

## EDITORIAL

# A new counter-reformation in the making?

It was inevitable that a new body should emerge to counter the Reforming Alliance. Could it be that the new group (For84) regards itself as a necessary counter-reformation to preserve the peace of the church from a conservative revolt? By no means. For84 makes its appeal by promoting novel policies long espoused by the Assembly. For84 is not a counter-movement. That role belongs to the Reforming Alliance.

The Alliance opposes the view that the essence of Christianity is diversity and inclusiveness as expressed in the partnership of the Assembly and the homosexual lobby, whose reinterpretation of long-held traditions is a triumph of distortion, misinformation and cold calculation.

All indicators suggest that the counter-reformation will fail in the short term. But the long-term picture is different. Fashions come and go in society as much as in the church, and the Spirit who revives churches and infiltrates societies is not beholden to our latest insights and surest certainties.

As Mary Hawkes (President of EMU) said in her conference address on 'hope, healing and holiness', "If we have hope in the idols of people, systems and institutions, rather than in God alone, we will be disappointed. ... To be agents of change we need to be people of hope, who have found healing in Christ and

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## Rescind Resolution 84, says RA to Assembly

The Reforming Alliance has called on the Uniting Church Assembly to rescind Resolution 84 and adopt the Queensland Synod statement on sexuality. This was one of several resolutions carried at the first national conference of RA, attended by more than 130 people in Brisbane in July.

The conference also resolved:

- To provide written public responses to Resolution 84 and the forthcoming Assembly booklet on Sexuality and Leadership in the Uniting Church.
- To establish non-geographic presbyteries in as many synods as necessary to enable congregations to group together based on a common theological confession.
- To develop proposals for constitutional reform within the UCA that will ensure presbyteries and synods can refer matters they deem vital to the life of the church to congregations for ratification.
- To make reformed, orthodox and evangelical theological education available to ministry candidates and other members of the UCA.
- To reaffirm the "crucial importance" of ecumenical relationships in the hope that it will strengthen the church's commitment to the faith of the "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church."

The Reforming Alliance also decided that, if orthodox Christian reform does not occur at the 2006 Assembly, it will facilitate an amicable separation from the UCA.

Chair of the Reforming Alliance, the Rev Dr Max Champion, said the conference was a vital time of encouragement for many disenfranchised Uniting Church members who

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are living holy lives." (Her address will appear in next issue.)

Her words offer a salutary contrast to the religious tolerance and fashionable social analysis that inform many congregations, and led inevitably to Resolution 84. How could things be otherwise when, in appointing the 1992 committee to prepare the original report on sexuality, the Assembly by-passed its own commission on doctrine, ignoring the theological basis of the church's understanding of sexuality, and distorting all subsequent debate on the subject?

Notwithstanding the value or otherwise of the latest exercise in 'biblical and theological reflection' now appearing under the title **Sexuality and Leadership in the Uniting Church**, any church that adjusts its sails to prevailing social winds is headed for disaster. This is why a reforming movement is vital, not only to record dissent but to brake the church's descent into theological and scriptural incoherence.

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## Rescind Resolution 84

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have found themselves in strong disagreement with the Assembly. 'Our aim is to bring reform to the Uniting Church in conformity to the lordship of Christ, 'the one Word of God whom we must hear, trust and obey in life and death'''. (Preamble, Basis of Union)

Strong support for the conference resolutions indicates that significant numbers within the church will not accept departure from orthodox Christian doctrine and values, and will fight to preserve the integrity of the gospel as authoritatively attested in Scripture.

Sadness was expressed that it had become necessary for many evangelical and orthodox Christians to protest against recent Assembly decisions. At the same time there was hope that our unity in Christ will bring about reconciliation.

Conference members, both lay and ordained, came from every State and included Chinese, Tongan and Korean congregations and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. "It was highly significant," said Dr. Champion, "that the ethnic and Aboriginal representatives insisted that their opposition to Resolution 84 was for theological and biblical reasons, not, as is often said by others, for 'cultural reasons.'"

Dr. Champion and Mrs Mary Hawkes, national chair of EMU, spoke at a public rally.

### Conference highlights

Conference addresses are being prepared in both video/DVD and audio format for use by members. For details, contact the national office or RA web site.

