



EDITORIAL

Right feelings and wrong theology

Throughout the controversy over sexuality, entrenched positions have been held and defended with little real examination of the issues. Few and far between have been the occasions when people from both sides of the argument actually discussed their differences, despite many attempts by RA and EMU to achieve that end. Official strategy is to ignore the disappointment and outrage that has led to tragic defections of individuals and congregations. Ignored also are warnings that the church is drifting into error and away from good faith within the ecumenical community. Officials blithely discredit the testimonies of individuals who have experienced the healing of confusion about their sexual identity. They sing the praise of indiscriminating diversity, ignore scientific evidence about the causes of homosexuality and disparage opponents of R84 as homophobic.

To make matters worse, they have silenced the voices of migrant ethnic congregations, whose national councils have explicitly rejected R84 on biblical, theological and cultural grounds, with the promise that their 'perspective' will be listened to at the next Assembly.

Since its publication, the *Interim Report* has swamped the church with a stream of persuasive (or intimidatory) and so-called 'enlightened' or 'progressive' ideas taken straight off the gay pride hymn sheet. Officials consistently give uncritical acceptance to the pro-gay agenda, which appeals because it is so sentimentally right and so theologically wrong. They display supreme arrogance in biblical interpretation, and fundamentalism in their selective use of biblical texts and theology. Leaders in presbyteries, synods and the Assembly regard R84 as having resolved the sexuality issue, and refuse to see that it puts the church in the ludicrous position of holding two contradictory attitudes, as if each is an equally correct rule for sexual conduct.

With the eleventh Assembly a bare six months away, the RA executive is preparing to do all in its power to prevent our church's rush to irrelevance. Should the Assembly press on with Resolution 84, or not place it on the agenda, the RA will immediately consider setting up a reform movement (continued on p. 12)

Plans advancing for a reforming movement

The Reforming Alliance executive is pushing ahead with proposals for a reforming movement within the Uniting Church, if next July's national Assembly either endorses its 2003 Resolution 84 (permitting ordination of homosexuals) or decides to take no further action on the matter. Several presbyteries in four States and the Queensland Synod have asked that an RA resolution on sexuality be debated at Assembly, but executive members are not confident this will happen.

Accordingly, planning is under way, with a statement of faith being developed and questions of property, finance, theological training, Christian education and pastoral care now being closely examined.

Assembly standing committee and the general secretary Terence Corbin are being asked to devise a policy sympathetic to congregations which decide, after the July meeting, that they have no choice but to dissociate themselves from the UCA. These congregations will need pastoral support and 'property justice' to allow them to continue to worship in the same building.

The issue of property use will be brought by EMU to the NSW Parliament, by way of a private member's bill moved by the Rev. Dr. Gordon Moyes of Wesley Mission, Sydney. The bill will seek changes to the State's UCA Property Trust to enable congregations which dissent on serious theological and ethical matters to maintain their life and worship.

The RA annual general meeting and conference will convene on the day after Assembly (July 12) and accommodation has been booked for 120 people. More details will be published early in 2006.

Legal advice is being sought from a highly qualified team of lawyers on the procedural fairness and other matters relating to R84.

Dr. Phil Marshall

The executive received with regret the resignation, for personal reasons, of the Rev. Dr. Phil Marshall. As a founding member of RA his outstanding contribution has been pivotal to the support of RA's 2000 members and 184 affiliated congregations.

Agenda for a Confessing Church

Max Champion's opening address to the 2005 RA Conference

'An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophecy falsely, and the priests rule at their discretion; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?' (Jer 5: 30-31)

Resolution 84 at the 2003 Assembly officially sanctioned the presence of both orthodoxy and heresy in the UCA. It now permits and encourages us to hold what amounts to 'mutually exclusive faiths' as if they are equally valid expressions of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Faith.

Proponents of R84 such as 'For84' argue for its acceptance on the grounds of Jesus' inclusive love and justice. Opponents like RA argue that it permits behaviour that is forbidden in the historic witness to Jesus Christ, as attested in Scripture. It is clearer by the day that 'a city or house divided against itself will not stand' (Mt 12:25). No amount of 'spin doctoring' to convey an impression of 'peace' can hide the fact that 'there is no peace' (Jer 6:13).

Among members and supporters of RA, there is a mixture of weariness of heart, firmness of resolve and uncertainty about strategy. Some friends are sceptical because the UC name is 'shop soiled.' Here are some of their comments: 'It seems to me that the UC is now in a situation which cannot be redeemed.' But 'If we just move on one by one or couple by couple, the "body" loses out.' 'If the UC ceases to be the church and becomes a "corporate sponsor for theological opinion" will we be happy with our gains? That might help us find a niche in an apostate church but at the end of the day what have we accomplished?'

The issues are becoming more urgent by the day, as ministers, congregations and members consider their place in, and responsibility for, the life of the UCA. Should we stay and fight within the present structures (strand 1) or leave to join more 'evangelical' groups (strand 3)? Should we form alternative networks within the UCA (strand 2)? Should we graciously separate from the UCA (Resolution 8, 2004; PCUSA)?

Discussion of various strategies will be a major part of our conference as we consider our calling to be witnesses to our LJC in our own time in conformity with the faith of the ecumenical Church.

First, we must attend to fundamental theological and ecclesiological issues. What beliefs and practices are of the 'substance' of the faith? What does it mean 'to live and work within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church' and 'adhere to the BU' so as to 'allow for difference of

opinion in matters which do not enter into the substance of the faith' (BU after 14(d). And what is to be done if or when a Church separates herself from the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church? ... Are we really faced with choosing between 'Reformation and Schism?'

Naturally, it is not the first time that the Church has faced such questions. The clash between 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy' or 'apostasy' has been a regular feature of the history of covenantal communities. The Church has suffered many 'schisms.'

