



THE SALVATION ARMY AND THE 1986 HOMOSEXUAL REFORM BILL IN NEW ZEALAND

**A paper by Ian Hutson (Salvation Army Officer)
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Introduction

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 controversy of such magnitude since its pioneering days in the 1880s and 1890s.

The impact of this issue on the Army can still be felt today in the way that some people continue to respond negatively during fundraising appeals, in social service settings with clients and non-Salvation Army staff and when engaging with politicians. The level of conflict among Salvationists was such that when I sought the views of those who had been in leadership at the time, several expressed clear concern that a paper such as this might 'open up a can of worms'.

The purpose of this paper is to:

- record for posterity some of the events that took place and how people viewed these. This will focus primarily on an internal view of The Salvation Army as it worked its way through this issue.
- look for insights that might be gained, particularly in relation to how the events of the Homosexual Law Reform Bill 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 spoken with people who took opposing views, it is apparent to me that each took their position with a high level of integrity. This issue was one in which any middle ground was hard to find and emotion ran high.

1. Historical Context

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 1980s, 'a new generation had come into power ... the years 1984-90 saw numerous and rapid changes which many people found bewildering. The only comparable periods of change were the 1890s 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 so that 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 1980s, the Springbok Tour of 1981 had a huge impact on New Zealand society leading to unprecedented levels of civil disobedience

and with families and communities sharply divided. The focus on apartheid that the tour created began to highlight issues of race within New Zealand society. Māori 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, 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 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 'of 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.

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 associated with the compromising of one's Christian values. It was common for evangelicals to say, 'Politics and religion don't mix.' However, the 1980s in the USA 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 in which moral 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 the extreme end of the conservative/evangelical spectrum, he did reflect widely-held concerns of many evangelicals. Although different dynamics were at play, some evangelicals in New Zealand responded in a similar fashion to those in the US to what was happening in New Zealand society. There was a strong sense that 'something had to be done'.

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. The Homosexual Reform was therefore a natural issue in which evangelical Christianity could attempt to contend with the perceived 'moral decay' of the nation.

2. The Salvation Army's Response

At the time, a number of positions were considered as possible with regard to homosexuality. It could be considered a sin requiring a punitive response; a sickness or deviant behaviour that needed to be healed or corrected; or a natural and normal state to be accepted. Regardless of which of these perspectives people personally held, many had come to the point of recognising that homosexuals should not be treated as badly as they had been. This view was reflected in The Salvation Army's submission to the Bill.

The Salvation Army did not support maintenance of the existing law, which included a sentence of up to seven years' imprisonment for anyone over sixteen who committed sodomy, with or without consent, or up to five 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 did not see 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' (TSA Submission 1985:2). It further acknowledged the alienation that homosexuals often felt and indicated that Salvationists desired to alleviate such loneliness and alienation 'by offering Christian love within Salvation Army fellowship and worship' (TSA Submission 1985:2).

The Salvation Army acknowledged 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' (TSA 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 in the Bill to the Human Rights Commission Act 1977. This 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 Salvationist 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 to what degree the sentiments expressed throughout this submission reflected the beliefs of the majority of Salvationists at the time and whether they would have generally supported the submission. The Salvation Army does not have a democratic structure and the time frame for a response to the Law Reform was limited; therefore, it might have been unrealistic to gain 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 Salvationists may have

had little idea of the nuances of the issue. However, based on my own memory of opinions Salvationists expressed at the time, it seems likely to me that many would have generally supported the submission's contentions that homosexual behaviour was deviant and should not be encouraged.

As well, the submission was consistent with The Salvation Army's Positional Statement on Homosexuality at the time, 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 these views into the laws of a pluralistic society.

Salvationist Major Campbell Roberts was highly critical of how the Army's leaders handled the whole issue of the Homosexual Law Reform. He saw them 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). Campbell Roberts was of the opinion that 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 shown leadership in this issue.

The more contentious aspect of The Salvation Army's response to the proposed Bill was its involvement in a nationwide petition against the Bill. The decision to become involved in this way was communicated to all Salvationists by the Territorial Commander (senior leaders within New Zealand), Colonel Donald H. Campbell (himself an Australian), 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. He said his decision was inspired as a result of his Bible reading on 8 March set out in the devotional book *Soldier's Armoury* that was 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 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). When I spoke to Rodney Knight for this paper, he indicated other senior officers at Territorial Headquarters (THQ) 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 the petition by the Army's senior THQ leadership was arrived at. In an initial meeting, according to 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 MPs 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, Donald Campbell and others apparently believed, cleared the only obstacle to proceeding with involvement in the petition.

