

**The Salvation Army
and the 1986
Homosexual Reform Bill in New Zealand**

By Major Ian Hutson - 2002

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The 1985 Homosexual Law Reform Bill, and the manner in which The Salvation Army in New Zealand involved itself in the controversy surrounding it, was to have a significant impact on the Salvation Army. The issue generated a level of controversy that few Salvationists would have been prepared for and the level of external societal and internal Salvation Army conflict was extreme to say the least. The Salvation Army in New Zealand had not experienced any controversy of this magnitude since its pioneering days in the 1880's and 1890's. The impact of this issue on the Army can still be felt today in the way that some people continue to respond negatively during the Annual Appeal time or in Social Service settings with fellow professionals or politicians. The level of conflict among Salvationists was such, that as I sought the views of various people who had been in leadership at the time, several expressed clear concern that this might 'open up a can of worms.'

The purpose of this paper is to a) Record for posterity some of the events that took place and how people viewed these events. This will focus primarily on an internal view of The Salvation Army as it worked its way through this issue. b) Look for any insights that might be gained from the issue and particularly in relation to how it impacts on homosexuals in the Army and the wider society.

It is not my intention to criticise those who took various stances in this issue since having personally spoken with people who took opposing views it is apparent to me that each took their position with a high level of integrity. The issue was one in which any middle ground was hard to find and emotion ran high.

1. Historical Context

a) New Zealand

The period of time in which the Homosexual Law Reform Bill came to be considered was a time of considerable ferment in New Zealand. In the 1980's "a new generation had come into power.... [t]he years 1984-90 saw numerous and rapid changes which many people found bewildering. The only comparable periods of change were the eighteen-nineties under the Liberals and the nineteen-thirties under Labour" (Sinclair 2000:335). The Labour Government voted into power in 1984 introduced wide-ranging and radical 'New Right' economic policies that had a huge impact on New Zealand society. In addition an anti-nuclear stand was taken by government and 1985 was a year full of "dire threats from American congressmen of trade sanctions against New Zealand if it persisted in banning nuclear ships, armed or not" (Sinclair 2000:339). Also, earlier in the eighties the Springbok tour in 1981 had had a huge impact on New Zealand society with unprecedented levels of civil disobedience and with families

and communities sharply divided over this issue. The focus on apartheid that the tour created also began to highlight issues of race within New Zealand society. Maori had already become aware of race issues in other parts of the world and were increasingly agitating for the Treaty of Waitangi to be honoured and land claims to be recognised. As a result of this, the Treaty of Waitangi Amendment Act was passed in December of 1985 which significantly broadened the Waitangi Tribunal's jurisdiction "to allow the investigation of claims referring back to 1840" (Orange 1988:251).

These and other issues created a significant level of controversy and reflected a general move towards a more post-modernist society. The Homosexual Law Reform Bill was in many ways a part of this general societal change. Many Western countries had decriminalised homosexual behaviour by 1985 and "New Zealand was an isolated hold-out in the Western world, lumped in with countries like the Soviet Union, Romania, Chile..." (Guy 2000:19). In any period of change like this there is bound to be a significant reaction from those who wish to preserve something of the values of the past as well as those who seek a different world. James Belich has noted in reference to the changes that took place in society at that time, that "[o]f all the escapees from nappy valley, working women, teenagers, graduates, activists and liberals, the one that most riled moral conservatives was probably the Gay" (Belich 2001:511). To a large extent the Homosexual Reform Bill was a flash point in which conservatives sought to take a stand against many of the changing values of an increasingly liberal society.

b) Evangelical Christianity

Evangelical Christians throughout the world had often regarded involvement in politics as something to be avoided. In contrast to liberal Christians, evangelicals saw politics as being associated with the compromising of one's Christian values and it was common for evangelicals to say, "politics and religion don't mix." The 1980's in the United States of America saw a strong move by evangelicals to involve themselves in politics out of concern for the changes taking place in their country. Evangelical leaders, like Jerry Falwell, felt that something had to be done about the way issues like abortion, equal rights legislation and homosexual rights were impacting on the traditional family (Hutcheson, Jr. R.G. 1988:77). While Jerry Falwell may have been considered by many as being at an extreme end of the conservative/evangelical spectrum, he did reflect the widely held concerns of many evangelicals. Although there were different dynamics, some evangelicals in New Zealand responded in a similar fashion to some of the same issues. There was a strong sense that something had to be done. The Homosexual Reform was a natural issue in which evangelical Christianity could attempt to contend with the perceived moral decay of the nation.

This was the climate within New Zealand society at the time that the Homosexual Law Reform Bill was being considered and in which The Salvation Army made its response.