There never has been, nor will there be this side of the eschaton, a perfect faith community; only communities called by the grace of God to be set apart (holy) for the sake of the nations. In the Old Covenant, prophets of the Word were opposed by false prophets on various matters of idolatry (Baal versus Yahweh), immorality (promiscuity, prostitution, homosexuality, bestiality) and injustice (corruption, oppression of the vulnerable, inhospitality). In the New Covenant, the evangelists, Paul et al battled Gnosticism, docetism, legalism and libertarianism. ... The formation and content of Scripture itself, as well as the rise of the Ecumenical Creeds (AC, NC), is the result of fierce conflicts between truth and falsehood. The Great Schism (C11th) and the Reformation (C16th) are two (of many) occasions when Christians believed that dissension necessitated separation from an (heretical) Church for the sake of the unity of the (orthodox) Church. (For other instances, see Ian Breward, 'Unity and Dissent' in *The Other Side of 84: Homosexuality and the UCA*, pp 3-5)

"Hitler had no objection to Christians who confessed that Jesus is Lord; but he was enraged when they confessed that Jesus is Lord and Hitler is not!" The 'Yes' of the Gospel entails the 'No.'

In more recent history the cause of authentic evangelical/orthodox faith has (eventually) triumphed in opposition to Slavery (Britain, USA), nazism (Germany) and apartheid (South Africa). Today, Episcopal Churches (Africa) and Confessing Movements (UK, Canada and USA) are seriously considering separation over ordination of gays.

What theological grounds exist for Christians to take the drastic step of moving from dissent to schism? What is essential to a 'Confession of Faith' on which such a decision must rest?

It is clear from decisions of recent controversies (Barmen Declaration, 1934), that the issue must be of doctrinal and ethical 'substance.' Slavery, nazism and apartheid were denounced as 'heretical' teachings-and-practices. Nowadays 'heresy' is widely regarded as the ugliest, most dangerous, word in the theological lexicon. It conjures up images of the Inquisition, the Wars of Religion, the Salem witch

trials, sectarian bigotry and intolerance. An orthodox theologian even wonders whether 'the question of heresy is askable.' (Thomas Oden, *After Modernity ... What? Agenda for Theology*, 1990, pp 154-160).

'Heresy' is derived from 'hairesis' meaning 'to choose for oneself.' Once it was a badge of dishonour; indicating novel teachings which were at odds with the received tradition and, thus, disruptive of the unity of the One Church. Today, it is a badge of honour worn by advocates of post-Christian 'orthodoxy' (self-styled 'progressivists') whose creed is tolerance of diverse spiritualities and moral relativism. Now, the orthodox are said to be disruptive! It is a pity that the original meaning has been subverted. 'Orthodoxy' actually encourages enlargement of our understanding, but not falsification of the Apostolic Faith. 'There was never anything so perilous or so exciting as orthodoxy, nothing so sane and so thrilling' (Dorothy Sayers, quoted by C.F Allison, *The Cruelty of Heresy*, 1994 p 11). The 'romance of orthodoxy' (GK Chesterton) is found in its ability to elicit in us a sense of mystery-and-acceptance. It is not 'something heavy, humdrum and safe.' In contrast, 'heresy' is a 'cruel deception' because it 'panders to the most unworthy tendencies of the human heart' (Allison) and 'narrows the church' (Chesterton).

What theological grounds exist for Christians to take the drastic step of moving from dissent to schism? What is essential to a 'Confession of Faith' on which such a decision must rest?

Yet, mustn't we also say that 'heresy is permitted by the grace of God in order that the true faith may be reflected in the light of its false expressions.' (Oden, 158-9) Christian teaching and practice is invigorated by clarification of the truth in the face of error. ... This must be kept in mind as we further consider our response to R84. Heresy reminds us that 'all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God' and, also, that God's mercy is not to be mocked. In Scripture God's judgment on (unrighteous and self-righteous) behaviour is accompanied by his mercy and patience (Ezekiel 37:15f; 1 Sam 12:19f; Lk 23:39f; John 8:1f; 1 Cor 6:9:1f).

What, then, must we say and do to uphold orthodoxy in the present situation in the UCA? What must we do to be a Confessing Movement?

Protestants usually associate 'confession' with 'sins.' Yet, it is more properly used to indicate 'acknowledgement' of what God has done for us all.' In the Ecumenical Creeds, BU etc, we 'confess' // 'acknowledge' // 'affirm' // 'recognise' // 'witness to' the redeeming love of God in Christ. We 'assent' to what has been accomplished on our behalf. ... Thus confession forms an integral part of our regular worship in continuity with the whole Church and becomes necessary at particular times of crisis (turn-

ing point) when the apostolic tradition must be clarified or reaffirmed.

What, then, should be the marks of a Confessing Church? (See, for example, 'The Nature of a Confession of Faith' in AC Cochrane's *The Church's Confession under Hitler*.)

A Confessing Church confesses the lordship of Jesus Christ, 'as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture.' It affirms that he is the unity of the old and new covenants (as in the RA motion on sexuality). It rejects the idea that there are other sources of knowing God's will through (unaided) reason and (direct) experience of human culture.

A Confessing Church is concerned about specific matter(s) in the church's doctrine and life which threaten the 'evangelical substance' of the Christian faith. What a Confessing Church says and does bears definite implications for concrete social and political issues. It has an ethical character in being 'a witness to Christ before the church and the world.'

A Confessing Church claims to be the (exclusive) church of JC ('one, holy, catholic, apostolic') against the claims of the (inclusive) church. It claims that 'there is no salvation outside the one, true church.' (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*) 'The daring of a Confessing Church lies in its claim to be the true church. Its authenticity is reflected in the willingness of its confessors to venture and to stand by this stupendous claim' (Cochrane, 186, 192).

'It speaks for the whole church to the whole church. Its ecumenicity is grounded in the one Lord and the one faith attested in Scripture and given to the whole church (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol 1/2, 622f). In speaking of unity being 'grievously imperilled'/'threatened,' and its theological basis being 'continually and systematically thwarted and rendered ineffective by alien principles' (186-7), it seeks to re-call the church to unity of faith, love, and hope grounded in Jesus Christ.

A Confessing Church invariably provokes opposition from the false church and from the world precisely because in its witness to God's free grace for all peoples it constitutes a radical attack upon the false church and the world' (210).

Confessors must submit to lies, half truths, ridicule, slander about 'uncharitableness' etc. It is marginalised as 'an interesting point of view' (211). "Then the tolerance of the world becomes the most terrible weapon of its intolerance" (Barth).

