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Packing Down the Scrum

An Historical Analysis of the 1981 Springbok Tour and the Homosexuality Issue in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

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Introduction

Division, debate and drama abound in Presbyterian Church history. Latterly, centre stage in the New Zealand church has been occupied by the 1981 Springbok Tour and the issue of homosexuality, the two foci of this dissertation. The debates have been bitter, and the second issue is yet to be resolved by the Presbyterian Church. The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand has a tradition of being involved in politics, and also a tradition of division across the theological spectrum and between and among its clergy and laity. In some instances opinion in the church has been ahead of society’s thinking, in others the church has lagged behind. The Church has tried to accommodate differences of opinion, but it is inaccurate to speak of the Presbyterian Church as a united body.

The Presbyterian Church engaged in a lengthy debate in the 1970s and 1980s over whether or not the church, as a body, should be involved in politics. Some church members said that political action was not the responsibility of the church as a body and that church leaders who spoke out on political issues should make it quite clear that it was their personal opinion and not that of the church. Other church members declared that the church, ‘either as a body or as individual members of it, has a right and responsibility to speak out’ and that Christians fail badly if ‘we do not make our
presence felt as the conscience of the community.'¹ Allan Davidson, a New Zealand church historian, has suggested that the church has been more comfortable dealing with morality. This is an area that the church has believed they have represented.² There is, however, a fine line between morality and politics, as indeed there is between morality and economic, social and religious issues. Some, according to Davidson, have seen religion as a private matter, consequently requiring that the churches keep out of politics. Others have seen the churches as having an active and critical role within politics beyond the church’s traditional moral concerns.³ If one traces the history of the Presbyterian Church in this country the extent that it involved itself in politics becomes clear.

The Presbyterian Church was a leading voice in such issues as the 1877 Education Act, and prohibition, but it has not been a united body on how these issues should be approached. This is perhaps not surprising given the origins of the Presbyterian Church in New Zealand. Otago was founded predominantly by Scottish settlers with strong Presbyterian ideals shaped by the Free Church which separated from the Church of Scotland in 1843 after much discord and acrimony. The Presbyterian Church in Otago and Southland refused steadfastly to unite with the remainder of the Presbyterian Church in New Zealand until 1901. It had, however, insisted on the establishment of educational institutions in Otago. By the time of the 1877 Education Act diverse opinions were evident in the Otago Synod and the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand. Some Presbyterians were convinced of the

¹ Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, (hereafter PCANZ), Reports of Committees and Other Papers to be Presented to General Assembly 1978, (hereafter White Book), pp270-271.
³ Ibid.
need for a religious element in schools, while others felt that a secular system was preferable to control of the education system by the Catholic Church. Similarly, there were sharp divisions between those who supported prohibition and those who advocated self-control, legal regulation and education concerning alcohol. Disunity was also a feature of the twentieth century, despite the Union of 1901.

The Boer War, controversy over the use of Sundays, gambling, Bible-in-Schools, conscription during the First World War and the Depression were issues that confronted the church. The 1950s was a period of growth and stability not only in New Zealand society, but also in the churches. The stability was shattered by the 1960s, a decade during which certain practices directly challenged the Christian message. Presbyterians were asked to address such things as the Vietnam War, race relations, immigration, unemployment, civil liberties, nuclear war and peace. Divisions were prevalent in the Presbyterian Church as well as in New Zealand society which had become increasingly pluralistic.

'The divisiveness', according to Davidson, 'both within and between churches over political issues became obvious in the seventies and eighties.' This period is the major focus of this dissertation. The two issues examined engaged the church in discussion for some time. The first chapter principally examines the Presbyterian Church’s response to the 1981 Springbok Tour and the arguments of the various groups involved. It also traces the church’s attitude to apartheid and sporting

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5 Ibid, p.61.
6 Davidson and Lineham, p.351.
7 Ibid.
contacts with South Africa. The second chapter outlines the issue of homosexuality and the church, a deeply divisive topic, and one that remains unresolved today. It describes the various responses within the church to the 1985 Homosexual Law Reform Bill and the 1993 amendments to the Human Rights Act. The debates are placed in the context of scientific evidence and biblical interpretations. Questions regarding the position of the clergy and the possible theological and political directions of the church in the future are also raised.

