

Uniting Church Teaching on Abortion

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In 1995 the Presbytery of Cincinnati was debating a proposal that the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the USA affirm "that human life begins at fertilization" and that this affirmation "be included in policy statements concerning problem pregnancies and abortion". It was reported that both sides in the debate "appeared to agree that for the General Assembly to make the affirmation called for, would call into question the traditional pro-choice stance of the denomination."¹ This report was striking because, although as a matter of fact Reformed churches usually do take a "pro-choice stance" on abortion it is very rare to see it named as a Reformed "tradition".

Yet "traditional" is a very good way to describe it, for several reasons. Although Reformed churches tend to be reluctant to make formal statements on abortion at all, when they do their persistent inclination is to support legislation which reflects the justifiability of abortion under certain circumstances. Further, these cautious public statements seem to reflect the general mood of the membership of Reformed churches to accept the justifiability of abortion under certain circumstances. In addition, within the continuity of teaching in these statements are shifts in emphasis and priority which suggest the dynamic nature of "tradition". But especially, an examination of the Uniting Church attitude to abortion finds that it coheres with doctrinal perspectives characteristic of the Reformed tradition. The Uniting Church is a Reformed church², and it is the purpose of this paper to show how that has been reflected in its teaching on abortion.

A "Pro-Choice Tradition"?

In a recent book I tried to model a method of theological reflection which began with profound human experiences such as bereavement. A Uniting Church reviewer of the book, who disagreed with some of my more controversial personal conclusions, wanted to show that from the same kind of experience quite conventional conclusions could be reached just as easily. The main experience I had used had been the loss of my child. The reviewer used the experience of the loss of his child: "The week before Christmas, 1994, a routine ultrasound examination in my wife's nineteenth week of pregnancy disclosed that our baby was [an]encephalic. A few days later, in grief and shock, Michele and I terminated the pregnancy."³

The reviewer's use of the story of an abortion reveals something about our fellowship. He was intending to defend a conventional theological position against my more contentious proposal. That is, he was being consciously conservative. In this project he confidently assumed that the moral legitimacy of their decision to

abort would not be challenged; that the decision to abort was itself quite conventional. It would not distract the reader from his main point and would not compromise his claim to relative conservatism. And he was right. In our fellowship it is just accepted that there are circumstances in which, tragically, a woman or couple will be forced to cooperate with and embrace the loss of her child by seeking an abortion.

It is even possible to identify, in broad terms, the kind of circumstances which Uniting Church people tend to accept as justifying abortion. An analysis of the National Social Science Survey of 1989 found that a substantial majority of Uniting Church attenders would support the legality of abortion if the foetus was seriously malformed, if the pregnancy was the result of rape, or if the woman's health would be placed at risk by continuing the pregnancy⁴. The views of Uniting Church members have been reflected in the handful of formal statements made by the church⁵.

Shortly before union, both the Methodist and the Presbyterian churches adopted positions on abortion⁶. In 1973 the Methodist General Conference expressed its opposition to abortion on demand but affirmed that "abortion may be justified when a serious mental or physical disorder exists in the mother or there is a high probability that it exists in the fetus". It also accepted "the possibility of other valid humanitarian reasons for termination". The General Conference made it clear that "the woman has to choose" and should be provided with counselling support as she makes her decision. The Presbyterian General Assembly found it harder to arrive at an agreed position, acknowledging instead that "Christians may conscientiously hold different views" on abortion. It too affirmed that "the basic decision...should be left in the hands of the individual woman" taking account of expert advice.