A Confessing Church rejects false doctrine-and-ethics, but only for the sake of the positive affirmation! "Hitler had no objection to Christians who confessed that Jesus is Lord; but he was enraged when they confessed that Jesus is Lord and Hitler is not!" The 'Yes' of the Gospel entails the 'No.'

'To spare them the anathema would be neither loving nor truthful. The anathema ought not to be exercised rashly or self-righteously. But if we do not

have the confidence to say, 'We condemn,' if we still want to indulge in innocuous, sweet-sounding affirmation that can neither give offence nor engender strong loyalties then it is a sure sign that we are not ready to confess at all (Cochrane, 211).

A Confessing Church acknowledges its own complicity in the apostasy of the church. 'Confession of guilt' (as Dietrich Bonhoeffer notes in his *Ethics*) which accepts one's solidarity in sin with the whole church (in a specific instance) and summons people to responsible action is a necessary part of genuine confession. 'The true story of the church in Germany is not an unrelieved epic of faith and courage; it is to a large extent a sad tale of betrayal, timidity, and unbelief. Even among those most faithful to the gospel, there were "none righteous, no, not one."' (Cochrane, 16)

A Confessing Church must ask whether it is concerned with a *status confessionis* (like slavery, nazism and apartheid) or merely wants to protect its particular 'confession' against another 'confession' (egs Lutheran vs Roman Catholic; Evangelical vs Liberal).

The implications for the present situation

RA argues that R84 is not only a serious departure from the faith of the church but a fundamental breach of the covenant fidelity within which the UCA has promised to live. It is a matter requiring a *status confessionis*.

This (outrageous) claim must be defended, particularly to supporters of R84 who (genuinely) believe that a truly Confessing Church which claims to be the One Church, must be committed to accepting people who are engaged in homosexual behaviour with the compassion and justice of Christ. It is argued that, as the church has changed its beliefs and practices on slavery etc, so, too, it should now change on homosexuality. As the One (true) Church does not discriminate against slaves blacks (apartheid, Australia), migrants (White Australia), women (ordination), the disabled and Jews, it should not discriminate against homosexuals. Thus, the approval of committed homosexual relations is, for them, a *status confessionis*!

This argument, however, is flawed because it is based on a false analogy. It is strongly rejected by black church leaders, like Baptist Bishop Paul Morton (New Orleans): "You insult African-Americans when you say that this is a civil rights issue." ... "I can't change the colour of my skin, but you can change your lifestyle." The Rev Talbot Swan (Mass) said, "This is not a civil rights issue; it is a moral issue." (The Washington Times, 18/5/04)

Nowhere in the Bible is it said that being a woman, black, disabled or Jewish are in conflict with being part of God's good creation. Homosexuality is always said to be in that conflict. Cultural presuppositions of patriarchy and slavery in Scripture are

counterbalanced by other aspects of biblical teaching. There is no counterbalance for homosexuality! There is no element of choice in being female, Jewish, black etc. Indeed, we rightly reject the idea that they should be 'defined' by their biological condition.

No specific moral behaviour is attributable to such biological conditions. People may choose to embrace or resist their biophysical and psycho-social promptings.

Therefore, the inclusiveness required by supporters of R84 fails at the critical point to distinguish between the welcoming love of God for all sinners and the unmerited grace of Christ in forgiving sin and healing broken lives. It is not truly 'evangelical inclusiveness.'

The question of where we stand as a Confessing Church or confessing movement requires an urgent and immediate answer (at this conference). The answers we give to this central theological-ethical issue will affect the decisions we make and the strategies we devise. The theo-logic of a confessing church certainly commits RA to do everything possible to re-call the UCA to its Reformed heritage. Failing that, is it possible to reconstitute the UCA according to the Basis of Union, as set out in RA Objectives?

As sinners who are justified by God's grace through faith in Christ, we can be members of a Church in which various heresies (of doctrine and ethics) exist. In that situation, error is (theoretically) open to correction by orthodox teaching. When, however, heresy is officially endorsed as if it were 'orthodox' by the National Assembly of a Church whose 'confession of faith' (Basis of Union) commits her to membership of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, we must resist the resultant apostasy.

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A critical issue for a 'confessing faith' is whether the confessors are seeking to secure an evangelical, reformed or orthodox 'niche' in the UCA, thereby tacitly acknowledging that the UCA still belongs to the ecumenical Church, or are we re-calling the UCA to the ecumenical family from which, by virtue of R84, it has divorced itself?

A truly confessing church does not act in the name of 'an orthodox party' (185-6). It is disturbing that most congregations which have left the UCA (strand 3) have stood alone as 'community churches' or joined pietistic-Biblicist networks whose confessions of faith 'narrow' the faith of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. ... The attraction of these networks seems to stem, in part, from a strong but

mistaken view among some RA members that R84 has come about because the UCA has a weak doctrine of Scripture (BU, para 5).

In the decisions taken at this RA conference, we must decide whether we are serious about being a confessing church or an 'evangelical ginger group.' Can the UCA be reconstituted according to the Basis of Union? Can RA continue to work 'within the UCA' (Constitution)? Should RA establish a confessing church within the UCA? If so, in what form? And what, in each scenario, are the theological, legal and property implications for congregations, ministers and lay people?

The issue confronting us, and the UCA as a whole, is nicely summed up in these acute observations. 'What disturbs our critics more than that we should leave is that we should stay.' (Oden) Can 'two faiths embrace one future?' (*Lay Committee, Presbyterian Church of USA*)

Causes and healing of homosexuality

Mrs. Whitehead gave a power point presentation at the 2005 Conference. It is summarised below :

Between the ages of 26 and 40 I tended to get into emotionally dependent relationships with men old enough to be my father. I seemed powerless to stop these happening or to end them. They were serial, deeply ingrained over years, and life-dominating. I knew no way out. As a writer I began a biography of a former gay man, but was confronted with my own total lack of empathy and compassion. This was when God began my own healing process.

As I researched homosexuality and its causes I began to understand the causes of my own intense connections to certain sorts of men. The process took about four years. I discovered God to be the healer of a large male love deficit, and that persons with same-sex attraction to be my brothers and sisters. We shared the same desperate drive to fill the deficit with a person uniquely suited to the shape of it – a particular sort of chemistry that the homosexual person knows all about but also doesn't understand.