There are three overriding themes that emerge from this dissertation. Firstly, it illustrates the nature and the extent of the division within the church. There have been two vocal and powerful groups at either end of the theological spectrum, but there has also been a large middle group that has remained confused or ambivalent. The second major theme is the degree to which the church has reflected society. Certain sectors of the church community have been persuasive in influencing societal opinion, pressing for change. Another section has been lagging behind and, it could be argued, significant in preventing reform. Thirdly, these two issues illustrate that Presbyterians disagree over the authority of the Scriptures in modern day society. Conservatives have placed a higher emphasis on the Bible in comparison with liberals.

At first glance one might ask the question: what has the 1981 Springbok Tour and issues surrounding homosexuality and the church have in common? Why examine these two seemingly unconnected topics? There are a number of reasons. Firstly the Springbok Tour and the question of homosexuality have been two of the most contentious issues that have divided the modern Presbyterian Church, with strong
convictions expressed by the different theological outlooks. The issue of sporting contacts with South Africa has been resolved with the dismantling of apartheid in that country, but the question of homosexuality is something that could hasten a split within the church. Secondly the two issues address questions of morality and the church’s message. Non-whites in South Africa were discriminated against, and so too are homosexuals within New Zealand society and the Presbyterian Church. Thirdly these two issues enable the historian to compare the Presbyterian Church with the wider society: does it reflect or lead it, or both? New Zealand society was as divided as the church on these issues. Fourthly, they also serve to highlight how the church operates, in terms of its hierarchical structure, system of governance, the value placed on the Scriptures and the relationship between General Assembly, clergy, and the lay person.

The structure of the church is an important factor that needs to be considered. The General Assembly is the highest court in the Presbyterian Church and consists of ministers and elders who have been elected to represent the whole church, over which it exercises supreme jurisdiction. At the regional level presbyteries are comprised of ministers and representative elders of the congregations within the area. Sessions are the lowest court in the church and consist of the ministers and elders of a local congregation. Assembly also appoints a number of committees to examine particular issues within the church. The most important in terms of the two issues addressed in this dissertation is the Public Questions Committee whose task it was to ascertain the mind of the church.

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Chapter 1  Playing By the Rules?

The Presbyterian Church and the 1981 Springbok Tour

Batons and barbed wire; hard hats and armour were the props as New Zealand divided into two warring camps.¹

A war was waged in New Zealand over the 1981 Springbok Tour. Families, friends, workplaces, and sporting and cultural bodies were divided on whether politics had a place in sport and ultimately whether a rugby team from South Africa should be allowed to tour this country. This war was also fought within the Presbyterian Church.

As with most political issues confronting the Church, Presbyterians articulated a broad spectrum of ideas concerning the 1981 Springbok Tour ranging from radical to ultra-conservative. The cancellation of the Waikato game and the ensuing violence on both sides served to harden opinion. Radical and ultra-conservative groups invariably were more aggressive and vocal which has led many to believe that opinion was polarised, as the opening quote has suggested. But there was also a

significant number of Presbyterians who were caught in the middle, disillusioned and confused. Moderate liberals, for example, remained committed to the dismantling of apartheid, but viewed the violence utilised by both anti- and pro-tour demonstrators as abhorrent. This caused internal friction within the church and prompted others to question whether the church was losing sight of its real objectives.

The Presbyterian Church, today as in the past, is a complex body with a diversity of theological, social and political outlooks. Often this was reflected in regional variations and the personalities involved. The General Assembly was united in its opposition to the system of apartheid, but not so unanimous over how this should be expressed. As a body it was agreed that the Presbyterian Church should indicate its opposition to the tour. Assembly recognised the trickiness of the situation believing that the credibility of the Church was at stake.\(^2\) The Church hierarchy, which constituted Assembly and its appointed committees, responded to this challenge, but that did not mean that it had the universal support of its laity. There was, in fact, a widening gap between what Assembly was saying, and what the person in the pew was saying on the issue.

