

■ In this issue

- 2 A Church engaged in theological controversy – *D. L. Jones*
- 4 Whose approach is right? – *Brian Hill*
- 5 The beauty of our creation as male and female – *Max Champion*
- 6 Hope, Healing and Holiness – *Mary Hawkes*
- 7 The UC's bitter divisions to go on
- 8 In Brief

EDITORIAL

Where the battle lies

A curious fact about the war over Resolution 84 is that both sides, RA and For84, believe they are defending a righteous cause against overwhelming opposition.

Both sides cannot be right.

When this year's Victoria-Tasmania Synod was asked to refer R84 back to synods, presbyteries and congregations, the Synod refused. This despite the clear provision of Basis of Union Paragraph 15 (e) that "it is obligatory for the Assembly to seek concurrence, from other councils and on occasion of the congregations ... on matters of vital importance to the life of the church."

Movers of the failed motion correctly stated that past and latest surveys show most UC members oppose the ordination of same-gender people. That cuts no ice with synod representatives. The outcome was entirely predictable. A synod is not congenial to impartial debate.

Perhaps supporters of R84 see themselves as an embattled elite in the cause of tolerance, diversity, compassion, justice and all things kindly. Their fiction is that homosexuals' rights are trampled on. They sympathise with perceived victims at the expense of the solid teaching of the church. It is hard to refuse sympathy to a suffering person. The trouble is, compassion is not necessarily a cure but a tranquilliser, especially in a world that is shedding moral certainties like baggage thrown overboard to save a sinking ship. The ship of the church is sinking for want of sound teaching, not because of it.

Assembly asked: will you prevent schism?

The Reforming Alliance has asked the Assembly standing committee ten questions about the crisis caused by the decision on ordination and sexuality (R84) at last year's Assembly. RA chairman Dr. Max Champion has sought a reply by November 30 "so that the 1500 individual members and 170 congregations of RA can be informed of developments before Christmas."

The Assembly standing committee (ASC) is asked the following questions :

1. Does the ASC intend to refer R84 to other councils of the church for 'concurrence' as required by *The Basis of Union* and the Constitution on 'matters of vital importance to the church.' Such a move was rejected by the Victoria-Tasmania Synod.
2. Does the ASC intend to bring a motion to the next Assembly, with a biblical and theological rationale, to rescind, clarify or affirm R84?
3. How is the ASC responding to the concerns of migrant-ethnic and Aboriginal-Islander congregations about R84?
4. What is the ASC doing to protect the rights of congregations and ministers who have withdrawn from the UCA, or intend to? Will principles of social justice be applied to property settlements and ministerial entitlements?
5. Has the ASC asked the committee on church polity to amend *The Basis of Union*, Constitution and Regulations to safeguard conscientious objectors on matters touching 'the substance of the faith'? Will these be presented to the next Assembly?
6. Will the ASC encourage alternative structures to make room for reformed, evangelical and orthodox theology and practice?
7. What arrangements are there for alternative theological training for 'reformed, orthodox and evangelical' candidates for ministry? Has the Ministerial Education Commission been asked to consider accrediting other theological schools to provide significant training of some UCA candidates?
8. Will the ASC seek the views of our ecumenical partners in Australia, Asia and the Pacific on ordination of practising homosexuals? Will these views be made known in the interests of mutual respect and open dialogue?
9. Will the ASC correct the oversight in the Sexuality and Leadership booklet by putting forward the views of church members who have come out of homosexuality?
10. What does the ASC intend to do to prevent schism over R84?

(continued on page 2)

(continued from p. 1) In his letter Dr. Champion said "Already thousands of individuals and many congregations and ministers have left the UCA over the issue. Migrant-ethnic and UAICC congregations are waiting to see what happens at the next Assembly before finally deciding whether to remain in the UCA. ... Many believe that the evangelical, reformed and orthodox faith of the ecumenical church has been seriously damaged by R84."

THE GOSPEL, THE CHURCH AND HUMAN SEXUALITY

A Church engaged in theological controversy

D. L. Jones

First of a series of extracts from the address to the July RA conference by the Rev. Doug Jones, who teaches at Trinity Theological College, Brisbane. It is edited for publication.

