

Anglicans and Abortion: Sydney in the Seventies

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SYNOPSIS

This paper considers the public voice of the Anglican Church in Sydney as it discussed and took part in debates concerning the issue of medical abortion during the 1970s. Just prior to this decade, UK law changes and church discussions were bringing this issue on to the table. Contrary to many other voices, the Sydney Anglican position was not supportive of legislative change to make abortion more readily available.

Following an initial investigation, the Sydney diocese recommended actions at church, diocesan and State levels calling primarily for better education and support for those considering abortion. While the diocese was not unanimous in its voice on the matter, it found a significant ally in the Roman Catholic Church, with whom it campaigned over the next decade despite a number of other tensions. In 1971, while a court case provided greater security for those seeking abortions, it was still a controversial topic. It surfaced at elections and during significant parliamentary debates as politicians were called on to clarify their personal opinions regarding the matter. The Church aimed to be non-partisan, but spoke independently and with groups such as the Festival of Light, calling for restraint and moral conduct. Archbishop Marcus Loane and Dean of the Cathedral Lance Shilton were prominent Anglican voices throughout this period. While increased support and education were provided over the decade, the results were not always as the Church would have wished.

As the seventies drew to a close, the voice of the Anglican Church is here briefly assessed. It is suggested the significance of the abortion debate may have been diluted by its grouping with a number of other social issues of potentially less importance. Their voice may have gained a limited hearing as their response became predictable. Finally, while support and education were important, they may not have been sufficiently provided by the Church itself. Perhaps the focus must now be to work towards a society where abortion is not merely rejected as wrong but no longer seen as a necessary option.

ANGLICANS AND ABORTION: SYDNEY IN THE SEVENTIES

In his 1969 Presidential address to the Sydney Synod, Archbishop Marcus Loane spoke about the place of the Christian voice in discussions of public morality and the law. The ideal case, he suggested, was when the law defined the real standard of right and wrong for a community. The Church's role here was to support this by making an educational contribution.¹ To demonstrate this point, Loane spoke about the practice of abortion.

Abortion was to increasingly become a point of discussion in society, politics and the church especially over the next decade. The aim of this paper is to discuss the public voice of the Sydney Anglican Church in the 1970s as it spoke on this issue. This will cover the situations in which the Church spoke, looking at what was said and how they said it. The focus here is on official church speeches, publications and what can be found in the Australian Church

¹ Marcus L. Loane, 'Presidential Address to Synod 1969', in *Year Book of the Diocese of Sydney* (Sydney: Church of England In Australia, 1970), 242–3.

Record (ACR), a newspaper which was the mouthpiece of Moore College under the Principal Broughton Knox.²

As well as what is officially said, we must also consider what was heard by the public, many of whom would not be aware of these Church publications. To do this we consider articles relating to the issue of Abortion and the Church that are found in the Sydney Morning Herald (SMH), a popular newspaper reportedly read by around 20% of the population³ in the mid-seventies.⁴

Abortion in Context

The term abortion, while technically referring to all forms of miscarriage, is generally (and in this paper) used to describe the intentional medical act of terminating a foetus before it is capable of life outside of the uterus.⁵ When it is deemed to be a medically necessary procedure it is termed a therapeutic abortion. ⁶

The Law in NSW stands today as it did in the 1960s and 70s. In the NSW Crimes Act 1900, sections 82, 83 and 84 proscribe penalties of up to 10 years imprisonment for a woman who unlawfully uses anything to 'procure her miscarriage'; similarly for anyone who assists in miscarriage or provides anything that will be used in the process.⁷ This legislation was based

² Marcia Cameron, *An Enigmatic Life: David Broughton Knox* (Victoria: Acorn Press, 2006), 137.

³ Aged fourteen and over

⁴ Henry Mayer, 'Media', in *Australian Politics: A Fourth Reader* (ed by. Henry Mayer and Helen Nelson; Melbourne: Longman, 1976), 142.

⁵ Royal Commission on Human Relationships (Chair: Justice Elizabeth Evatt), 'Final Report. Vol. 3' (Commonwealth of Australia, 1977), 135.

⁶ Talina Drabsch, 'Abortion and the Law in New South Wales', Briefing paper No 9/05 (NSW Parliamentary Library Research Service, August 2005), 3.