2. An Analysis of the Army's Response

a) The Army's Submission

There were a number of positions people could take in regard to homosexuality. It could simply be considered a sin requiring a punitive response, a sickness or deviant behaviour that needed to be healed or corrected, or it could be considered a natural and normal state that needed to be accepted. Many people had come to the point, whichever of the above perspectives they had taken, of recognising that Homosexuals should not be treated as badly as they had been. The Salvation Army's submission was not supportive of the existing law that included a sentence of up to 7 years imprisonment for anyone over sixteen who committed sodomy, with or without consent, or up to 5 years for indecency between males (Crimes Act 1961:699-700). The Salvation Army's submission described homosexual behaviour as deviant but noted that a homosexual disposition was "not blameworthy as long as it did not result in overt acts" (The Salvation Army Homosexual Law Reform Bill Submission 1985:1-2). It saw homosexuals as not being locked into the homosexual life-style. The submission suggested that help could be provided for homosexuals by "medical and/or psychiatric, pastoral counselling, and pre-eminently by submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, liberating the whole person for a new quality of life" (T.S.A. Submission 1985:2). It further acknowledged the alienation that homosexuals often felt and indicated that Salvationists desired to alleviate the loneliness and alienation "by offering Christian love within Salvation Army fellowship and worship" (T.S.A. Submission 1985:2).

The Army acknowledged that the "present law is difficult to enforce; unreasonably harsh ... and discriminatory against consenting behaviour between males where the same behaviour between a male and a female or two females is not an offence" (T.S.A. Submission 1985:7). However, there was no support for the removal of all legal sanctions. Instead the submission recommended "giving the courts authority to encourage or direct first offenders to obtain such counselling and personal support as the courts see fit". The primary reasons for maintaining some level of legal sanction included the fear that legalisation would normalise homosexual behaviour and would consequently undermine the family life affirmed in scripture as being based on the marriage relationship between a man and a woman. There was concern expressed in regard to amendments included in the Bill to the Human Rights Commission Act 1977. This part of the Bill was seen as giving a signal that "homosexual orientation was equal in acceptability and quality to heterosexual orientation – to the extent that it was given the status of a 'human right'" (Knight 2002). According to Lt -Colonel Rodney Knight it was this part of the Bill "that caused leadership most concern in 1985" (Knight 2001b:1).

It is hard to determine how the sentiments expressed throughout the submission reflected the beliefs of the majority of Salvationists at the time and whether they would have generally supported this submission. Since the Salvation Army does not have a democratic structure, and the time frame for a response to the Law Reform was limited, it might have been unrealistic to get a thorough idea of how Salvationists thought at the time. Also, the subject had not widely been studied by Salvationists in any systematic way so that Salvationists may have had little idea of the nuances of the issue. However, it is highly likely according to my memory of opinions Salvationists expressed at the time that many would have generally supported the submission's contentions that homosexual behaviour was deviant and should not be encouraged. Also, the submission was consistent with The Salvation Army's Positional Statement on homosexuality as far as that goes, and did not differ greatly from other Salvation Army publications on the subject such as "Strong Doctrine, Strong Mercy" (Clifton 1985:71-78). However, these documents do not go on to describe how to interpret this into the laws of a pluralistic society. Major Campbell Roberts is highly critical of how the Army's leaders handled the whole issue of the Homosexual Law Reform. He saw the leaders as being out of touch with societal changes, failing to analyse or develop a theology that adequately addressed these changes, and focusing almost entirely on the tactics of the campaign (Roberts 2002). Roberts was of the opinion that the Army leadership believed they were reflecting the values of mainstream New Zealand and that they would be viewed with favour by most New Zealanders because they had taken leadership in this issue.

b) The Petition

The more contentious aspect of The Salvation Army's response to the proposed Bill was its involvement in a nation-wide petition against the Bill. The decision to become involved in this way was communicated to all Salvationists by the Territorial Commander, Colonel Donald H. Campbell, in a letter dated 28 March 1985. In it he indicated that "many Christians and God-fearing people have embarked upon the gigantic task of endeavouring to secure a minimum of one million signatures on a petition to Parliament to prevent the passage of the Bill. In response to an invitation to do so, The Salvation Army has offered to fulfil the role of 'petition co-ordinator'."

The letter includes the Colonel's rationale for taking this step as being related to his view that the moral decay of civilisation was proceeding unchecked and that it was in many ways a greater threat than that of nuclear destruction. His decision was inspired as a result of his devotions on March 8 that included a *Soldier's Armoury* reading in this vein, which he felt the Lord used to speak to his heart. Another who was supportive of involvement with the petition was Major Rodney Knight (now Lt-Colonel retired) who later indicated that he saw the situation at the time as fitting the familiar saying that "all that is required for evil to flourish is that good men do nothing" (Knight 2001b:1). Colonel Knight indicated that there

were other senior Officers at Territorial Headquarters who saw the situation in a similar light and were active in promoting the Army's stance.