The Uniting Church must identify and deal with some major theological and doctrinal issues if it is to resolve the issue of ordaining persons practising homosexuality.

1. Theological controversy – the long duree

Most major theological controversies have engaged the church over long periods of time. A theologian, commenting on the current debate within the Anglican Church, suggested that the debate over the ordination of homosexual persons is the most substantial that that church has had to deal with since the time of Henry VIII.

The Christological and Trinitarian controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries caused difficult, painful, and even dangerous debates that were only finally resolved in ecumenical councils. Let us recall that the debate over what was to be accepted as orthodox Christology raged throughout the third century and came to a head at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. That first ecumenical council was attended by 318 bishops and was held from May to August of that year.

In the end, the debate came down to a dispute over one letter – is Jesus homoousios with the Father or homoiousios with the Father? Was Jesus of the same substance or being as the Father (homoousios) or was he of like being with the Father (homoiousios)? The Council finally decided on homoousios. I suggest that the church down through the ages bears the fruit of the hard work

done by that Council. Some left the Council clearly identified as heterodox in their Christology. Other left the Council confirmed that they held to an orthodox Christology. There were "winners" and "losers" but I contend that the whole church catholic became a "winner" because of the work of those bishops in council and because the Holy Spirit lead them into an appropriate understanding of Christology. Nothing less than an adequate understanding of the saving work of Jesus Christ was considered to be at stake in that debate.

1.4 Theological controversy allows the church to identify the theological and doctrinal issues, to expose and test assumptions, and to seek for a better understanding and clearer articulation of the gospel, the light of the revelation of the grace and truth of God that are in Jesus Christ. The Uniting Church is in the process of engaging a major theological controversy that involves a number of important theological and doctrinal issues, some of which are dealt with briefly in the following material.

2. Christian anthropology

2.1 How is humanity to be understood? Is humanity created in the image of God, humanity as male and female? What does it mean to be created male and female? Does being made in the image of God relate to how sexuality is expressed? The recent statement from the Roman Catholic Church, Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons (3rd June, 2003) understands that being made in the image of God clearly relates to the expression of sexuality. To quote from that document:

"There are three fundamental elements of the Creator's plan for marriage, as narrated in the Book of Genesis.

"In the first place, man, the image of God, was created 'male and female' (Gen 1:27). Men and women are equal as persons and complementary as male and female. Sexuality is something that pertains to the physical-biological realm and has also been raised to a new level – the personal level – where nature and spirit are united.

"Marriage is instituted by the Creator as a form of life in which a communion of persons is realised involving the use of the sexual faculty. 'That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife and they become one flesh' (Gen 2:24).

"Third, God has willed to give the union of man and woman a special participation in his work of creation. Thus, he blessed the man and the woman with the words 'Be fruitful and multiply' (Gen 1:28). Therefore, in the Creator's plan, sexual complementarity and fruitfulness belong to the very nature of marriage."

2.2 How is homosexuality to be understood in the light of creation of humanity as male and female in the image of God? Does God create male and female and, within that polarity and complementarity, create some males who are sexually oriented in their very beings (whether that be genetically, psychologically, or however else that possibility is described) towards males and some females who are sexually oriented in their very beings towards females, while, at the same time, creating males and females who are heterosexually oriented?

2.3 How does being created in the image of God as male and female relate to being part of the new creation in Christ Jesus? Does being in Christ eliminate our maleness and femaleness? Some readings of Galatians 3:28 ('There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus') would suggest 'Yes'. However, we need to be aware of Paul's argument that our status in Christ does not depend upon our being male or female, Jew or Greek, etc. Our being in Christ does not depend upon such things. That status, our being in Christ, rests solely and securely upon God's gracious action towards us and for us in Jesus Christ. However, while distinctions like those that Paul lists are excluded as a basis for such a status, they are not eliminated *per se*. Are there still male and female in the new Creation? Yes, but gender is no basis for identity in Christ.

[This theme of the new creation and creation in the image of God is picked up in a number of places in the Pauline literature: Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:9, 10; 2 Cor. 5:17. See also the references to marriage by Paul and Jesus: Matt. 19:4-6; 1 Cor. 6:16; 7:2, 8-9.]