⁷ Drabsch, 'Abortion and the Law in New South Wales', 19.

on laws in the UK, which themselves remained unchanged until the Abortion Act 1967 which attempted to clear up ambiguity related to the word ‘unlawfully’. It was argued that the inclusion of this word meant that there were instances where abortion was lawful, and the 1967 Act stated what they were. According to the Act, abortions were legal if performed by a registered medical practitioner in a hospital, provided that another doctor had also agreed that continuing the pregnancy was a risk to the woman’s life, or her physical or mental health. It was also allowed if there was a significant risk of the child being seriously handicapped.⁸

This change sparked discussion in the Church of England, with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr A.M. Ramsey speaking out in support of the Act. In Australia, the Anglican Bishops of Newcastle and Goulburn agreed with Ramsey and called for local abortion studies to commence.⁹ The Melbourne Synod called for similar legislation reforms in 1968, ¹⁰ and the following year the issue was discussed at General Synod.¹¹ Also, by 1969, South Australia had passed reforms which legalised abortions under certain conditions.¹²

Sydney Speaks

Into this context, Archbishop Loane made his third Presidential Address to the Synod of Sydney and stated his position with regard to abortion. Loane likened it to the ancient pagan practice of exposing unwanted infants to the elements and allowing them to die. Loane stated that, in the same way as early Christians opposed this practice, Christians should now oppose abortion. All people, he claimed, are made in the ‘Image of God’ which entails both sanctity

⁸ Drabsch, ‘Abortion and the Law in New South Wales’, 17.

⁹ ‘Bishop Calls for Urgent Church Study of Abortion’, *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, January 21, 1967), 6.

¹⁰ ‘Synod Calls for Abortion Reform’, *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, October 23, 1968), 29.

¹¹ ‘Anglican Bishops End Talks’, *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, April 26, 1969), 15.

¹² ‘Legal Abortion in S.A. by the End of the Year’, *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, December 6, 1969), sec. Front page.

to all human life, and a responsibility to look after others. Relaxing abortion laws in the same manner as in the UK, would move away from these fundamental principles.¹³

Loane did not just condemn the practice, but indicated what the response of the church should be. This was to, ‘do all that lies in its power to support and protect the weak: that includes the overwrought woman, burdened by an unwanted pregnancy, as well as the helpless child that still lies beneath her heart.’¹⁴ As previously stated, he saw that a significant part of this response was to be in community education.

While a group had already done some work on the issue of abortion, it was proposed at this Synod that a committee be established to examine the Christian teaching on a number of social questions including abortion.¹⁵ In the following year, this Ethics and Social Questions Committee presented their report which focussed not on the social and personal ramifications of abortion, focussing rather on the central question of the significance of foetal life.¹⁶ The report concluded that ‘Foetal life is human life, and only when that life itself constitutes a threat to the life of the Mother or seriously threatens her mental or physical health can any interference with it be condoned.’¹⁷

The report recommended action at three levels. At the personal and local church level it called for good teaching about the responsibilities of bringing life into existence and the providence of God even in ‘misfortunes’. It called for the church to bear each other’s

¹³ Loane, ‘Presidential Address to Synod 1969’, 243.

¹⁴ Loane, ‘Presidential Address to Synod 1969’, 243.

¹⁵ Bruce Smith, ‘Resolution 29/69. Ethics and Social Questions’, in *Year Book of the Diocese of Sydney* (Sydney: Church of England In Australia, 1970), 350.

¹⁶ ‘Abortion Report’ (Sydney: Ethics and Social Questions Committee set up by the Synod of the Church of England in Australia, Diocese of Sydney, 1971), 7–8.

¹⁷ ‘Abortion Report’, 17.

burdens, and for doctors to be understanding and supportive of mothers in their unwanted pregnancies.¹⁸

The Denomination was called to adhere to the teachings of Christ, to provide more programs of social aid and provide the money required for this. Finally at the level of state action, governments were urged to provide education on sex and family planning, provide counselling and aid services rather than easily obtainable abortion and to maintain laws that uphold the sanctity of foetal life.¹⁹

The key conclusions and recommendations of Synod were reported in both the ACR²⁰ and the SMH,²¹ though the latter with the provocative headline, “Church favours some abortion”, highlighted the limited situations in which abortion could be considered. The Herald did however make the distinction between the report recommendations and the social reasons for abortion as presented in the UK Act.²²

Here at the beginning of the seventies, in their resistance to relaxation of Abortion Legislation, the Sydney Anglican Diocese was plotting a different course to others in Australia as well as the Church of England in the UK. Sydney however was not a lone voice, the Bishop of Armidale was reported as resisting laws that would extend the provision for abortion,²³ and in 1971 the Primate of the Anglican Church spoke out against abortion on demand.²⁴

¹⁸ ‘Abortion Report’, 18.

¹⁹ ‘Abortion Report’, 19.