# World renewal and the law of holiness

Unity and diversity in conflict

*Ivan Kirk*

In earlier and more orthodox times members of the church took ‘unity and diversity’ as a rubric for the way the Spirit of God has given diverse ‘gifts’ to the members of the Church. In more recent times in the Uniting Church ‘unity and diversity’ has become a rubric on the lips of those who argue for the normalisation of homosexuality. The division this has caused within the church puzzles me. How can anyone claim this agenda to be a movement of the Spirit of God? We know that the Spirit is free to diversify the Body of Christ, because the Spirit will not breach the unity of the church with any diversity that is contrary to the mind of Christ. Thus at the outset we experience a divided religious tradition, and we should treat with reserve pleadings that this is the work of the Spirit among us.

I want to consider ‘unity and diversity’ in relation to proposals to ‘normalise’ homosexuality. I mean by the ‘normalisation’ of homosexuality the recognition or acknowledgment that homosexuality is a ‘godly’ preference which church members may make from a range of different sexual relationships. By the normalisation of homosexuality the Uniting Church will bless same sex relationships and the church will see its ‘vocation’ as nurturing such relationships. By the normalisation of homosexuality leadership in the church, ordained and lay, will be open to those who define their identity as ‘homosexual’ and their sexual preference may be exemplary of how God may call others to live as homosexuals.

## Christ and the Spirit

I contend that homosexuality and

bisexuality are sinful and that we should not be indifferent nor affirm these practices. This contention is sometimes answered by the rubric of ‘unity and diversity’. We are encouraged by some leaders of the church to consider homosexuality as an instance of the Spirit’s diversification among us and are assured that this diversity is in union with Christ. In fact, some think nothing more is to be said on the matter, once gay and lesbian Christians claim the Spirit of God has led them into a ‘right’ and ‘loving’ relationship.

I have already foreshadowed how untenable is this special pleading for the work of the Spirit in terms of the church. Much the same point can be made from a doctrine of creation. The diversity of creation does not breach its unity but is made purposeful by the ends its diversity serves. Thus at the outset, I want to make plain my theological presupposition that ‘unity and diversity’ should be considered within the one economy of Christ and the Spirit. Whether or not we speak of creation or the church, we speak of a unity that cannot be breached by diversity because the Spirit of God does not diversify either the church or creation in ways contrary to the mind of Christ.

## Diversity and Unity

In reflecting on ‘unity and diversity’ let us take ‘diversity’ first. ‘Diversity’ has a kind of visibility which confronts us, whereas the church’s unity is hidden in Christ and known only to faith. Ephesians 2: 11-22 refers our unity in Christ to the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles, and we will attend to that once we have looked at the phenomena of ‘diversity’.

We are forever being told that we live in a pluralist society and in so far as this means that there are a range of diverse options on all sorts of matters I do not think life is very different from what it has been in the past. I will make my point from the holiness code in the book of

Leviticus in just a moment. But first let me say that the acquisition of social skills to ‘negotiate’ or ‘manage’ the occurrence of diversity, or of the religious imagination to give diversity a pleasing look, are not the way of faithful obedience to the command of God.

It is evident from chapters 11 and 18 of Leviticus that a large number of different meats and sexual relationships were forbidden by God. Israelites were permitted to eat the meats of animals which chew the cud and have divided hoofs but not those that had only one of these features. Thus the camel, hare and badger were codified as ‘unclean’ (Leviticus 11). In chapter 18 a range of sexual relationships are described as detestable or abominable: Sexual relationships are forbidden between parents and their children; between siblings; with uncles and aunts, and men and woman were forbidden to have sexual relationships with animals or to indulge in homosexual relationships with their own gender.

Briefly, Leviticus points to the broad and diverse choices that appear within the moral field of the ancient Israelites. There are a diversity of sexual relationships to gratify every passion including, incest, homosexuality, adultery and bestiality, and an exhaustive range of meats including hare, crocodile and eel to satisfy every appetite. Yet this priestly code, in the interest of holiness, discriminates between the ‘clean’ and the ‘unclean’ and between the permissible and the abominable, all in the interests of holiness (Lev.11: 45). The occurrence of diversity within the lives of the Israelites compares with the novel, which enters our moral field and demands a response from us. Besides, the novel range of sexual relationships which some leaders and members of the church commend to us there are many other ‘novel’ choices such as; ‘gender selection’ and ‘sibling saviours’. We as much as Israel need to discriminate between the clean and the unclean and between the

permissible and the abominable. I want to come back later to the holiness code in Leviticus as ‘the cash value’ of a doctrine of creation. But for the moment let us consider the need for God’s people, ancient and modern, to know what to make of the diversity which criss-crosses our lives every day.

