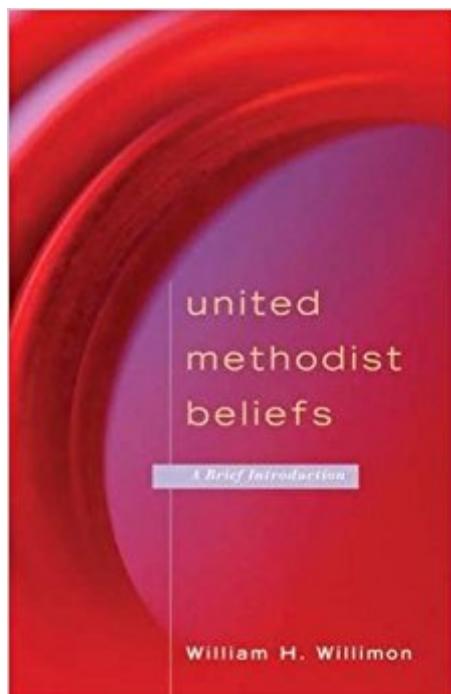


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# United Methodist Beliefs: A Brief Introduction



## **Synopsis**

This brief introduction spells out the major beliefs of the United Methodist Church in a clear, nontechnical style. William Willimon, the beloved United Methodist author, preacher, teacher, and bishop, discusses the great theological themes that United Methodists share in common with all Christians as well as the particular accents and emphases that characterize United Methodist understandings of Christian doctrines. In his engaging style, Willimon opens the door for further study, challenging the reader to move toward a continuing reflection on their faith. This guide will be of great value to those who are beginning their study of United Methodist beliefs as well as those who have long been in the church and want a helpful way to refresh their understandings of the distinctiveness of United Methodist doctrine.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Starred Review. Methodist bishop and noted preacher Willimon (Pastor, and, with Stanley Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens*), opens his lucid and thought-provoking overview of Methodist beliefs with the counterintuitive claim that Jesus actually wasn't principally concerned about beliefs. He wanted people to follow him, not necessarily assent to a set of "cool intellectual propositions" about him. Still, Methodists do have doctrines, which Willimon feels are worthy, God-given guideposts to following Jesus. Willimon first tackles the Trinity, underscoring that "a decisive change in the human heart can and does occur under the prompting of grace and the guidance of the Holy Spirit." He then moves on to Methodist beliefs about Jesus, salvation, grace and good works. Especially

important is his chapter on the church, where, reprising themes that pervade his earlier writing, Willimon argues that although Americans desire to go the spiritual life alone, Methodism teaches that people become most fully conformed to Christ when they are part of the larger ecclesial body. Methodist church life, says Willimon, is a tad schizophrenic, appreciating order while also seeking "radical renewal." Written with Willimon's characteristic dry wit, this highly readable book brings to life doctrines that in other hands would seem dry and dusty. Willimon has produced the most insightful introduction to Methodism available today. (May) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

William H. Willimon is the Presiding Bishop of the Birmingham Area of the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church. Recognized as one of the most effective preachers in the English-speaking world, he is the author of several books, including *United Methodist Beliefs: A Brief Introduction* and *The Early Preaching of Karl Barth*, both published by WJK.

Although interested in the Methodist denomination (I am not Methodist), I found the author to be a very articulate, thoughtful, apologist for Christianity as a whole. There are very few theologians who are truly intellectual enough, and yet deeply spiritual as well, whom I believe could defend the Christian faith and stand up to any atheist or agnostic in a debate (and I've watched quite a few of these kinds of debates with much embarrassment on Youtube). Yet, William Willimon would be a match for the famed atheists Richard Dawkins or, the now deceased, Christopher Hitchens. In short, this book is a truly insightful and enjoyable read.

As a late arrival to the Methodist Church, I found this book to be both enlightening and inspiring (even the footnotes were helpful). Frankly, at this stage of my life, I'm not interested in any church that doesn't challenge me to become like Jesus. However, my experience in this tradition so far indicates to me that there are an awful lot of Methodists that are either uninformed or unconvinced by the values and doctrines espoused by Dr. Willimon. Despite that, I remain in this tradition because I'm inspired by the potential for transformation if these beliefs were ever truly practiced. One wonders if the rapid decline in the Methodist church could be reversed simply by Methodists becoming who they say they are. After reading this book, I'm convinced that such a revival could occur just that way.

I teach theology at a middle-of-the-road/progressive United Methodist school; in several courses I

try to present classic Christian theology in a clear format. This book fits the bill well. The author and I may disagree on this point or that point, but as I say, the book presents classic theology in a clear way--can't ask for more than that!

Methodist Doctrine isn't the most scintillating of subjectsÃ¢â€¢ let's be honest. But Bishop Willimon puts his Southern storytelling abilities to work and makes (what can be) a dull subject come alive. He's practical and yet true to the essence of Wesleyan thought. Great gift for seminarians WHILE IN school, but also a good way for career clergy to brush up on long-forgotten or under utilized doctrinal ideas.

I enjoyed this book for the information. Learned a lot about the faith and belief of the Methodist Church and teaching.

Brief but cleverly critiqued.

Important to remain focused.

A bit strident but well written.

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