

the supernatural had a detrimental effect on Methodist doctrine and practice. If the supernatural was a significant mark of Wesley and Methodism, as argued by Webster, then its suppression likely affected the tradition in important ways. Another addition that would strengthen the book is a section that situates belief in the supernatural within orthodox Christianity. While the existence of the Devil was not affirmed by all orthodox Christians, there was and remains consensus that God is actively seeking to justify and sanctify humanity. This consensus suggests that the supernatural was and will always be a significant mark of Methodism.

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Darryl W. Stephens, *Methodist Morals: Social Principles in the Public Church's Witness*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2016. 320pp. \$48.00.

*Methodist Morals*, a densely-packed study of the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church, will benefit any serious student of Methodism's social witness. According to author Darryl Stephens, the book represents an attempt, "among other things, to retrieve the richness of Methodist tradition through the lens of corporate experience for the purpose of strengthening the UMC's social witness." Additionally, says Stephens, the book aims "to reinvigorate 'the spirit of the Church,' in the words of sociologist of religion Steven M. Tipton, so that the UMC and other denominations may become the public church needed in the world today" (9).

Stephens provides historical context which is at once broad and deep, covering 1) written expressions of social witness, such as the General Rules, Special Advices, Articles of Religion, Social Creed, and the Social Principles of the UMC and its predecessor denominations; 2) a description of and observations about the UMC's *process* of decision-making as part of the church's witness; 3) reflections on the way the unique structure of United Methodism relates to the church's social witness; and 4) the challenges facing the denomination in its effort to live into its stated desire to be a global church.

The book makes a major contribution in laying important groundwork for discussions and dialogue essential to moving United Methodism, currently deeply polarized and often paralyzed at the highest decision-making level, toward a healthier future. I would note that both the 2016 General Conference and the 2016 Presidential Election have taken place since this book was published. Both events have further polarized the UMC and the populace, at least within the United States, putting the challenges noted in this book in even higher relief.

Even for those without the time or commitment to ponder and digest the entire book, sections taken by themselves can be extremely elucidating.

One five-page section entitled “Seeking Grace,” for example, provides gist for reflection and any number of in-depth discussions. Having described the multitude of social witness practices and expressions in the predecessor denominations to United Methodism, Stephens describes the weight we currently place on the legislative process at one event, General Conference (GC), and one document, the Social Principles. He goes on to speak of the importance of placing value on “different perspectives,” and not just “the leveraged power of a majority” and points to the tension between GC’s democratic decision-making and ongoing “moral formation and continued growth in covenantal community” (66).

Likewise, distinct descriptions of particular historical periods are fascinating in and of themselves. Perhaps this speaks to my own deep Methodist roots, but reading sections of the book about the leadership of Bishop James S. Thomas at the critical juncture when the UMC was formed in 1968, and how he guided the Social Principles Study Commission at that time all felt like reading important chapters of “family history.”

*Methodist Morals* leaves me wanting to engage the author. I want to thank him for the time he spent speaking with Bishop Thomas and the invaluable insights he gained from that experience, but I also want to ask him questions. Why didn’t he write about the extensive work the General Board of Church and Society has done throughout the Central Conferences related to the Social Principles? I want to take issue with him in the chapter on marriage where I disagree with the way he lists divorce, adultery and homosexuality as issues related to marriage as if they are similar in nature. I want to spend more time reflecting on his articulation of something that I have long thought, i.e. that the *way* we make our decisions about the social witness of the church is as important as *what* any given document might say.

If providing historical context and then generating questions, reflection, agreement and disagreement represent an awakening of the “spirit of the church,” I would say that *Methodist Morals* has gone a significant distance toward accomplishing the goal of the author. As to whether the UMC becomes the “public church needed in the world today”—the jury is still out.

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*Facettes du Méthodisme Français*, edited by Jean-Louis Prunier and Jean François Zorn. n.p.: Ampelos, 2016. 264pp. \$22.52.

A volume on Methodism in France is a rare occurrence! This tome is the result of two years of work by the Société d’Étude du Méthodisme Français (Society for the Study of French Methodism [SEMF]). Established in 2011, SEMF meets annually at the Protestant Faculty of Theology, Montpellier,

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