## Admission of the Gentiles

Leviticus is sidelined by some Christians who take the exchange between Peter and a ‘heavenly voice’ in Acts chapter 10 as an end to the concern of Leviticus for holiness. It is a story about a hungry man dreaming of forbidden meats who is alarmed to hear a voice saying ‘Get up Peter; kill and eat’. Peter replies, ‘By no means Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean’ His concern for holiness is not dismissed as a pharisaic quibble but is answered with the words ‘What God has made clean, you must not call profane’ (Acts 10:13-15). This exchange moves Peter to proclaim the gospel in the household of the Gentile Cornelius.

It is disappointing to read and hear in the sexuality debate how Peter has become a whipping boy who takes the rap for so called bigoted Christians who pay heed to Scripture’s condemnation of homosexuality. Our concern, as much as Peter’s, is for holiness and the answer he got disclosed to him how Christ and the Spirit have met the concerns for holiness so that ‘God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life’ (Acts 11:18).

The story of Gentile admission gets a different reading from moral revisionists who hail it either as a trail-blazer for normalising homosexuality or compare homosexuals with Gentiles who have been injured by exclusion. A good thing about this alleged similarity between the influx of Gentiles into the church and the inclusion of homosexuals and bisexuals is the way it drives us back to Scripture to

look again at what apostle and evangelist have to say about Gentile admission. We discover from Ephesians a grand vision of Christ and the Spirit who create 'one new humanity' (Eph. 2:15) out of two groups who were mutually hostile and in need of reconciliation to God (Eph.2: 16). These two groups were divided by a metaphorical wall (Eph.2: 14) which got more than a helping hand from the Jews in its construction. They turned the covenantal sign of 'circumcision' into a tease by nicknaming the Gentiles 'the uncircumcision' (Eph.2:11) to remind them of their alienation from the commonwealth of Israel and the covenants of promise (Eph.2:14).

I must say in the light of Paul's analysis of the enmity between Jews and Gentiles and what it took to resolve this hostility, that it makes the alleged resemblance between this reconciliation and the normalisation of homosexuality look like a fudge. Paul is describing nothing less than the creation of a new humanity in Jesus Christ who will dismantle the division between Jew and Gentile and make peace between these two hostile groups.

### Creation

If the notion of 'creation' is the keynote of the work which Christ and the Spirit accomplish then the Acts 10 story is not about the inclusion of a group of Gentiles injured by exclusion. Instead, it is about the creation of a new humanity out of two hostile groups who need reconciliation between themselves and God. If we make this creation motif our hermeneutic for reading the Acts story our take on that story will be different from theirs who define the cause of homosexuals as a matter of social justice.

Let us now back-track to the Levitical holiness code to see that the intelligibility of its 'unity and diversity' is dependent on God's creation that is so ordered that each diverse kind has a God given end. For example, the fruit of the land is given by

God to sustain life (Gen.1:11) and the 'lights' in the sky are given by God to separate the day from the night (Gen.1:14). In other words, the diverse entities within creation are given to serve a purposeful end. The fruit of the earth sustains life and the sun and moon give light in the darkness. To speak about the creation's purposeful end brings me back to my allusion about the Levitical holiness code as the 'cash value' of a doctrine of creation. Leviticus should be understood as Israel's moral and theological response to the good order of God's creation. Prohibitions against eating diverse meats and indulging in diverse sexual practices are not driven by anthropological concerns for hygiene and public health. Nor are the prohibitions from narrow-minded bigots who wished to curtail the pleasures of diverse sexual experiences. Rather the holiness code honours the good order of God's creation. Israel knew, as we know, that both human and animal nature is nothing like it once was when it came from the hand of God. Israel's thinking is ordered by reverence for God's creation. Israel pronounced the eel 'unclean' because it lacked the scales and fins which God gave to fish at creation. Thus the evolution of the eel was pronounced unclean because it was a misfit within the order of God's creation; it was neither one thing nor the other. Israel denounced incest, homosexuality and bestiality as 'abominations' because according to creation sex is ordered to husband and wife and its practice outside of a marriage between a man and a woman is considered abominable.