In 1980 the Queensland Synod received a report on abortion from its Social Responsibility Committee. The report did not recommend that the church take a particular stance in relation to the law, recognising the "different and often conflicting positions" being taken by Christians. However, it observed that while there are those "who would reject abortion in all circumstances, the majority will allow for it in some circumstances. Nevertheless, the responsible recognition that human life in some form is at stake should prompt Christians to do their utmost to prevent abortion and the situations which give rise to it." The report saw that the foetus was not the only victim in an abortion. It described women seeking abortions as "victims of a broken society"; a brokenness made manifest in, for example, the ignorance, violence or poverty which underlie "the situations which give rise" to these women's decisions. The report recognised "that a responsible answer to the matter of abortion requires that the women's voice be heard and seriously considered."⁷ In 1988 the Queensland Synod expressed "great regret" over "the number of abortions being performed in our society". It rejected the notion that abortion could be accepted as a normal event, although it recognised that rare "exceptional circumstances" could make the termination of a pregnancy necessary. The Synod called upon "Christian people to treat with love, understanding and practical assistance those with...unwanted pregnancies, and also those who have had to undergo the termination of wanted

pregnancy”⁸.

In 1984 the South Australian Synod of the Uniting Church resolved that “The abortion of a foetus should only be undertaken after a serious consideration of all possible options, and with an awareness of the responsibility we have as Christians to protect life.” The assumption here is that abortion is one of these “possible options”, and can be a valid one. It went on to call on the State Government to amend the law which provided for abortions in certain circumstances “to limit termination of pregnancy to the first trimester except in cases where the life and physical health of the woman is threatened or where there is substantial risk that the child would suffer physical or mental handicaps.”⁹ By implication, during the first trimester other, less dire circumstances could justify the procurement of an abortion. At the same time, the Synod gave close attention to counselling issues. The report of the Abortion Working Group included a critique of existing counselling services in the hospitals and of the minimal role of the church¹⁰. In response, the Synod called for the establishment of independent pregnancy counselling centres, and undertook to “establish a pregnancy counselling service on a trial basis for two years, preferably at Presbytery level”¹¹.

In 1992 the NSW Synod recognised that “abortion must remain a legal option for a woman who is unable to continue her pregnancy” and that the woman herself is the best person to make a decision regarding abortion “after consultation with her family, friends and trusted advisers”. It made a commitment “to support women who continue their pregnancy...[and to] advocate support for women and families within the wider community”¹². In 1993 the Western Australian Synod agreed that “Christians conscientiously hold different views” on abortion, and called on the church “to exercise compassion to those facing difficult decisions of whether to terminate a pregnancy or not, and to offer pastoral support”¹³. So too the Tasmanian Synod, recognising that “there are a number of different views prevailing in the Uniting Church, each of which has integrity and needs to be respected”, chose to pursue a process of education and discussion rather than adopt a particular position in relation to the law¹⁴. In 1994 the Victorian Synod specifically rejected both abortion-on-demand and right-to-life positions, recognising that “there are circumstances in which the decision to have an abortion is a responsible decision to make”. The Synod identified the woman as the one who has “the responsibility to make the final decision”, again recognising the importance of “consulting those whom she trusts”. It expressed a commitment to provide “sensitive, mature and non-judgemental pastoral care” for women who have had to decide about abortion, whatever the outcome¹⁵.

Clearly, there are recurrent themes in Uniting Church teaching on abortion. These include:

- that abortion is always a matter for lament
- that there are circumstances in which a decision to terminate a pregnancy is a morally responsible decision

- that there is a legitimate difference of opinion among Christians
- that the decision is the woman's to make
- that women must be provided with adequate and appropriate counsel and pastoral support

This is a clear contrast to a tradition such as that of the Roman Catholic church. In Roman Catholic teaching abortion is condemned, regardless of circumstances, and the penalty of excommunication is attached¹⁶. It is also forbidden to promote or obey laws permitting abortion, regardless of circumstances¹⁷. While it is an overstatement to call it “pro-choice”, the consistency of Uniting Church teaching and its apparent resonance with the church’s membership might justify describing it as a “tradition”. It becomes more plausible as “tradition” when we consider the coherence between this pattern of teaching and characteristic doctrinal themes of the Reformed tradition.

