”Seventh Lambeth Conference, Resolutions 9-20” (1930) by the Anglican Communion

In 1930, bishops of the Anglican Church from various countries published resolutions from their seventh Lambeth Conference in England. The Lambeth Conference brings together leaders of international Anglican churches approximately every ten years to discuss current issues and come to a consensus. In the published resolutions, the church leaders state their conclusions on issues ranging from the organization of the Anglican Church to contemporary social events. Many Anglican leaders use the resolutions of the Lambeth Conferences to guide their decision-making and leadership, especially on controversial issues like the use of contraceptives. The 1930 resolutions nine through twenty provide new opinions from church leaders about the use of contraceptives by married couples, amending statements from the sixth conference in the year 1920. Through the resolutions from the seventh conference, the Anglican Church contrasted its opinions from the previous conference and showed a clear acceptance of contraceptives.

The Anglican Church, also called the Church of England, is one of the largest Protestant Christian communities in the world, with over eighty million members and dioceses on every continent except Antarctica. Different geographical districts, or dioceses, make up the Anglican Church, and bishops are responsible for overseeing the dioceses. The bishops also attend the Lambeth Conferences, writing and publishing the resolutions from each conference.

The first Lambeth Conference met in 1867 in Lambeth, England. At that time, the bishops who attended the Lambeth Conference were mainly from England, though the Anglican Church has expanded to the United States, China, Nigeria, and other countries. The Archbishop of Canterbury historically presides over the conference, and Archbishop Cosmo Gordon Lang presided over the seventh conference in 1930. The Archbishop of Canterbury serves as a leader for the Anglican Church as a whole. Generally, archbishops preside over even larger sectors of the organization, called archdioceses. At the conferences, the bishops and archbishops often discuss issues of marriage and sexuality and what they deem appropriate reproductive practices for married couples.

Ten years before the seventh Lambeth Conference, the resolutions from the sixth Lambeth Conference in 1920 clarified the participating Anglican bishops’ negative views on contraceptives. Most notably, resolutions sixty-eight through seventy state that the Anglican Church provides strong warnings to church officials and members against the use of what the authors call ”unnatural” methods to avoid conception. The authors state that such practices threaten the main purpose of a Christian marriage, which is to have children. Despite the participating bishops’ concerns about sexually transmitted diseases, the Anglican Church refuses to support the use of barrier methods of contraception which prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Additionally, in resolution 70, the Anglican Church encourages church members to assist in pressuring governing bodies to forbid pornography, brothels, and contraceptives, which the resolutions’ authors label as incentives for sex.

Ten years later, the Anglican Church held the seventh conference in England, and published seventy-five resolutions. Resolutions nine through twenty are titled ”The Life and Witness of the Christian Community – Marriage and Sex.” Each resolution ranges from a single sentence to a paragraph of text. Resolution nine begins by stating that the Anglican Church needs an updated view and statement on the topic of sex. Resolution ten states that Christian teachings about marriage will lend the solution to modern problems of marriage and sexuality. Resolution eleven includes disapproval of divorce and remarriage for church members but does not explicitly forbid it. Resolution twelve urges the Anglican Church to provide better sexual education for their youth. Resolution thirteen

states that God gives human sexual instinct but also that married couples should exercise self-control when it comes to exercising that instinct. Resolution fourteen emphasizes parenthood as a privilege and expression of married life. Resolution fifteen permits the use of contraceptives under certain conditions for married couples in the Anglican Church.

Resolutions sixteen through twenty reaffirm unchanging standards of the Anglican Church regarding reproductive or sexual practices. Resolution sixteen condemns abortion. Resolution seventeen condemns the promotion of contraceptives for those in poor economic or social conditions. Resolution eighteen condemns premarital sex, and resolution nineteen calls for the Anglican Church to reinforce the notion that immoral sexual practices are unacceptable. Resolution twenty shows appreciation for church members who dedicate their time to sexual education.

The ninth and tenth resolutions begin the section on marriage and sex with remarks that contrast the resolutions from the previous Lambeth Conference. In the ninth resolution, the conference leaders agreed that the Anglican Church needed a modern interpretation of sex. The leaders recognize sex as a part of life and what they call a ”God-given” ability and therefore state that it is a positive part of life. They recognize the creation of life as noble and calls for the Anglican Church members to view sex with more leniency. The tenth resolution discusses how traditional principles of marriage derived from God’s teachings are still relevant, even in modern interpretations of marriage. Additionally, the resolution’s authors emphasize equality between male and female partners and the importance of monogamy.

The eleventh and twelfth resolutions focus on marriage and education. In the eleventh resolution, the church leaders discuss their stance on divorce. The resolution states that the Anglican Church allows divorce but does not condone church members remarrying. The authors also emphasize that a Church member’s history of marriage and divorce does not detract from the Anglican Church’s goal of protecting its members’ welfare. Resolution twelve calls for improved sexual education in the Anglican Church to prepare young members for adult life. The authors call for the education of church officials on such matters, the establishment of branches of the organization to study issues of sex from a Christian viewpoint, and the evaluation and improvement of literature on the topic of sexual education.