Different perceptions exist as to how the decision to become involved with petition by the Territorial Headquarters leadership was arrived at. In an initial meeting, according to Colonel Rodney Knight, the decision had been made "not to support a national petition unless it could clearly be seen as non-party-political and a conscience vote in Parliament. Initially MP's from only one party appeared to be promoting it. This situation changed so "that it was taken away from direct MP sponsorship and party political connection" (Knight 2002). This, Colonel Campbell and others apparently believed, cleared the only obstacle to proceeding with involvement in the petition.

The March 28 letter to all Salvationists had been preceded by a television news announcement of the Army's decision on 22 March. Therefore many Salvationists first heard of the Salvation Army's role in the petition on television news. This upset some Salvationists because they saw it as a serious failure to consult about a contentious issue. This was evident even within Territorial Headquarters leadership where the Social Secretary, Colonel Melvin Taylor, and the Chief Secretary, Colonel Ken Bridge, both expressed the dismay and surprise they felt at the time, at the manner in which The Salvation Army publicly announced on nation-wide television a drive to collect signatures against the Bill. Both appeared to believe, as did Colonel William Allott also present at the meeting, that a lower profile was required and that this was what had been agreed by Heads of Departments in meetings leading up to the announcement (Taylor 2001:1, Bridge 2001, Allott 2002). Minutes of a meeting held at THQ with Department Heads and other key leadership on 27 March, includes comments that suggest some mixed views on the Army's involvement in the petition. There was a concern "that The Salvation Army had been dragged into the political arena" and in relation to a planned door-to-door visitation for petition signatures "that a number of Salvationists were very hurt at being pushed into such a situation". However it was also observed "that petitions have been taken by soldiers throughout the country, placed on factory notice boards etc., etc." Colonel Rodney Knight, who as the Public Relations Secretary was the Army's spokesperson at the time, later noted that there had been an extremely tight time frame in which to respond to the Bill (8 March – 24 March). Colonel Knight noted that "we relied upon information emanating from parliament for this. As it turned out, the campaign slowed things down very considerably and it was more like a year before the Third Reading took place" (Knight 2002). This anticipated time frame would have hindered attempts to communicate fully with all Salvationists in the early and decisive moments. This is a point contested by Major Roberts who instead believed that the Army leaders were manoeuvred into taking rushed action by politicians who were using the Army for their own purposes (Roberts 2002). Colonel Knight however, clearly believed that decisions taken had been made in consultation with, and the agreement of, senior leadership within the Army. Cyril Bradwell (2002) was clear in his belief that a consensus had been

arrived at among leading officers to accept the role of petition co-ordinator. The minutes of the 27 March meeting do indicate that prior to the 22 March television presentation, there was communication with as many department heads and divisional commanders as were available at the time. Most had been successfully contacted either in person or by phone. As to whether this interaction was consultative in nature, or a process of informing leaders of a firm decision already arrived at, is unclear. Also Lt-Colonel Taylor, as the Social Secretary of the time, indicated that he had been very angry that he had not been contacted while on furlough and had been unable to express his contrary view on this (Taylor 2001). Certainly Laurence Guy, who wrote a thesis regarding the gay debate, believed that "Campbell failed to consult widely before making his decision, holding discussions with a handful of others, and simply announcing the Salvation Army decision to the media (Guy 2000:275).

3. Salvationist Opposition and Support for The Official Response

a) The Various Views of Salvationists that Opposed

While the disagreement so far mentioned primarily focuses on the perceived lack of consultation with regard to the decision to sponsor the petition, there was also a significant belief that the Army's response did not show an adequate degree of compassion for the suffering of homosexuals. There appear to have been significant differences within those at senior levels of leadership. Lt-Colonel Melvin Taylor, the Social Secretary of the time, saw the associated campaign as "homophobia in action. We were the righteous crusaders waging war against the filthy infidels" (Taylor 2001:1). He saw those with a homosexual bias as having "no more control over this disposition than say children with asthma" (Taylor 2001:3). Colonel Ken Bridge noted that prior to the Army's decision to sponsor the petition he had outlined his position by indicating that "The Salvation Army and maybe other sections of the Church could do with a lot less arrogance and a lot more humanity being revealed at this time" (Bridge 2001).