2.4 What part does the socialisation process play in the formation of personal identity and sexual orientation? If a person is socialised in society and in church where attitudes and role models are not free from the damaging influence and effects of sin, how can one determine what impact the sinful aspects of church and society have had in shaping identity? How does one distinguish between sexual orientation, sinful influences and sinful inclination? Some have described options alluded to in 2.2 and 2.4 as nature versus nurture (although "influence" might be a better term than "nurture").

2.5 How is the new identity in Christ to be reconciled to the old identity of a person with a homosexual orientation or who engages in homosexual behaviour? Are there certain things that are 'beyond redemption' because they are 'natural' in the sense of being a 'given' of a person's creaturely existence?

2.6 These are complex questions without easy answers. Nevertheless, the ongoing discussion of such questions must take adequate account of the

reality of sin and its pervasive and subtle impact upon our thinking, feeling, willing, and acting.

3. Grace

3.1 The debate on homosexuality and ordination has been going for some twenty years in the Uniting Church. The debate is not Law versus Grace. For me, that is a Lutheran way of conceiving the issue and how the church might deal with it. The Reformed branch of our tradition has always valued 'law' and has not accepted a dichotomy between Law and Grace. (However, it has been aware of 'legalism' which is a quite different matter.) John Calvin spoke of a threefold purpose for the Law. First, the Law acts as a restraining force in society guarding it from sinful behaviour and violence. Thus, it benefits not only the Christian citizen but also all citizens. Second, the Law is a pedagogos or "schoolmaster" leading people to Jesus Christ. And third, the Law reveals God's will in general terms and provides guidance for Christian persons for their Christian life.

3.2 The debate is not about the reception of sinners into the church. Our Protestant heritage makes it amply clear that we are incorporated into Christ, we receive forgiveness of sins, adoption as children of God, membership in the body of Christ, and new life in Him, solely on the basis of the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ, in his life given in sacrificial love for the world. That is, our being incorporated into the church is solely on the basis of the grace of God in Jesus Christ received by faith. This is what the Reformation debates about justification were all about. I would hope that the debate about sexuality is not about revisiting that understanding of the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

The UCA, in debating the appropriateness of ordaining those who claim homosexual orientation or who are actively engaged in homosexual expression, is now clearly polarised (and deeply divided?). In the process, two catch-cries of the Reformation – *sola scriptura* and *sola gratia* - have found expression in particular ways.

3.4 Some argue that the grace of God is pre-eminent, and that all are welcomed by Christ into the church. Thus, the issue is about inclusivity. Others argue that homosexual expression is contrary to the teaching of scripture and have wanted to uphold the authority of the scriptures in this matter. Thus, the matter is about conformity to the revealed will of God and holiness. It is not, however, a matter of either grace or scripture. Those who argue on the basis of grace appeal to the scriptures to support their argument. Those who argue on the basis of scripture do not exclude grace, and argue strongly that grace is effectual because it brings about transformation (sanctification).

3.5 The debate is, in part, about how the UCA

understands grace (which is not about God's unconditional love, but about God's undeserved love). In one sense, it is about how the doctrine of sanctification is to be understood, particularly in relation to the doctrine of justification. At the time of the reformation, the debate that engaged the church resulted, in part, from a confusion or drawing together of these two doctrines. Language that the Reformers (and the New Testament) used exclusively for sanctification was used by the Roman Catholic Church in relation to justification. It seems that much of the debate in the UCA in recent years is in danger of running these two doctrines together again.

In next issue : 'What is Scripture, and how are we to interpret it?'

INTERPRETING THE BIBLE FOR TODAY:

Whose approach is right?

Brian Hill

Dr. Hill's address at the RA national conference is edited for publication and covers the Introduction and two parts of a seven part paper. We plan to publish more in next issue of ReForming.

Introduction - Why this topic?

How recently have you heard someone say "You can prove anything from the Bible"? The minister of a church I attended in the 1950s said it often. An old-style liberal, he was keen to discredit fundamentalists. Even so I had a great respect for him. He had a strong personal devotion to Christ and compassion for the oppressed. But I felt then, and still feel, that his heart was closer to God than his head. I suspected that the devotional faith in which he had been reared was compensating for his theological training.