The Transmission of a Doctrinal Tradition

The 1992 resolution of the NSW Synod began, “in a world of peace, justice and harmony of relationships, where hopes are fulfilled and plans succeed, there would be little need for women to seek abortions.” The implication was obvious but unstated: as much as we would like to, we do not live in such a world. We live in the kind of world where, as the resolution put it, “abortion must remain a legal option for a woman who is unable to continue her pregnancy.”¹⁸

This is essentially a standard Reformed position on abortion, arising as it does from a classical Reformed view of the world. As Kenneth Vaux has explained: “moral doctrine on abortion intensifies [the] antinomy of freedom and necessity in the ethics of the Reformed tradition. The benign goodness of nature expressed in Catholic teleology...is now set aside, and the caprice and bondage of nature is emphasized so as to incline the moral equation towards dominion and freedom. Freedom of choice thus comes to prevail over right to life in the tradition.”¹⁹

That is, in doctrinal terms, the world itself is “fallen”. As the Queensland Social Responsibility Committee expressed it, against the world as God intends it, and as we long for it to be, “stands the reality of sin, which affects every human being and which is the cause of the break which runs through the whole of creation”²⁰. Nature disappoints. It lets us down. Nature sometimes fails to serve the good. Indeed it sometimes generates evil. And it is a horrible irony that sometimes even human conception amounts to the generation of evil. In such a circumstance of brokenness, it is not the human vocation to acquiesce but, by grace and in the strength of the Holy Spirit, to give expression to such freedom as is available by exercising dominion over nature. Sometimes abortion is necessary.

This does not make abortion good in the Reformed perspective. The Victorian Synod’s Bioethics Committee emphasised that “the destruction of human life is an offence to God”²¹ and that “we must begin by honestly recognising that an abortion

involves the destruction of human life - which is a very solemn responsibility²². And yet, "in imperfect world there are situations in which responsible moral action may involve taking human life"²³. The Committee recognised that "there are no simple or absolute indications of what is the most responsible course of action" but that living with this "ambiguity and uncertainty is part of what it is to be human."²⁴ So, as Kenneth Vaux explains, in the Reformed tradition, "Abortion is not good. It is an evil but a mitigated evil...We need to distinguish among differing situations and admit that there are times when the technique of abortion must be used."²⁵ These "differing situations" might be envisaged on a kind of scale. Abortion might be "strongly advised" where the pregnant woman's life is threatened or where profound genetic or congenital abnormalities were identified in the foetus. Abortion might be only "permissible" in cases of moderately severe foetal abnormalities or if the pregnancy were the result of rape. Abortion might be "permissible but discouraged" if mild foetal abnormalities were discovered or in the case of teenage pregnancy. Abortion might be "proscribed" if it were sought for "reasons of convenience, population control, and sex selection"²⁶.

While the majority of Uniting Church people would allow legal abortion on the basis of some such scale, we can never be complacent about particular decisions. As the Victorian Bioethics Committee argued, "although we may believe we are acting responsibly and make these decisions as carefully and prayerfully as we can, we recognise that they may be wrong. The Committee acknowledge[s] our continuous need for God's grace and forgiveness"²⁷.

The NSW Synod's Board of Social Responsibility commented that it was likely that Uniting Church members would prefer decisions on abortion to be made "on a case by case basis, rather than having a blanket position which covers all situations."²⁸ So it was that the Synod resolution went on to affirm, "That the best person to make the decision to proceed with an abortion is the pregnant woman, after consultation with her family friends and trusted advisers." Again, this is consistent with classical Reformed thinking. As Davis McCaughey has said, there has always been among lay people in the Reformed tradition "a reluctance to accept instruction by 'the Church' on what they should do". This reluctance derives in part from "the sense of God's sovereign power, his immediate presence, and from an awareness of his claim on every aspect of life". Accordingly, "the Reformed Churches have avoided laying down patterns of behaviour for their members" but have instead taught that each one is *responsible* to God for their life and decisions²⁹.

It is no coincidence that Uniting Church agencies concerned with social issues have been consistently called "social *responsibility*" committees, boards and commissions. Modern Reformed ethics has tended to rely on the idea of "responsibility"³⁰. The Victorian Bioethics Committee developed this theme quite explicitly, understanding our accountability to God not in terms of obedience to abstract principles or rules but in the way we have used our God-given "freedom and

responsibility, in all our dealings with God, neighbour, ourselves and the world in which we live.”³¹ The Queensland Social Responsibility Committee also had worked with these themes: “The law by itself is not the decisive factor in the debate on abortion, but humanity’s freedom, and responsibility...and God’s sovereign grace”³².