This chapter seeks to examine the channels of diversity within the Presbyterian Church as a whole. It identifies the ideology of both anti-tour and pro-tour supporters and the methods of protest that each employed. It examines the controversy and discord over sporting contacts with South Africa stretching back to the 1950s. It deals with the Presbyterian Church's contact with the Government and

the New Zealand Rugby Football Union as well as its own people. There was a variety of differing views expressed by a variety of different groups. The lead the Public Questions Committee gave the church community and the resistance of more conservative groups is addressed. A petition, organised by the Joint Methodist and Presbyterian Public Questions Committee\(^3\) is dealt with in detail. This was submitted to Parliament asking the Government to call off the tour, but this did not receive as much support as the Committee often suggested. The importance of the Waikato game in strengthening convictions is also emphasised. First though, it will be important to identify the position of the church in relation to New Zealand-South Africa rugby relations from the 1940s.

There has been a legacy of controversy surrounding New Zealand-South Africa rugby relations. There were the 1960s 'No Maori, No Tour' protests, the 1967 and 1973 tour cancellations and the boycott of the 1976 Montreal Olympics in direct response to the All Blacks tour to South Africa that year. These circumstances were brought about by South Africa's racial policies, namely apartheid, which denied human rights to the majority of the population. Increasingly New Zealanders became aware of the 'real situation' within South Africa. Much of this not only had to do with the activities of organisations such as HART (Halt All Racist Tours) and CARE (Citizens Association For Racial Equality) but also the activities of the churches, including the Presbyterian Church. Groups such as the Public Questions and International Relations Committees outlined the political and racial policies of South Africa in a variety of remits and discussion papers for presbyteries and

\(^3\) The Methodist and Presbyterian Public Questions Committees joined to form one body following the union of the two in 1977.
parishes to address. The issue came more into focus for churchgoers as more was learned about apartheid and as the level of international pressure mounted. Calls for economic sanctions and sporting boycotts of South Africa jeopardised New Zealand-South Africa rugby relations. But rugby is more than a game in New Zealand, it is an institution. The 1984 Reports of Committees and Other Papers to be Presented to General Assembly, commonly known as the White Book, expanded on this, recognising that in New Zealand’s secular culture, rugby was the closest thing New Zealand has to a common religion. Megan Wishart has also noted the importance of rugby culture in New Zealand, particularly contacts between South Africa and New Zealand, in saying that ‘it is almost indisputable that the reason for the strength of feeling against anti-apartheid protest is because it attacks a central part of New Zealand culture, rugby, which is linked to a central part of Afrikaner culture, which is also rugby.’ Most New Zealanders recognised the injustices against the non-white population in South Africa, but many were also passionately interested in watching the traditional ‘battle’ between the Springboks and the All Blacks. More often than not the belief that sport had no place in politics was used in defence. Peter Morttock of the Society for the Promotion of Individual Responsibility (SPIR) was more frank in his approach. He stated in 1981 that ‘the average member of our organisation couldn’t care less what happens in South Africa as long as they have the right to a game of football in peace.’ This was the prevailing culture that the church hierarchy was competing against.

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4 PCANZ, 1984 White Book, p.76.
Initially the focus for the Presbyterian Church had been to redress South Africa's racial prejudice that prevented Maori from being considered for the All Blacks. An editorial comment that appeared in the 1946 edition of the *Outlook* suggested that 'if the South Africans will not have Maori in the New Zealand team then we should state clearly and unequivocally that no team from this country should visit South Africa.' This philosophy generated support in the 1950s and formed the basis of the famous 1960 'No Maori: No Tour' campaign in which New Zealanders called for the cancellation of the tour if Maori were not eligible for selection. At this stage attention was centred on what New Zealand should do, not on South Africa's policy of apartheid. One study has argued that had Maori been chosen by the Rugby Union, and allowed to tour by the South African Government, then the tour should proceed. Although the campaign was unsuccessful it did raise the consciousness of Presbyterians.