²⁰ ‘Abortion Law Report’, *Australian Church Record* (SYD, August 21, 1969), sec. Front page.

²¹ ‘Church Favours Some Abortion’, *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, July 30, 1969), 5.

²² ‘Church Favours Some Abortion’, 5.

²³ ‘Unborn Must Be Protected - Bishop’, *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, February 24, 1970), 6.

²⁴ ‘Primate Speaks out against Liberalising Abortion Laws’, *Australian Church Record* (SYD, September 23, 1971), sec.

A United Front?

However, within the Sydney Diocese, despite Synod resolutions and the statements of Loane and Knox, there was not a united front on this issue. One dissenting voice that appeared a number of times in the Press was that of Anglican Rev. W.G. Coughlan.

Coughlan had previously been the director of the Marriage Council of NSW, where he and his wife had been pioneers in marriage guidance counselling.²⁵ In 1969, he became the President of the Abortion Law Reform Association NSW.²⁶ That year, in a letter to the editor of the SMH, he called for clearer abortion laws and advocated the need for abortion as a way to rescue women who were often not to blame for their circumstances.²⁷ In another letter, Coughlan took issue with Archbishop Loane for presuming to speak on behalf of the whole Church. He stated that the Church was not doing enough to support and protect the weak, and that they needed a more realistic interpretation of 'life'.²⁸ His views made the front page of the Herald as he responded in favour of the proposed abortion law reforms in South Australia.²⁹ The same story outlines the less favourable reaction of G.R Delbridge, Bishop of Wollongong, clearly showing division within the Sydney Anglican Camp.

Front Page.

²⁵ 'W.G. Coughlan Retires', *Australian Church Record* (SYD, December 11, 1968), 2.

²⁶ Joan Mansfield, 'Coughlan, William George (1902–1979)', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (vol. 13; National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, 1993).

²⁷ W.G. Coughlan, 'Abortion Law Reform', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, June 24, 1969), 2.

²⁸ W.G. Coughlan, 'Call for Abortion Law Reform', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, October 18, 1969), 2.

²⁹ 'Legal Abortion in S.A. by the End of the Year'.

While at the senior levels and as a majority, the Anglican Church appeared to be steadily resisting abortion law reform, there continued to be voices in Synod that called for change.³⁰ Others expressed their distance from the leadership's views in letters to the editor.³¹

It is also difficult to ascertain the opinions of the population that identify as Anglican. In 1969, a report on an opinion poll indicated that evangelicals (including Anglicans) were no different to the general population when it came to their stance on abortion. The report stated that 73% supported abortion under certain circumstances and 17% said it should never be legal.³² The problem with this reporting is that the 'certain circumstances' are a very broad category. This response could include the limited circumstances outlined in the Synod Report and the 'social reasons' of the Abortion Act 1967. A 1970 survey asked more defined questions and it reported that 20% of those identifying as Anglicans support the legalisation of abortion in all circumstances. While the majority only allow for it in situations of exceptional hardship (46%) or to save the mother's life (28%) this shows that a significant population dissented from the 'official' Anglican position as outlined in the synod report.³³

An Unlikely Ally

This same survey also showed that the response of those who identified as Roman Catholic was more conservative than the Anglican response. While the two groups held significantly different views on a range of issues, they spoke with a remarkably united voice on the topic of abortion. During the seventies, particular sources of friction between the two Churches

³⁰ 'Anglicans Reaffirm Opposition to Abortion', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, October 16, 1971), 11.

³¹ David Davies, 'Anglican Embarrassed by Archbishop's Views', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, October 7, 1977), 6.

³² 'Health Risk Abortions Favoured', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, April 27, 1969), 38.

³³ 'Abortion Survey in Australia', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, April 5, 1970), 15.

included Archbishop Loane's refusal to meet with the Pope during his visit in 1970, 34 and his resistance to the ecumenical movement later in the decade.³⁵ Despite significant divisions over theology, Loane praised their agreement on social issues, and played down tension reported in the press.³⁶

The Roman Catholics and Anglicans began meeting together to discuss abortion from 1969.³⁷ In 1970 a front page article in the SMH reported a united statement which said that the law should not be extended in any way. It was claimed that the current legislation offered sufficient scope for responsible and conscientious decision making. Archbishop Loane and Cardinal Gilroy together offered an 'earnest plea' in defence of unborn life on the basis of humanity as the 'crown and summit of creation.'³⁸ Such a plea allowed for a common voice, while smoothing over the difference in the details, namely that the Catholic position did not allow for abortion in any circumstances compared to the limited scenarios allowed by the Anglicans. This particular debate was reported as impossible to resolve, an 'irresistible force against an immovable object'.³⁹

It appears that this united voice was noted by State Labor MPs as they overwhelmingly defeated a motion on liberalising abortion laws in that month. Notably at this point, many of the caucus were Roman Catholic and not in favour of change. Premier Askin also publicly committed his government to not seek reform.⁴⁰

³⁴ 'Archbishop and the Pope', *Australian Church Record* (SYD, October 29, 1970).