Reformed Christians are supported by the church in their responsibility to God by its constant proclamation of the Gospel and instruction in the faith, and by participation in the priestly body of the faithful. As James Gustafson would have it, “religion *qualifies* morality” rather than determine it³³. The church’s role is not to tell its members what to do, nor to tell society what to do, but to provide nourishment in faith and pastoral support within a community of believers so that Christians can exercise their responsibility to God in their personal lives and, by that “free obedience of the Children of God”³⁴ serve the transformation of society from within. “Such an approach”, McCaughey has observed, “sits ill with a centrally placed *magesterium*. It call[s] for a dispersed authority, dispersed among the members, each in his own place, dispersed among the institutions of society.”³⁵

It is important to note that the NSW Synod resolution took a distinctive turn by identifying the pregnant woman as “the best person to make the decision”. The Reformed approach has always been to maintain that those most familiar with the situation have primary responsibility for the decision but, characteristically, this has been interpreted as giving priority to the judgement of “experts”. In this case medical advice would be emphasised. This pattern was very clear in the 1974 resolution of the Presbyterian General Assembly which recognised that “the basic decision...should be left in the hands of the individual woman as advised by her qualified medical practitioner and other professional advisers, who are in the best position to discover all the relevant factors and weigh them up in each particular situation.” The 1973 Methodist General Conference seemed to have something similar in mind when it stressed the importance of the availability of “counselling facilities” to assist the woman “to take into account all the factors relevant to her decision”. In recent Uniting Church thinking, however, it is not the judgement of “experts” but that of those most directly affected by the decision which is given weight. This reflects our appropriation of a general trend in ecumenical social ethics which has given special emphasis to hearing people’s stories³⁶. For example, the study resource prepared by the Western Australian and Tasmanian Synods include several women’s stories, told in the first person, as a key element of the reflective process³⁷.

So Uniting Church teaching on abortion represents the transmission of three characteristic emphases of the Reformed tradition:

- In respect of worldview, there is an emphasis in its doctrine of the fall which encourages a pessimistic view of nature as a guide to morality.
- As regards the moral agent, there is an accompanying emphasis in its doctrine of the human person which leads to an insistence on the personal responsibility of the individual to discern and choose the good in their particular situation.
- And as far as the doctrine of the church is concerned, there is an understanding of

ecclesial authority which makes Reformed Christians suspicious of a church which prescribes or legitimates a particular path for its members.

The Ecumenical Context

These doctrinal emphases can be seen even more clearly when they are compared to other Christian alternatives which emerged in the national media debate surrounding the NSW Synod's resolution. In the most frequently quoted comment in the debate, a spokesman for the Sydney Catholic Archdiocese described the Uniting Church resolution as "incoherent". He said that the NSW Synod's acceptance of the legitimacy of abortion in some circumstances, and its conclusion that it must therefore "remain a legal option", was the denial of "an innocent unborn child's right to live"³⁸. Especially problematic was the resolution's statement that "the best person to make the decision to proceed with an abortion is the pregnant woman."

Roman Catholic teaching on the issue is, of course, clear enough. It insists, in continuity with the most ancient Christian tradition, that "from the moment of conception life must be guarded with the greatest care, while abortion and infanticide are unspeakable crimes."³⁹ In the further elucidation of this teaching there was the clarifying comment: "The movement for the emancipation of women...is perfectly justified...But one cannot change nature. Nor can one exempt women, any more than men, from what nature demands of them."⁴⁰ That is, nature conveys the call of God. To have conceived is to have received the vocation of parenthood; either for oneself or, in the case of an envisaged adoption, in cooperation with another. From this perspective the Uniting Church resolution is indeed "incoherent". But the point of contrast is not merely the particular moral instruction. The more interesting contrast lies in the worldview which is presupposed. Where the Reformed tradition views nature with suspicion as a potential obstruction to the Christian's discernment of her vocation, the Roman Catholic tradition views nature more optimistically as a God-given guide to the moral life. If you are pregnant, whatever the circumstances, God is calling you to bear a child.