At some point I realised that the racy biography I had planned to write about a former gay man had been replaced by a book of considerably more depth and wisdom – as if God had said to me, "Now you know what you're talking about, write." The result was *Craving for Love, Relationship addiction, homosexuality and the God who heals*, an attempt to explain what causes homosexuality, and quite a bit about the healing process, while showing that many heterosexual problems have similar origins and recovery paths.

I traced the general origins of homosexuality, fleshing them out with individual case histories I knew of. For a better appreciation of causes and cases read *Craving for Love*, and Dr. N. E. Whitehead's book, *My Genes Made me do it – a scientific look at sexual orientation*. (www.mygenes.co.nz)

I read a small parable I wrote called "The Pit", from *Craving for Love*, which puts a few things in a nutshell.

THE PIT

(Dedicated to those who struggle homosexually.)

A man fell into a pit and couldn't get himself out. Respectable people came along and said: "We don't associate with pit-dwellers." An empathist came along and said: "I really feel for you in that pit."

A sociobiologist came along and said: "You were born in your pit:"

A psychiatrist came along and said: "It can be very destructive to remove people from pits they were born in." A psychologist came along and said: "Accept your pit, that way you'll be happy."

A gay activist came along and said: "Fight for the right to stay in your pit:"

A politician came along and said: "Discrimination against pits is illegal."

A researcher came along and said: "What an interesting pit."

A religious fundamentalist came along and said: "You deserve your pit."

A religious liberal came along and said: "Your pit is God's beautiful gift to you."

A charismatic came along and said: "Just confess you're not in that pit."

His mother came along and said: "It's your father's fault you're in that pit."

His father came along and said: "It's your mother's fault you're in that pit."

His wife came along and said: "It's all my fault you're in that pit."

But Jesus, seeing the man, loved him, and reaching into the pit put his arms around him and pulled him out.

(From Briar Whitehead, *Craving for Love, Relationship addiction, homosexuality and the God who heals*, pp. 87-88, Monarch Books, UK, 2003)

R84 shatters multicultural UC harmony

Thriving migrant congregations report that shock and dismay followed the 10th Assembly which reopened debate on ordination of active homosexuals without earlier notification, then moved to permit such ordinations if presbyteries so decide.

Statements by Korean, Chinese and Tongan national bodies within the Uniting Church indicate that they reject homosexuality on biblical and cultural

grounds after years of debate on sexuality. There is strong cultural resistance to open discussion of the issues. Typical comments include the following :
“In Tamil culture it is not the practice to speak of sexual matters like this”.

“Culturally, discussion of sexuality is taboo among Chinese, let alone homosexuality”. “We do not discuss such things in our Samoan culture”.

During the 10th Assembly Mrs Kalo Fotu said “same sex relationships are not acceptable in Tongan culture and in Tonga, culture and faith are so intertwined it is difficult to tell the difference”. Dr Jovili Meo, who translated the materials from the 10th Assembly for the Fijian community said “In Fijian these words are rarely spoken and almost never written down, usually it is just rejected outright without any discussion or listening to any other points of view”.

This means that migrant communities have faced great difficulties in the ongoing debate within the church. Concerned to retain their place in a church that has made them welcome, ethnic congregations nevertheless are unable to take the step of affirming leadership by gay and lesbian people. They are aware that their wider ethnic communities could identify them with a church that allows practising homosexuals to be ministers and deacons.

*“We see possible division ahead.
We do not want this to happen,
because we love the hospitality the
Uniting Church offers in Christ to
all cultures.”*

The Rev Benyamin Susilo says Resolution 84 has caused a crisis in trust in the whole leadership of the Uniting Church. Many migrant communities have experienced being uprooted and have a deep need for stability and affirmation of their identity. Christian faith based on their belief in the authority of the Bible gives a sense of security and belonging which is threatened by R84. Anger, confusion and a sense of loss have been the result.

Ministers serving migrant congregations have a demanding role as community leaders and are held in high regard. They are expected to model ideal family life, and uphold cultural values and traditions in every way. People from many migrant backgrounds cannot consider homosexual people as fit role models.

The Cook Island Christian Church (CICC) sees marriage as a prerequisite for successful ministry so that practising homosexuals could not be considered for ministry. Debate in Australia has led some overseas churches to encourage people to ‘stay put in the Uniting church and keep struggling with the issues’. Other ‘home churches’ have expressed disapproval by not encouraging students studying in Australia to join Uniting Church congregations.

A gathering of the Methodist Committee of

Congregations of the Pacific in April 2004 reaffirmed that it would : respect the position taken by each Church, respect any agreements about homosexuality made between churches represented in the MCCP, and express pastoral concern for the people who originally came from another Methodist or United Church in the Pacific, bearing in mind the decisions of their home Church in regard to homosexuality.

Thanks to R84, some energy and impetus for multicultural ministry has suffered in the past few years. Some ministers serving migrant communities have been concerned that the Uniting Church now has a reputation of being the “gay church” and additional strain has been placed on them as they try to counter negative attitudes and criticism from others in their community. Some migrant leaders are worried about what this means for the future growth and development of their ministry and mission and have lost pride in belonging to the Uniting Church.

There is diversity of views in the multicultural network, but most migrant congregations strongly believe that homosexuality stands outside what God intends and goes against what the Bible teaches. No study has been done to determine if second generation young people think differently from their parents.

The Parish of Balkara in Victoria includes English speaking Tamil and Cook Islander congregations and states that “having a homosexual minister within the presbytery or parish would place untenable strain on our relationships together”. The parish ministry team says “the parish would not accept a minister of the Word who was in a same gender relationship.”

Some congregations believe R84 is a compromise with biblical truth and are seriously considering whether they can stay in the Uniting Church. Mulgrave Indonesian UC congregation (Victoria) has informed the Assembly that 25 of their congregation of 150 have left, feeling ashamed to be members of the Uniting Church.

