



A Brief History of the Lambeth Conference

Part II of IV

Third of a nine-part series on the Lambeth Conference and the Anglican Communion.

By Christopher L. Webber

When the Lambeth Conference met in 1908 the bishops were entering a new century and facing new issues. Their focus in 16 resolutions was, appropriately, on education and training both for ministry and lay people. There was a greater interest as well in ecumenical relationships, especially with the Orthodox, the Old Catholic Churches, and the Presbyterians. The conference condemned

the opium trade and deplored the growing "disregard of the sanctity of marriage." Those who were divorced, they said, could not be remarried in the Church, though the "innocent party" might be readmitted to communion after a civil marriage. Birth control and abortion were condemned.

Ironically, the bishops, while "frankly acknowledging the moral gains sometimes won by war," rejoiced in the "increasing willingness to settle difficulties among nations by peaceful methods." The outbreak

of World War I caused the postponement of their next meeting.

Meeting in 1920, the bishops had nothing to say about any "moral gains" that might have been won but did commend the League of Nations to the people of the world. Americans rejected that advice. The most revolutionary statement they made



Photo: Edward G. Malindine/Topical Press Agency/Getty Images

Bishops from around the Anglican Communion convene at Lambeth Palace, London for the 1948 Lambeth Conference. From left to right, Bishop Hallwood of Hong Kong, Bishop Chang of Fukien or Fujian, Bishop Percy Jones of Sierra Leone, and Assistant Bishop R.W. Jones of Wales.



A Brief History of the Lambeth Conference

Part II of IV

Third of a nine-part series on the Lambeth Conference and the Anglican Communion.

By Christopher L. Webber

When the Lambeth Conference met in 1908 the bishops were entering a new century and facing new issues. Their focus in 16 resolutions was, appropriately, on education and training both for ministry and lay people. There was a greater interest as well in ecumenical relationships, especially with the Orthodox, the Old Catholic Churches, and the Presbyterians. The conference condemned

the opium trade and deplored the growing "disregard of the sanctity of marriage." Those who were divorced, they said, could not be remarried in the Church, though the "innocent party" might be readmitted to communion after a civil marriage. Birth control and abortion were condemned.

Ironically, the bishops, while "frankly acknowledging the moral gains sometimes won by war," rejoiced in the "increasing willingness to settle difficulties among nations by peaceful methods." The outbreak

of World War I caused the postponement of their next meeting.

Meeting in 1920, the bishops had nothing to say about any "moral gains" that might have been won but did commend the League of Nations to the people of the world. Americans rejected that advice. The most revolutionary statement they made



Photo: Edward G. Malindine/Topical Press Agency/Getty Images

Bishops from around the Anglican Communion convene at Lambeth Palace, London for the 1948 Lambeth Conference. From left to right, Bishop Hallwood of Hong Kong, Bishop Chang of Fukien or Fujian, Bishop Percy Jones of Sierra Leone, and Assistant Bishop R.W. Jones of Wales.



was to advise that women (who had just been given the right to vote in America) could be admitted to any office in which a layman might serve. It took nearly 50 years for the American Church to catch up with that and allow women to serve on vestries and as deputies to General Convention. In a more conservative mood, they continued to condemn birth control and linked it with prostitution in calling on governments to end "the open or secret sale of contraceptives, and the continued existence of brothels."

Women's ministry was a major concern, but the restoration of the order of deaconesses was all they could recommend.

By 1930, the bishops were beginning to have second thoughts about birth control. The 1662 Prayer Book, still the standard throughout the British Empire, said that the procreation of children was the primary purpose of marriage, but if parents were not enthusiastic about large families, the bishops called for "deliberate and thoughtful self-control...in intercourse" and possibly, where there were morally sound reasons, "other methods," but not "for selfishness or mere convenience."