Before we leave the 'Leviticus' holiness code we turn to moral revisionists who attempt to refute my argument by claiming that today homosexuality is as innocent as eating eels. Beneath this assertion is the assumption that the eel is as morally responsible for its evolution without fins and scales as humans are for their indulgence in homosexuality, incest

and bestiality. There is no good news for the eel in this assertion but there is good news for the eel in the work of Christ. He has come to redeem humanity, and when we renounce the sexual vices prohibited in the holiness code, the whole of creation, including the eel, may rejoice that creation's redemption is foreshadowed by the redeemed of the Lord.

### Conclusion

Neither Israel nor the Church has been left to figure out what to do with the diversity which presents itself to us. The holiness code gave Israel a way of negotiating the confusion and disorder that besets the world. Every creature and relationship which retained its God given end was pronounced clean, but the rest, however pleasurable or appetising, were considered as an abomination. The encouragement Israel got from the holiness code to live faithfully before God we now discover in the church, which gets all the encouragement it needs to revere God's creation from Jesus Christ who has come to renew it.

Paul's description of the church as a building (Eph. 2:19-20) and a body (1 Cor. 12) are implicitly entities of unity and diversity, which are given to the church as much as they were given to creation by Christ and the Spirit. The diversity of the church is not established by its members claiming the Spirit's sanctification for their sinful pleasures, nor is its diversity established by an agenda of inclusiveness which carefully manages how much wealth will be shared by those less privileged than ourselves. Rather, the diversity of the church is the work of the Holy Spirit who orders that diversity according to its unity in Christ.

The diversity we embrace must be ordered to the unity given us in Jesus Christ. It is not up to us to adjudicate the occurrence of diversity which crosses our path, for Christ and the Spirit has already done this for us in the work of creation

and the church. We too often experience the unity and diversity of the church on the horns of a dilemma because we are reluctant to take our place as new creatures in Christ who serve the world by living as a sign of its forthcoming renewal. The mission of the church can hardly be served by turning our backs on God's creative order, order, for that would be to deny the eschatological destiny of which Paul wrote. When queried about the bodily nature of our existence in the resurrection age the apostle appealed to the good order of God's creation. 'Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds...So it is with the resurrection of the dead' (1 Cor. 15:38-42).

We need to urge our members to be faithful to our God-given gender, for without this commitment we have hardly an evangelical word for those who indulge in the pleasures of homosexuality, bestiality and incest. I don't make this remark to raise the ante but to clear the way for a question. 'Without a reverence for the creation what objection could we possibly raise against incest and bestiality?' Our revulsion from these vices, or from homosexuality for that matter, is not a Christian response; neither is an idealisation of homosexuality. Those who experience revulsion at the idea of homosexuality and those who count homosexuals as among the most 'Christ-like' people they know settle this question in terms of their own subjective judgements. Neither response is Christian. Instead the only evangelical word we can speak to the homosexual is, 'Jesus Christ has come to renew the whole creation in all of its God given order and diversity, and the church must be faithful to this end by its reverence for the good order of God's creation'.

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# Sex and Society: the Reforming Agenda

*Max Champion*

*An edited version of the RA chairman's address to the July Conference rally.*

Since the 1960s we have experienced the astonishing advance of permissive behaviour in all areas of public and private life. Self-expression, self-realisation and self-assertion are in the ascendancy. My right to live as I choose, subject only to the consent of another person and provided I don't cause anyone else harm, has become the mantra of modern society. 'I think anyone who is against anyone's lifestyle is just plain wrong.'

In sexual relations we have come to believe that all sorts of behaviour are 'natural' and desirable. Repression of desire is said to stunt personal growth and cause irrational, neurotic feelings of guilt. I must be free to explore my sexuality in ways that meet my needs and the needs of my partner(s). Sexual restraint is the enemy of self-fulfilment; self-denial is harmful to the development of a healthy ego. Commitment destroys individuality.

The damage caused by this so-called sexual liberation is evident in a plethora of films and TV sitcoms, such as Ally McBeal, Sex in the City, the L-Word and Big Brother. Sexual experience is glorified as the measure of normality in healthy individuals who 'live life to the full.' It doesn't matter whether sexual intercourse is male-female or male-male or female-female, or how many partners one may have concurrently or in series. What matters is self-gratification. Sadly, in reality (not reality TV), such narcissism often results in loneliness, despair and ill health.