Outside of Territorial Headquarters opposition was expressed by some salvationists in a number of ways. The Salvation Army in-house publication *Battle Point* was one vehicle in which Salvationists expressed their views on the Army's response. The editor collated some of the concerns. The concerns included a) The over emphasis on "secular law and law enforcement." b) Questions regarding whether there had been adequate consultation with Salvationists over this issue. c) An observation that the Army's stated concern in this issue, of protection against the threat of homosexuality to the family structure, was not in proportion to the greater threat to the family of low income and poor housing (Thompson 1985:12-13). One group of Salvationists went to the media to express support for the Bill in opposition to the Army's official position. The group's spokesperson, Max Cresswell, was quoted as saying that The Salvation Army leaders "had not distinguished the legal question from the moral question." The group was said to consist of nine officers and an unspecified number of laity

(Steel 1985). However, none of the officers were named and there is no evidence available to verify who, apart from the few people named in the article, were a part of this group. Major Campbell Roberts recalled that "a network of people and a counter petition" was set up and in addition "a meeting was organised by the Northern Divisional Commander at the Railton in Auckland which gave some Christian homosexuals the opportunity to talk about their faith and the theology underpinning it" (Roberts 2002).

Those that opposed the Army's official response to the law reform appear to have been united in their belief that the law should not be used to enforce morality. However, few appear to have believed that the homosexual lifestyle was something to be supported or encouraged. This perspective was expressed by Major Allott who saw the homosexual lifestyle as undesirable but argued "that it was one thing to demand this standard of people who freely chose to become Salvationists and quite another to actively support its imposition on the population at large" (Allott 2002). Max Cresswell in a *Battle Point* article, coming from a position consistent with the Army's international positional statement that condemns homosexual acts, argued that the law and morality should be treated separately. In so doing however, he does express his uncertainty, when considering the morality of homosexual acts, about what his "Christian attitude should be" (Cresswell 1986:14). In other words at least some Salvationists were questioning whether the homosexual lifestyle was as clearly or simply immoral as the Army's international positional statement indicated.

There is some evidence that those officers in the Salvation Army's social wing were not supportive of the Army's response. Colonel Taylor's strong statements, as identified previously, support this as does the observation of Major Allott that "some officers with a social service background were also uncomfortable with our possible involvement. They expressed a concern about the effect an anti-gay protest could have on potential gay clients, particularly in our Bridge Programme" (Allott 2002). Brian Thompson (1985:17) asked questions about whether Territorial leadership had consulted with social service personnel before using the Army's considerable prestige as a social agency, to add weight to the Army's argument. The Army had indicated that the legalisation of homosexual acts was likely to have a detrimental effect on a range of social areas. It would again appear that the leadership had not consulted with social service personnel, going by the then Social Service Secretary's (Colonel Taylor) statements regarding these events as stated previously.

There was also a concern among some that there was an injustice being perpetrated on a homosexual minority by New Zealand society and that the Army's stance supported the continuation of this (Thompson 1985:19). One writer to *Battle Point*, an Anglican, accused the Army of abandoning "its usual support for the oppressed, and even as joining the oppressors" (Bishop 1985:23). These concerns are in one way or another reflected in various statements made by Colonels Taylor and Allott that intimated that the Army's response was to

some degree "homophobic." It would appear that these concerns were shared by a number of Salvationists.

Over the issue of whether Homosexuality was a sin, a deviancy or a variation of God's creation. The Salvation Army's submission indicated that homosexual behaviour was deviant behaviour and capable of control (pg 1). Colonel Taylor in his communication saw it as being more of a fixed condition requiring a compassionate response (Taylor 2001). Major Roberts indicated that there were theological debates within the Army. These debates tended to move over time from a clear-cut view of the evil of homosexuality towards more compassionate positions that grappled with the apparent lack of choice in being gay. This raised questions about whether it was a deviation akin to a mental illness, or a variation in God's creation. The former viewpoint would appear to have been more commonly accepted. Major Roberts also stated that, in relation to this much needed process of debate, "the leadership failed to engage in any way with a network of Salvationists who were attempting to do the analysis" (Roberts 2002).

b) The Degree of Support or opposition to the Army's Public Position

How widespread this kind of opposition from Salvationists was at the time, is not easy to discern. It is possible that many Salvationists did not share these sentiments, or just as likely, when they did they withheld them out of some sense of loyalty to the Army. Colonel Taylor indicated that he himself, along with at least a few others, strongly disagreed with the Army's involvement in the petition and clearly expressed this to the leadership at the time. However, once he had expressed himself he had seen himself as bound to keep what he called "cabinet solidarity." It was his perception that the hierarchical nature of the Army, and the strength of personality of key people in leadership, also made it more difficult for people to openly express an opposing view (Taylor 2002). This was a view shared by Major Campbell Roberts who noted that the public nature of the Army's position made opposition to it very difficult (Roberts 2002). Both Roberts and Taylor believed that key people within the leadership at the time were right of centre in their political/theological leanings so that the Army's stance was more aggressive than may have been the case had the leadership had more centre or left wing attitudes. In addition the lack of opportunity for theological debate and analysis meant that, in the opinion of Major Roberts, many Salvationist leaders who were uneasy about the Army's stance were unable to clearly articulate their concerns.

