play.

Changing lanes for a moment, I would suggest that we need more work within our tradition on the power of the demonic, spiritual warfare, and deliverance ministry. Wesley certainly believed in these things. Oh, and Jesus did as well! Once we Methodists became respectable, we outsourced such discussions to the Pentecostals. Now our pastors are by and large utterly unprepared to deal with such matters. The work of [Professor Bellini](#) is illuminating here.



I would like to see us continue to explore the theology of the body. Works by [Beth Felker Jones](#) and [Timothy C. Tennent](#) are among the important contributions to this area of inquiry, but I would hope we would continue to drill down into these topics and to make the results of our inquiry accessible to nonspecialists.



I would be interested to see more concentrated work on the notion of sin. What is it? What is its effect on our lives? What did Wesley think about it, and how does his thought inform our own?

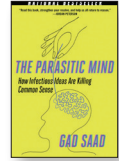
We need continued epistemological work on the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. How is it that we have assurance of salvation? How can we know that we know?

It would be beneficial for us to continue to work on our theology of ordination. What is ordination? What are we evaluating when we interview candidates for ordination?

Now, academic publications on these matters will of themselves be valuable contributions to the life of the church. In addition, however, we need to make the results of our work available to nonspecialists. I can't emphasize this latter point strongly enough. Forgive me if I step on some toes here.

Gad Saad is a controversial academic who has been a vociferous proponent

of academic freedom. I quote him here neither to endorse nor repudiate his more popular views, but because I found his remarks on public discourse illuminating. In his book [The Parasitic Mind](#) he writes:



During a recent visit to give a lecture at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, I had a telling conversation with a Stanford colleague who epitomizes the “ivory tower” bias. He was aware that I had appeared on the Joe Rogan podcast (an extraordinarily popular platform) but was clearly disdainful of such public engagement. He seemed to think that one could either publish in leading scientific journals or appear on Rogan’s show. I disabused him of this false either-or proposition by pointing out that a complete academic should strive to do both. Many professors forget that their professional responsibility is not only to generate new knowledge but also to seek to maximally disseminate it. Social media offers endless such opportunities by allowing ideas to spread quickly and to a very large number of people. No rational intellectual should oppose such a possibility, and yet many succumb to what I refer to as the garage band effect. If you are a struggling band that plays in your parents’ garage only to be heard by them and a few annoyed neighbors, you are legit. If your band becomes a smashing success with a number-one hit on Billboard and now plays in front of large stadium crowds, you’re a “sellout.” This is precisely the mindset of many academics.

Of course I value academic discourse, peer-reviewed journals, and scholarly monographs. But first and foremost, I believe that we here in this room are

scholars in service to the church, and we must find ways of getting our ideas into the church's public discourse. Christianity in the West is in serious trouble, and we don't have time to wait for our ideas to "trickle-down" from our scholarly monographs into the pews, Bible studies, and dinner table conversations. We must be proactive. Other traditions have found effective ways to do this. For example, the Gospel Coalition has been very effective in disseminating Reformed teaching. [Word on Fire](#) has been masterful in its public presentation of Roman Catholicism. One available outlet for us as Wesleyans is [Seedbed](#). Another is [Firebrand](#). I'm sure Steve Beard would be happy to receive articles from us in [Good News](#). We have options.

I don't say any of this to criticize or harangue the scholars of our tradition. But within this room are some of our best minds, and I want our people to hear from you.

I would even suggest the formation of a commission on public theology for a new Methodist denomination. We need to be able to explain to people both inside and outside our churches why we believe what we believe in straightforward, accessible ways. Why do we worship only one God? Why are we not simply spiritual, but religious? Why do we make

claims about sex and marriage that are different from those of the ambient culture? What do we think about

the beginning and end of life? Why do we ordain both men and women, when many Christians ordain only men? What do we have to say about the racial tension that has gripped our country? How can we reckon with these issues in ways that are specifically Christian, and even specifically Methodist, without simply

outsourcing our ethical positions to popular ideologies and political parties?