The 28 March letter to all Salvationists had been preceded by a television news report of the Army's decision on 22 March, the first that many ordinary Salvationists first heard of the Salvation Army's role in the petition. This upset some Salvationists because they saw it as a serious failure to consult on a contentious issue. This was evident even within THQ leadership, where Social Secretary Colonel Melvin Taylor and Chief Secretary Colonel Ken Bridge, both expressed dismay and surprise at the manner in which The Salvation Army publicly announced on nationwide television a drive to collect signatures against the Bill. Both appeared to believe, as did Colonel William Allott (also present at this 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 leaders on 27 March includes comments that suggest 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.'

Rodney Knight, who as the Public Relations Secretary was the Army's public spokesperson at the time, later noted that there had been an extremely tight timeframe in which to respond to the Bill (8 March to 24 March). Later he told me, '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). The timeframe originally anticipated would have hindered attempts to communicate fully with all Salvationists in early and decisive moments. This is a point contested by Campbell Roberts, who instead believed Army leaders were manoeuvred into taking rushed action by politicians who were using the Army for their own purposes (Roberts 2002).

Rodney Knight, however, clearly believed decisions taken had been made in consultation with, and with agreement from, 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 coordinator. 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. Melvin Taylor told me he was very angry that he had not been contacted while on furlough (holiday) and had been unable to express his contrary view on the matter (Taylor 2001). Certainly, Laurence Guy, who wrote a thesis regarding the gay debate, believed that '[Donald] 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. Support and Opposition to the Army's Position

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 on this point within those at senior levels of leadership. Melvin Taylor 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). 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 THQ, Salvationists expressed their opposition 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, which 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 on 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. Its spokesperson, layperson 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, was part of this group. 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 [Hotel] 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 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 William 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 and coming from a position consistent with the Army's international Positional Statement condemning 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 Positional Statement indicated.

There is some evidence that officers in the Salvation Army's social (service) wing were not supportive of the Army's response. Melvin Taylor's strong statements, as already noted, support this, as does the observation of William 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 [addiction treatment] Programme' (Allott 2002). Brian Thompson (1985:17) asked questions about whether THQ leaders 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 indicated it thought the legalisation of homosexual acts was likely to have a detrimental effect on a range of social areas. It would again appear that leadership had not consulted with its social service personnel, going by comments by Melvin Taylor, then Social Service Secretary.

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 Melvin Taylor and William Allott that intimated the Army's response was to some degree 'homophobic.' It would appear such 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 (TSA Submission 1985:1). Melvin Taylor saw it as being more of a fixed condition requiring a compassionate response (Taylor 2001). Campbell 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. Campbell 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).

How widespread this kind of opposition from Salvationists was at the time is not easy to discern. It is possible many Salvationists did not share these sentiments; or it is just as likely that when they did, they withheld them out of some sense of loyalty to the Army. Melvin 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 his views he saw 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 Campbell Roberts who noted that the public nature of the Army's position made opposition to it very difficult (Roberts 2002). Both men believed that key people within the leadership at the time were right of centre in their political/theological

leanings, so the Army's stance and response 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 Campbell 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 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 the Corps Officer at Dannevirke, Lieutenant Peter Christensen, actively organised a petition there and managed to collect 1700 signatures. Many others were likewise active in this fashion—including myself—then the Corps Officer at Stratford. Melvin Taylor, despite his personal opposition to the petition, had the impression that many Salvationists supported it, probably even a majority (Taylor 2002). However, William Allott, 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). He 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 there were significant shifts in Salvationist support throughout the whole process of the Army's involvement in the petition and regarding 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 high pedestal of public opinion, they had begun to be vilified by many. Even within 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 some point in time, it seems evident from the following observations of Rodney Knight that pockets of dissension began to appear within the Army as the process of opposing the Bill proceeded. He said 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). When I spoke to him, he continued 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.

4. The Experience of Other Churches

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 indication 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 its schisms were possibly 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 its right to speak for the denomination and its failure to reflect the views of the majority of the grassroots 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 Salvation Army leadership managed in its overall response to strike a position closer to the movement’s grassroots, but alienated those who took a more moderate or supportive view of the bill.