It is not possible to accurately determine how many Salvationists actively supported the petition, but there is little doubt that many did. Certainly a copy in the Salvation Army Archives of an undated and unidentified newspaper clipping indicates that the then corps officer at Dannevirke, Lieutenant Peter Christensen, actively organised the petition there and managed to collect 1700 signatures. Many others were likewise active in this fashion including myself, then the corps

officer at Stratford. Colonel Taylor, despite his personal opposition to the petition, had the impression that many Salvationists supported it, probably even a majority (Taylor 2002). However, Colonel Bill Allott, the Divisional Commander for the Wellington Division at the time, noted that “petitions were made available at all corps but observation suggested that only a few officers and soldiers actively embraced the cause. A groundswell of Salvationist support did not emerge in the Wellington Division” (Allott 2002). Allott went further in saying that his reading of the situation was “that few had a heart for this homophobic semi-political exercise.” Could this indicate that there was a difference in how Salvationists and indeed New Zealanders reacted over the issue in rural areas as opposed to urban areas?

It is possible that there were significant shifts in Salvationist support throughout the whole process of the Army’s involvement in the petition or the Army’s submission. It is likely that many initially supported the petition and or the submission, but later changed their mind when they saw the strength of the opposition to the Army’s stance or began to think through some of the complex arguments involved in this issue. To a lesser extent the reverse could also be true. Certainly many would have been alarmed for the first time to find that instead of the Army being held on the pedestal of public opinion, they had begun to be vilified by many. Even within the Army leadership there was initially an expectation by some that the level of controversy might be no greater than in 1975, when the Army had put forward a similar submission, but not nearly as great as 1985 proved to be (Knight 2001b). At whatever point in time, it seems evident from the following observations of Colonel Knight that pockets of dissension began to appear within the Army as the process of opposing the Bill proceeded. He said that he had come to believe the Territory “might blow itself apart, such was the intensity of emotion and disloyalty among officers and soldiers at various levels” (Knight 2001b:3). Colonel Knight continues to feel, that people focused much of their anger on him as the front person for the Army’s effort, when much of what he did was simply carried out in support of the Territorial Commander in his role as the Public Relations Secretary.

This kind of dissension was not confined to the Salvation Army. Many other denominations experienced similar sharp rifts. Laurence Guy noted of this period that there was “a growing theological diversity, with greater movement within the middle towards the extremes of Christian theology, both conservative and liberal. Mainstream Christian perspective, which in 1960 was fairly middle-of-the—road, had shifted markedly within a decade. At one extreme a Christian minister was arguing that one did not need to believe in God to be a Christian. At another extreme a Christian minister was arguing that homosexuals should be executed for transgressing the law of God” (Guy 2000:208-209). An idea of how Salvationists felt on this issue may tentatively be guessed at by looking at how a similarly evangelical Church such as the Baptist Church responded. The Baptist Church had a more democratic structure and therefore the schisms were possibly a little more transparent. The Baptist public questions committee

submission “was a cautious statement, supporting decriminalisation (although with a higher age of consent), but opposing Part II of the bill (the human rights provisions).” They went on to clarify that their support for the bill did not signify a support for homosexual practices (Guy 2000:248). This was met with deep opposition from local Baptist churches with ten or more writing to the committee questioning it’s write to speak for the denomination and it’s failure to reflect the views of the majority of the grass-roots of the Church. Any support for the bill at all was frequently viewed as support for the homosexual lifestyle and this left “moderate Baptist leadership in an impossible situation: trying to represent Baptists while taking a reflective view of the issue” (Guy 2000:249-250). It may be that the Salvation Army leadership managed in its overall response to strike a position closer to the movements grass roots but may have alienated those who took a more moderate or supportive view of the bill.

4. The Public Perception of The Salvation Army

Why many inside and outside the organisation perceived the Salvation Army’s position as being anti-gay may have much to do with the groups the Army allied itself to in promoting the petition. One of the most prominent figures was the Member of Parliament Norman Jones who frequently vilified homosexuals as being perverts. He was quoted as saying that “[w]e’re not going to have 5 percent of perverted New Zealanders legalising this filth for other New Zealanders” (The Star 1985: 27). These kind of comments, which were frequently reported by the media, tended to overshadow The Salvation Army’s more reasoned message. This was exacerbated to some extent as the Salvation Army increasingly took a lower profile due to the vehement nature of the opposition it was facing. An attempt was made to publicise the Army’s position with the inclusion of a classified advertisement explaining the Army’s position in the Evening Post on April 2. However, it was observed that the Territorial Commander “felt it best to go ‘silent’ and the result was that very little was said to explain the merits of the conservative position sociologically” (Knight 2001a:1). This sometimes left people with the impression that others like Norman Jones were expressing the Army’s position for it.