From the Roman Catholic perspective the Reformed approach to abortion is culpably muddle-headed, compromising the rights of the unborn. But from the Reformed perspective the Roman Catholic approach to abortion is wilfully naive, compromising the Christian's personal responsibility to God. Similarly, where the Reformed tradition limits the church's authority to interfere directly in its members' moral decision making, the Roman Catholic tradition would see it as the Church's duty to make plain to all believers and to the world at large what, in the light of Christ, is found written by God into nature.

Anglican responses to the Uniting Church resolution provided an interesting alternative. On the one hand, spokesmen drew attention to the rights of the foetus as those of a human life. But on the other hand, they acknowledged "extraordinary cases" or "mitigating circumstances" which justify abortion⁴¹. One would be tempted

to see this as an example of the clever (English) way Anglicanism has managed to maintain itself as a single communion of strikingly different Christian traditions, except for the fact that this approach is almost identical to that taken by the Orthodox churches in Australia. Like the Orthodox⁴², the Anglican spokesmen seemed to condemn abortion in the abstract, while leaving room for a more flexible approach in pastoral reality. This represents an adherence to ancient tradition tempered by an accommodation to a pastoral context being redefined by new diagnostic and clinical possibilities. In practical terms, this is reflected in their unease with the Uniting Church's affirmation of the *woman's* responsibility to make the decision. The Anglican and Orthodox churches would want to specify both priestly and medical participation in the decision rather than simply leave it to "consultation" with "family, friends and trusted advisers".

The Orthodox and Anglican churches in Australia approach the question from a doctrinal position midway between those of the Reformed and Roman Catholic traditions. Their perspective on nature is less pessimistic than the one but less optimistic than the other. Nature guides but can also impede our discernment of God's will. So too in respect of the Christian vocation. Individuals must be responsible for their choices but within a pastoral relationship more directive than the Reformed tradition would tolerate. And as far as the teaching authority of the church is concerned, there is more hesitancy to rule than is true of the Roman Catholic church but only because of the seriousness with which the dividedness of the church is taken. While Anglicans questioned the wisdom of the NSW Synod making a statement, the Orthodox questioned the competence of any single church to pronounce on an issue like abortion⁴³. For the Orthodox, it is the kind of issue which requires the determination of "a genuinely ecumenical council" before denominations may say with confidence what the church teaches.

In Western Australia in 1988, when abortion law came under review in both houses of parliament, the churches' role in the public controversy was muted but instructive. As might have been predicted from the debate of 1992, it was clear very early that the churches were having difficulty offering a single "Christian point of view". Indeed, it is no surprise that it was the Uniting Church's moderator, the Rev John Dunn, who advised journalists that "churches were as split on the issue as the rest of the community"⁴⁴. Even though the Pope himself had weighed into the controversy, opposing any liberalisation of abortion law⁴⁵, when a "Combined Churches Statement on Abortion" was finally issued it lacked the support of the Anglican Archbishop of Perth and the Uniting Church moderator⁴⁶. The Anglican Archbishop rejected "abortion on demand" but acknowledged that abortion may be necessary in certain cases. The judgement, he said, ought to be made by "medical practitioners in conjunction with the mother"⁴⁷. A significant feature of the debate, for our purposes, was the role of Marion Millin. Preparing for ordination by the Uniting Church to the renewed Ministry of Deacon, Ms Millin played an active part in promoting abortion law reform. She wrote to *The West Australian* offering an

explicitly Christian argument in support of reform and was the subject of an article in the same paper⁴⁸. Although it is always a personal risk to take a public role in these debates (on any side), there was never any suggestion that she was compromising her progress to ordination by doing so. Ms Millin was, after all, simply propagating the Uniting Church's teaching on abortion.

In the 1992 debate, the general secretary of the NSW Synod's Board of Social responsibility always insisted that "our church entered this debate reluctantly"⁴⁹. So, why take up the issue at all? Essentially, they were pushed into it by the right-to-life lobby within the Uniting Church in NSW. The same has been the case when the corresponding agencies of other Synods have taken up the question. And this is a matter of ecumenical significance.

