

5-1-1931

The Modern Church Looks at Society

Th. Graebner

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Graebner, Th. (1931) "The Modern Church Looks at Society," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 2 , Article 37.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol2/iss1/37>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

Von den Symbolen der Lutherischen Kirche.

45. Wir bekennen uns zu allen Symbolen, die im Konkordienbuch vom Jahre 1580 enthalten sind. — Die Symbole der Lutherischen Kirche sind nicht eine Glaubensregel außer und neben der Heiligen Schrift, sondern ein Bekenntnis zur Lehre der Schrift dem aufgetretenen Irrtum gegenüber.

46. Weil die christliche Kirche keine Lehre machen, sondern nur die in der Heiligen Schrift geoffenbarte Lehre bekennen kann und soll, so sind die Lehrentscheidungen der Symbole für uns gewissenverbindlich nicht deshalb, weil sie durch einen Lehrkampf hindurchgegangen sind, sondern lediglich deshalb, weil sie Lehrentscheidungen der Heiligen Schrift selbst sind.

47. Diejenigen, welche ein öffentliches Lehramt in der Lutherischen Kirche begehren, verpflichten sich, den Lutherischen Symbolen gemäß zu lehren, nicht „insofern“, sondern „weil“ die Symbole mit der Schrift übereinstimmen. Wer die in den Lutherischen Symbolen enthaltene Darlegung der Lehre und die Verwerfung der entgegenstehenden Irrtümer nicht als schriftgemäß erkennen kann, ist nicht zum Lehramt in der Lutherischen Kirche zuzulassen.

48. Die Verpflichtung auf die Symbole erstreckt sich auf alle Lehren, mögen sie ausdrücklich als Lehren bezeichnet oder nur zur Begründung anderer Lehren verwendet werden.

Die Verpflichtung erstreckt sich nicht auf geschichtliche Angaben, „rein exegetische Fragen“ und andere Dinge, die nicht zum Lehrinhalt der Symbole gehören. Alle Lehren der Symbole sind auf klare Schriftausagen gegründet.

Das Komitee:

| | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| F. Pieper. | L. A. Geerboth. |
| F. Wenger, Sekr. | L. H. Engelder. |
| E. A. Mayer. | |

The Modern Church Looks at Society.

The official papers of the Lambeth Conference have been published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.* The Lambeth Conference is a meeting of bishops of the Anglican Church and the Episcopalian bodies (including the American Protestant Episcopal Church) affiliated with it. The name is derived from the old palace overlooking the river Thames, owned by the Anglican State Church.

The Lambeth Conference papers contain, in addition to the

* Lambeth Conference, 1930. Encyclical Letter; Resolutions and Reports. In America: The Macmillan Co. 200 pages 5¼×8¾. Cloth.

Encyclical Letter and the resolutions of the conference, the reports of the committees. It is pointed out, however, that the conference itself is not responsible for these reports, except in the sense that it formally received them. Naturally this factor depreciates the value of these documents considerably, all the more so since the more significant and startling announcements of the Lambeth meeting are contained not in the official letter, but in the resolutions. These resolutions number 75. They embrace matters of doctrine, of conduct, and of church organization as they affect, and have been affected by, the social and scientific questions which are prominent in the world to-day: Marriage and Sex; Race; Christian Unity; the Nature and Status of the Anglican Communion; Training for Holy Orders; Women and the Ministry; Youth and Its Vocation. As a cross-section of opinion in the modern Church with reference to these social questions, but also as a contemporary witness to some of the fundamentals of Christianity, these reports and resolutions deserve our attention, the more so because they are very carefully phrased and are intended to bring to the Episcopalians a call "to bear witness in word and deed to the faith, hopes, purposes, and resources of the Church." The Lambeth Conference indeed does not claim the authority of a general synod. Its function is to provide the churches of the Anglican Communion "with counsel rather than with command." Accordingly its resolutions are designed merely to advise the Church in the settlement of doctrinal and moral controversies.

