

**“A Dialogue Has Now Begun”:  
European Adaptations of the United Methodist  
Social Principles**

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Every social witness is made from a social location, all public policy written for a specific public, and all principles emerge from a foundation of faith. The Social Principles is no exception. When the United Methodist General Conference speaks, it speaks from its social location—i.e. the perspective of its dominant demographic, which is a White, male, college-educated and middle class U.S. citizen—to a particular public in light of its inherited and embraced tenets of faith. What becomes problematic is extending a particular social location to include or represent all social locations. As a U.S.-centric document, presuming a U.S. social and political context and trading on the moral valence of the “American Creed” and its sacred texts,<sup>1</sup> the Social Principles needs to be critiqued for universalizing the policies of a particular location to apply to all publics. European conferences provide a critical, corrective lens for this cultural myopia of the UMC. A recent European petition to General Conference provides an intra-institutional, cross-cultural perspective on the cultural specificity of the Social Principles.<sup>2</sup>

The Executive Committee of the United Methodist Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe (CSECC) submitted a petition to the 2000 General Conference, “Concerning the Meaning of the Social Principles,” in which they raised concerns about the relevance of a document written primarily from a U.S. context for United Methodists around the world (see appendix for full text).<sup>3</sup> This petition could have been more accurately titled, “Concerning the

*Authority of the Social Principles,*” since it took General Conference to task for legislating authoritatively on behalf of the entire church statements that clearly did not apply to those outside the U.S. In this petition, CSECC asked General Conference to consider the diverse experiences and contexts of world-wide United Methodists when making ethical pronouncements and “to clearly indicate which part, or parts, of the [Social] Principles have the characteristic of being fundamental, ... in accordance with the Gospel, and ... therefore valid for all Christians.” A major point of contention in this petition is that the General Conference edition of Social Principles is written by persons in the U.S. with the U.S. context in mind. European and other perspectives are not represented in the document, rendering it irrelevant on some points and simply confusing on others. This had been an important point of discussion in the UMC in Europe for over a decade. CSECC announced that, since the fall of communism, “political, economic, social and religious principles” could now be discussed openly in Europe: “A *dialogue has now begun.*” That is, United Methodists in Europe are entering into dialogue among themselves about the UMC’s social witness. However, those outside of Europe gave little notice to this petition, and the overwhelmingly U.S.-constituted delegation at General Conference hastily referred it to the then existent General Council on Ministries at the eleventh hour without further consideration.<sup>4</sup>

This petition is an explicit acknowledgement of the U.S.-centrism precipitating a hidden discourse in the central conferences. Unbeknownst to most United Methodists in the U.S., the three European conferences of the UMC—Germany (GCC), Northern Europe (NECC), and CSECC, are actively engaging in dialogue about the church’s social witness by adapting the Social Principles to their own contexts. This practice of adapting the document for use in other countries seems almost clandestine in its execution. U.S. readers are given the distinct

impression by the General *Discipline* that theirs is the only version of the Social Principles currently effective in the denomination. The General Conference edition of Social Principles shows no indication of concurrent versions of Social Principles within the UMC, in the form of adaptations. Very few United Methodist clergy and leaders from around the United States are aware of the power of the central conferences to adapt the *Discipline*. Furthermore, central conference adaptations of the Social Principles are not available at the denominational archives, publishing house, Council of Bishops, or even the general board responsible for implementing the Social Principles, the GBCS.<sup>5</sup>

Europeans offer distinct and valuable perspectives on the Social Principles, and the adaptations of the Social Principles in their central conferences deserve a wider hearing. Conferences in Europe offer a profound connectional challenge within the UMC as they struggle to maintain a more healthy and honest unity than superficial adherence to a uniform document of social witness would afford. It is possible that uncovering such textual diversity within the UMC could lead to a reduction of the freedoms of the central conferences, in the name of denominational unity. On the other hand, such a realization might prompt a reconsideration of the efficacy of majority rule at General Conference as a procedure for determining shared and/or culturally specific social witness statements.<sup>6</sup> This small minority offers corrective vision for the UMC's cultural myopia.

### ***Quiet Improvisation***

Each European edition of the Social Principles includes some degree of adaptation, alterations in meaning that go beyond the inherent slippage between different languages. Unlike the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," which is perhaps the most widely translated document in human history, the Social Principles documents in the central conferences are not

simply translations of the same text into various languages. Reading the Social Principles in Russian or French yields different claims and ideas than the General Conference version in English. The intra-institutional discourse represented by European adaptations focuses mainly on differences in cultural context between the U.S. and various parts of Europe. The result of this institutional flexibility is a multiplicity of current Social Principles documents throughout the connection, each witnessing to a unique aspect of the UMC—although much of this witness appears subversive given the absence of documentation regarding these changes.

The multiple Social Principles documents in several languages create a bibliographic challenge. I abbreviate General Conference editions of the Social Principles in English with the letters “GSP” and the date: e.g., GSP2004 is the current edition of Social Principles in the most recent English-language *General Discipline* (GD2004) of the UMC.<sup>7</sup> Adaptations vary by language, date, and conference—sometimes varying among annual conferences within the same central conference (see Table One).

Table One: Selected Editions of the Social Principles by Conference and Language

| <u>Author</u>                  | <u>Title</u>          | <u>Language</u> | <u>Abbr.</u> | <u>Year(s)</u>         |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|--------------|------------------------|
| General Conference             | Social Principles     | English         | GSP          | 2004, 2000, 1996, etc. |
| GCC                            | Soziale Grundsätze    | German          | SG           | 2005, 2002, 1996       |
| CSECC                          | Soziale Grundsätze    | German          | CSE          | 2005                   |
| CSECC (France and Switzerland) | Principes Sociaux     | French          | PS           | 2005, 2001, 1996       |
| NECC (Sweden)                  | Sociala Principer     | Swedish         | SV           | 2000                   |
| NECC (Scandinavia)             | Sociale Principper    | Danish          | DA           | 1997, 1993             |
| NECC (Russia)                  | Sotsial'nye Printsipy | Russian         | R            | 2001                   |
| NECC                           | Social Principles     | English         | NE           | 2005, 2001             |

The adaptations of the Social Principles examined in this paper by language are German (SG1996, SG2002, SG2005, CSE2005),<sup>8</sup> French (PS1996, PS2001, PS2005),<sup>9</sup> Danish (DA1993, DA1997),<sup>10</sup> Swedish (SV2000),<sup>11</sup> Russian (R2001),<sup>12</sup> and English (NE2001, NE2005).<sup>13</sup> Each

adaptation is based on different source material, i.e. not every adaptation begins by translating the most recent General Conference edition. For example, SG2002 is primarily based on SG1996 and revised and adapted in conversation with GSP2000. SG2005 is actually identical to SG2002. All of the French editions are based on SG1996, and PS2005 is nearly identical to PS2001.