³⁵ Alan Gill, 'Key Year in Nation's Religious History', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, December 28, 1977), 8.

³⁶ 'Archbishop of Sydney's Statement on the Papal Visit', *Australian Church Record* (SYD, October 29, 1970), 2,6.

³⁷ 'Anglican Group to Reconsider Abortion Views', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, December 10, 1969), 12.

³⁸ 'Clergy Unite to Oppose Abortion Change', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, September 3, 1970), sec. Front page.

³⁹ John O'Hara, 'Labor MPs Reject Abortion Changes', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, September 9, 1970), 8.

⁴⁰ O'Hara, 'Labor MPs Reject Abortion Changes'.

A Legal Test: 1971

In 1971, five people appeared in the District Court charged under abortion legislation in the Crimes Act 1900. This case, *R v Wald*, provided an interpretation of what it meant for an abortion to be lawful or unlawful. The outcome was that Justice Levine effectively expanded the grounds that could cause a serious threat to the health of the woman. Levine allowed that social and economic factors could be taken into account. The accused were subsequently acquitted.⁴¹ While this case was to go on to become the major example of abortion case law in NSW, it appeared to receive little direct comment from the Anglican Church in Sydney at the time.

Also in 1971, the Synod Abortion Report was released to the public as a 50-page book and sold for 90c a copy. The Herald reported the accompanying statement made by the secretary of the Ethics and Social Questions committee, Rev. Bruce Smith. He claimed that the book was a response to ‘a relatively small, but very vocal number of people agitating for relaxation of the State’s abortion laws.’ He states that abortion is not like any other operation, as this small group were presumably saying, rather it is the termination of another; life.⁴² The ACR reported this statement in more detail, as Smith called on people to firstly, accept the God-given responsibilities that come with procreation and to not, ‘cut through difficulties with a surgical knife.’ Secondly, he asks that every step be taken to preserve the unborn life and allow the mother to carry on with minimum strain.⁴³ Smith went on to appear in a debate at Sydney University about the issue of Abortion as birth control.

⁴¹ Drabsch, ‘Abortion and the Law in New South Wales’, 20.

⁴² ‘New Abortion Scheme’, *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, May 16, 1971), 2.

⁴³ ‘Abortion Book Is Launched’, *Australian Church Record* (SYD, June 3, 1971), 4.

Policy and Politics: 1972-1977

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⁴⁴ Drabsch, 'Abortion and the Law in New South Wales', 20.

⁴⁵ 'New Abortion Scheme', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, May 16, 1971), 2.

⁴⁶ 'Abortion Book Is Launched', *Australian Church Record* (SYD, June 3, 1971), 4.

The Royal Commission into Human Relationships

An outcome of the failed Bill was the launch of the Royal Commission into Human Relationships (RCHR). While originally focussed on the topic of abortion, the scope was widened and its aim was to, 'enquire into and report upon the family, social, educational, legal and sexual aspects of male and female relationships.'⁴⁷ Both Anglicans and Roman Catholics reportedly supported this proposal,⁴⁸ and in its submission to the Commission, the Anglican Church outlined its stance on many aspects of the family, relationships and social issues. In the submission, they claim that, 'the Christian is vitally concerned in this matter, for right relationships are at the centre of the life of the Christian community.'⁴⁹ Regarding Abortion, little is said that has not already been said in the Abortion Report. It urged that the laws regarding abortion are not to be changed, but that the right to life of the foetus would be preserved. For the sake of society, adequate services are to be provided for mothers with unwanted pregnancy rather than providing easier abortion.⁵⁰

In 1977, when the findings of the Royal commission were finally released, many of the recommendations spoke strongly in favour of liberalising the law on a number of social issues. Regarding abortion, the report recommended that it be unregulated up to 22 weeks when performed by a medical practitioner for girls over 14 with no parental or partner consent. In a front page article, the then Liberal government was reported as denouncing the report and blaming the previous Whitlam administration for it.⁵¹ Church leaders were also

⁴⁷ 'Churches May Unite in Campaign'; Ruth Shatford and Ken Harrison, eds., *Human Relationships: Anglican Submission to the Royal Commission* (Sydney: AIO Publishing, 1975).