The claim "You can prove anything from the Bible" has pursued me over the years since my experience of conversion at the age of 14. As an evangelical Christian, I have constantly sought to keep my head in step with my heart, believing that God gave me both body-parts. That has meant revisiting constantly the grounds of my belief that God did once intervene in my life, and still does.

The challenge to keep revisiting this question has been revived in recent years by the debates between Christians over women's ordination and

same-gender sex. I have had to weigh up on one side an extreme fundamentalism that says both are sinful, and, on the other, the claim by some post-liberals that they are both acceptable and in both cases the Bible is out-of-date.

At the beginning of this year, some concerned evangelical friends drew my attention to a paper by Professor Bill Loader on "Approaches to Scripture." The Assembly home page provides a link to it, which gives it quasi-official status. I have also been stimulated, though in a different way, by a recent book on The Trinity and Subordinationism by Rev. Dr Kevin Giles, which also reflects on the use of Scripture.

The current debates were what prompted Loader and Giles to go into print. Both saw that the deeper issue to be addressed is how we interpret Scripture. The leaders of the Reforming Alliance have realised this too. Dealing with homosexuality is not our main issue. Interpreting the Bible is. The Bible is being quoted on both sides. But how do we apply Scripture to contemporary issues?

The heart of evangelicalism is a personal encounter with God, but the mind of evangelicalism is defined by its attitude to Scripture. Last century, most of the debate focused on the authority of Scripture. Old liberalism was saying that science obliged us to place the Bible under the authority of human reason.

Today, however, many post-liberals are contesting the evangelical use of the Bible by quoting back to us different interpretations. In doing so, it looks as though they have conceded that Scripture is our primary authority, or else why would they bother quoting it? For many this is a ploy designed to embarrass people like us who set such store by plain biblical teaching – hoisting us with our own petard, as it were.

The real authorities of post-liberals are autonomous reason and cultural relativities. If we wish to answer our critics and sway people in the "messy middle", it will not be sufficient merely to appeal to proof-texts. Two can play at that game. We must have a credible hermeneutic, that is, a justifiable method of interpreting and applying Scripture. That is what I have been asked to explore with you.

The nature of Christian belief

First let us consider the nature of Christian belief. Christianity is not in the first instance a philosophy, the product of human speculation. Nor is it a mythology, resting on archetypal stories whose historicity is irrelevant. It is a set of truth-claims derived from extraordinary historical events.

The central truth-claim is that these events have made us aware of a Creator God who has chosen to communicate with one of the species of creatures he

has made – us. Progressively, through a chosen people, he has shown us what he is like and what is our special destiny. Finally, by contracting himself to a particular historical time and place, he became a man, lived to teach and heal, died for our sins, and rose from the dead to validate his promise to us of eternal life.

This is miraculous – a singularity in the natural order. As a result, we know things about God that we would never have found out for ourselves through natural observation or mental speculation. Revelation, achieved supremely in the person of Christ as attested to by Scripture, corrects the fallibilities of reason, intuition, and tradition.

Oh lucky disciples, who saw and heard these things! Wish I'd been there! But Jesus himself said to his disciples as he was leaving them, "Teach others what you have learnt, assured that I will be sending my Spirit to guide you into all truth."

Thus the scarlet thread of the salvation story endures into the future. And the disciples, anticipating their own deaths, attested to the authority of the new Scriptures already in the making, assured that the Spirit of God would oversee their compilation and distribution. In this way, future generations would be able to pick up the thread and weave it into their own story.

Approaching the biblical text

History tells us that the original churches took only a few decades to agree on most of the books included in the canon of Scripture. Only much later did a Synod in Carthage confirm it. Clearly, the Spirit had been at work well before the invitations for Synod went out. One would like to think that is a common occurrence.

The Christian world has traditionally regarded this process as inspired by God. For this reason, few questioned the authority and inspiration of Scripture before the advent of "higher criticism", and the Basis of Union continues to affirm it. We believe, on good grounds – Word and Spirit concurring – that the Bible is a book like no other book.