5. The International Salvation Army

Retired General Shaw Clifton, then a captain at The Salvation Army’s International Headquarters in London with the role of ‘Legal and Parliamentary Secretary’ (and later a Territorial Commander in New Zealand), was very much involved with events as they unfolded in New Zealand. He described the IHQ perspective as follows:

At that time ... we [at IHQ] had faced the same issue [Homosexual Law Reform] elsewhere and had handled it calmly by neither opposing change nor supporting it, but instead analysing the draft legislation to see if it protected minors, plus those of unsound mind, prisoners, etc. We also looked carefully at the age of consent in the legislation as some were advocating in those days for same sex relations to be legal at 16 when the age for heterosexual acts was often 18 or even 21.

The New Zealand Salvation Army leadership, through the then Territorial Commander, went public and made known its opposition to the new law without consulting or

informing IHQ. The resulting furore triggered a direct approach to the General by the then Chief Secretary (CS), something that The Salvation Army's Orders & Regulations permits in extreme circumstances. The Chief Secretary hoped the General would direct the New Zealand Territorial Commander to change his attitude.

The matter then reached my desk at IHQ because it centred on legislative measures, and I received and handled a large number of letters to IHQ on the issue. Many of the letters were abusive, some obscene, and offensive substances were, more than once, placed through the IHQ letter box in the dead of night. The letters came from all over the world, and many were identical in content thus evidencing a well organised homophile network globally.

Had IHQ been consulted before the Army in NZ went public, and had NZ acted upon the advice that would have been given, the outcomes would have been very different because less offence would have been caused to the supporters of the draft bill, without any loss of principle occasioned to the Army (Clifton 2017).

Clearly, the ramifications of the decision to support the petition against the Homosexual Reform Bill had international ramifications inside and outside The Salvation Army, and International Headquarters was not happy with how the matter was handled.

6. Public Perceptions 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 MP Norman Jones who frequently vilified homosexuals as being perverts. He was quoted as saying, 'We're not going to have five percent of perverted New Zealanders legalising this filth for other New Zealanders' (The Star 1985: 27). These kinds of comments, 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 2 April. However, it was observed 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 Salvation Army's position for it.

Looking back, Rodney Knight believed 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 therefore probable 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. The 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.

7. Homosexual People and The Salvation Army/Churches

It is not entirely clear that all Salvationists at all levels were 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 not always perfectly followed.

Captain Paul Clifford, who joined The Salvation Army shortly before the Homosexual Law Reform, 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 either to help this marginalised group or any evident success in 'curing' homosexuals. The Salvation Army had never seriously challenged the kind of hatred and even violence perpetrated against gay people in society, and even in the submission this 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. 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 gay people alone could provide.

Paul Clifford has stated, 'Much 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.' He also 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. Paul Clifford noted that: 'Apart 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, Melvin 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 Paul Clifford. However, the kind of training and expertise he describes was not widely available at the time of debate over the Bill, and sadly within the Army and the evangelical world, it is still too rarely observed. The Salvation Army's submission certainly proposed counselling for homosexuals and research into the homosexual condition, but there was little evidence any effort was made to do this after the furore died down. This 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 Melvin Taylor.

This perception of the church as being a place of judgement rather than love is something strongly felt by gay people. One gay man 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 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 gay people 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 reform was being debated, Fran Wilde, the MP who introduced the Bill, was quoted as saying the anti-gay campaign was 'bigotry masquerading as Christianity'. She also 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 gay men, their perception of the opponents of the Bill could be likened to the view African Americans 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 9 October 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, 'They 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).

8. The Petition's Effectiveness

The petition was a resounding success if the numbers of signatures obtained was the only measure by which this could be gauged. With over 800,000 signatures, this was the largest petition in the history of both The Salvation Army and New Zealand up to that time. Questions were 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, this 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 removed (with these introduced in a later Bill).

9. Lessons for The Salvation Army

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. It had also been involved in petitions before, albeit not on the same scale or with the same public profile as 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 the Army had been more politically active prior to this issue gaining in prominence, it might have seen the issue coming and had time to talk it through collectively, to develop an adequate theological position and give its leaders a stronger 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. 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 Salvation Army involved itself in a petition and, in particular, with whom it aligned 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 with the Homosexual Law Reform Bill, it needs to make sure either that those individuals or groups it aligns with wish to promote very similar perspectives, or that the Army's unique perspective is strongly promoted.

One thing often feared in relation to any form of political involvement is loss of public support. The evidence regarding whether this occurred or not for The Salvation Army is mixed. A study carried out in 2002 showed The Salvation Army to be the charity people would most consider donating to (Newspoll Market Research 2002:6). But at another level, 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 one 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 Salvation Army staff about gay issues she confessed 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 it had taken in 1985.