⁴⁸ 'Churches May Unite in Campaign'.

⁴⁹ Shatford and Harrison, *Human Relationships: Anglican Submission to the Royal Commission*, 4.

⁵⁰ Shatford and Harrison, *Human Relationships: Anglican Submission to the Royal Commission*, 19.

⁵¹ 'Govt Attacks Plans for Big Change in Sex Laws', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, December 1, 1977), sec. Front page.

unimpressed. The Dean of the Cathedral, Lance Shilton, labelled some elements of the report as being a 'dangerous concession to an unrepresentative minority of secular humanists, evil libertarians and radical liberationists'.⁵²

Lance Shilton

Dean Shilton had become increasingly vocal in his opposition to Abortion Law through the mid-seventies. His involvement with the moral action group, 'Festival of Light', saw him address 25,000 to 35,000 people at rallies in 1974 and 1976. Both rallies made the front page of the Sydney Morning Herald with headlines such as, 'Vote-1 for Morality Dean tells Rally'. With a potential double-dissolution looming, Shilton was urging 'churchmen to stand up and be counted.' ⁵³ ⁵⁴

Archbishop Loane was also a member of the Festival of Light committee and spoke from these platforms alongside the Catholic Archbishop and future Senator Fred Nile. Loane however was not interested in becoming too directly involved in politics and resigned from the committee in 1977 when he felt the group move in that direction.⁵⁵ On the other hand, Fred Nile, a Uniting Church Minister, went on to form the Family Action Movement (F.A.M) who campaigned for a seat in senate.⁵⁶ Nile was elected into senate in 1981 as leader of the Call to Australia Party (Later the Christian Democratic Party) and he continued to be a strong voice for Christian values in the decades to come.⁵⁷

⁵² 'Human-Relationship Plans Criticised', *The Canberra Times* (ACT, February 16, 1978), 13.

⁵³ Alan Gill, 'Vote 1 for Morality Dean Tells Rally', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, April 8, 1974), 1.

⁵⁴ Alan Gill, '35,000 Throng to Hyde Park Rally', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, October 11, 1976), sec. Front Page.

⁵⁵ Alan Gill, 'Archbishop Resigns from Committee', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, December 14, 1977), 12.

⁵⁶ 'Put F.A.M First!', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, May 17, 1974), 19.

⁵⁷ 'Reverend the Hon. (Fred) Frederick John NILE, ED LTh MLC', *Parliament of New South Wales* (November 2013), Cited 29 May 2014, Online:

In the elections that followed, Shilton maintained his strong voice as he spoke out on moral issues and called on leaders to uphold Christian values.⁵⁸ Other clergy had drawn backlash over their direct support of political parties, ⁵⁹ but it appears that the dean avoided doing this. In the 1978 State election he called for the ‘decent silent majority’ to become vocal and demand reasonable standards for families’ claiming that, ‘We all have the right to know where political parties stand in respect to [...] defacto relationships [...] homosexual acts [...] the easy availability of abortion and the direction of education[...]also child pornography, prostitution and marijuana.’⁶⁰ Returning to the front page of the SMH in the final week of the campaign, Shilton listed ten questions that he wanted to candidates to answer. These covered not only their policies but their personal lives and habits.⁶¹ While both candidates objected to this intrusion, Shilton retorted with the claim that a man’s private life is a reflection of his public life. This too made front page news. ⁶²

Support and Sex Education

Archbishop Loane had repeatedly called for a support within the church for mothers with unexpected pregnancies and for improved education to be available regarding the place of sex in relationships. Here we consider what the church was saying and doing in these two areas during the seventies.

Unmarried Mothers

<http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/members.nsf/0/C85947F5A79AD5554A25672E0002E1C9>.

⁵⁸ ‘Dean Urges Questions on Moral Issues’, *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, November 24, 1975), 12.

⁵⁹ Alan Gill, ‘Anger over Clergy’s “Party Call” Advert’, *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, December 12, 1975), 18.

⁶⁰ ‘Clergy Back Call on Moral Attitudes’, *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, September 30, 1978).

⁶¹ ‘Opposition to Push Moral Issues in Last Week’, *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, October 2, 1978), sec. Front page.

⁶² ‘Leaders Object to Religion Questions’, *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, October 5, 1978), sec. Front page.