The process of bringing a reliable written testimony into being shared one miraculous feature with the Incarnation. It involved an interaction of the divine with the human. The Holy Spirit, breath of God, animated conscious human writers, in their proper time and place, to record his acts and to reveal the person of Christ.

Not only, therefore, should we appreciate the power and reliability of this true narrative, but also read it within its historical and literary context. Often we will need help in discerning the right meaning of what we read, which is one of the reasons why God has raised up the church, though

always to be under the Scriptures, as, again, the Basis of Union attests. All this lays upon us the need to make explicit our theory of interpretation.

We are obliged to find a mediating position between two extremes which I will characterise as "Letteralism" and "Post-liberalism." (*To be continued*).

Dr. Brian V. Hill is Emeritus Professor of Education, Murdoch University, WA.

THE REFORMING AGENDA

The beauty of our creation as male and female

Max Champion

Concluding the RA chairman's address to the national conference of RA

In the new situation in which the Uniting Church finds itself, what does it mean to set The Reforming Agenda?

First, the Church must proclaim and re-claim the word of grace. In Jesus Christ incarnate, crucified and risen, God's mercy for all sinners has been uniquely embodied. Paul reminds recalcitrant Corinthians that 'they have been washed, justified and sanctified in Christ' (1 Cor 6:9f).

Second, knowledge of God's grace entails repentance and wrestling with temptation. Life in the flesh (self-indulgence and self-righteousness) must give way to life in the spirit. (Gal 5:13-26). ... To this end, Christians are called to 'bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ' (Gal 6:2). Paul takes sin seriously as disobedience to the holy will of God but he takes more seriously the reconciling mercy of God in Christ. Sexual misbehaviour is a most serious denial of our marvellous creation as male and female and of the splendour of marriage between a man and a woman. But that does not mean that those who have succumbed to sexual (or other) temptation are to be abused, vilified or excommunicated. Compassion means bearing one another's sins because Christ has already borne the burden of our sins.

Third, the endorsement of behaviour that is clearly and consistently regarded as idolatrous and unethical in Old and New Testaments must be opposed. It amounts to defiance of God's good creation.

Such is the situation that has been created by the Tenth Assembly. Despite what our President, the

Rev Dr Dean Drayton, and our General Secretary, the Rev Terence Corkin, still say, R84 was not merely a clarification of the responsibility of Presbyteries in matters of candidature and ordination. It permitted presbyteries to accept people even if they were in homosexual relationships. The fact that Nepean Presbytery (Vic) has already passed a motion to accept homosexual ministers in principle (22/15/5) is proof that the implications of R84 are well understood – as is the formation of RA, the distress of so many congregations and individuals, the boldness of the gay lobby (Uniting Network), a newly formed group in support of R84 (For 84) and, not least, the dismay of our ecumenical partners in the NCCA – some of whom have already suspended bilateral conversations.

It simply will not do to feign ignorance of the real situation and insist that matters of fundamental Christian doctrine and ethics (about the nature of human dignity) can be decided on the basis of individual choice and tolerance of diversity in sexual behaviour.

The Reforming Alliance is committed to do all that is possible to see that R84 is rescinded so that the biblical witness to the splendour, beauty and wonder of our creation as male and female is reaffirmed as the teaching of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Far from being ‘regressive,’ conservative or homophobic, this strategy is designed to encourage folk who have lost their way in their sexual (and other) relationships to rejoice in the gracious, healing love of God supremely displayed in Jesus Christ.

Dr. Max Champion is chairman of the Reforming Alliance, and parish minister at Mt. Waverley, Victoria.

Hope, Healing and Holiness

Mary Hawkes

An address to the RA national conference on the first anniversary of the passing of Resolution 84 by the 10th Assembly of the Uniting Church.

We are people in need of hope, healing and holiness. God can only bring about change as we allow him to begin in us. We cannot be agents of change unless we are people of hope, who have found healing in Christ and are living holy lives.

As Christians, our hope must be in God and God alone. If we have hope in people, systems,

institutions (these things are idols by the way) we will be disappointed. Always. When our hope is in God, however, our faith grows. Listen to Hebrews 11:6 : “It’s impossible to please God apart from faith. Why? Because anyone who wants to approach God must believe both that he exists and that he cares enough to respond to those who seek him.”