European adaptations openly acknowledge the cultural adaptability of this document through a variety of textual clues: additional prefaces, editor's notes, and footnotes. Swedish and German editions include additional prefaces to indicate the source and occasion for these adaptations.<sup>14</sup> These editorial prefaces not only reinforce the importance of the document in the life of the denomination but also provide an outlet for remarking on the need for adaptation of this witness outside the U.S. context. The Danish editions provide a editors' notes within the body of the document, engaging both the General Conference edition and the concurrent NECC English adaptation in dialogue on several points, since each of these editions is different in some way. The 2001 NECC English edition documents its alterations in a series of six footnotes. These footnotes serve to remind the reader that the Social Principles is a forum for discussion about social issues rather than simply a platform for proclamation. The Russian edition also includes footnotes regarding some of its adaptations, but not all of its adaptations are so noted. Most significantly, the two most recent French editions boldly present dual texts for "Human Sexuality," "Alcohol and Other Drugs," and OSC: one version from the General Conference and one from the central conferences. These French adaptations are the only versions of the Social Principles to offer dual texts on important issues of social concern, candidly admitting to and presenting differences of viewpoint across the connection, differences which will be explored in more detail below. These textual indicators serve not only to clarify intra-denominational discussion but also to remind the reader that each adaptation of the Social Principles is part of a

larger conversation about the church's social witness. Overt variations from the General Conference witness are anomalous, however.

For the most part, European adaptations of the Social Principles represent a discourse not of bold innovation but of quiet improvisation. While many European adaptations hint at active intra-denominational discourse, the vast majority of textual adaptations in the European versions of Social Principles are undocumented. Commonly, there is no explicit indication as to which parts of these texts have been adapted. Even the dual texts of the French editions, which appear to be so carefully demarcated, slightly alter the General Conference version with no indication of adaptation. Furthermore, there are numerous undocumented changes in these French adaptations in other subsections of the Social Principles. The 2002 German document is the most extensively adapted of all European versions, with the meaning of fifty of its sixty subsections altered in some way. Many of its changes involve only a word or phrase; sometimes sentences are simply reordered within a paragraph or omitted altogether. The fact that these alterations go beyond the inevitable linguistic hurdles involved in translating English to German is clearly evidenced by reading SG2002 next to CSE2005, which is a near-literal translation of the General Conference text. Despite its extensive adaptations, SG2002 is a quiet improvisation—none of its adaptations are noted as such. The many undocumented alterations in these European editions of the Social Principles adds an air of subversion to this discourse.

Although officially authorized by General Conference, these adaptations function stealthily in their quiet dissent to the U.S.-centrism of the General Conference edition of Social Principles. Ten of the thirteen adaptations researched for this paper omit the parenthetical note at the end of the Preface, referring to the fact that only General Conference has the authority to speak for the UMC.<sup>15</sup> This note is admittedly a display of power by the General Conference. Yet,

it would be easy to infer a slight deception in this omission, falsely implying that each adaptation speaks for the entire denomination. While there may be considerable debate within central conferences during their processes of adaptation, opportunity for wider dialogue within the UMC is hampered by the lack of a paper trail. Adaptations are rarely noted as such in the published documents. As was the case with the legendary builders of the tower of Babel, conferences of the UMC speak past each other in rich linguistic variety, uncomprehending of what the others are saying.

### ***Adherence to Form***

As with most effective improvisation, the European adaptations observe a strict adherence to the form of their source material. The Social Principles as legislated by General Conference has been received as a distinct genre characterized by a very tight set of parameters for allowable alterations. Each adaptation utilizes almost identical headings, subsection titles, and organization. New subsections are never added by central conferences; in only one instance has an entire subsection been omitted without explanation.<sup>16</sup> In the rare event in which the text of a subsection is so thoroughly rewritten so as to be freely adapted, it still conforms to the style and structure of the General Conference document.<sup>17</sup> This is why the use of dual texts in the French editions is so striking—it is a departure from the inherited form. Adopting the structure and tone of the General Conference edition, each adaptation expresses variation and emphasis within a very circumscribed set of editorial functions. The form, structure, and style of the Social Principles provides coherence to this improvisatory dialogue.

The unwritten rules of adaptation within the form of the Social Principles allow for repetition, retention, rearrangement, addition, omission, and alteration of General Conference textual material. For example, NE2001 emphasizes the sentence on capital punishment by

repeating it in an additional subsection of the document.<sup>18</sup> Retention of deleted text is another subtle means of improvisatory expression in European adaptations. For example, the 2001 Russian version retains the proscription on homosexual unions even though it had been moved to a different part of the General *Discipline* in 2000.<sup>19</sup> Rearranging General Conference material within the document also serves as an editorial or interpretative alteration. For example, SG2002 combines the subsections “Sustainable Agriculture” and “Family Farms,” implying connections between these topics not necessarily intended by—although not necessarily in conflict with—General Conference.<sup>20</sup> The German texts especially tend to add, omit, and alter single words or phrases as a way of expressing interpretative independence. For example, under the topic of “Media Violence,” SG2002 adds “computer networks” to the list of media under consideration. Omission of parts of the text also provide interpretive inflection. For example, SG2002 omits the concluding phrase denouncing public lotteries in the subsection “Gambling.”<sup>21</sup> Wholesale alteration of the General Conference text is rare but significant when it happens.

The 2002 German edition makes a number of significant alterations to the text. It alters what is perhaps the most controversial phrase of the entire Social Principles document. GSP2000 reads, “we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.”<sup>22</sup> Instead, SG2002 reads, “A majority in the church interprets the Bible in such a way that it cannot approve of the practice of homosexuality.”<sup>23</sup> Through this adaptation, SG2002 narrows the debate to Biblical interpretation, rather than Christian teaching more broadly considered, and lessens the sharpness of the statement by speaking in terms of disapproval rather than incompatibility. This adaptation, by implicitly giving voice to a minority in the church who disagree with it, also comes closer to admitting the “diverse opinion” about sexuality recognized by GSP1972 than does the current General Conference document. Another



significant difference is GCC's decision not to alter OSC, translated as "Soziales Bekenntnis," on a quadrennial basis. General Conference has legislated half a dozen changes to OSC since 1976, altering this creed in all but two quadrennia. In contrast, "Soziales Bekenntnis" has remained nearly unchanged during that time and is a much more stable text than OSC.<sup>24</sup> This long-term stability facilitates its liturgical use within the church, avoiding the confusion of a proliferation of quadrennial editions. However, GCC's reluctance to change this text also allows it to sidestep the debates prompting General Conference's revisions, e.g. omitting the specification of "all persons" in GSP2000 as inclusive of "men, women, children, youth, young adults, the aging, and people with disabilities" along with "racial, ethnic, and religious minorities"—qualifiers that had been repeatedly revised.<sup>25</sup> This illustrates a tendency in SG2002 to prefer general advocacy of rights rather than advocacy for the rights of specific categories of persons,<sup>26</sup> which seems to avoid rather than encourage discussion of current and historical systemic patterns of discrimination.<sup>27</sup>

The heavy editorial hand of the GCC prompts questions about the purpose of altering the Social Principles in various conferences. German adaptations (SG1996, SG2002) offer a fascinating array of revisions and rearrangements of the General Conference text. If the Social Principles were a static form of communication, it would make sense to consider these edits and adaptations efforts to improve the text. Certainly, careful editing and improvement are requisite for such an important, published document.<sup>28</sup> However, if GSP2000 and SG2002 were understood as documentations of a larger, dynamic discourse within the institution, attempting 'improvements' to such an ongoing discourse would be akin to editing a transcript in order to improve the quality of a conversation that has already happened.<sup>29</sup> The Social Principles is such a discourse. These adaptations may only serve to improve the discourse if they are heard in

dialogue with the other versions of Social Principles in the UMC. GCC's adaptations are an indication of an active conversation within that central conference about social issues. Yet, curiously, none of these adaptations are documented within the German document, stifling further discourse. These improvisations might benefit the entire connection if they were spoken above a pianissimo within this global connection.