Firstly, in terms of support for unmarried mothers, the institution that appears repeatedly in the press was the Carramar home for unmarried mothers. Located in Turramurra, it was operated by the Home Mission Society (HMS) of the Anglican Church. Mentioned a handful of times in the SMH during the seventies, it was reported in 1970 to be taking in 100 girls a year, some as young as 13.⁶³ Their stated aim was to provide for the needs of the girls, to help them feel love, acceptance and their own value.⁶⁴ Running advertisements in women's magazines, they wished to provide an alternative to abortion by supporting unmarried mothers through their pregnancies and in the decisions that followed. ⁶⁵ Social workers advised the women on adoption procedures and most decided to give up their babies.⁶⁶ In the early seventies this kind of decision was praised as a choice to give the child a better life. ⁶⁷ The HMS used Christian publications as a way of raising awareness of and funds for Carramar. They educated readers on the psychological impact of abortion, and suggested Carramar as a supportive alternative.⁶⁸ Some fundraising advertisements included emotive statements about girls who considered suicide. Others called for understanding across generations to accept the way things were and to continue to be practical Christian support to these women who have been let down by the 'permissive' society.⁶⁹

During the 1970s, the number of women seeking help from Carramar steadily decreased as did the general rate of adoption in the State. The SMH reported that the Department of Youth and Community Services placed 2077 children in 1972 but only around 500 in 1977 with

⁶³ Ursula O'Connor, 'Million Dollar Mission - 1', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, May 30, 1970).

⁶⁴ O'Connor, 'Million Dollar Mission - 1'; Judy Young, 'Million Dollar Mission - 2', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, June 6, 1970).

⁶⁵ Alan Gill, 'City of God Grows in Heart of Sydney', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, May 7, 1976).

⁶⁶ O'Connor, 'Million Dollar Mission - 1'.

⁶⁷ April Hersey, 'Giving a Few Little People a Loving Start in Life', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, January 28, 1973), 85.

⁶⁸ 'The Abortion Alternative', *Southern Cross* (Sydney, September 1974), 26.

⁶⁹ Home Mission Society, 'Alison Is Pregnant', *Australian Church Record* (SYD, August 12, 1971), sec. Advertisement; Home Mission Society, 'She Contemplated Suicide...', *Australian Church Record* (SYD, February 5, 1970), sec. Advertisement.

many private services closing their doors.⁷⁰ The service was not without controversy. While claiming to not pressure the women into adoption, ⁷¹ a state government enquiry in 2000 heard evidence that this did occur at times. This report also included admission that while those working in the home were acting in good faith, they were at the time just unaware of the profound and long lasting impacts of adoption on the mother which were investigated only after the 1970s.⁷² In hindsight perhaps different measures may have been taken.

Loane had called on the government to also provide better health and education support in order to address the issue of abortion. The result however was not as he had hoped. In his 1970 presidential address to synod he openly criticised the government for providing funding to a number of health and crisis centres. He asserted that the education that they were providing, advocated abortion and homosexuality rather than outlining the proper place of sex in relationships. ⁷³

Sex Education

Similar to the previous issue, what the Church hoped for in improved sex education was not exactly what was provided. The Australian Church Record ran a series of articles in June 1974 which outlined a number of responses to the recently released Public School Sex Education Program. While some thought the program went as far as it could in the pluralistic

⁷⁰ 'Adoptions: Long Wait for Babies', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, July 6, 1977), 7.

⁷¹ Margaret O'Sullivan, 'No Pressuring into Adoption', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, July 11, 1976), 109.

⁷² 'Releasing the Past: Adoption Practices 1950-1998: Final Report', Parliamentary Paper Number 600 (Sydney, N.S.W: Standing Committee on Social Issues, December 2000), 83, 149–50.

⁷³ Alan Gill, 'Archbishop Attacks Crisis Centre Finance', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, October 5, 1977), 2; 'Archbishop Criticises Formal Links with Church of Rome', *Australian Church Record* (SYD, October 17, 1977), sec. Front Page.

public system, 74 others were alarmed that it didn't protect the family as the basic unit of society and that in the wrong hands and with incomplete training, teachers could push a secular, atheist, humanist, permissive lifestyle.⁷⁵ Pointing to Sex Education programs in the UK, Russia and Sweden which recorded had no decrease in divorce, sex offences, and unwanted pregnancies and so on, many called for the home and church to be place where proper values would be lived and taught. 76 At the very least, parents and churches were encouraged to take opportunities available in the Schools program⁷⁷

The End of the Seventies

In March 1979, the Lusher Bill was presented to the Federal government. This called for the restriction of Medicare funding for abortion procedures. Lusher claimed that so-called mental conditions had become the catchall that accounted for 95% of all abortions.⁷⁸ While technically a discussion of funding, it was clearly a statement against the easy availability of abortion at the time. Archbishop Loane and the Social Issues Committee issued a statement supporting the Bill, expressing concern over the 'rapid and large increase of abortion which destroys human life.'⁷⁹ While the Bill was not passed, the process reveals a number of elements of the state-of-play at the close of the 1970s.