The right-to-life lobby forced the issue in NSW in the sincere expectation that the Synod would produce a resolution which would support their cause. However, as I have attempted to show, the resolution which eventuated was a statement of mainstream Reformed ethics, entirely consistent with statements produced elsewhere in the Uniting Church. The right-to-life lobby was never going to get the resolution it wanted from the Uniting Church without somehow forcing or persuading the Synod to depart from its own doctrinal and ethical tradition. The movement's lobbying of the Anglican and Orthodox church leaders is similar in nature. It involves an attempt to make those denominations betray their own religious traditions. The Lutheran Church of Australia is more accommodating to the right-to-life lobby in its moral teaching. However, its particular approach to church-state relations makes it resistant to the political project of right-to-life⁵⁰.

The right-to-life lobby is most at home within the Roman Catholic church which can sponsor its project ideologically and politically without compromising its religious tradition at all. This should be entirely unsurprising given the history of the anti-abortion lobby in Australia⁵¹. However, with the participation of the Roman Catholic church in the reconstituted National Council of Churches in Australia, its alliance with the right-to-life lobby is problematic. Although they remain unstated and unexamined by the movement, the doctrinal presuppositions of the right-to-life lobby are such that its activities within all other traditions amounts to proselytism; a practice which has been profoundly destructive of ecumenical relations⁵².

The Catholic Weekly carried on its front page the comment of the Right To Life Association (NSW): "The Uniting Church's support of women's right to have an abortion demonstrates the corruptive effect of abortion in our society. How a church which claims to be Christian...can ignore the clear teachings of the Bible...is beyond comprehension. Either it is an attempt to attract trendy New Age people...or it demonstrates how pro-abortion bureaucrats...are manipulating the church and its own members."⁵³ It has been my purpose to show that none of this is the case. The Uniting Church's teaching on abortion has consistently reflected our participation in the Reformed tradition of faith and social engagement.

Conclusion

From our perspective, the law should reflect the reality that there are circumstances in which the decision to terminate a pregnancy can be a morally responsible decision. This is the view of the great majority of our members. It has been reiterated by responsible councils of the church over two decades. And it is consistent with the way the world, the human person and the church is understood in our theological tradition. It does not matter how often the question is raised, our answer is always most likely to come out in this general form. This is something that we need to make clear to our ecumenical partners. In my view, however, this is the least interesting thing that the Uniting Church has to say about abortion.

There is another, quite different approach to the fact of abortion. It is identified by Ann Loades:

“The path to change will be a long and hard one, given that the young and healthy finding themselves pregnant will (some of them) opt for abortion on the grounds that ‘having this baby will ruin my life’. How on earth did they come to think that way in the first place? And the trouble is, that in a sense, in our societies, they are right. That’s what needs changing.”⁵⁴

Recognising just this problem, the South Australian report to the Synod included a sustained discussion of the material difficulties which could lead a woman to anticipate her “inability to cope” with a child and decide to terminate the pregnancy. These included such things as the absence of the necessary supportive relationships, financial problems in the short and long term, problems with housing or employment, and the continuing “social pressure or stigma” facing single mothers - especially in the church⁵⁵. As a recent report on post abortion syndrome has observed, “Frequently it is not the baby that is unwanted, but the problems surrounding the pregnancy that are unwanted.”⁵⁶ What is it about our society - and our churches - that makes some babies “unwanted”? What can we do to change our society - and our churches - so that an untimely or imperfect pregnancy is not going to ruin the mother’s life? These much more interesting, and challenging questions demand our attention, and they warrant attention on an ecumenical basis. For while the state of abortion law is unlikely to offer much opportunity for ecumenical collaboration, the state of a society which has become inhospitable to some children and their mothers can and should be addressed ecumenically. As the NSW Synod resolution said, “The issue of abortion is a social not a criminal one.”