Some congregations have asked the Assembly to rescind R84. They want a clear policy against ordination of people in same sex relationships. Depending on the outcome of the next Assembly some will consider leaving the Uniting Church, despite the trauma of severing ties with the UCA. Other congregations may not physically leave but emotionally and in practical terms do not feel part of the UCA.

Some have appreciated the church’s acceptance, openness and welcome and hope for a way through a difficult debate. They will not leave the UCA as long as their position is respected and there is no attempt to force them to change their beliefs. They know the final decision on calling a minister rests with a congregation and trust the process of call through congregations and presbyteries. This has helped allay their fears. These congregations, not without difficulty, are trying to understand and live with the implications of R84.

Opponents of R84 includes the Council of Korean Churches (July 2003) which affirmed that “the homosexual relationship is not biblically correct” and “we do not accept gay people to become leaders in the church.” It was signed by the council chairman (Rev. K.H.Lee) and all Korean ministers.

Ethnic congregations in Victoria and Tasmania declared in August 2003 that R84 was “not acceptable to most ethnic congregations.” They stated “Our understanding of Christian discipleship with our experience of many cultures makes it very difficult to accept this kind of Uniting Church leadership... We are generally not willing to accept the notion of ‘right relationships’ as it now stands, though some of us are better able to live in the tension this notion creates, than others.” The statement added : “We see possible division ahead. We do not want this to happen, because we love the hospitality the Uniting Church offers in Christ to all cultures.”

The UCA Chinese National Conference in March 2004 heard presentations on the Uniting Church polity and code of ethics. Delegates shared the deep pain and sense of confusion relating to the possibility of ordination of practising homosexuals and unanimously stated that in accordance with Roman 1: 26–27 and 1 Cor. 6: 9–10, “the Bible clearly tells us: homosexual behaviour is a sin. We unreservedly accept the biblical teaching ...” “We firmly oppose the ordination of practising homosexual persons to the ministry of God.”

The Tongan National Conference 1998 affirmed that “homosexual practice is contrary to the teaching of the Scripture and the historic church, that those who advocate through promotion and practice of any homosexual lifestyle or behaviour contrary to the Scripture will be deemed unfit for Church leadership and that self-avowed practising homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates into ordained ministry or appointed to any positions of leadership”.

HEALING SEMINARS

Following the decision of the 2005 National Conference two seminars on sexual brokenness have been held at Nowra and Sydney. More than sixty attended the Nowra meeting organised by the Order of St Luke and promoted by RA. Twenty two took part in the seminar at Wesley Mission, Sydney, with Pastor Ron Brookman leading on both occasions. His caring, pastoral and informative approach was greatly appreciated. At Nowra a wide range of areas was covered that are not normally discussed in church circles. The Sydney seminar focussed on homosexuality. Further seminars are planned for 2006, including Adelaide and Brisbane.

Briar Whitehead’s address to the National Conference 2005

A healing community is God’s calling to us

Briar Whitehead’s vision: a church strong and compassionate

I believe God asked me to share this vision with the conference. I was very nervous about doing so because I came here knowing next to nothing about the Alliance. I had been asked to speak on homosexuality only. However, the day before I was to speak I woke early with very clear impression that God was asking me to share a vision I had had about five years before – which I had rarely spoken of to anyone. I reconstruct it as faithfully as I can.

In the vision I was standing very close to a figure wearing ecclesiastical clothing: robes. The person was male. Suddenly something best described as a giant meat cleaver came swiftly between us, out of the air above us. It came with such force that the man and I were thrown metres apart. As I regained my footing and looked at the space between us, a block of concrete appeared. As I looked at the block of concrete it grew quickly into a church building. It was made of stone and made me think of a typical small parish church in England. It had a belfry. It seemed neat and tidy. It was on the same side as the man wearing the ecclesiastical clothing. Essentially it had come between us, but the man wearing the ecclesiastical clothing was identified with it. As I looked at the man he raised his arms and began to flex them. He began to laugh. It was not the laughter of a person enjoying a joke. It was the laughter of someone powerful who did not doubt his power for an instant.

*Homosexuality in leadership.
Same-sex marriage rites in the church. Unchallenged homosexuality in the pews. I believe God is now forcing the issue with the church.*

In the vision I seemed to shrink into a tiny person who slunk from the scene. I was made to feel I was entirely to blame, that it (this division or whatever it was) was all my fault and that I was an object of pity. It was a terrible feeling: guilt, fear, powerlessness, confusion. As I cast round desperately for something I found I had my arm around the cross. It was the cross of Christ. I prayed : “God, stay close to me, and keep me close to you.” As I stayed with my arm around the cross it began to grow upwards. It went very high, and I went up with it. I looked down at one point and found that the landscape was now well below me as if I were viewing it from thousands of feet up. The church I had earli-

er seen had become a tiny building – like a child’s toy – but the cross I was attached to was filling the scene.

I did not attempt to interpret the vision. I left that to the Holy Spirit and to conference attendees.

However, I found something coming together in my head on the night before I was to speak, with the same sense that God wanted me to say these words. I read these words as an interpretation but I hesitate to say that. Here they are:

Homosexuality in leadership. Same-sex marriage rites in the church. Unchallenged homosexuality in the pews. I believe God is now forcing the issue with the church. We want to preserve the unity of the church. I say God is dividing/judging the church. He is dividing it because he is building His Church.

The issue is wider than homosexuality per se but I think God is using homosexuality as the defining issue because in some way this reaches into the reflection in us of the essence and nature of God in a way no other issue does. We are not just incidentally male and female; male and female go to the heart of what we are. He is not going to permit us to deface his image, by saying this reversal of things has his blessing. But I think he is also drawing the line here because he is wanting to show us again what redemption is meant to do in the lives of his followers. And he wants the world to know that the name of Jesus means Rescuer and that our world and our sexuality and our understanding of masculinity and femininity are desperately in need of rescuing.

It is the nature of homosexual activism, which is driven by profound needs for love, acceptance and, often, by addiction, to take ground wherever there is not a strong “No!” It recruits, and it finds easy converts among those who have forgotten or perhaps never known the power of Jesus Christ the redeemer. It finds converts because it uses the right religious language – social justice, tolerance, respect, acceptance. And we are accepted in Jesus Christ. He loves us as we are, but he doesn’t want us to stay where we are. If we say “yes” to homosexuality we fail those caught in it.