It was 18 years until the bishops could meet again and, when they did, in 1948, recovery from the war was very much on their minds. They reaffirmed a 1930 resolution "that war as a method of settling international disputes is incompatible with the teaching and example of our Lord Jesus Christ." Inspired perhaps by the recently created United Nations, they provided a definition of the Anglican Communion as "a fellowship, within the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church...bound together

not by a central legislative and executive authority, but by mutual loyalty sustained through the common counsel of the bishops in conference."

The bishops were concerned to hold up a different way of life to a war-torn world. The first eight resolutions concerned "the Christian Doctrine of Man" and human rights. The bishops affirmed "that man has a spiritual as well as a material nature, and that he can attain full stature only as he recognises and yields to the love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and to the influence of his Holy Spirit."

On the subject of marriage, the bishops could do little more than repeat themselves. They noted with sadness "the great increase in the number of broken marriages and the tragedy of children deprived of true home life," affirmed that "marriage always entails a life-long union and obligation," and called on "members of the Church and others to do their utmost by word and example to uphold the sanctity of the marriage bond and to counteract those influences which tend to destroy it." Yet divorced people could not be remarried in the Church and if remarried in a civil service and wishing to receive communion, the case should be referred to the bishop.

Not until 1958 would the bishops begin to construct a positive theology of marriage, but then they would be facing still more complex issues.

Christopher L. Webber, an Episcopal priest living in Connecticut, is the author of several publications including two coming later this year: "An American Prayer Book" and "The New Metrical Psalter revised for the Revised Common Lectionary."

was to advise that women (who had just been given the right to vote in America) could be admitted to any office in which a layman might serve. It took nearly 50 years for the American Church to catch up with that and allow women to serve on vestries and as deputies to General Convention. In a more conservative mood, they continued to condemn birth control and linked it with prostitution in calling on governments to end "the open or secret sale of contraceptives, and the continued existence of brothels."

Women's ministry was a major concern, but the restoration of the order of deaconesses was all they could recommend.

By 1930, the bishops were beginning to have second thoughts about birth control. The 1662 Prayer Book, still the standard throughout the British Empire, said that the procreation of children was the primary purpose of marriage, but if parents were not enthusiastic about large families, the bishops called for "deliberate and thoughtful self-control...in intercourse" and possibly, where there were morally sound reasons, "other methods," but not "for selfishness or mere convenience."

It was 18 years until the bishops could meet again and, when they did, in 1948, recovery from the war was very much on their minds. They reaffirmed a 1930 resolution "that war as a method of settling international disputes is incompatible with the teaching and example of our Lord Jesus Christ." Inspired perhaps by the recently created United Nations, they provided a definition of the Anglican Communion as "a fellowship, within the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church...bound together

not by a central legislative and executive authority, but by mutual loyalty sustained through the common counsel of the bishops in conference."

The bishops were concerned to hold up a different way of life to a war-torn world. The first eight resolutions concerned "the Christian Doctrine of Man" and human rights. The bishops affirmed "that man has a spiritual as well as a material nature, and that he can attain full stature only as he recognises and yields to the love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and to the influence of his Holy Spirit."

On the subject of marriage, the bishops could do little more than repeat themselves. They noted with sadness "the great increase in the number of broken marriages and the tragedy of children deprived of true home life," affirmed that "marriage always entails a life-long union and obligation," and called on "members of the Church and others to do their utmost by word and example to uphold the sanctity of the marriage bond and to counteract those influences which tend to destroy it." Yet divorced people could not be remarried in the Church and if remarried in a civil service and wishing to receive communion, the case should be referred to the bishop.

Not until 1958 would the bishops begin to construct a positive theology of marriage, but then they would be facing still more complex issues.

Christopher L. Webber, an Episcopal priest living in Connecticut, is the author of several publications including two coming later this year: "An American Prayer Book" and "The New Metrical Psalter revised for the Revised Common Lectionary."



Episcopal Life Focus

Online video reports on the mission and ministry of The Episcopal Church

See it all at <http://episcopalchurch.org/ELifeFocus>



Episcopal Life Focus

Online video reports on the mission and ministry of The Episcopal Church

See it all at <http://episcopalchurch.org/ELifeFocus>