### ***Cultural Diversity and Justice***

Much of the European dialogue about the General Conference Social Principles considers cultural differences between Europe and the U.S. as an issue of intra-institutional justice. Specifically, the “American,” i.e. United States, perspective of the document is readily apparent to the central conferences.<sup>30</sup> The introduction to the Polish adaptation expresses this bluntly, warning its reader that the Social Principles “represent American point of view in crushing number.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, the vast majority of the document is perceived as U.S.-centric. This is explained more clearly in the CSECC's petition on the meaning of the Social Principles:

The Social Principles were prepared and formulated by a Board of the General Conference, which itself consisted entirely of Americans. This means that the opinions and critiques were formulated from the perspective of the existing situation in American (United States of America) society.<sup>32</sup>

It is true that the original Social Principles Study Commission (SPSC), which formulated the document that was adopted by the 1972 General Conference, did not include anyone from outside the U.S. in its membership.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the discourse at General Conference continues to be dominated by U.S. delegates, who have always comprised more than 80% of the total number. As a result, during the last three General Conferences, only one central conference petition pertaining to the Social Principles has been approved.<sup>34</sup> The U.S. cultural commitments of the General Conference Social Principles are seen by CSECC as so prominent and

problematic that this is considered an injustice to those outside of the U.S. The 2000 CSECC petition concludes: “If the General Conference ... doesn’t wish to speak only to the Christians in the United States of America, then it must seek to do justice to the diversity of the world” by hearing and taking into consideration the diverse experiences and cultural perspectives of United Methodists from across the entire connection.

Clearly, United Methodist central conferences struggle with translating and embracing a document written by and primarily for U.S. United Methodists. Language is power, and the use of a particular language is the exercise of or submission to a particular group’s power. Specifically, part of the problem in translating the Social Principles is the hegemonic cultural-linguistic perspective of American English in the document. For example, concern about discrimination against “non-English speaking persons” in the subsection “Criminal and Restorative Justice” must be (and has been) adapted for it to make sense in continental Europe. For United Methodists in countries whose official language is not English, this phrase would be confusing or possibly alienating as a part of their social witness. The most recent German edition adapts this subsection to express concern for those who do not speak the common language of the nation.<sup>35</sup> In fact, every one of the footnotes the 2005 German-language adaptation pertains to something in the document that is specific to American English or the U.S. social and cultural context: affirmative action, U.S. pension system, migrant workers, Koinonia Farms, the meaning of the word “drugs,” and various technical terms employed in debates about abortion in the U.S.<sup>36</sup> The Danish adaptations address cultural hurdles by omitting subsections. For example, the Scandinavian editors offer no translation at all for subsections “Adoption” and “Other Christian Communities,” simply referring the reader to the General *Discipline*. Koinonia Farms, an interracial Christian community in south Georgia, USA, is sufficiently foreign to Scandinavia to

be an ineffective illustration in its social witness. The Danish adaptations also render the phrase “separation of church and state”—a clear reference to the first article of the U.S. Bill of Rights—in quotes even while translating the words, indicating that it is a foreign idiom.<sup>37</sup> A few topics in the Social Principles present such incommensurate cultural viewpoints as to require complete revision in Europe. Three subsections—“Work and Leisure,” “Human Sexuality,” and “Alcohol and Other Drugs”—have been thoroughly rewritten by European conferences, illustrating some of the cultural challenges posed by General Conference’s social witness.

A close comparison of the subsection “Work and Leisure” as rewritten in the NECC (R2001) to the General Conference version (GSP2000) is illuminating (see Table Two). GSP2000 asserts several times that “we support policies ...” or social measures of one sort or another. In contrast, R2001’s advocacy for public policy is indirect, e.g. “it is recommended that shortened workdays be introduced.”<sup>38</sup> This recommendation illustrates several divergent features of these documents. First, GSP2000 makes a distinction between government and the private sector with regard to employment; R2001 does not indicate who is to responsible for introducing shortened workdays. Second, GSP2000 uses the first person plural extensively, in contrast to R2001, which uses “we” only once. Third, R2001 emphasizes “work” while GSP2000 emphasizes “leisure.” R2001’s recommendation for shortened workdays is to address unemployment; GSP2000 advocates “that workers [be allowed] additional blocks of discretionary time” in order to address the need for leisure time. Each of these adaptations reflects differences in social, cultural, and political contexts between Northern Europe and the U.S. For example, traditionally in Russia government has been the sole employer, rendering unintelligible a distinction between it and private employers. Furthermore, R2001 does not share GSP2000’s opposition to monopolies—government controlled monopolies have traditionally

formed the basis of Russia's economy. Other contrasts include R2001's coupling of right *and responsibility* with regard to laborers, R2001's emphasis on responsibility "to the common good" vs. GSP2000's emphasis on "increasing freedom in the way individuals may use their leisure time," and R2001's approval of protests and strikes and a *sufficient and appropriate* living wage. Such a thorough revision of the General Conference text is a rarity, however. Maintaining adaptations of the Social Principles in the central conferences has proven to be a significant challenge in the global UMC.