Notes

1. Hay Bray “Abortion Issues Dominate National/Urban Agenda” *General Assembly News* GA95041 July 18, 1995 [<http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/briefs.htm>] my emphasis.
2. Andrew Dutney “Is There A Uniting Church Theology?” *Uniting Church Studies* Vol.2

No.1 March 1996 pp.17-35

3. Graham Perry, review of Andrew Dutney *Food, Sex & Death: A Personal Account of Christianity* (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1993), in *Uniting Church Studies* Vol.1 No.2 August 1995 pp.63-66 at p.65.
4. In, Board of Social Responsibility [NSW], "Abortion: Report on Discussion and Recommendations to the Synod", *Business Papers of the 1992 Synod* (Sydney; UCA Synod of NSW, 1992) pp.C6.21-C6.25, at p.C6.22 The analysis was the work of Peter Bentley, "Abortion and the Uniting Church - NSSS Data Preliminary Material" (unpublished, October 7, 1991).
5. An excellent, plain language summary of formal discussion and decisions on abortion in the Uniting Church may be found in, Social Justice Commission [WA] *Abortion: Between a Rock and a Hard Place* (Perth: UCA Synod of Western Australia, 1994) pp.31-37
6. The resolutions are reproduced ...in *ibid* pp.31-32
7. Social Responsibility Committee [Qld] *A Statement on Abortion* (Brisbane: UCA Synod of Queensland, 1980) pp.2 and 4
8. Minute 88.117, in *Minutes and Supplementary Reports of the Twelfth Synod* (Brisbane: UCA Synod of Queensland, 1988)
9. Minutes 84.124 and 84.126, in *Reports and Business Papers of the Eighth Synod* Vol.2 (Adelaide: UCA Synod of South Australia, 1984) p.500
10. *Ibid* Vol.1 pp.259-278, at pp.264-267
11. Minutes 84.128 and 84.130, in *Ibid* Vol.2 p.500. To my knowledge this trial never took place.
12. Minute 241/92S, in *Synod 1992* (Sydney: UCA Synod of NSW) pp.27-28
13. Minute 26/93, in Social Justice Commission [WA] op cit, p.1, and see pp.57-58 for the notices of motion discussed by that Synod
14. Social Responsibility and Justice Task Group [Tas] *Abortion - A Christian Dialogue: Resources to Help Congregations and Groups in Tasmania to Explore a Christian Response to Abortion* (Launceston: UCA Synod of Tasmania, 1993) pp.2-3
15. Minute 94.2.2.6.1-6, in *Minutes of the Eighteenth Synod 1994* (Melbourne: UCA Synod of Victoria, 1994) p.B3.9
16. *Guadium et Spes* [Vatican II] para.51 in *Vatican Collection Vol I: Vatican II, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* Edited by Austin P.Flannery (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1975) pp.903-1001, at pp.954-955; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Homebush, Sydney: St Pauls, 1994) para.2272
17. *Declaration on Procured Abortion* [1974] para.22, in *Vatican Collection Vol II: More Postconciliar Documents* edited by Austin Flannery (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1982) pp.441-453, at p.449
18. op cit
19. Kenneth L.Vaux "Biomedical Ethics in the Reformed Tradition", in *Bioethics Yearbook: Volume I, Theological Developments in Bioethics* Edited by B.Andrew Lustig (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991) pp.201-213, at pp.205-206.
20. Social Responsibility Committee [Qld] op cit p.2
21. Bioethics Committee [Vic] *Report to the Synod of Victoria on Abortion and Euthanasia*