Looking back, Colonel Rodney Knight believed that the Army would have been advised to continue in “articulating its stance intelligently and logically, including the rationale for its support of the petition. Alternatively it would have been more honourable and practical to have withdrawn from the petition leadership entirely than to ‘go silent’ and pretend we were involved as we did. This however would have meant the Army betraying the people we had promised to support and undermining the cause we had initially aligned ourselves with. This left him [as Public Relations Secretary] with the impossible task of organising the petition

without publicity or an acceptable communications chain as well as explaining the unexplainable disappearance of the Army to the public" (Knight 2001b:2).

It is probable therefore that many Salvationists had difficulty discerning the Army's position in all this from media representations. It is possible that few would have read or understood the Army's submission. The Salvation Army's own good reputation in society may have made it a target in this issue. The Editor of the Catholic magazine *The Table*, having roundly praised the generosity and compassion of The Salvation Army said "that's why it [the Army] has to be attacked and besmirched by those who want sodomy to become an acceptable practice in our society" (Kennedy 1985:1). In such a heated cauldron of emotion it is understandable that opponents to the Army's position would wish to denigrate the Army in an attempt to discredit its cause. This degree of confusion and heat generated must have impacted on the diverging opinions of both rank and file Salvationists as well as the public, regarding the "good" or "evil" of the Army's stand.

5. Gays and the Salvation Army or the Church

It is not entirely clear that all Salvationists at all levels were that far away in their thinking from the kind of sentiments expressed by Norman Jones and others. Certainly within the conservative-evangelical Church the maxim "love the sinner but hate the sin" was often not perfectly followed. Captain Paul Clifford, who had joined The Salvation Army shortly before the Homosexual Law Reform issue came along, observed that "The Salvation Army attitude to gay people or homosexuality was one of the few issues that disturbed me personally when I joined. Although it was often quoted "love the sinner hate the sin", I very often saw that in fact, the sinner was also 'hated' along with the sin" (Clifford 2001). He further observed that many Salvationists thought of homosexuals in stereotypical terms, as portrayed in the media, without recognising that a number of the apparently "normal" people Salvationists knew, were likely to be gay.

The degree to which the Church had a "right" to comment on what it perceived as a sickness or sin could be questioned, especially when it had shown little apparent desire to help this marginalized group or any evident success in "curing" homosexuals. The Salvation Army had never seriously challenged the kind of hatred and even violence perpetrated against gays in society and even in the submission it was barely acknowledged. Also, in the Army's submission a number of claims were made about the possibility of homosexuals being helped either to control their deviant behaviour or "by submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, liberating the whole person for a new quality of life" (TSA Submission 1985:2). Unfortunately, there was no clear evidence supplied to back this claim up. While the submission reflects a reasonable evangelical theological viewpoint it could be argued that it did not equally reflect the kind of understanding that compassionate contact with gays alone could provide.

Captain Paul Clifford has stated that “[m]uch later on - in Officership, and particularly at the Bridge Programme, I became aware that there are very few people within the Army ranks who are skilled at dealing with gay issues as they arise.” Also he noted that “there are a number of gay soldiers and yes, officers too” (Clifford 2001). As a result he undertook specific training in this area and as this became known to some within the Army, he found people coming to him seeking his counsel. He noted that “[a]part from wanting to work on the presenting issues, many were terrified that they would be "outed", exposed and made to slink away from the ranks disgraced. I have to say that in my experience it has not happened like this when discovery has been made. Good counsel, compassion and care is what I have seen” (Clifford 2001).

In his search to understand homosexuality in his social work ministry Colonel Taylor “discovered that even the occasional child of highly respected Salvation Army officers struggled and wrestled with their homosexual bias but found it was impossible to deny or change. They loved the Army but had no option but to leave in disgrace” (Taylor 2001:3).

It is good to hear that compassion has been shown in the instances described by Captain Paul Clifford. However, the kind of training and expertise he describes was not widely available at the time of the debate over the Bill, and sadly within the Army and the evangelical world, it is still too rarely observed. The submission certainly proposed counselling for homosexuals and research into the homosexual condition but there was little evidence that any effort was made to do this after the furore died down. It suggests that censure of sin is still more widely practiced than compassionate love, acceptance and support. In this climate it is still likely that the experience of at least some homosexuals within Army circles still closely resembles the painful feeling of disgrace and rejection described by Colonel Taylor.