What has happened to bring us to this point? It is not enough to say that we have ignored the Bible. Our culture is now largely hostile to the Christian understanding of what it means to be a person-in-community. ... Sexual experience has become detached from the process of bodily reproduction and the need for children to be raised in a stable environment, as well as from the sense of divine calling to forge covenanted marriages between men and women as signs of hope for faithfulness and love in a disordered world.

The marketing gurus of our post-Christian society have little desire to promote or support faithful marriages because it restricts the range of desirable relationships that can be exploited for commercial advantage. The pink dollar is much sought after! Our bodies are now treated as objects of play and part of the entertainment industry. Sex, as ethicist Gordon Preece says, is an individual choice to be catered for in a consumer culture. Sexual preferences are now determined, not by the splendid God-given complementarity of male and female, but by whom we choose to be as 'individuals.'

This way of thinking about people, as 'individuals with diverse choices' has crept into Uniting Church discussion about sexuality as well as into theology, doctrine, ethics and meeting procedures. We begin with how we understand ourselves, not with how we are known by God in Christ, as witnessed in Scripture. We claim the right 'as individuals' to believe and do whatever makes sense to us, arguing that God has made each one of us 'as we are.' ... My choices, and all sincere choices, must be respected and accepted as being 'Christian'!

Resolution 84 is a classic expression of this mindset. The fact that individuals and groups in the Uniting Church come to

contradictory conclusions about sexual behaviour shouldn't cause undue distress. Diversity is intrinsically a good thing. Christians must settle their differences in a civilised manner through a process of consensus which takes account of all points of view.

Ironically, anyone who disputes this way of thinking and acting isn't to be taken seriously. While it is thought to be progressive and liberal-minded to believe in the rights of the individual, those who believe in the unique dignity of our creation as male-female and in marriage as the only divinely appointed relationship in which to enjoy sexual intercourse and to raise children, are called 'regressive, bigoted, homophobic conservatives. ...'

This bullying language is designed to try to make people forget that, until very recently, these 'conservatives' were regarded as responsible, mainstream citizens. ... It also intimidates those who realise that these self-styled progressives are deluded in believing that they are heralding a 'New Reformation'. Nothing could be more regressive or repressive than to base the satisfaction of our sexual needs on individual desire and to endorse sexual behaviour which mocks the clear design of creation of the incredible otherness of man and woman and their unique bond in marriage so joyfully attested in Scripture.

It is a mark of the irrationality of our rational society that many people think it is radical rather than decadent for individuals to find sexual satisfaction in using their penises and vaginas in ways for which they are not designed, including ways which cause miserable death to millions of people through AIDS. ... Calls for compassion to those who suffer are timely, but they do nothing to challenge the deadly behaviour.

The situation is so serious that we must challenge Church bodies which 'affirm lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and heterosexual experiences of sexuality as gifts from God, part of the marvellous

diversity of creation' (General Council of the UCA, The Adelaide Affirmation). No gay gene has been discovered and homosexual behaviour is now widely regarded, like so many other harmful attractions, as the result of complex pre-natal and social conditions and individual choice. Increasingly, homosexuals argue that they choose to be what they are.

Whatever may be the complex factors behind it, the Church, in continuity with the clear witness of Scripture, must insist that homosexual practice be treated as one form of the perversion of our created and redeemed humanity. Against the argument that biblical opposition to homosexuality was culturally conditioned by factors which no longer apply to our enlightened culture, it must be said that the prohibition is so strong because they knew the dreadful effects of homosexual practice. That is why, with incest and other forms of injustice, it is called an abomination.

It makes no sense to exclude homosexuality from this judgment, without also excluding consensual incest. ... This is not scaremongering. In May 2004 a campaign was started to repeal the ban on consensual incest in NZ on the ground that it is a relic of primitive society. New Testament scholar Walter Wink makes this sort of action possible by saying that the crucial thing is not whether a relationship is homosexual or heterosexual, but whether it is 'loving.' ... In this new situation what does it mean to set The Reforming Agenda?

## **Continued in next issue**

Max Champion listed three responses to the present impasse: One, reclaiming the word of grace; two, repentance and wrestling with temptation; three, opposing the endorsement of behaviour which Old and New Testaments regard as idolatrous and unethical.

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