In 1965 the concern was still to make the New Zealand team wholly representative. New Zealanders had great pride in their own record of racial equality which prompted the church to pass a resolution supporting an 'open door' policy with South Africa. This policy was a common argument presented by pro-tour churchgoers well into the 1980s.

The New Zealand Rugby Football Union rejected an invitation by the South African Rugby Board in 1967 that insisted that Maori be excluded from the touring party. The tour was duly cancelled after South Africa refused to amend its invitation.

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7  *Outlook*, 4/9/70, p.4.
Paterson has highlighted the role of the Presbyterian Church in alerting New Zealanders to the injustice that excluded Maori. ‘There is little doubt’, he suggested, ‘that the church’s stand, expressed as far back as 1946, and held consistently, with the support and agreement of the other churches had considerable influence in shaping the thoughts of the New Zealanders on this matter.’

The cancellation of the 1968 tour had the intended effect, for South Africa agreed to accept Maori for the 1970 tour. For most New Zealanders the issue was solved but the Presbyterian Church, and especially the Public Questions Committee intensified their focus on apartheid. Objections to the exclusion of Maori and the resulting change in the stance of the South African Union concerning this showed what concerted protest action could achieve. A large proportion of New Zealanders, however, still maintained the belief that contacts should be maintained to illustrate a better way of life to South Africa. The Public Questions Committee rejected this stance. They believed that ‘such contacts as we have had in the past may have been a means of keeping open the channels of communication, but we believe that the time has now come for these to be closed.’

There was substantial evidence that white South Africans took great heart from continued contact, particularly with New Zealand. This was morale boosting and a sporting and political success for South Africans. Labour Prime Minister Norman Kirk instructed the New Zealand Rugby Football Union to cancel the proposed 1973 Springbok Tour. Kirk recognised that the tour would create a violent situation and tarnish New Zealand’s image as a multi-racial society. The Public Questions Committee did not support such a cancellation believing that this was the sort of political interference that they were protesting

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9 Ibid, p.152.
against. The International Relations Committee, however, supported the cancellation. The Public Questions Committee had altered its stance sufficiently by 1975 supporting calls for the 1976 All Black Tour to be called off. But by this time National had regained power and its leader Robert Muldoon maintained that a National Government would welcome a tour despite the conflict and turmoil that this might cause. This generated a great deal of support among the rugby-loving public. General Assembly was not impressed and strongly urged the Rugby Union to revoke its invitation. The motion in Assembly was carried by a two-thirds majority and accompanied similar resolutions among the Anglican, Catholic, Methodist and Baptist Churches. The Moderator and Assembly Executive called on the Rugby Union and the Prime Minister to cancel the tour for the 'sake of our dignity and New Zealand's worldwide credibility.' To tour, they said, 'allowed South Africa's highly developed propaganda machine to make players and their country appear to support apartheid.' Repercussions of the tour, it was predicted, would affect New Zealand for many years.

This prediction was realised earlier than Assembly anticipated. New Zealand became subject to international condemnation as a consequence of the 1976 tour. The All Blacks lost the rugby, New Zealand lost in the world. Attempts to ban New Zealand from the 1976 Montreal Olympics failed, prompting a boycott from a number of African, Asian and Caribbean nations. New Zealand had signalled itself out by insisting on maintaining sporting contacts with South Africa. This raised the level of political consciousness within this country. In 1976 most of New Zealand

13 PCANZ, 1976 White Book, p.188.
was not against sport, particularly rugby, with white South African teams.\textsuperscript{14} There was a hint, though, of the tide turning. There was a suggestion of the potential disruption that a South African tour to New Zealand could cause if the position of non-whites in South Africa was not significantly improved.