In a sense - whether congregations represented here dissociate from the Uniting Church or not – is not the point because you belong to the Kingdom of God. The point is that the Uniting Church has got to make a decision one way or the other on the issue of homosexuality, because God is requiring it. God is forcing a distinction between the Body of Christ and the merely institutional church. If the UC embraces homosexuality then you will become part of a nominal church, an irrelevancy in the Kingdom of God, increasingly indistinguishable from a charity or a club of do-gooders. If you say, “No, homosexuality is something that our God of great love and power can redeem,” and you hold out the word of Life, and you become a healing community,

then you will find yourself within the Body of Christ and the Holy Spirit will be with you.

The critical issue is that if you DO separate on this issue then you MUST become a healing community for those who are caught in the behaviour you reject. Brian Hill talked about angry and thunderous responses from the RA, emanating from righteousness and self-righteousness, which did not move your critics but rather alienated the confused.

What is better is that your strength of feeling on this issue be balanced by the steady development of compassion and understanding that will make you a healing community for people with a homosexual orientation. What I think I detect here is a willingness to do that.

Relating sexuality to theology and Bible

Continuing Doug Jones’ paper on the Gospel, Church and Sexuality presented at the RA conference, July 2004.

Recent debate has raised the profoundly difficult but fundamentally important issue of how the church understands human experience, how that understanding relates to the church’s pneumatology, and how those, in turn, inform the whole theological enterprise. If, as Luke Timothy Johnson contends, the church “is called to discern the work of God in human lives and to adapt its self-understanding in response to the work of God” (*Theology and Sexuality* 2002, 372), how is that to be done? How is the church to deal with claims to the work of God in human experience that contradict Scripture and tradition?

In terms of theological method, the UCA has, at least in its official reports, accepted homosexual orientation or identity and, more recently, (it could be argued) homosexual behaviour, as “givens” and has proceeded to engage the Scriptures with those “givens”, particularly the former, as more or less non-negotiable. Where does that lead hermeneutically and theologically? It leads to novel and imaginative readings of the Scriptures.

These “givens” needs to be revisited by the UCA if it is to do justice to the complexity of the human condition, the reality of sin which impacts upon individuals, churches and the society at large, and produces all sorts of distorting and destructive identities and influences, and to deal with the available scientific and psychological knowledge with honesty and integrity. What evidence is currently available from scientists, psychologists and sociologists in relation to the emergence of sexual identity? In that process, the church needs to do careful “exegesis” of the “evidence” and opinions of researchers in the fields of biology and genetics as there is clearly evi-

dence that these fields of research have themselves become, to varying degrees, polarised (sometimes because of *a priori* commitments). To be fair to the whole process, such research should also take into account research into heterosexual orientation, identity and behaviour.

Charis, Call, Charismata, Character and Conduct

God is free to be gracious, to call and to bestow gifts upon any person God chooses. The Spirit blows where it wills. However, because God calls and gifts a person does not mean that that person's character is wholly conformed to the gospel, nor his or her conduct wholly consistent with the will of God. Recognition of a person's call should never be confused with legitimation of his or her conduct.

Consequently, the church must discern a person's call to ministry and distinguish between his or her gifts, morality and psychological makeup (or, to express it slightly differently, between charisms, conduct and character) of persons called to ministry. Persons may have gifts that would equip them well for ministry. That does not necessarily mean that their morality is consequently acceptable. Nevertheless, it is not to be doubted that the Holy Spirit is active in the lives of those whom God calls to ministry, nor is it to be questioned that the Holy Spirit is in the process of sanctifying those called to ministry, even when there is evidence of sin in their lives, for God does not call us because we have attained sinless perfection. God calls us because God is gracious.

Sexual rights?

Is sexual expression a 'right' and has the language and understanding of rights influenced our current debate? The report *Uniting Sexuality and Faith* caricatured some of the Old Testament teaching on human sexual expression as 'copulate or perish', but it needs to be asked whether the spirit of the age suggests that the popular approach to the expression of human sexuality is 'copulate or perish'. Suggestions of discipline and restraint in relation to human sexuality in obedience to the gospel stand in some tension with an emphasis on the 'rights' of persons to sexual intimacy.

It is argued by some that people have the right to experience and express sexual intimacy in homosexual relationship. A "Letter to the Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons" offers a different perspective when it states:

"What, then, are homosexual persons to do who seek to follow the Lord? Fundamentally, they are called to enact the will of God in their life by joining whatever sufferings and difficulties they experience in virtue of their condition to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross. That Cross, for the believer, is a fruitful sacrifice since from that death come life and

redemption. While any call to carry the cross or to understand a Christian's suffering in this way will predictably be met with bitter ridicule by some, it should be remembered that this is the way to eternal life for all who follow Christ."

Acknowledging the particular emphasis of the Roman Catholic Church should not blind us to the fact that this represents an approach that is vastly different from a 'rights' based approach.

Right relationships or teleological equivalence?

Are homosexual relationships morally equivalent to marriage? Are they teleologically equivalent? That is, do they have the same purpose or end? If all relationships in the Christian community are to be informed by the gospel, to participate in the communion of the Holy Spirit, and thus to be doxological, is the telos ('purpose' or 'end') of both marriage and same-gender relationships. How does one deal with the dimension of procreancy that is unique to the marriage relationship? Is there a telos that relates to the salvific purpose of God, that is, a telos that is common to all relationships between Christians, and another telos that relates to the creative purpose of God that is unique to those who are married?

How is the issue of human sexuality and its expression to be understood in light of the doctrines of creation, sin and salvation (justification and sanctification)? What is the God-given telos or purpose of sexually explicit relationships? What makes 'right relationships' 'right', and what is the God-given purpose of such relationships? Are same-sex relationships morally equivalent to traditional marriage between a man and a woman? If so, are they also teleologically equivalent? In what ways? If they are not teleologically equivalent, in what sense are they 'right'?