The resolutions begin with an affirmation of the Christian doctrine of God, of which a fresh presentation is declared to be urgently needed "in the face of many erroneous conceptions" due to "the enlarged knowledge gained in modern times of God's ordering of the world and the clearer apprehension of the creative process by which He prepared the way for the coming Jesus Christ." (We comprehend the reference to the evolutionary theory.) "Perhaps most noteworthy of all, there is much in the scientific and philosophical thinking of our time which provides a climate more favorable to faith in God than has existed for generations. New interpretations of the cosmic process are now before us which are congruous with Christian theism. The great scientific movement of the nineteenth century had the appearance at least of hostility to religion. But now, from within that movement and under its impulse, views of the universal process are being formed which point to a spiritual interpretation." Undoubtedly this is a reference to the more recent research in physics and chemistry, which has found in the atom and in the germ cell, factors which point to the action of creative forces not predictable in their quantity by any mechanical formula, and hence to a divine source of power and energy. The bishops are, however, too optimistic in their opinion if in this they see any approach to the Christian idea of

creation and divine government. Milliken's and Einstein's cosmic religion is as far removed from Christianity as the agnosticism of Dewey and of Russell.

An apology which the Scriptures and a Scriptural theology do not feel free to accept is that limiting purpose of Scripture, which "is not to give information on those themes which are the proper subject-matter of scientific inquiry," the Bible not being "a collection of separate oracles, each containing a final declaration of truth." The first sentence quoted is to give sufficient latitude to evolutionistic theories in biology, anthropology, psychology, and education. The reference to "separate oracles" either is a truism or is designed to eliminate the method of "proof-text," a method used by our Lord and by the apostles and objectionable only to those who refuse to accept the Scriptures as the inspired Word of God. The modernistic concept of inspiration is again found in the pronouncement: "Wherever men genuinely seek after goodness and truth and beauty, God's Spirit is in that search and guides it towards Himself," as also in the statement that the Holy Spirit "has in every generation inspired and guided those who seek truth." Particularly the assumption of "equal authority of all parts of the Bible" is characterized as a source of imperfect conceptions regarding the idea of God. The adoption of the evolutionistic viewpoint also in the doctrine of God is evident in a paragraph which in the mind of the Lambeth bishops substitutes a "new ground of reasoning out God" instead of the "separate oracles" on which the Church hitherto has grounded its faith concerning the nature and attributes of God. The section reads as follows: "Certain sciences whose boundaries were for generations indeterminate have in recent times united to give us a consentient view of the process by which the world as we know it has come into being. From this view has emerged an account of the order of creation upon which all instructed opinion is now agreed. Physics and astronomy, geology and biology, anthropology and archeology, united to give us a description of the ordered sequence of creation. In view of this revelation — for such it truly is — the popular interpretation of the Biblical account of creation cannot be accepted literally; and it must be remembered that in great ages of constructive theology such a literal interpretation was not regarded as of primary importance."

The initial statement of the encyclical, treating "the Christian doctrine of God," has this statement about the person of our Lord which cannot prove satisfactory to Trinitarians: "In Him as nowhere else, in Him alone, God's character, God's gracious love and innermost purpose, are revealed." In the committee report covering the same topic occurs the guarded statement: "In Christ, as His followers came to believe, there dwelt 'the fulness of the Godhead bodily,' and as under the guidance of the Holy Spirit reflection dwelt upon

His life, it brought all the varied interests of humanity to the feet of the Father in heaven." In the same section the "principle of the Cross" is stated from what appears to be the viewpoint of the "moral-influence theory" of the atonement, as follows: "The Cross sums up the struggle of love against evil throughout the ages. Christ's love redeems the world by creating the conditions in which righteousness and love can be all-powerful." In these statements we find nothing that would distinguish the Anglican pronouncement from the views expressed at the (frankly modernistic) Modern Churchmen's Conference which met at Oxford the following week.

Naturally, the expressions regarding the Sacraments reflect the Reformed viewpoint. Holy Communion is treated primarily as an act of worship (p. 20), and in the resolutions covering this point it is said that in the Eucharist "the worshipers commemorate, present, and claim their part in, the sacrifice made once for all upon the cross."

So much concerning the doctrinal standards of the encyclical letter and the resolutions. In the main the attitude of the bishops must be characterized as modernistic.

The subject of sex is given considerable space, especially in the resolutions, and our readers may remember the commotion which was caused in the secular and religious press when these pronouncements were first published. That the lowered view of marriage, the prevalence of divorce, and the flouting of traditional morality by writers who influence the young, noted throughout the world, would require the inclusion of this subject in any program covering social life need not be disputed. Some of the resolutions concerning marriage are abstract reaffirmations of general truths. "The Conference believes that in the exalted view of marriage taught by our Lord is to be found the solution of the problems with which we are faced," leaves matters from a practical point of view much where they were before. Nor does the conference attempt to establish Spiritual grounds for the suggestions which follow. Naturally not, since it has previously declared that the Bible is not "a collection of separate oracles, each containing a final declaration of truth."