Table Two: “Work and Leisure” Comparison (italics indicate discrepancies between the texts)<sup>39</sup>

|  |   |
|--|---|
| GSP2000  | R2001 (see also DA1993, DA1997, SV2000)   |
| Every person has the right to a job at a living wage.  | Every person has the right to a job at a <i>sufficient</i> living wage.   |
| Where <i>the private sector</i> cannot or does not provide jobs for all <i>who seek and need them</i> ,  | Where there is no possibility to offer such a job to all,   |
| <i>it is the responsibility of government to provide for the creation of such jobs.</i>  | <i>it is recommended that shortened workdays be introduced seeking to accommodate the interests of all workers.</i>   |
| <i>We support social measures that ensure the physical and mental safety of workers, that provide for the equitable division of products and services, and that encourage an increasing freedom in the way individuals may use their leisure time.</i> | <i>Every person has the right to a sufficient and appropriate wage for his or her work as well as the responsibility for carrying out that work in the best possible way.</i>   |
| We recognize the opportunity leisure provides for creative contributions to society  | <i>[As the amount of leisure time increases in society, society is responsible for providing opportunities for its appropriate use. The church and its members have responsibility to assist families and unions to dedicate their lives to the common good.]</i> |
| <i>and encourage methods that allow workers additional blocks of discretionary time. We support educational, cultural, and recreational outlets that enhance the use of such time.</i>   | We affirm the opportunities that leisure time offers for creative contributions to <i>the development of church and society.</i> ]  |
| We believe that <i>persons</i> come before profits.  | Priority must be given not to the increase of profits but to <i>human needs</i> .   |
| <i>We deplore the selfish spirit that often pervades our economic life. We support policies that encourage the sharing of ideas in the workplace, cooperative and collective work arrangements.</i>  | It is the right of every person to refuse to work in situations that endanger health and/or life.   |
| We support rights of workers to refuse to work in situations that endanger health and / or life <i>without jeopardy to their jobs.</i>   | <i>Protest and strike must be used as legitimate ways for finding a solution when the way of negotiation is ineffective.</i>  |
| <i>We support policies that would reverse the increasing concentration of business and industry into monopolies.</i>   | [see insert placed above for ease of comparison]  |

## **Connectional Challenge**

The various manifestations of the Social Principles present a challenge to global connection of the UMC.<sup>40</sup> Walking a tightrope of intra-institutional diplomacy, central conferences in Europe deliberate about both the purpose and the extent of adapting the Social Principles. The practice of adapting the Social Principles in Europe has become increasingly debated in Europe during the past two quadrennia.<sup>41</sup> Debates regarding the German language adaptation formerly shared by GCC and CSECC illustrate this challenge. In April 2005 in Bern, Switzerland, CSECC issued a new German-language version of Social Principles designed to be a direct translation rather than an adapted translation of the General Conference text. Prior to this time, German-speaking members of CSECC had simply adopted the adaptation written by GCC. No doubt, the debate over the degree of adaptation in SG2002, which altered 80% of the subsections of the Social Principles, was a significant factor in this independent action by CSECC. GCC has responded to this debate through inaction: the document found on the GCC's website purporting to be the 2005 edition in Germany is identical to the previous (SG2002) edition.<sup>42</sup> Where German-speaking United Methodists in Europe once shared a common adaptation of Social Principles, there are now two editions, one for CSECC and one for GCC. While divergence from the General Conference edition generally reflects cultural differences between the U.S. and German-speaking Europeans, the divergence between these two German-language editions of Social Principles is probably due not to debates over culturally specific social issues but to debates over the degree of adaptation of the General Conference document.

United Methodists in CSECC are becoming more aware of the differences between the German-language and General Conference Social Principles, are moving toward the General Conference version in their translations, and are becoming more careful to document places of

contention and disagreement. All of the French editions are translations and adaptations of the same German adaptation (SG1996) of Social Principles, i.e. they are second-generation translations. Their differences lie in the degree of conformity, which has increased in the more recent adaptations, to the 1996 General Conference edition. PS1996 is a very close translation of SG1996. PS2001 is also based on SG1996, although it evidences an effort on the part of CSECC to bring the document into closer conformity with the General Conference version. Almost every change made from PS1996 to PS2001 restores General Conference material where SG1996 had adapted it. The most significant change in PS2005, which is nearly identical to PS2001, is that OSC is moved to the end of the document and presented as a dual text: one by General Conference and one shared in Europe. Thus, the connectional challenge confronting United Methodists outside the U.S. is not only between the U.S. and central conferences but also between and within central conferences themselves.

Recognition of a common and normative document, i.e. the General Conference edition of Social Principles, within the UMC provides a healthy and motivating challenge for the church's social witness in different countries when it is allowed to be debated. For example, the GCC's adaptation prior to the reunification of Germany weakened the church's social witness by avoiding advocacy for specific social policies.<sup>43</sup> This adaptation suggested that the UMC in Germany was less engaged in the socio-political realm than the UMC in the U.S.<sup>44</sup> The fact that GCC was allowed to adapt the Social Principles enabled this central conference to craft a more honest document of social witness at that time, one that reflected the state of affairs in the UMC in a divided Germany, than would have been the case by merely translating the U.S. document. The fact that the General Conference edition still had normative valence eventually served to motivate GCC to strengthen its social witness with regard to public policy advocacy. GCC now



displays a much stronger sense of its role in promoting social justice, observing a positive relationship between evangelism and social action. That this discussion within the GCC regarding United Methodist social witness was able to take place through official conference documents, i.e. the GCC's adaptation of the Social Principles, is due to the UMC's flexible polity, which accommodates cultural adaptations to its primary document of social witness—even if General Conference chooses to ignore these discussions. The kind of debate that occurred within the GCC is healthy for the church and would benefit the entire UMC if expanded to a dialogue with other conferences, too.

Maintaining this fragile forum for intra-institutional dialogue about the Social Principles is a challenge in itself. Translation and adaptation is difficult and expensive work, especially when there are dozens of languages spoken in the UMC in Europe. Might quadrennial revision be too often and too much to maintain?<sup>45</sup> As noted above, the three most recent French adaptations in CSECC are all based on the same 1996 document. NECC also seems to be tiring of its translating work. The 1997 Scandinavian *Discipline* states that it is the official version for NECC and encourages annual conferences to translate the book into their own languages.<sup>46</sup> Eight years later, the 2005 NECC conference minutes state that English is now the conference's official language and that its committee on *The Book of Discipline* will shift its focus from translation to remaining current with General Conference revisions and making recommendations for adaptation, as necessary.<sup>47</sup> Even as they adapt the Social Principles, however hesitantly, the central conferences try to honor the authority of this General Conference document designed for a context other than their own. Though permitted by the polity of the UMC, these adaptations appear as subversive discourse because of the limited ways in which the text is altered, the recent trend within the central conferences of Europe to reduce the practice of

adaptation, and the tendency of General Conference to ignore the existence of adaptations. These conferences struggle to balance intra-institutional diplomacy and social relevance.

Political pressures within the institution, translation expense, and debates over adaptations collectively threaten to drive this dialogue underground or, at the least, into other genres of witness. The most recent German-language edition in CSECC, CSE2005, with virtually no adaptation, certainly does not indicate that United Methodists are now all of one mind on social issues. To the contrary, the two European conferences that use a German-language edition, CSECC and GCC, have not reconciled their views sufficiently to agree upon CSE2005 as a shared document. GCC's 2005 edition of Social Principles, SG2005, is identical to its previous edition, SG2002, not to CSE2005. The fidelity of CSE2005 to the General Conference edition may actually suppress European moral discourse in the UMC, forcing it into other venues. The recent proliferation of ecumenical agreements and other genres of social teachings in European United Methodism indicates that this may in fact be the case. For example, GCC has produced other documents of social witness to augment the Social Principles.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, European United Methodists have participated in significant ecumenical articulations of social witness.<sup>49</sup> These multiple genres of social statements in the UMC express a more complex moral discourse than the format of and discourse about the Social Principles allows. Likely, CSE2005 represents some degree of fatigue as well as agreement. If European translations and adaptations of the Social Principles are muted, it will become more difficult for United Methodists in the U.S. to hear this part of the dialogue about their denomination's social witness.