⁷⁴ John Robson, 'Sex Education and the School Syllabus', *Australian Church Record* (SYD, June 27, 1974), 6.

⁷⁵ 'Christian Women Speak out on NSW Sex Education Proposals', *Australian Church Record* (SYD, June 27, 1974), 3.

⁷⁶ 'Unrestricted Sex Education Has Had Disastrous Results', *Australian Church Record* (SYD, June 27, 1974), 2; Robson, 'Sex Education and the School Syllabus'; 'Sex Education - in the Family', *Australian Church Record* (SYD, June 27, 1974), sec. Editorial, 1.

⁷⁷ 'Christian Women Speak out on NSW Sex Education Proposals'.

⁷⁸ Paul Ellercamp, 'Hamer Calls on MPs to Defeat Move on Abortion', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, March 21, 1979), sec. Front page.

⁷⁹ Ellercamp, 'Hamer Calls on MPs to Defeat Move on Abortion'.

Firstly, there were still a lot of abortions taking place. The royal commission in the mid-seventies estimated 60,000 per year in Australia while some other estimates went up to 100,000.⁸⁰ The law in NSW had not changed, and in fact has not changed to this day. In practice though, prosecution under the Crimes Act 1900 effectively ceased in the early 1970s, and NSW Health patient information suggests that doctors take medical, economic, and social factors in consideration into account in consenting to abortions.⁸¹ This shows that the *R v Ward* case of the early 1970s has set the legalities of abortion, despite just being a single judge's decision in the district court.⁸²

While abortions were increasing, adoptions were decreasing. It is probably unfair to state that it is simply as more children were being aborted, but additionally that family, social and economic changes meant that more mothers were keeping their babies.⁸³ There was simply less stigma in being an unmarried mother.

Assessing the Anglicans

At the level of looking at newspaper reports and official publications, it is very difficult to know what individuals, families and churches were saying and doing in response to the increased availability of abortion. It is also hard to know the extent of the work done by the Home Mission Society and other groups. However something can be said of the public voice of the Church.

⁸⁰ 'Adoptions: Long Wait for Babies'.

⁸¹ Drabsch, 'Abortion and the Law in New South Wales', 60.

⁸² Drabsch, 'Abortion and the Law in New South Wales', 50.

⁸³ 'Releasing the Past: Adoption Practices 1950-1998: Final Report', 85.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the issue of abortion was only just coming into the public arena. Early work was done then to figure out a theological position and present the facts of the matter. In response to the assertion that the foetus' life was human and valuable, the initial forays into the public arena were framed as pleas in defence of this life.⁸⁴ This tone was to shift quickly as the opposition surfaced. Rev. Bruce Smith spoke against the small but vocal group seeking to liberalise the laws. Archbishop Loane and Dean Shilton were also prepared to speak out sharply against the alternate voices in judgement rather than persuasion. In 1979, Shilton claimed that just as the early Christians retrieved the world from paganism, the 'blunting and ignoring of its voice would only open the doors to the re-paganisation of the west.'⁸⁵ It did appear that the church voice was being blunted and it was only really during periods of political change that the issue of abortion got media attention as it became a marker of a politicians' conservatism.

Around Election times, abortion often appeared in lists of social issues that included gambling, pornography, censorship, alcohol and prostitution. It appears that these are all markers of what many people saw as a society either in decline or in increasing liberation. It could be argued though that abortion should have been in a different order to the rest of these issues, at least for the Anglicans discussing it. Their understanding was that in the act of abortion, a helpless life was being cruelly taken, and while not minimising the impacts of gambling and pornography, abortion appears to have more serious 'life and death' consequences. Perhaps in the process of combining all these issues together, the seriousness of the message about abortion may have been heard less by the public. The public may have seen it as just another move by the same conservative 'wowsers' who wanted to restrict

⁸⁴ 'Anglican Group's Plea on Abortion', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, March 3, 1970).

⁸⁵ Alan Gill, 'Church Opposition to Abortion Steadfast', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, March 21, 1979), 10.

others people's freedoms. While perhaps presented as a vitally serious issue, its combination with the large list of vices may have diluted the impact of the message of the sanctity of unborn life.

Is anybody listening?