This perception of the Church as being a place of judgement rather than love is something that is strongly felt by gays. One gay wrote in a suicide letter to his mother, of his rejection by his minister when he revealed the nature of his gay relationship with a recently departed friend. He said that the minister “condemned us in front of the whole church congregation, saying that we had sinned against the Church and God” (Gearing 1997:162). While this is an individual incident, in many ways gays and their supporters saw the opponents of the Bill as doing the very same thing in how they publicly campaigned against the Bill. During the time the reform was being debated Fran Wilde, the MP who introduced the bill, was quoted as saying that the anti gay campaign was “bigotry masquerading as Christianity.” Also, she likened the rallies with “the uniforms, martial music, the whole atmosphere was very like a Nazi rally” (Gearing 1997:22). This is a likely reference to the presence of a Salvation Army band. For many gays their perception of the opponents of the Bill could be likened to the view Blacks in America have of the Ku Klux Klan. The Army’s visibility in this process,

regardless of its actual intent, could well have provided an image of an organisation to be feared if you were gay or lesbian.

On the other hand, given the amount of anger the issue generated and the intemperate rhetoric on both sides, these descriptions need to be tempered somewhat. I personally heard one person at the time describe the debate around the Bill as “generating more heat than light”. In the Parliamentary Debate regarding the Bill on October 9, 1985, the former Prime Minister the Rt Hon Sir Robert Muldoon criticised Fran Wilde and in particular her comments about opponents to the Bill. Speaking of those that presented the petition to Parliament he said, “[t]hey sang hymns and prayed on the steps. Regardless of whether one agrees with them, they came in the name of Christ and they were not, as she called them, obscene.... I must refer to The Salvation Army. I could not do what the Salvation Army does every day in caring for those at the bottom of society. I do not want to go further into the matter, except to say that I hope that in this debate we have respect for the opinions of those who behave respectably” (Muldoon 1985:7261).

6. The Petitions Effectiveness

The petition was a resounding success if the numbers of signatures obtained was the only measure it could be gauged on. Over 800,000 signatures were on it, making it the largest petition in the history of both The Salvation Army and New Zealand up to that time. There were questions raised by opponents about whether some signatures had been falsely obtained and there was evidence that there were some irregularities (Gearing 1997:20-22). However, even if it were assumed that only half were genuine and valid, it is still an amazing accomplishment. This indicates that at least within certain sizeable portions of New Zealand society the petition had support. These people deserved to have their concern noted. Ultimately though, the petition failed to stop the Bill going through albeit with some of the human rights aspects deleted (these were introduced in a later Bill).

7. What are the lessons for the Salvation Army about Involvement in Politics and Society?

For many in The Salvation Army the Homosexual Law Reform debate may well have confirmed the traditional view that “religion and politics don’t mix.” However, as in all areas of human endeavour, involvement in politics is something that requires a great deal of expertise and experience. The Salvation Army unwittingly chose a most controversial issue in which to emerge onto the centre stage of New Zealand politics. The Army had previously sent submissions to parliament on issues such as abortion, homosexuality, alcohol and drugs to name a few. Also, it had been involved in petitions before, albeit not on the same scale or with

the same public profile as was the case in 1985. Generally though, The Salvation Army had maintained a low profile in politics and perhaps for this reason was caught by surprise at the degree of social change taking place. Maybe if it had been more politically active prior to the issue coming into prominence it might have seen the issue coming and had time to talk it through collectively, to develop an adequate theological position and given the leaders more of a mandate to take specific actions. In The Salvation Army, the fact that most positions are arrived at by a top down process also leaves open the possibility that they don't reflect the ideas of the rank and file, coming as they do sometimes from outside of a particular culture or nation. It also tends to abdicate those outside of leadership from seriously considering these harder issues of life. Given that the issue created such division throughout New Zealand society it is highly likely that a clear consensus may have been difficult to obtain. This would not necessarily have been a bad thing.

One clear lesson relates to the way the Army involved itself in a petition and in particular, with whom it allied itself. It would seem that taking the position it did, the Army may have been better advised to have gone on its own in this. If an organisation like the Army is to involve itself with other parties in the way it did, it needs to make sure either that these individuals or groups wish to promote very similar perspectives, or that the Army's unique perspective is strongly promoted.

One thing that has often been feared in relation to any form of political involvement is the loss of public support. The evidence regarding whether this occurred or not, is mixed. A study carried out in 2002 showed The Salvation Army to be the charity who people would most consider donating to (Newspoll Market Research 2002:6). At another level however, some aspects of the social services continue to feel the impact of the Army's stand in 1985. Even as late as the year 2000 I became aware of a reluctance of a referral agency to refer homosexual clients to The Salvation Army because it was believed that they would not be treated sensitively. This was not an isolated incident. In addition, when a lesbian social worker came to speak to staff about gay issues she confessed that it was the first time she had been inside a Salvation Army building. She said she had been afraid of, and angry towards, the Army as a result of the stance the Army had taken in 1985. In any action the Army involves itself in, care needs to be taken that an alienated group such as homosexuals are not further alienated. This is especially so since it is the alienated and disenfranchised that the Army, with its Biblical mandate, most clearly exists for. Major Roberts went as far as to say that "the Homosexual Law Reform actions did enormous damage to The Salvation Army in New Zealand and compromised severely for a number of years our Christian witness and mission".

