



# Methodist Morals: Social Principles in the Public Church's Witness

*Darryl W. Stephens*

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*Methodist Morals* offers keen insight into the public church, interpreting the United Methodist Social Principles as a dynamic discourse about morality and human rights in light of faith. Revised every four

years by the General Conference of the United Methodist Church, the Social Principles exposes the moral deliberations of this distinctly American and increasingly “worldwide” church as it struggles to

achieve community across multiple languages and cultures. Perhaps no other document provides as rich a depiction of Protestants participating in the moral argument of public life.

This is the first full-length study of Methodist social teachings in over fifty years. Examining official Methodist teachings from institutional, historical, and cross-cultural perspectives, Darryl Stephens provides a

rich analysis of this case study of Protestant social witness, drawing on his expertise in church polity, Methodist history, and Christian social ethics. A wide range of comparisons— with documents of the

United Nations, with moral debate in Germany and Zimbabwe, and with historical Methodist statements of social witness—shows the Social Principles to be a unique form of social witness. The issues of war,

abortion, human sexuality, and marriage illustrate the messiness of democratic deliberation in an ecclesial context and the evolution of a people ever concerned with the sin of “worldliness” even as they

become more attuned to transforming social structures. Stephens also contrasts this conception of the public church with the ecclesiologies of prominent Methodist ethicists Stanley Hauerwas and Paul

Ramsey.

Intended for students of Methodism, ecumenical church leaders, and scholars of Christian social ethics and contemporary US mainline religion, this work reveals the challenges to and possibilities for

achieving moral community in an increasingly global and diverse world.

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