While the Anglican church was speaking, was anyone listening? At a general level, the seventies continued the general decline in support for traditional values, and religion in general received less support.⁸⁶ This means that in general less people were looking to the church for guidance. In terms of media coverage, it also appeared that apart from when there was an election, the voice of the church at least in the Sydney Morning Herald was restricted to the Churches and Churchmen column and the pen of Alan Gill.

Gill, a well-respected but almost lone voice on church and abortion issues throughout the 1970s pointed out that in 1979, 'Statements by Church leaders on abortion are no longer considered newsworthy by the media.'⁸⁷ People knew what the churches thought and did not want to hear it anymore.⁸⁸

Practical support

Regardless of who was listening, the Anglican church spoke over the decade about what its own response should be to the issue of abortion. This voice shifted somewhat in its tone also.

⁸⁶ Mayer, 'Media', 60.

⁸⁷ Souter, *Company of Heralds*, 471; Gill, 'Church Opposition to Abortion Steadfast'.

⁸⁸ Gill, 'Church Opposition to Abortion Steadfast'.

In the 1969 Synod, Loane had called for the church to do ‘all that lies in its power to support and protect the weak’ including the mother and the unborn child. Later in the 1978 Synod, Dean Shilton expressed ‘deep concern’ with the increasing number of abortions performed. He also expressed concern that ‘adequate assistance’ be given to those with the difficulties associated with unplanned pregnancy.⁸⁹ This tempering of language perhaps came from the experience of a decade that had not lived up to the idealistic statement of Loane in 1969. While the efforts of the HMS and Carramar House are not to be underestimated, and while the work of the individual churches is unknown, it is unlikely that the diocese could claim that everything in its power was done to protect these weak.

Education

The other big call from the Church was to increase the availability of sex education. The outcome they hoped for was fewer unwanted pregnancies and an understanding of abortion such that it did not appear to be the simplest or necessary solution. This call for education appeared to be based on an understanding that many of those having abortions were young girls who didn’t know better. As already discussed, the sex education program was met with varied reactions by Christians, however it could also be argued that education was not the main problem.

As early as 1971, it was suggested by some that the majority of abortions were actually performed on married women, many who already had children. These were not the young,

⁸⁹ L. Shilton, ‘Resolution 11/78. Abortion’, in *Year Book of the Diocese of Sydney* (Sydney: Church of England In Australia, 1979), 250.

vulnerable and uneducated, and abortion, it seemed, was being used as birth control.⁹⁰ In 1978 some claimed that, 'it was easier to have one abortion a year than remember to take a pill every day.'⁹¹ For these people, the issue was not so much lack of education; instead it was a fundamentally different understanding of the sanctity of the unborn life.

Alan Gill, in his 1979 article, points out that even a belief in abortion as being wrong did not necessarily correlate with action. Citing the similar rates of abortion for Catholic women as the general population, he quotes a Catholic priest who said 'although a woman knows that abortion is wrong, and would much rather not have to choose it, she feels she really has no choice, something is obviously quite wrong in that.'⁹²

Gill succinctly summarises what has been learnt about the necessary church response to an issue that had not abated despite a decade of Christian campaigning. He stated that, 'all agree that it is not enough for Christian denominations to pronounce that abortion is sinful or even educate people as to why this is so. The Church must provide suitable caring organisations to women tempted to have abortions.'⁹³

A Way Forward?

All this is not to say that education is unimportant or that the Church should not have engaged in the discussion and instead to have poured money and resources into aid programs. It is to simply realise that these discussions take place in a broader societal context with many

⁹⁰ Marie Toshack, 'Abortion as Birth Control', *Sydney Morning Herald* (SYD, July 7, 1971), 14.

⁹¹ Arnold Jago, 'Abortion', *On Being*, 1978, 52.

⁹² Gill, 'Church Opposition to Abortion Steadfast'.

⁹³ Gill, 'Church Opposition to Abortion Steadfast'.

different pressures which contribute to many people seeing abortion as a viable or even vital option. Katharine Betts, in a 2004 article which tracked attitudes to abortion in Australia, indicates that while the majority of Australians are ‘pro-choice, ‘it is probable that an even larger majority would prefer a situation in which women did not need to resort to abortion.’⁹⁴ Perhaps as abortion continues to be a part of Australian society, the Church would serve its community well by working towards such a society, doing what it can to show and provide alternatives to the apparent inevitability and necessity of abortion availability.

⁹⁴ Katharine Betts, ‘Attitudes to Abortion in Australia: 1972 to 2003’, *People Place* 12/4 (2004): 22–27.

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