The practical suggestions which the conference makes are three. First, it adheres to a restriction already theoretically enforced and "recommends that the marriage of one whose former partner is still living should not be celebrated according to the rites of the 'Church.'" Though it may inflict hardship upon the "innocent party," the bishops, while softening their decision by conceding the use of the term "marriage," no doubt feel that by this means they will discountenance divorce. They have left completely out of consideration the fact that according to the rule established by our Lord only the guilty party sins by entering a second marriage during the lifetime of the former spouse. A concession, however, is made in the second suggestion to

the effect that, "where an innocent person has married under civil sanction and desires to receive the Holy Communion, it recommends that the case should be referred for consideration to the bishop, subject to provincial regulations." On this resolution the *London Times* comments editorially August 23: "That resolution can hardly escape criticism. If such a person presents himself for Holy Communion, the parish priest is entitled to repel him and to refer the case to the bishop if he be 'an open and notorious evil liver.' But to brand every 'innocent party' who has remarried as 'an open and notorious evil liver' is a step from which it may be hoped even the rigorist would shrink. Again, the proposal to leave the decision to individual bishops seems unwise. Innocent divorced persons who have remarried either ought or ought not to be admitted as communicants; and it is clearly the business of the Church to decide that point authoritatively."

On the difficult subject of birth control the Lambeth Conference of 1930 has taken an attitude frankly different from that of its predecessors. It contends that, "if our own communion is to give guidance on this problem, it must speak frankly and openly, with a full appreciation of facts and conditions which were not present in the past, but which are due to modern civilization." Therefore the conference decided by a large majority to sanction birth control as permissible "when there is a clearly felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood," but only "on Christian principles," not "from motives of mere convenience." The decision in fact is left to the individual conscience. What the majority of the conference evidently desired to do was, on the one hand, to avoid any phrase that might be taken to sanction birth control as a moral practise and, on the other, to abandon the doctrine that every one who practises it must be morally culpable. The resolution on this point, which was carried by 193 votes to 67, has this text:—

"Where there is a clearly felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, the method must be decided on Christian principles. The primary and obvious method is complete abstinence from intercourse (as far as may be necessary) in a life of discipline and self-control lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, in those cases where there is such a clearly felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, and where there is a morally sound reason for avoiding complete abstinence, the conference agrees that other methods may be used, provided that this is done in the light of the same Christian principles. The conference records its strong condemnation of the use of any methods of conception-control from motives of selfishness, luxury, or mere convenience" (p. 43).

In the report underlying this resolution the bishops complain that in many quarters Christian morality is receiving the treatment frequently accorded to Christian doctrine. It is disowned and even

repudiated. This attitude is encouraged and extended by the multitudinous stimulants to an exaggerated sex consciousness "which abound in our day and to which the stage, the novel, and the film all make their contribution" (p. 86). Accordingly, the Church "has a responsibility for training her children in that attitude to all sex-questions which is at once open and reverent. This should be done as soon as the child begins to ask questions. Shame and secrecy in these matters need not exist for the child. He only learns them if and when he discovers the facts in undesirable ways. No child should be sent to school before his father or mother has forearmed him with the knowledge. Though this parental responsibility is frequently refused, we call upon all our people who have young children to face it, and we acknowledge that they have a right to look to the Church for guidance in their delicate task. This, however, is only the beginning. There is grave need that in schools of all types such instruction should be given as will enable the children, particularly as they approach adolescence, to look at the whole question of sex, whether in plants, animals, or man, in its rightful setting as essentially part of God's unceasing creative activity. Passing to what the committee declares to be one of the most urgent and perplexing problems of our day, the decline of birth-rate in civilized countries, it goes on record as strongly denouncing the practise of abortion, which has as its aim the destruction of life which has already come into being. It is contrary to the law of God and of man. We have reason to know that the sale of drugs designed to procure abortion is large. . . . There is no doubt, however, that the diminution of the birth-rate in modern times by 50 per cent. is mainly due to the knowledge and use of methods which prevent conception. These methods are now widely used in every class of society. There are many who advocate them as the solution of social and personal problems; there are others who condemn them as sinful; there are many who are sorely perplexed as to the legitimacy of their use. We feel therefore bound to give troubled consciences some guidance on this matter." Then follow the considerations which lead to the resolution we have already quoted. In the main, the entire matter is referred to the Christian conscience: "Each couple must decide for themselves, as in the sight of God, after the most careful and conscientious thought and, if perplexed in mind, after taking competent advice, both medical and spiritual. In our judgment the question which they should put to themselves is this: Would conception be for any reason wrong? If it would clearly be wrong, and if there is good moral reason why the way of abstinence should not be followed, we cannot condemn the use of scientific methods to prevent conception which are thoughtfully and conscientiously adopted." On this resolution the *London Times* has the acute remark: "To the superficial observer it may seem to

lay itself open to the charge of modifying a divine standard in order to accommodate human weakness and thus of falsifying the ideal which it exists to maintain."