Do we believe these things? Does God care enough to respond to our prayers? (Hebrews 11 and 12). There are many examples of people of faith who had hope in the promises of God. They hung on in faith until they saw seemingly impossible things happen. It was credited to them as righteousness. They are a model for us of faithful behaviour.

Is our hope in the God who came to us as Jesus and is revealed to us in the Scriptures, or is it somewhere else? Are we allowing that hope to build our faith or not? Nothing will change in the UCA without faith that by the grace of God He will do something.

None of us has suffered to the extent that our Lord Jesus did for us. Nor will we have to. He did it for the joy that was set before him. He knew where he was heading and was not deterred, even by the cross. (Hebrews 12: 3-4) Opposition from others and the struggle against sin are tough, but not impossibly tough. Where is your hope? On what is it founded? Will you say with the psalmist : “Why are you downcast O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Saviour and my God.” (Ps. 42:5; Ps. 43:5)

Worship is great medicine for the hopeless heart (Psalm 103) and healing comes through the cross. Healing is released as we forgive others and repent of our sins. We cannot afford the luxury of going around wounded and maimed spiritually. Healing comes through the cross. It is also released as we forgive others and repent of our sins. (Isaiah 53) We cannot afford the luxury of going around wounded and maimed spiritually. There is work to do.

God allows us to be hurt and in pain in order to bring us more and more into the likeness of His Son Jesus. (Hebrews 12) Times are tough and many things have happened to hurt us in recent times to say nothing of the hurts of the past we haven’t dealt with yet.

Now is the time to deal with this stuff, to get on our knees alone or with others who can help us in prayer and allow the crucified Saviour to heal our wounds.

He suffered far more than we are suffering for the joy that was set before him. What are you looking at? The issues and the problems which are causing you pain, or the future of all believers? And so with Paul and James we can rejoice in these hard times. Rejoice because they give us the opportunity

to become more like Jesus and to grow in our faith. (Phil.4: 4, James 1: 2-5.)

Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? He who has clean hands and a pure heart. So do we have clean hands and a pure heart? Are we in the right place with God and with each other. There are many instances in Scripture where the people thought they were right with God and they weren't. The only way we will go forward is if we walk in holiness before the Lord and in right relationship with each other. That way when the fires of judgement come they will not scare us or harm us, in fact we will be able to rejoice in them.

Jesus said we should live each day as if it were our last. We don't know when He will return but we must be ready. Similarly we don't know the way forward now as people of the Uniting Church but we must walk with integrity and humility each and every day looking for and moving with the wind of the Holy Spirit. He alone has the answers to our questions.

This is about the Kingdom of God, not a denomination. It is about the body of Christ, of which the UCA is but one part. I don't know what the future is for the UCA or even if there is a future for it. At what point do we as a denomination cross the line from being a part of the body of Christ? Does the UCA ever stop being part of the body of Christ while there are faithful believers within it?

What I do know is that we must be faithful and true disciples of Christ as far as we know how. We must proclaim the gospel within and to the UCA and insist on Godly principles to guide us. We must be the watchmen on the walls that Ezekiel wrote about (Ez.33). It gets very wearying to be constantly calling out a warning to people who don't see that there is anything to be warned about.

But we must do it. We will be ridiculed and falsely accused for doing it but we have no other option.

We must ensure that we have our hope firmly placed in God and His love for us.

We must ensure that we deal with the issues of the past at the cross of Christ or we will be too wounded to go on and seek healing for the body of Christ along with our brothers and sisters of other denominations.

If the UCA is an idol in our lives then let us lay it down now. Let us surrender our selves and our denomination to the God who loves us and hear what His Spirit is saying to the church. In the letters to the churches in Revelation there was always a way forward. Have we discerned our way forward? What is it that we are called to do to return to purity before the Lord? What is the

Spirit saying to us, the church?

We must be holy as He is holy (1Peter 1:15-16). Clean hands and a pure heart will get us to where we want to be, looking our Saviour in the face and hearing the words "Well done, good and faithful servant."

The future of the UCA is in God's hands. We are his co workers on earth and so we must ensure that we are in the right place to do His will.