In any action the Army involves itself in, care needs to be taken that an already 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. Campbell Roberts went so 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 Salvation Army did suffer some consequences. Melvin 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). Melvin Taylor believed 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 Campbell 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 Campbell Roberts that Salvationist readiness to support THQ initiatives or directives has been significantly reduced since the 1980s 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.

10. Issues for The Future Salvation Army

One positive aspect The Salvation Army's involvement in this issue 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 churches 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, 'If 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 is 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 gay people 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 'while 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).

Margaret Hay 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.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to record the perspectives of various Salvationists regarding the 1986 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. As stated in the introduction to this paper, my reason for writing 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 gay people in the Army, or does wisdom suggest that this subject is still too likely to 'blow the Army apart'? Time alone will tell.

Postscript: Fifteen Years On

Moving on from where this paper finished some 15 years later, in 2017, it is notable that The Salvation Army has shown signs of seriously wrestling with how to reconcile its past involvement in the 1986 Homosexual Reform Bill and in how it should relate to individual GLBTI people and their wider community.

There is still no tidy consensus about this issue across The Salvation Army and its members in New Zealand. Many will not agree with some of Army leaderships' attempts over time at reconciliation, while others will no doubt think that not enough has been done. Indeed, many gay people will still feel unsafe in involving themselves in Salvation Army corps when levels of understanding may not be as high as they could be.

A survey of Salvationists was carried out in 2014 (The Salvation Army 2014). The central question of the survey was 'Which of the following would best describe your current attitudes toward same-sex relationship?' Questions and findings of some of this survey is as follows:

- 1) I hold unwaveringly to the historic understanding of the church, that sexual relationships are appropriate only for a man and a woman in a marriage relationship—officers 51%, soldiers 58%.
- 2) I live with a degree of uncertainty: I long for clear teaching on this matter but suspect the answer is far from simple—officers 37.5%, soldiers 27.6%/

- 3) I am convinced that committed, monogamous, same-sex relationships are fully capable of honouring God—officers 11.36%, soldiers 14.85%.

Far more needs to be done to develop a thoughtful and compassionate theological response to how The Army should respond to GLBTI issues. The 2014 survey suggests that while a small majority of Salvationists continue to support a traditional Christian understanding of same-sex marriage there appears to be a significant degree of uncertainty among many about this issue. How GLBTI people should be responded to or included in the various Corps or community services still fails to find universal agreement. However, in my experience, Salvation Army social services have generally made significant attempts to compassionately engage with any GLBTI people that have entered Salvation Army care.

The following examples provide encouraging evidence that The Salvation Army has made significant attempts to reach out and reconcile with its past and in looking to repair its relationship with GLBTI people:

- 20 years after the Homosexual Law Reform Bill was brought into law on 15 May 2006, the then Territorial Commander Commissioner Garth McKenzie issued a statement that acknowledged the Army's role in the petition (The Salvation Army, 2006). This statement was reconciliatory towards the GLBTI community and sought to build bridges and encourage dialogue. The statement acknowledged that the Army's official position had been deeply hurtful to many and expressed regret for any hurt that remained.
- The Salvation Army and LGBTI+ organisation Rainbow Wellington looked to make a start to putting the events of 1985 and 1986 behind them on behalf of their respective organisations. The result was that, in May 2012, they agreed to make a new start in their relationship by signing off a document called: 'Rainbow Wellington and The Salvation Army Reach a Rapprochement' (Rainbow Wellington & The Salvation Army, 2012).
- An Inter-Faith Service was held in the St Peter's Anglican Church on Willis Street in Wellington on 10 March 2016 to mark 30 years since the passing of the Homosexual Reform Bill. Salvationists participated in the planning of and running of this service. A small Salvation Army band played as an accompaniment to the hymns. 'Many of those attending expressed their surprise and thanks to the Army for their presence, given that they still remembered The Salvation Army's active role in opposing homosexual law reform in New Zealand. A number of speakers expressed gratitude for the healing nature of a gathering that allowed them to feel welcome inside a church—some for the first time since they had revealed their sexual orientation in the churches of their youth' (The Salvation Army, 2016).
- In 2017, a few Salvationists participated in a Gay Pride Festival March, also running a stall that gave away free baking and interacting positively with the GLBTI community (The Salvation Army, 2017).
- A Submission to Parliament was made by The Salvation Army in August 2017 in regard to the Criminal Records (Expungement of Convictions for Historical Homosexual Offences) Bill. This Bill, when enacted, would expunge criminal records of people who

were convicted of historical homosexual offences that are no longer considered criminal. This would thereby take away the stigma and the associated disadvantage of a criminal conviction to a person's name.

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