The diversity among Social Principles documents in the UMC offers both challenge and opportunity. The Social Principles is a unique forum for discussing the social witness of United

Methodists; to insist on uniformity in social witness statements would only serve to hide these aspects of moral discourse within the denomination. Uniform statements of Social Principles would not produce true agreement on these issues within the denomination but would rather suppress the discourse that is already happening. While it might be important to some persons to achieve uniformity among these editions of Social Principles, it is important to recognize this textual diversity as a vital denominational discourse about the Social Principles. These differences in the Social Principles witness to a type of unity that might be more genuinely representative of the spirit that holds United Methodists together than any uniform document could ever be. The Social Principles is a window onto the corporate body, affording a view not available when examining the United Methodist doctrinal standards, General Rules, or other static and uniform statements of faith. The Social Principles is a dynamic witness to an ongoing conversation about what it means to be United Methodist. A challenge is how to maintain denominational unity while embracing diverse understandings of a shared social witness. This discourse about the Social Principles affords the UMC an opportunity to be more cognizant of the global diversity found within its ranks.

### ***Corrective Vision***

At its best, the current situation of central conferences represents an institutional struggle to balance participation and inclusion with the pragmatics of corporate decision-making. The UMC tries to balance missional pragmatics with democracy by allowing central conferences both a vote at General Conference and the authority to adapt the Social Principles to their own contexts after General Conference. Thus, the international delegates at General Conference are allowed to vote on legislation that is not directly binding on them or the conferences they represent. This ability to vote on and to adapt disciplinary material is an important power for

non-U.S. delegates in a church so historically and self-consciously identified with the U.S., allowing them voice and power that might otherwise be lost in an environment ruled by U.S. majority. The ways in which these adaptations are registered, i.e. without acknowledgement and with much debate regarding the purpose and degree of adaptation allowed, indicate a subversive discourse by these minority constituencies in an institution predominantly composed of U.S. citizens. When central conferences adapt the Social Principles, however, it is difficult to tell whether they are subverting the authority of General Conference, its democratic procedures, its U.S.-cultural myopia, or its U.S. patriotism.

Officially sanctioned adaptations of the Social Principles imply that the General Conference does not speak accurately to or for every part of the church. In 1972, Bishop Thomas expressed his hope that revising the Social Principles be a continuing process characterized by dialogue and discussion. His hope might be more closely realized through adaptations in the central conferences than through debate at General Conference. Such dialogue is necessitated precisely because ethicist Paul Ramsey is correct in his concern about the “irrelevance abroad” of General Conference’s particular dictates.<sup>50</sup> The CSECC’s attempt at dialogue about the meaning of the Social Principles across cultures was marginalized by the dynamic of majority vote at General Conference, however, as their petition was essentially tabled without debate. Yet these adaptations convey their own submission to the authority of General Conference even while challenging and sidestepping this authority. Working outside of the majority-rules democratic procedure of General Conference has all the characteristics of subversion: these adaptations rarely acknowledge that General Conference is the only legal authority to speak for the entire UMC, most of these adaptations are undocumented, and the extent of these adaptations is a matter of great concern within the central conferences *even though they are authorized to*

*make such adaptations.* These factors suggest that something sacrosanct is being challenged when the Social Principles is adapted. Democracy, its authority and its effectiveness, is being challenged by a minority not adequately accounted for within its procedures.

There is a reckoning awaiting the UMC, a meeting of the collective self of this denomination, that is becoming increasingly necessary as the central conferences become a larger part of the UMC's constituency. Bishop Heinrich Bolleter, in his 2005 Episcopal Address, names "[r]eligion and national identity" as one of the primary issues that the UMC will have to face in the near future.<sup>51</sup> He was speaking to CSECC, but his remark applies to the entire UMC. The U.S. majority of the UMC cannot deny its own situatedness for much longer. In 1961, Walter Muelder claimed, "American Methodism needs the corrective criticisms of both World Methodism and the World Council of Churches" in order "to correct the conformist tendencies of denominations within the various countries."<sup>52</sup> Today, the UMC has such a global correction within its own institutional structures. United Methodist central conferences can provide a clear witness to the jurisdictional (U.S.) conferences, being what Muelder terms the "courageous minorities" within this church,<sup>53</sup> spurring it to a more faithful, profound, and prophetic social witness. Specifically, the UMC must differentiate between its secular, national, and distinctively Wesleyan Christian commitments in order to maintain a faithful social witness. The dialogue that has now begun in the UMC in Europe can promote an honest, self-critical reflection on this witness in the UMC.

U.S. United Methodists need to join in the dialogue begun in Europe regarding the Social Principles, utilizing the perspectives of the central conferences to correct the UMC's cultural myopia. Denominational leaders and scholars in the U.S. are called to acknowledge and respond to this intra-institutional dialogue.<sup>54</sup> One strategy for accomplishing a wider vision is to utilize

that means of grace instituted for our mutual accountability, namely the Wesleyan practice of Christian conference. Christian conference allows us to learn from each other, to test each other's convictions and experiences, and to grow together in communion with Christ. Receiving central conference adaptations as a means of grace requires that United Methodists in the U.S. be willing to join in this conversation as equal rather than dominating partners. If United Methodists are truly united, conferences around the globe must at the least be aware of what each is saying. In this light, the allusion to the U.S. Constitution in the document's Preface can be read as a prophetic call to accountability.<sup>55</sup> Whether "We, the people" can indeed speak for all of "the people called United Methodists" may well depend on the extent to which United Methodists in the U.S. can recognize, differentiate, and discuss the cultural commitments they express through our Social Principles.

## **Appendix**

### **Concerning the Meaning of the Social Principles<sup>56</sup>**

We petition that the General Conference directs the respective Boards (or Commissions), which regularly work on the Social Principles, to hear and take into consideration all of the experiences of the world wide church related to ethical questions, and from this to clearly indicate which parts, or parts, of the Principles have the characteristic of being fundamental, are in accordance with the Gospel, and are therefore valid for all Christians.

Rational: Our Experiences and Observations

1. The Social Principles make the claim that they take a stand on the human questions and problems of the contemporary world. They formulate the opinion of the General Conference with regard to these broad fields:

- a) The Natural World
- b) The Nurturing Community
- c) The Social Community
- d) The Economic Community
- e) The Political Community
- f) The World Community

2. The Social Principles were prepared and formulated by a Board of the General Conference, which itself consisted entirely of Americans. This means that the opinions and critiques were formulated from the perspective of the existing situation in American (United States of America) society. There are many fundamental questions which can be supported and approved of by Methodists worldwide. Yet there are also questions which are not relevant to the situation in Europe, Asia, or Africa.