In resolutions thirteen through fifteen, the church leaders restate that sexual instincts are a natural part of life and a gift from God for married couples. They state that the Anglican Church’s principles of procreation and self-control should guide one’s decisions about sex. The authors affirm that the purpose of married life is to bear children. They go on to discuss the benefits of parenthood and family for the improvement of society. However, the church leaders discuss instances in which a married couple feels obligated to avoid parenthood. If there was a situation where a married couple decided that they were unfit to have children, the authors encourage abstinence from sexual intercourse, but church members may use contraceptives. The organization permits the use of contraceptives as long as the decision aligns with Christian principles, directly contradicting their statements from ten years prior. They condemn the use of contraceptives in a way that violates Christian principles, such as for selfishness or luxury.

The church leaders finish their statements on marriage and sexuality by restating unchanged beliefs from previous conferences. They state in resolution sixteen that the Anglican Church still condemns abortion. In resolution seventeen, the authors recognize that couples may feel inclined to use contraceptives to limit conception due to financial difficulties. However, they criticize the promotion of contraceptives as a response to poor economic and social conditions. In resolutions eighteen and nineteen, the church leaders state that the sexual union between any unmarried people is still unacceptable according to the Anglican Church and that the use of contraceptives does not change that. The authors still call for some restrictions on the advertisement of contraceptives and their accessibility to the public. The authors state that self-control and chastity before marriage is their recommendation for avoiding unacceptable sexual behavior, such as pre-marital intercourse. Finally, in resolution twenty, the church leaders thank social workers and others who provide sexual education and call for more support for those people.

The statements of the Anglican Church condoning the use of contraceptives were some of the first of their kind from a Christian organization. Other Christian organizations addressed the controversy

of contraceptives following the Anglican Church's statements. In December of 1930, the Catholic Church issued what they called an encyclical, a statement from the pope about current affairs and opinions of the Catholic Church, called Casti Connubii ("On Chastity in Marriage"). In the encyclical, Pius XI, the pope at the time, condemned the use of contraceptives and cited them as a threat to Christian marriages. Conversely, following the statements of the Seventh Lambeth Conference, many Protestant organizations updated their stance on contraceptives to be more accepting of family planning. In the United States, the Committee on Home and Marriage of the Federal Council of Churches that oversaw many different Christian denominations issued a statement in 1931 that agreed with the Anglican Communion's recent statements, giving what the Committee called "guarded approval" to the use of contraceptives. The resolutions of the Seventh Lambeth Conference regarding sex and marriage publicized a different perspective from a Christian body. As of 2021, the Anglican Church maintains its acceptance of the use of contraceptives in married couples for reasons that the Anglican Church deem appropriate. The Lambeth Conference still meets regularly, with the next conference planned to begin in July of 2022 Kent, England, under Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Sources

1. Anglican Church in North America. "Structure." The Anglican Church in North America. https://anglicanchurch.net/structure/#1582230319985-7ae1590b-4620 (Accessed July 19, 2022).
2. Anglican Communion Office. "The Lambeth Conference, Resolutions Archive from 1920." Anglican Communion Document Library. https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127731/1920.pdf (Accessed July 19, 2022).
3. Anglican Communion Office. "The Lambeth Conference, Resolutions Archive from 1930." Anglican Communion Document Library. https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127734/1930.pdf (Accessed July 19, 2022).
4. Archbishop of Canterbury. "Lambeth Conference." Archbishop of Canterbury. http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/pages/lambeth-conference.html (Accessed July 19, 2022).
5. BBC. "Contraception." BBC Religions. https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/christianethics/contraception_1.shtml (Accessed July 19, 2022).
6. Campbell, Flann. "Birth Control and the Christian Churches." Population Studies 14 (1960): 131–47.
7. Lambeth Conference. "History and Impacts of the Lamberth Conference." The Lambeth Conference Ltd. https://www.lambethconference.org/about/history-and-impact-of-the-lambeth-conference/ (Accessed July 19, 2022).
8. Lambeth Conference. "What is the Lambeth Conference?" The Lambeth Conference Ltd. https://www.lambethconference.org/about/what-is-the-lambeth-conference/ (Accessed July 19, 2022).
9. The New York Times Company. "Council of Churches Hold Birth Control Morally Justified." New York Times, March 21, 1931.
10. Pandia Health Editorial Team. "Birth Control and Religion." Pandia Health. https://www.pandiahealth.com/resources/birth-control-religion/ (Accessed July 19, 2022).
11. Pius XI. "Casti Connubii." The Holy See. https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19301231_casti-connubii.html (Accessed March 1, 2022).
12. Rowan Williams. "Archbishop's Roles and Priorities." Dr. Rowan Williams, 104th Archbishop of Canterbury. http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/pages/roles-and-priorities.html (Accessed July 19, 2022).