A Final Note: Global Methodism

Now if you'll bear with me for just a few more minutes, I want to touch on one more topic.

Part of our work for the next Methodism will involve deciding what we must recover, what we must conserve, and what we must change. Change is not necessarily bad depending on what we are changing, and in some ways it is unavoidable.

One way in which change has already come to the church is in its global nature. As we think about this peculiar Methodist future, we must bear in mind that Methodism is now a global phenomenon, not just a Western one. This is a positive development, but it complicates things quite a bit. The character of Methodism is already being shaped by people all over the world. It will be crucial that we enter into ongoing conversations about how core Methodist ideas such as holiness, sacramentalism, and accountability translate into different cultures across the globe. I have had the privilege of teaching Methodists in places such as Kenya, Cuba, Vietnam, Mexico, and Indonesia. Others of you have experience with Methodists in many other parts of the world. There is great need for both theological education and academic theological discourse in places outside of the Global West, and we need to be involved.

Last October I went to Nairobi, Kenya. I was with a group working with a church in a slum of Nairobi called Mathare. It is the third-largest slum in Africa and is actually made up of thirteen slum villages. Mathare is not a geographically large area, but over a million people live there. The population density is almost 69,000 people per square kilometer. Our host, the Rev. Davies Musigo, took us deep into Mathare,

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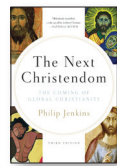
where few Westerners ever set foot. I've traveled a great deal in my life, but I've never been anywhere quite like this. The domiciles were primarily tin buildings, perhaps with only a small doorway for ventilation, without electricity. Perhaps ten people would live in a ten-by-twelve-foot room. Raw sewage ran down the middle of some of the side streets while children played nearby. Other children dug through the garbage dump looking for scraps to sell. Many people get one meal a day if they're lucky, and it may only be a dish of ugali, a paste made of corn, reminiscent of grits, but thicker.

This is where my friend Davies planted a church, which has outgrown the small building in which it is housed. It is where he also started a Methodist school for the impoverished children of this area.

Most of these people have never imbibed Western skepticism. Belief in the supernatural is second nature to them. This is also the case in Cuba, where I've spent considerable time working with the Methodist Church. They are hungry for

God. And they're also just hungry. They are too poor for milquetoast Methodism, which is the religion of comfortable, self-satisfied

people. They are desperate for God and for his power.



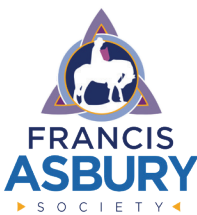
As Philip Jenkins told us years ago in [The Next Christendom](#), the church's center of gravity has moved east and south. We in the West are the outliers. We are no longer the head, but the tail. We are a rich tail,

but a tail, nonetheless. After centuries of Western dominance, the bulk of the Christian world is now in Africa and Asia, and Pentecostalism is making massive inroads in Latin America.

We in the West are going to have to recognize that the next Methodism will not be primarily a Western or white phenomenon. And as scholars of the next Methodism, we are going to have to learn to speak and write and listen across cultures. We would do well intentionally to collaborate with people from the majority world. It cannot simply be the colonial model of us teaching them. They will also teach us. We are going to have to make our work accessible to people who make less than \$100 a month. We are going to have to think about post-secondary and seminary education according to new paradigms. All of this will require not just conversation, but genuine relationships of Christian love and fellowship. It will require humility and vulnerability. Majority-world Christianity is here. These brothers and sisters in Christ have already begun to re-evangelize the West. And the question for us is, "How can we, as scholars, serve this burgeoning global church, preserving and passing on those beliefs and practices that are most central to our Methodist identity?"

There's so much more to be said, but as Richard Watson wrote, "the great virtue of divines, like that of writers, is to know where to stop." We're here to work together, so let the work begin. Thank you for coming here. Thank you for using your God-given gifts and hard-won expertise in service to the church. May God give us a vision of the next Methodism, and may we find the courage to become a peculiar people once again.

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