A separate section deals with the ministry of women. While insisting on the great importance of "offering to suitably equipped women responsible posts providing full scope for their powers, the conference cannot recommend their admission to any other order of the ministry than that of deaconess." Deaconesses should be understood to dedicate themselves to lifelong service, but no vow or implied promise of celibacy should be required.

Much space is given to the progress of church union, but a reading both of the letter and the resolutions does not reveal anything that goes beyond the traditional insistence of Anglicanism upon the episcopate, while endeavoring to make a brave show of liberality, by urging comity, humility, and good-fellowship to all Christian communions. In order to achieve the reunion of Christianity, there is required "the humility in which each Church is willing for a change of mind in regard to its customary teaching in one respect or another." And this humility "must lead to a readiness on the part of each Church to admit that in some respects it may have been wrong" (p. 112). After thus making a concession which no Church has the right to make, the customary Anglican restrictions on communion are renewed. Even in their treatment of the special problem raised by the situation in South India, the bishops only apparently yield the point of episcopal ordination. In South India, until recent years, the Anglican Church, the Wesleyan Church, and the "South India" Church — itself blended from Presbyterian, Congregationalist, and Lutheran missions — each occupied its own territory. In 1929 it was resolved that "the uniting churches agree that it is their intention and expectation that eventually every minister exercising a permanent ministry in the united Church will be an episcopally ordained minister." When the issue again arose before the conference of last year, the matter was referred to a strong committee, which perceived a feature of the scheme which changed the whole situation. To quote the committee's words — subsequently endorsed and adopted by the whole conference —: "The united Church in South India will not be a part of the Anglican Communion," but "a distinct province of the Universal Church, with a rule and character of its own." This deprived the objections to the scheme of all their points. What might be an unpardonable irregularity within a branch of the Anglican Church might fairly be conceded to a Church "not a part of the Anglican Communion." Even if he disapproved of such experiments, the most rigorous of Anglicans would have no complicity in their adoption by a Church outside the Anglican body. To our mind this solves the problem in South India by dissolving it, and it remains to be seen

how the views of the Lambeth Conference will be received there and what will happen in the course of further negotiations between the episcopal and other churches.

We are interested in the reference to the Church of Sweden. The conference went on record with a vote of thanks to the Church of Sweden for the visit of the Bishop of Lund and expresses its hope "that the existing fraternal relations with that Church will be maintained and that relations may also be strengthened with the other Scandinavian churches with a view to promoting greater unity in the future." From the conference report we gather the information that a great deal of unionism is even now being practised by the Swedish state churches and the Church of England. "Since 1920 Swedish ecclesiastics have preached in our cathedrals and churches and Anglican ecclesiastics in theirs. Advantage has also been taken of the recommendations with regard to admission to Holy Communion. Further, two Anglican bishops took part in the consecration of two Swedish bishops in Upsala Cathedral on September 19, 1920, and a Swedish bishop took part in the consecration of three Anglican bishops in Canterbury Cathedral on November 1, 1927" (p. 148).

THEODORE GRAEBNER.

How Peter Became Pope.

VII. 1515—1650.

Giovanni de Medici was made Abbot of Fonte-dolce at the age of seven, Pope Sixtus IV confirming the grant. When thirteen, he was made a cardinal by Pope Innocent VIII.

Lorenzo the Magnificent sent his boy cardinal to Rome with a warning against the fashionable society in "that sink of all iniquity." An Italian proverb ran, "Rome seen, faith lost." Froude declares that "no imagination could invent, no malice could exaggerate, what the papal court really became under Alexander VI and Julius II and Leo X."

Leo X became Pope in 1513 and had to swear to reform his court from top to bottom. As early as 1516 Jerome Aleander told Leo thousands in Germany were only waiting the word to cry out against Rome.

Cardinal Pucci said at the Lateran Council in 1516: "Rome, the Roman prelates, and the bishops sent out daily from Rome, we together are the causes of so many errors and corruptions in the Church. If we do not regain our good name, which is almost wholly lost, everything will be ruined." (Engert, II, 188.)

In the session of March 16, 1517, a speaker pointed to the Gospel as the only source of wisdom and reform; but the council did not reform, it went on to deform.