3. We wish to put forward the following observations:

- a) Our world consists not only of East and West, but of North and South.
- b) Throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia there live many different peoples with their own cultures, histories, religions, languages, and varying social realities.
- c) Already we observe that within the European situation changes and developments take place at different speeds. The church must take these differences into consideration in its ministry.

4. In the Cold War era these differences with our fellow Christians in Central, Southern, and Eastern Europe could not be discussed and debated. The political situation made subsequent discussions about political, economic, social and religious principles impossible at that time. A dialogue has now begun, and we experience differences in opinions about these matters. Each opinion has its correctness and no one should be made subordinate to another.

5. If the General Conference of the United Methodist Church truly wishes to comment on the human questions and problems of our time, and doesn't wish to speak only to the Christians in the United States of America, then it must seek to do justice to the diversity of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Myrdal, the “American Creed” asserts the ideals of freedom, democracy, equality, liberty, certain inalienable rights, and “the essential dignity of the individual human being.” Furthermore, Myrdal observes that U.S. citizens treat the country’s founding documents as sacred texts, noting a “worship of the Constitution.” All of these features of the American Creed, including its use of national sacred texts, are integral to the theological outlook of the Social Principles and its claim to legitimacy. Gunnar Myrdal, Richard Mauritz Edvard Sterner, and Arnold Marshall Rose, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1944), 4.

<sup>2</sup> This paper is based on my address, “The Worldwide Reception of the Social Principles,” given to the 5th International Consultation 2006 »Social Principles – Social Creed« on March 1, 2006, in Vienna, Austria. Partial funding of this research was provided by the Emory University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences/University Fund for Internationalization.

<sup>3</sup> Petition 31990-FO-NonDis -O: *Petition Number Search: General Conference 2000*, General Commission on Archives and History (UMC), <http://gc2000.org/pets/PET/num.asp> (accessed 23 May 2006).

<sup>4</sup> The General Conference 2000 plenary session referred this calendar item to the General Council on Ministries with a vote of 848 yes and 22 no. Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Outside of my own research, Darryl W. Stephens, “Face of Unity or Mask over Difference?: The Social Principles in the Central Conferences of The United Methodist Church,” *Thinking About Religion* 5 (2005), [http://organizations.uncfsu.edu/ncrsa/journal/v05/stephens\\_face.htm](http://organizations.uncfsu.edu/ncrsa/journal/v05/stephens_face.htm) (accessed 26 July 2006); Darryl W. Stephens, “A Witness of Words: The United Methodist Social Principles as Moral Discourse and Institutional Practice” (Ph.D. diss., Emory Univ., 2006), the only scholarly attention to the phenomenon of adapting the Social Principles in central conferences, i.e. those located outside the U.S., is offered by Rainer Bath in an insightful and succinct comparison written in German of the Social Principles of GCC to that of General Conference. Rainer Bath, *Methodismus und Politik: die sozialen Grundsätze der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche als Ausdruck ihres politischen Engagements*, Theologische Studienbeiträge, Bd. 6 (Stuttgart: Edition Anker, 1994). This dialogue has been ignored in United Methodist studies in English, though sometimes purposefully. For example, a German-language systematic theology text for use in the UMC, *Gelebte Gnade*, which was translated and adapted into English as *Living Grace*, quotes “Our Social Creed” with no indication that the original work in German quotes a different version of this social confession, as adapted by GCC: contrast these two editions: Walter Klaiber and Manfred Marquardt, *Living Grace: An Outline of United Methodist Theology*, trans. J. Stephen O'Malley and Ulrike R. M. Guthrie (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 400. Walter Klaiber and Manfred Marquardt, *Gelebte Gnade: Grundriss einer Theologie der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche* (Stuttgart: Christliches Verlagshaus, 1993), 391-2. In different book, Scott J. Jones incorrectly assesses the diversity of the Social Principles in the UMC: “The document is intended to apply to all universally. The same principles must be followed regardless of which country or society is being discussed.” Scott J. Jones, *United Methodist Doctrine: The Extreme Center* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 229. In contrast, Thomas E. Frank claims that “the Social Principles are written from a social and cultural point of view ... [and] are American in orientation.” Thomas Edward Frank, *Polity, Practice, and the Mission of The United Methodist Church*, 2006 ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 153. While Frank acknowledges central conference adaptations of the *Discipline* with regard to other aspects of church polity, Frank, 111., neither he nor Jones discusses the fact that the Social Principles document is not identical in all conferences of the UMC.

<sup>6</sup> E.g., COB restructuring in 1996 toward consensus model; WCC recent move toward consensus model.

<sup>7</sup> I adopt the term ‘General Discipline’ from GD2004 ¶31.5, referring to the *Discipline* legislated by General Conference. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2004*, (Nashville: United Methodist Pub. House, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> *Die Sozialen Grundsätze: angenommen an der Tagung der Zentralkonferenz von Mittel- und Südeuropa 2005 der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche*, Kirche und Gesellschaft (Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche Schweiz/Frankreich), <http://kug.umc-europe.org/dokumente/sozialegrundsätze/2005/> (accessed 3 April 2006); *Soziale Grundsätze der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche 1996*, Kirche und Gesellschaft (Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche Schweiz/Frankreich), <http://kug.umc-europe.org/dokumente/sozialegrundsätze/1996/sozfr96d.doc> (accessed 3 April 2006); *Soziale Grundsätze der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche (Fassung 2000 / 2002)*, Kirche und Gesellschaft (Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche Schweiz/Frankreich), <http://kug.umc-europe.org/dokumente/sozialegrundsätze/2002/sozgr2000d.doc> (accessed 3 April 2006). Abbreviated SG1996, SG2002, respectively. SG2005 is identical to SG2002:



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[http://www.emk.de/uploads/media/050000\\_soziale\\_grundsaeetze\\_zk\\_2005.pdf](http://www.emk.de/uploads/media/050000_soziale_grundsaeetze_zk_2005.pdf) accessed June 1, 2007. CSECC's 2005 edition is abbreviated CSE2005.

<sup>9</sup> *Principes Sociaux*, Eglise Evangélique Méthodiste en France (2001), <http://www.umc-europe.org/ueem/Doctrine/principessociaux.pdf> (accessed 3 April 2006); *Principes Sociaux de l'Eglise Evangélique Méthodiste 1996*, Kirche und Gesellschaft (Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche Schweiz/Frankreich), <http://kug.umc-europe.org/dokumente/sozialegrundsaeetze/1996-f/index.htm> (accessed 3 April 2006); *Principes Sociaux EEM*, Eglise Evangélique Méthodiste en France (2005), <http://www.umc-europe.org/ueem/Doctrine/PrincipessociauxEEM.pdf> (accessed 18 January 2006). Abbreviated PS1996, PS2001, and PS2005, respectively.