At a governmental level, the Army did suffer some consequences. Colonel Taylor indicated that government funding was denied the Army for at least one project the government supported the concept of, purely because the Army "wasn't the flavour of the month," according to one government official (Taylor 2002). The

Colonel believed that the Army had become increasingly viewed as being part of the extreme fringe of the right wing of society. In addition, Major Roberts recalled a later Territorial Commander being perplexed by his inability to get an audience with members of the government after numerous attempts. This was an indication according to Major Roberts that, the Army was seen as being on the fringe of society (2002).

Internally, it is hard to determine what effect the Homosexual Law Reform debate had on Salvationists in the long-term. It is the opinion of Major Roberts that Salvationists readiness to support THQ initiatives or directives has been significantly reduced since the 80s and that the poor leadership shown at the time was a major contributing factor (Roberts 2002). Although some people left the Army over this issue no research has been done to quantify the numbers of these people and over this single issue it may be that not many did. However, the general social changes that took place during the 1980s may have left the Army more on the fringe and therefore less relevant to a wider proportion of New Zealanders.

8. Issues For The Future Salvation Army in New Zealand

One positive aspect the involvement in this issue did was that it got Salvationists involved in discussing a particular issue that was a real part of life and not some ethereal spiritual concept. The disappointing thing was that the discussion took place in an atmosphere of extreme conflict and it is almost as if Salvationists have “dropped the subject” for now. With declining Church attendance and a failure of the Church to engage many in society, the homosexual issue could hold some of the answers for a way forward for the Church. One person was quoted as saying that “[i]f you want to see what’s happening in the stream called society, go to the edges and look at what’s happening there – if you know how a stream works – of what’s going on in the middle.... You have to be very careful not to mischaracterise what you’re witnessing as ‘fringe elements,’ thus assuring the listener that he’s okay because it’s not about him, which is bullshit.” (Faludi 1999:42). In the same way it is here on the fringes that we find Christ, amongst the prostitutes and tax collectors, and here that his grace is most evident. The grace is not only, or even primarily, for the “lost” but of vital nourishment and insight for the Christian on his/her journey. The enduring and disturbing legacy of the Homosexual Law Reform debate of 1985 is that to a large extent this marginalised group, along with others, has not been seriously engaged by the Army, with a consequent degree of God’s compassionate grace being lost to Salvationists and gays alike. It may be that this engagement needs to take place first at “home”, that is with the homosexuals that exist within the various corps fellowships.

In a letter making suggestions about the content of a possible media statement on a proposed amendment to the Homosexual Law being considered in 1993,

the then Training Principal of The Salvation Army Training College for Officers, Major Margaret Hay, stated that the Army's present positional statement is "unsatisfactory and in need of...overhaul" (Hay 1993). She further indicated that the Army needed to do further work in the area of 1) Biblical interpretation, where she noted that "[w]hile homosexual acts are clearly forbidden in the relatively few passages referring to them serious hermeneutical questions remain..." 2) To clarify "whether our sexual orientation is a matter of choice or determined. If as our present positional statement agrees it is determined we should be thinking more towards variation than deviation since God doesn't make junk" (Hay 1993). She went on to "urge that a group, including some homosexual Salvationists, and others across the spectrum of opinion be formed to study this matter and recommend a revision to the positional statement" (Hay 1993). This perspective clearly highlights the need for Salvationists to carry out a deeper level of analysis and theologising over the issue of homosexuality than has been the case to date.

9. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to record the perspectives of various Salvationists regarding the 1985 Homosexual Law Reform debate. There is certainly more room for further research and discussion on all aspects of this part of New Zealand Salvation Army history. For this reason I am keeping this paper open for possible further additional material at some future date. The reason for writing this is partly to record this important piece of Army history but also in the hope that we can learn from our past. It is my belief that Salvationists from sharply differing perspectives on this issue took their stance with the highest of motives. These higher motives need to be honoured for what they were while the search for God's wisdom and the means of adequately expressing his love in this age needs to be actively pursued even when it is painful to do so. The issue of homosexuals and their place in the Church appears not to have been adequately addressed by The Salvation Army in practical terms. The question remains as to whether the Army can bear to face the pain of re-examining some of the issues that surfaced throughout the tumultuous period of time that the Homosexual Law Reform Bill was debated. Can our compassion for the alienated allow us to "let sleeping dogs lie" in regard to the place of gays in the Army or does wisdom suggest that this subject is too likely to "blow the Army apart." Time alone will tell.

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