What is the Spirit saying to the Church? Do we have ears to hear?

Mary Hawkes is the national chair of EMU.

The UC's bitter divisions to go on

Researcher Peter Bentley claimed during a NSW Synod meeting that a liberal minority aims to neutralise the voice of mainstream conservative members of the Uniting Church. He cited the reaction of the church's liberal leadership to the majority 'No' response to the Assembly resolution on homosexuality, evident in church-wide surveys.

Official bodies reacted in two ways to the negative voice of rank and file members, he said. One suggested that people could not have read the Interim Report on Sexuality if they voted against its proposals. In other words, they voted in ignorance. The other reaction was to argue that their responses were wrongly reported or untrue. So much for the leaders' opinion of church members.

Peter Bentley said the Assembly standing committee has double standards in 'listening to the voice of the church'. When a few objected to proposals for bishops in the UCA and changes in ministry, the Assembly accepted their decision.

When 8000 responded negatively to the 2003 questionnaire about R84, the Assembly ignored them.

Supporters of the Assembly sexuality agenda dismissed the large member response as "only a small percentage of the church" as if all who did not respond agreed with them. This shows that the Assembly is dismissive of feedback from members, and pays just lip service to the process of consultation.

Mr. Bentley predicted that if the Assembly position is not revised in 2006 the church will face more decline and dysfunctional congregations. If there is a more radical reinforcement of the liberal position on sexuality, a significant split in the church is likely.

New SA structure

SA Synod decided by a big majority vote to disband its seven presbyteries from 2005 to create one presbytery in the State, containing 'mission networks' of from ten to 60 congregations, some based on geography. All congregations will develop a memorandum of understanding with the synod/presbytery, which may include a sexual ethic recognised by the presbytery.

This will allow congregations in an evangelical network to resolve the sexuality issue and focus on mission and pastoral care accordingly.

Mary Hawkes reports that debate was long, mostly gracious and gentle. Networks were strongly supported. "It was amazing to see the Synod pass something which has many uncrossed 't's and undotted 'i's."

Details of funding and contributions from congregations are yet to be clarified.

RA/NSW concord

RA and NSW Synod have established an amicable relationship following a report prepared by RA and the Synod Council. Among five proposals agreed to, Synod noted concerns of individuals and congregations about the treatment of those joining the reforming body, and asked a working group to explore how RA should relate to Synod and presbyteries. Synod affirmed RA as a movement within the Synod.

As in other States, the Synod heard RA's concerns about reform in the church, theological training and ministerial placements.

Indonesians reject R84

The seventh conference of Indonesian congregations has rejected R84 on grounds of theological understanding. Conference members voted to ask the 2006 Assembly to remove the present ambiguity and confusion caused by the resolution. Only then will their congregations be able to decide whether to remain in the Uniting Church. The conference also decided to urge all their congregations to join RA.

Thanks to donors

The Alliance wishes to thank all members and friends who responded to the recent special appeal for donations. Growing membership of both individuals and congregations has added to administrative costs, and donations provide the resources to meet them.

Malvern conference on November 27

Aimed at forming an RA network in Victoria a conference was held at the Glendearg Grove church of the Malvern Korean congregation on Saturday November 27.

A report on the planned network will appear in our next issue.

The conference heard an address by Dr. Max Champion and other speakers, and there was opportunity for discussion and future planning of the role of the Reforming Alliance in Victoria.

Further information may be obtained from the Rev. Graeme Harrison (9809 1795) and the Rev. Peter Greenwood (9696 6089).

School for evangelicals

Wesley Theological College, part of Sydney's Wesley Institute, offers undergraduate courses in theology and 50 per cent reduction in fee to Uniting Church members in good standing. Courses range from diplomas of theology and ministry to PhD and ThD supervision. The college fulfils the Assembly's request for greater diversity in ministry training, and provides evangelical congregations with graduates ready for ministry.

Students come from 30 countries. Next semester 60 American students will join the student body.

College faculty members hold 37 doctorates in psychology, education, theology and other disciplines, more than in any other Uniting Church educational institution. Training emphases include drama, radio and television, dance, music, visual arts and counselling

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