How are the doctrines of creation and salvation to be understood in relation to each other? In 20th century Old Testament study, the relationship between these two doctrines was not insignificant. One scholar, Gerhard von Rad (*The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation in The Problem of the Hexateuch and other Essays*, London: SCM; 1984, 142) wrote:

"Our main thesis was that in genuinely Yahwistic belief the doctrine of creation never attained to the stature of a relevant, independent doctrine. We found it invariably related, and indeed subordinated, to soteriological considerations.

That is, belief in God as Creator arose out of and was understood only in the context of belief in God as Saviour. How does the Christian church understand the relationship between its belief in God as Saviour and God as Creator? Is salvation the 'dominant' doctrine through which all other doctrines, including creation are to be understood? What is the relation of the old creation and its ordinances

("Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." Gen 1) to the new creation?"

Slaves, women and homosexuals

Homosexuality as an issue is not equivalent to the church's debate about slaves and women. Ulrich Mauser from Princeton Theological Seminary, in a debate held in 1994 with Walter Wink on the topic 'The Bible and Homosexuality' had this to say:

"The modern dispute about homosexuality in the Church has produced the argument that we must be open to change. Church history demonstrates that it is necessary, from time to time, to re-evaluate time-honoured traditions and to alter accustomed positions. It is often said that the abolition of slavery and the recognition of women as fully equal partners with men are issues in which Bible-supported positions had to be given up. Against this claim it must be kept in mind that, first, nowhere in Old or New testament is it indicated that being a member of a given race, or being a woman, is in conflict with being a part of God's good creation, but homosexuality is said to be in that conflict. And, second, while both slavery and patriarchal society are presuppositions in much biblical literature, they are counterbalanced by other aspects of Biblical teaching which have been used successfully by advocates of the abolition of slavery and of women's rights; but no such counterbalance exists in the Bible concerning homosexuality. In regard to homosexual activity there is no biblical evidence which might soften the unambiguous stand adopted in the Bible."

Next: Contested interpretations of Romans 1.

YOUR HELP NEEDED

Fund raising is a high priority for RA members in the next three months. Considerable expense is involved in legal fees, Assembly planning, administrative and pastoral support, media liaison, a support team of ten to twelve people at the Assembly.

Please consider making a donation to RA before Christmas, so that sufficient financial support is available to implement the policies of the 2005 Conference in the lead up to Assembly.

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Continuing A.N.Whitehead's 2005 Conference paper on 'Why gay activists act'

Violence against people who exit the gay life style

You will all be aware of the consecration of Bishop Gene Robinson in the Episcopal Church of the USA. He lives with a male partner and divorced his wife to do so. Reactions from the third world have been very strong, and the Kenyan church has recently severed links with its North American counterpart, and the world-wide communion has at least condemned the action as not having consensus.

The proponents have been typical in their actions – they push every law or boundary that exists and transgress all norms in the name of justice. They will continue to do so, because they are seeing successes. Appeals to back off will have nil effect. In other words we face an extreme activism so committed to change of this type that any effective response by us is going to be either extremely bloody or our response will be overwhelmed by continued pressure.

Let us look quickly at the standards adopted implicitly in the Episcopalian Church. A form of marriage between two gays is possible in the US in the State of Massachusetts, I am informed. Bishop Robinson has not taken this option up with his lover. Even if you accepted that such a "marriage" was OK, they would still be "living in sin". Hence at a press conference after the ordination a journalist asked "So if I'm divorced, and living unmarried with a heterosexual partner, I can now be a bishop?" There was general laughter from the journalists. The clergy fumbled and said they would be rather unhappy with that. In the midst of more laughter the press conference was hastily closed. In other words there were now either grossly inconsistent double standards, or no standards. Allowing this allows anything. Yes, it is a kind of line in the sand. If you do not stand here, you will not stand at all.

Types of Activists

There are three groups among "gay activists". Parents/relatives/friends of those with SSA, secondly theological liberals, thirdly gay people who have not seen any change in their own lives.

Relatives

When a parent or relative hears someone has SSA, he may be intensely shocked on several levels. In such a state he is vulnerable, and the gay/lesbian person or others in the lifestyle often supply propaganda to convince him that Gay is Good. This is a kind of conversion process, which can transform a

parent into a fervent advocate of gays and supporter of their lifestyle. Some of your opposition will come from such people. People can profoundly modify their theology in the light of what has happened to them personally. I have not had to personally encounter such people more than briefly, so will not comment further.

Liberals

Liberals have superb empathy. Very likely more than you have. They have often, because of their sympathetic personalities, encountered far more people with SSA than you have, and have really felt for the difficulties SSA people have. They tend to say "There can't be anything wrong with SSA, always subject of course to the law of love." They have heard the heartrending stories of those who have tried to change and failed, and they have become righteously indignant about any attacks on such people, theologically, legally, or personally. There is sometimes quite remarkable hatred against those who do not agree.

Fifteen years ago I was associated with a group in Lower Hutt, near Wellington, New Zealand, which was run by a man, Noel, who had changed immensely from being a political gay activist, to being married. Hate was shown in the group's interaction with a local Anglican minister. They sent that minister, and others, an introduction to the group, and stated that change was possible for gays/lesbian. There was a phone call from the minister. Noel said almost nothing, but the minister poured into the ears of Noel an extraordinary tirade of bad language and abuse. This subject can arouse violent reactions.

Alongside this, many are convinced by the half-baked idea that homosexuality is innate and immutable. It is a theological and ethical fallacy to think that this has anything to do with whether something is right or wrong, but the popular view became "They are born this way – surely God would not be so cruel? It must be ethically OK." That fallacy is called the naturalistic fallacy – "what is, is right". The fallacious nature of it may be seen in the following example. If Hitler had genes which unavoidably caused him to want to wipe out the Jews, would it have been right because he was born that way? Of course not. Sin is mainly determined by other things.

Alongside this, many liberals come across acquaintances who have failed in altering their SSA. They are often in the church, and their stories make horrifying reading. What do you feel like when you are aware of very strong SSA feelings and are condemned from the pulpit and you cannot change? Dreadful at best, suicidal at worst. Many of these folk had tried with all their might to change for years, by any route they could find, quite often including therapy (though this option dried up). Their views would be summed up in the statement "If there was a way out of this thing, I would have found it – I've tried everything, taken the best

advice, from Christian and therapeutic fields".