- (Melbourne; Typescript, 1993) p.4
22. *ibid* p.7
 23. *ibid* p.4
 24. *ibid*
 25. Vaux "Biomedical Ethics" *op cit* p.206
 26. *ibid* p.207
 27. *op cit* p.4
 28. Board of Social Responsibility [NSW] *op cit*
 29. J.Davis McCaughey "Towards and Approach to Bioethics Ecumenical and Reformed" *Trinity Occasional Papers* Vol.5, No.1, June 1986, pp.78-88, at p.80
 30. See eg Karl Barth *Church Dogmatics* II.2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, [ET] 1957) pp.641-644, and H.Richard Niebuhr *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962)
 31. Bioethics Committee [Vic] *op cit* p.4
 32. Social Responsibility Committee [Qld] *op cit* p.3
 33. James M.Gustafson *Can Ethics be Christian?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975) p.173
 34. *Basis of Union* para.17
 35. McCaughey "Towards an Approach to Bioethics Ecumenical and Reformed" *op cit* p.80
 36. See Marion Maddox *Suffering and Action: Theology and Ethics in the Writing of the Church and Society Subunit of the World Council of Churches 1966-1991* PhD Thesis (Adelaide: Flinders University of South Australia, 1991)
 37. Social Justice Commission [WA] *op cit* pp.17-22, Social Responsibility and Justice Task Group [Tas] *op cit* pp.7-8
 38. Christine Spiteri "Pro-Lifers to Tackle Church" *Daily Telegraph Mirror* 28th September 1992, p.3
 39. *Guadium et Spes* para.51 *op cit*
 40. *Declaration on Procured Abortion* para.15 *op cit*
 41. Louise Williams "Church Defends its Abortion Tolerance" *Sydney Morning Herald* 29th September 1992, p.9, and "Bishop Supports Abortion" *Daily Telegraph Mirror* 1st October 1992, p.5. It is interesting that the former report presents the Archbishop of Sydney as "attacking" the Uniting Church resolution, while the latter constructs the Archbishop of Brisbane as sympathetic to it. In fact their quoted comments amount to exactly the same position. The differences in the reports reflects the journalists' different assumptions based on the Archbishops' different reputations.
 42. See Stanley Samuel Harakas "Eastern Orthodox Bioethics" in *Bioethics Yearbook*, *op cit* pp.85-101, at p.93
 43. Ignatius IV, as reported by Louise Williams, "Christian Leader Fears for Future of Church" *Sydney Morning Herald* 29th September 1992
 44. Natalie O'Brien "Churches Agonise Over Abortion" *The Australian* February 2nd 1998

45. Matt Price "Pope Puts Abortion Row On World Stage" *The Australian* March 17th 1988
46. "Combined Churches Statement On Abortion", Press Release to *The West Australian*, *Sunday Times*, ABC News Room, *The Australian*, and Sonshine FM, March 26th 1998. The statement emphasises the rights of the unborn (points 1-3) and the medical and psychological risks to women having abortions (points 4-7). It was supported by the Catholic Archbishop of Perth, the Lutheran Church, the Baptist Churches, the Churches of Christ, the Assemblies of God, the Salvation Army and nine other small denominations and Christian organisations.
47. Natalie O'Brien op cit
48. Marian Millin, "Life and Breath", Letters to the Editor *The West Australian* March 3rd 1998, and Francesca Hodge "Abortion Not Morally Wrong: Minister-To-Be" *The West Australian* March 2nd 1998
49. Louise Williams "Church Defends its Abortion Tolerance" *Sydney Morning Herald* 29th September 1992
50. See the Statement on "Abortion" adopted by the 1970 Convention of the General Synod of the LCA, and the Statement on "The Involvement of the Church in Social and Political Problems" adopted by the LCA Commission on Social Questions in 1972, in *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions of the Lutheran Church of Australia*, Revised Third Edition (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1989) pp.H2 and H13
51. See Michael Hogan *The Sectarian Strand: Religion in Australian History* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books, 1987) pp.196-277
52. See Paul Loeffler "Proselytism" in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* Edited by Nicholas Lossky et al (Geneva and Grand Rapids, Michigan: WCC Publications and Eerdmans, 1991)
53. Cliff Baxter "'Yes' to Abortion Dismays Church" *The Catholic Weekly* 30th September 1992, pp.1-2
54. Ann Loades, review of Ann Farmer *The Language of Life: Christians Facing the Abortion Challenge* (St Paul Publications, 1994), in *The Expository Times* Vol.106 No.12, p.382
55. op cit pp.272-274
56. WHBA *Post Abortion Syndrome* (Canning Bridge, WA: Women Hurt By Abortion Australia Incorporated, 1995) p.4. The indicators for women at high risk of PAS, on p.19, correspond strikingly to the material difficulties discussed by the SA Abortion Working Group.