<sup>10</sup> *Metodistkyrkans lära och kyrkoordning*, (Helsingfors: Metodistkyrkan i Nord-Europa, 1993), 97-116; *Metodistkyrkans lära och kyrkoordning*, (Helsingfors: Metodistkyrkan i Nord-Europa, 1997), 103-28. Abbreviated DA1993 and DA1997, respectively.

<sup>11</sup> *Metodistkyrkans sociala principer: Svensk version 2000*, (Stockholm: Metodistkyrkans Huvudkontor, 2000). Abbreviated SV2000. I am indebted to Diana Coogle of Rogue Community College, Grant's Pass, Oregon, for her assistance translating.

<sup>12</sup> *Narod Very: Istorija, Konstitutsia, vera i sotsial'nye printsipy Ob"edinennoi metodistskoi tserkvi Severnoi Evropy*, (Russia: Ob"edinennaia metodistskaia tserkov' Severnoi Evropy, 2000), 46-66. Abbreviated R2001. I am deeply indebted to the Rev. Natalya Shulgina, elder in the Russian United Methodist Church, for her help in locating and translating this version.

<sup>13</sup> *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church in Northern Europe 2001*, (Oslo: The United Methodist Church in Northern Europe, 2003), 123-54. Abbreviated NE2001.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. SV2000 (by Växby) and SG2002 (by Bolleter and Gräsle).

<sup>15</sup> Only CSE2005, NE2005, and NE2001 include this parenthetical note: "(See ¶ 509)."

<sup>16</sup> SG2002 omits the subsection on HIV/AIDS.

<sup>17</sup> PS2001, PS2005, SG1996, and SG2002 include freely adapted texts for "Alcohol and Other Drugs," "Human Sexuality," and OSC. DA1993, DA1997, SV2000, and R2001 include a completely rewritten subsection "Work and Leisure."

<sup>18</sup> The sentence "We oppose capital punishment and urge its elimination from all criminal codes" is found in subsection V.A and repeated in V.F.

<sup>19</sup> Subsection II.C. R2001 is an adaptation of GSP2000. This sentence is found in GSP1996 but not GSP2000. The proscription was moved to another part of UMC GD2000.

<sup>20</sup> Günter Winkmann and Paul Gräsle petitioned General Conference in 2000 to legislate this change in the General Conference edition of Social Principles, but their petition was not approved. Petition 31626-FO-64-D to General Conference 2000. *2000 Petition Search Page*.

<sup>21</sup> The full sentence from GSP2000 subsection IV.G reads, "The Church should promote standards and personal lifestyles that would make unnecessary and undesirable the resort to commercial gambling—including public lotteries—as recreation, as an escape, or as a means of producing public revenue funds for support of charities or government."

<sup>22</sup> *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2000*, (Nashville: United Methodist Pub. House, 2000), ¶161G. This phrase was approved by General Conference in 1972 and has remained essentially unchanged, though highly contested, since. NB. In 2004, the word "we" was changed to "The United Methodist Church" UMC GD2004, ¶161G.

<sup>23</sup> My own translation. Original reads "Eine Mehrheit in der Kirche interpretiert die Bibel so, dass sie die Ausübung der Homosexualität nicht billigen kann."

<sup>24</sup> The Soziales Bekenntnis was adopted by the GCC executive committee on March 10, 1978. *Kirchenordnung der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche 1974*, (Stuttgart: Christliches Verlagshaus GmbH, 1974), 36. Translation of SG2002 by Darryl W. Stephens: "Social Confession. We believe in God, the creator of the world, and in Jesus Christ, the redeemer of all creation, and in the Holy Ghost, through whom we recognize God's gifts. We confess to have often misused these gifts and repent of our sin. We affirm that the natural world is God's creation. We will protect and use it responsibly. We gratefully accept the possible forms of human community. We stand for the right of every individual to meaningful development/deployment in society. We accept responsibility for the right and duty of all persons to contribute towards the welfare of the individual and society. We accept responsibility for overcoming injustice and need. We pledge ourselves to cooperation for world peace and plead for law and justice among nations. We are willing/prepared to share our opportunities in life with those who are discriminated against. We perceive this to be a response to God's love. We acknowledge God's word as the measure in all human affairs,

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now and in the future. We believe in the present and final triumph of God. We accept our commission to live the Gospel in our world. Amen.” Only two textual changes have been added over the years. The phrase, “und an der freiheit aller Völker,” was added to reflect 1984 General Conference legislation, although the German text soon reverted back to its original version: *Soziale Grundsätze der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche: Neufassung 1984*, (Stuttgart: Christliches Verlagshaus GmbH, 1985). Secondly, the word “verantwortungsbewusst” was changed to “verantwortungsvoll” at some point. I share the observation about the textual stability of the Soziales Bekenntnis with Jörg Niederer: Jörg Niederer, *Die sozialen Grundsätze und das soziale Bekenntnis der EMK, Kirche und Gesellschaft* (Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche Schweiz/Frankreich), [http://kug.umc-europe.org/dokumente/sozialegrundsätze/diverses/referat\\_vortrag.pdf](http://kug.umc-europe.org/dokumente/sozialegrundsätze/diverses/referat_vortrag.pdf) (accessed 10 February 2006), 4.

<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, General Conference 2004 altered OSC, moving closer to the generality of SG2002, by replacing the phrase “racial, ethnic, and religious minorities” with “all persons” *UMC GD2004*, ¶166.

<sup>26</sup> Compare SG2002 subsections 2.0 and 3.0, 2.9, and 3.1, respectively, with GSP2000 Prologues II and III, subsections III.H, and III.A. These differences might also reflect a reluctance of SG2002 to allude to a distinctly U.S. phrase, echoing Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination in employment based on “race, color, religion, sex, or national origin” (<http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/vii.html> accessed January 13, 2006). This phrase is echoed twice in GSP2004: “with regard to race, nationality, ethnic background, gender, sexuality, and physical differences” (Prologue II); and “based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, or economic status” (Prologue III).

<sup>27</sup> However, I must note that the German Southwest annual conference petitioned General Conference in 1996 (20071-GJ-4-C) to amend UMC GD1992 ¶4 to expand the list of attributes that would not be used as the basis for discrimination. Proposed was: “Therefore all persons, without regard to *sex*, race, color, national origin, or economic condition.” *Search for a Petition by Petition Number: 1996 United Methodist General Conference*, General Commission on Archives and History (UMC), <http://www.gcah.org/GC96/PETS/PET/num.html> (accessed 11 March 2006).

<sup>28</sup> In this spirit, I agree with Paul Gräsle’s concern, expressed in his preface to SG2002, that the Social Principles includes contradictory statements about war and military service, a situation that Günter Winckmann tried to rectify by petitioning General Conference. Petition 41305, submitted to General Conference 2004, was not approved. *Search for Petitions: General Conference 2004*, General Commission on Archives and History (UMC), <http://archives.umc.org/calms/MenuPetitions.asp?mid=2886>.

<sup>29</sup> The General Conference procedures of revision and the “eternal present” of its Social Principles text borders on an institutional attempt at works-righteousness.