Encountering this, many in the church are impressed by the struggle, sincerity and lack of progress. Often they have had a radical rethink, concluding that change is impossible, and that church attitudes and tradition must be wrong, or at least unloving.

Alongside this is the falsely exalted status given to love as an ethical norm. Note carefully that the Apostle Paul who promulgated this standard, uses it – but also uses alongside it a variety of ways of determining what ought to be done. For example in I Corinthians he says the reason a Christian ought not be joined to a prostitute is that it is the wrong pattern, the wrong image, quite inappropriate. **When Paul talks about sexual problems other than in the context of marriage he never uses love as a standard.** Isn't that curious? Whether he loves her is not the most important factor. Love is not the only standard. Love is not enough!

SSA Activists

Hurt people hurt people. I have seen several examples now of people involved in a group called Evangelicals Concerned. They seem to hold a conference in the US each year with several hundred present. In all but their sex life and sexual orientation they are traditional evangelicals. However they often believe that SSA is innate and immutable. They struggle mightily to reconcile scripture with their experience. Different outcomes occur. Some cannot believe the various versions of gay theology they hear, and remain puzzled and conflicted. Others embrace a version of gay theology and are convinced that fellow evangelicals need to understand how natural gay sex is.

Thus experience overrides scripture.

Noel placed an ad in a local newspaper which ran every Saturday night and read something like "Homosexual? Change is possible. Ring 5654444". This is a very simple ad and perhaps mildly irritating to some, you might think. But it triggered a campaign by the gay community to close down Noel and his group. They were subjected to a barrage of calls all evening, every evening by gay activists, many very obscene, many extremely hate-filled, many trying to undermine his marriage. Quite a number of death threats were among them. This went on for seven months. The phone company would do nothing, even on intervention from a member of parliament, until threat of media exposure of their failure to respond triggered a response within 24 hours, which resulted in netting one student who just escaped criminal conviction because of his age.

Why this violent response to such an innocuous ad? Because to say it is possible to choose to change is one of the most threatening things you can say to a gay person. I believe that is so basic to the Christian message that the very foundations are being tested.

Why is this activism so insistent and transgressive? It is fuelled by a profound insistence on the part of those with same-sex attraction that 'I will follow my

same-sex attraction regardless'. This is the idolatry described by Paul in Romans 1. Jesus calls us to something horrifyingly lethal – if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. He would go further – if your mind or genes push you towards sin, fight it. In part, what we encounter in gay activism is an addiction. This is strenuously denied, but it is commonplace. What else can we call it when HIV transmission routes are universally known but many gay people neglect precautions? In New Zealand we are seeing AIDS at a higher level than ever, after several years where sense prevailed and the cases diminished. Same sex attraction is more important than life. Can this be anything else than an addiction? Many in the mental health profession call anything which seriously interferes with normal life a mental illness. By this definition, death from AIDS results from a mental illness. By the strange standards of the mental health profession, however, it is only technically a mental illness if it worries the client.

I have observed the greatest hatred for traditional standards does not come from those who have formed a theological opinion about the rights and wrongs of acting on same sex attraction, but from those who have tried to change and failed. They are vehement that change cannot happen for anyone else and that people who claim change are faking or lying. They cross-question to an inordinate and invasive degree anyone who claims to have changed. They demand a level of change and of proof which is unreasonable and would not be asked in any other field.

I have talked to dozens who have made all sorts of degrees of change, and it is certainly real even if often partial. It is certainly not, in most cases, white-knuckle heterosexuality. But this means that *anyone claiming to have changed will be subjected to an intense attack in a way a reforming alcoholic never is*. It is not fair to expose those who are trying to change to this type of hostility. It would be just as unfair to expose a fragile AA member to prolonged and hostile interrogation by a strong sceptic of AA methods. Only those who have been out of the scene a long time and are stable should be exposed to such hostility. That will often mean 5-10 years of stability before public testimony.

Part of the reason for such disbelief is that activists rarely encounter anyone who has changed or controlled same-sex attraction. And yet statistical surveys show that even in this room there are half a dozen who were once convinced they were gay, (probably as teenagers) but totally changed their mind. They never talk about it. That is natural. No-one on the path of Christ wants to admit he wandered off it. *I estimate that there is a huge closet of ex-gays that is maybe half the size of the gay closet.*

NEXT : Change is possible.

(Editorial continued from p. 1)

or taking other action which may be deemed necessary. RA's 2005 Conference resolution on sexuality, intended for Assembly debate, has gained support in several presbyteries and one Synod.

The RA is not the cause of disunity, contrary to a widely-held view. It wants the church to make a clear statement on sexuality in line with our rich ecumenical heritage. Its actions are designed not to make mischief but to register for posterity that not all in the Uniting Church approve of being captive to our secularised culture, or of falling asleep on our watch as guardians of the gospel.

Peter Bentley debunks political speak in the UCA

No. 1 of a series

"We need to live in the messy middle"

One of the main problems with the idea of the messy middle is that very few people in church leadership actually live there, and some have not even visited the place, even though they may say it is a great place to be. Most people take sides, even if they say they do not. I was intrigued when a minister told me that he loved being in the messy middle, because I had noted that he had been more than happy to endorse a particularly one-sided liberal proposal at a Synod meeting.

People who call others to live in the messy middle would show more consistency if they abstained in any debate on matters of defined policy, and certainly took no active part in the promotion of the more liberal alternatives in matters of sexual standards.

Abstinence is the only path for 'messy middle' people when confronted by proposals that call for a categorical position.

APOLOGY

In Reforming Newsletter September 2005, pages 8-9 an article appeared on 'Orthodox Church's No to homosexual marriage.' The article contains two serious errors. First, a quote by Archbishop Stylianos was in relation to 'the Orthodox position on ordination of homosexual persons.' He said nothing about homosexual marriage. Second, the ensuing references to a statement by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith were wrongly attributed to Archbishop Stylianos' Orthodox Church. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith exercises authority within and on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Reforming Alliance deeply regrets these serious mistakes and unreservedly apologises to Archbishop Stylianos and the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia for any embarrassment that may be caused by the inadvertent misrepresentation of his statement.