<sup>30</sup> I use the term ‘American’ as an adjective for the United States with great hesitation and only as a reflection of popular usage. The term does not accurately represent the fact that the Americas are spread over two continents and inclusive of many cultures, languages, and countries.

<sup>31</sup> *Kościół Ewangelicko - Metodystyczny w RP*, <http://www.metodysci.pl/KEM.html> (accessed 2 February 2005).

<sup>32</sup> From the petition, “Concerning the Meaning of the Social Principles.”

<sup>33</sup> For the members’ names and conference affiliations, see the following: “Statements on Social Principles,” *Engage* 2, no. 20 (1970): 3. Thomas, “Report of the Social Principles Study Commission,” 14-31. While this may not have been a significant concern at the time, such a commission in the 2004-08 quadrennium would undoubtedly be careful to include non-U.S. citizens in its membership.

<sup>34</sup> Petition 30009-FO-66.J-D, submitted by GCC regarding Social Principles subsection “Alcohol and Other Drugs,” was adopted but amended to the extent that it was unrecognizable as the voice of this central conference.

<sup>35</sup> CSE2005 reads “die allen nicht der Landessprache mächtigen Personen”—a footnote translates GSP2004 literally.

<sup>36</sup> Three of the footnotes found online are not officially approved by CSECC but are remarks by an editor.

<sup>37</sup> This phrase occurs three times in the subsection “Church and State Relations” (V.C) and is alluded to in another subsection that expresses concern over “unconstitutional entanglements between church and state” (V.E). In the 1972 Social Principles, the concept was considered a basic “principle.” Some interpreters might counter that this is not a distinctly American principle. After all, even the Russian Orthodox Church recognizes the principle of “separation of church and state.” However, the “Bases for the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church” (2000, sec. III.4) names at least three conceptions of this principle, one of which is peculiar to the U.S. The Social Principles provides no such contextualization; it must be inferred. NB: This phrase is a part of U.S. political culture but is not actually found in the U.S. Constitution. The First Amendment states, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof ....”

<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, the Russian version is very similar to a statement from the original 1908 Methodist Social Creed: “reduction of the hours of labor to the lowest practical point, with work for all.” *Doctrines and Discipline of The Methodist Episcopal Church 1908*, (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1908), 480.

<sup>39</sup> See R2001, DA1993, DA1997, and SV2000 for the adapted text. NE2001 provides the General Conference version of this subsection. Translation of R2001, ¶163.C, by Rev. Natalya Shulgina.

<sup>40</sup> I am aware that there are many institutional pressures at work that complicate an open discourse among the conferences, not the least of which is a wide disparity in membership size and monetary support. Consideration of these dynamics is beyond the scope of this paper. Some of these issues and dynamics are discussed by Bruce Robbins: Bruce Robbins, *A World Parish?: Hopes and Challenges of The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004).

<sup>41</sup> Niederer, 7. See also [http://www.emk.de/fakten/55\\_894.htm](http://www.emk.de/fakten/55_894.htm) (accessed October 11, 2004)—NB this resource is no longer available online.

<sup>42</sup> Contrast [http://www.emk.de/uploads/media/050000\\_soziale\\_grundsaeetze\\_zk\\_2005.pdf](http://www.emk.de/uploads/media/050000_soziale_grundsaeetze_zk_2005.pdf) accessed June 1, 2007 to <http://kug.umc-europe.org/dokumente/sozialegrundsaeetze/2005/> accessed June 1, 2007.

<sup>43</sup> See analysis by Rainer Bath, contrasting SG1989 with GSP1988: Bath.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-42.

<sup>45</sup> Niederer, 7.

<sup>46</sup> *Metodistkyrkans 1997*, 4.

<sup>47</sup> *Northern Europe Central Conference Complete Minutes 2005*, [http://www.umc-northerneurope.org/central\\_conference\\_2005\\_complete\\_minutes.pdf](http://www.umc-northerneurope.org/central_conference_2005_complete_minutes.pdf) (accessed 3 April 2006), 97.

<sup>48</sup> E.g., “Sozialwort” and “Friedenswort”: <http://www.emk.de/images/sozialwort.pdf> and <http://www.emk.de/images/friedenswort.pdf> (accessed 28 May 2005).

<sup>49</sup> Documents such as “Das Sozialwort” of the ecumenical churches in Austria (des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen in Österreich) and “Sustainable Society” of the Church and Society Commission of the European Methodist Council evidence an active ecumenical witness: <http://www.sozialwort.at/> and <http://www.umc-europe.org/admin/documents/fa8536da50e8a2aede63d4a260620afc.pdf>, accessed August 18, 2006.

<sup>50</sup> Ramsey and Hauerwas 1988, p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> Heinrich Bolleter, *A Living Fellowship - Because God Loves Life: Episcopal Address 2005*, United Methodist Church in Central and Southern Europe, <http://www.umc-europe.org/admin/documents/60eddb79c3c6517aaaa2b25c78aa57a7.pdf> (accessed 18 January 2006), 16.

<sup>52</sup> Walter George Muelder, *Methodism and Society in the Twentieth Century*, ed. General Board of Economic and Social Relations (Methodist Church), *Methodism and Society* (New York: Abingdon, 1961), 399. John Bennett also proposed procedural means for the corporate learning of the church, suggesting ecumenical councils as a way of seeing beyond the immediate, culturally embedded concerns of local congregations and national churches. Noting that “opinions in churches differ little, if at all, from prevailing opinions in the strata of society most represented among them,” he advocated ecumenical learning as a process by which those “unexamined expressions of opinion are tested and sifted.” John Coleman Bennett, *The Radical Imperative: From Theology to Social Ethics* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 67.

<sup>53</sup> Muelder, 394.

<sup>54</sup> There must be sufficient institutional interest on the part of the UMC in the U.S. for such a dialogue to contribute positively to this denomination’s social witness. Impediments to dialogue include reliable access to primary documents, translation, and institutional interest. The first step in acknowledging this denominational conversation is simply to gather the primary documents. Nowhere does there exist a complete collection of United Methodist Social Principles documents currently in use—not in the denominational archive, not with the Council of Bishops, not with the General Board of Church and Society, and not with the United Methodist Publishing House. In fact, most of the primary sources for this paper can be found only in European libraries or on websites, some of which are no longer accessible as cited. Without adequate electronic archiving, these sources are ephemeral. Another step is translation. The Social Principles document is translated and adapted in far too many languages for one scholar to attend adequately to the entire corpus of United Methodist social witness statements. Translation must be considered a communal, scholarly task.

<sup>55</sup> The Preamble to the Social Principles begins, “We, the people called United Methodists, affirm our faith ....” GD2004, 95.

<sup>56</sup> Petition 31990-FO-NonDis-O from the Executive Committee of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe. The General Conference 2000 plenary session referred this calendar item to the General Council on Ministries with a vote of 848 yes and 22 no. Text available at online: *2000 Petition Search Page*.