The Rugby Union invited the Springboks to tour in 1981 knowing that a Muldoon-led National Government would not move vigorously to counteract this. Muldoon refused to condemn the tour stating as far back as 1975 that he would welcome a Springbok tour even in the face of violence and civil strife.\textsuperscript{15} He believed that a tour would be a vote-catcher among the marginal and conservative electorates, the traditional base of National Party support. Conservative sectors of the Presbyterian Church invariably would have supported further contact\textsuperscript{16}. The 26 affiliated rugby unions also pledged their unequivocal support for the tour. This was a chance to see the two greatest rugby playing nations in action on home soil, and an opportunity to exact revenge for the defeat handed out at the hands of the Springboks during the 1976 tour.

The churches were ahead of other groups in organising a prompt reaction to the Rugby Union’s invitation. This is contrary to the opinion of Megan Wishart who has stated that the churches, as a group, were slow to protest.\textsuperscript{17} There is a common belief that the church follows the lead of the middle-class because the middle-class occupy positions within the church hierarchy. A significant group of opinion within

\begin{enumerate}
\item Wishart, p.42.
\item Nichol and Veitch, p.291.
\item Studies cited in the Outlook 18/7/70, p.291, suggested that a majority of Presbyterians vote National.
\item Wishart, p.49.
\end{enumerate}
the Presbyterian Church, however, was ahead of society on this issue. This is not to say that other groups within the church were not lagging behind society. Experience in previous protest campaigns in the 1960s and 1970s enabled these groups to organise their resources promptly in response to this new challenge. One such group that occupied a leading position was the Public Questions Committee of the Presbyterian Church.

The Public Questions Committee was a visible group which had consistently spoken out against New Zealand-South Africa sporting contacts and the system of apartheid as a whole. The Committee was a body duly elected by the General Assembly and given the responsibility to act in matters of public interest. Its charter stated that it was within its agenda to:

- ascertain the mind of the church on the matters of public interest and concern in moral, social, political and industrial problems...
- to give a lead to the church in such matters...
- to speak promptly and with clarity on such issues when it is felt to be in the public interest...
- and to consult with leaders of Government and its departments as required.\(^\text{18}\)

This order of reference would come under scrutiny as the debate warmed up. Needless to say the Public Questions Committee was an important group in leading discussion on most issues.

The commitment of the Public Questions Committee to addressing apartheid stretched as far back as the 1950s as they tried to educate the church community about the ‘real situation’ in South Africa, and the damage that sporting contacts was having in postponing change. But this was an uphill battle in New Zealand’s rugby-dominated culture. The Committee saw the practice of rejecting apartheid and allowing sporting contacts, as the National Government were doing, as inconsistent and even hypocritical. They urged the Rugby Union in 1980 to revoke its invitation to the Springbok team, and to discontinue contacts with white-dominated rugby in South Africa. Some arguments had been put forward that moves had been made to dismantle apartheid and that South Africa should be ‘rewarded’ for ‘good behaviour’.19 The Public Questions Committee, and HART in particular, found this reasoning abhorrent. As HART argued, ‘since 1968 sports organisations [in South Africa] have made cosmetic changes to sports policy to appease international opinion while spending massive sums of money to give the world the impression that its sport has been completely desegregated.’20 Sam Ramsamy of the South African Non Racial Committee (SANROC) developed this further. He declared that “in fact mixed selection in racist South Africa is a sham and is meaningless to Blacks, and that stage managed merit selection is intent on proving Black mediocrity.”21 Ramsamy continued: ‘racist South Africa has only changed its attitudes partially because of international pressure, so why now release the pressure before the change is complete.’22 The New Zealand Rugby Football Union, according to Ramsamy,

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20 HART Pamphlet, The boxes to which I refer are all found in the Knox Archives, Hewitson Library, Public Questions Committee of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, (hereafter PQC), PQC 94/80.
21 Letter from Sam Ramsamy to the PQC, 14/11/80, PQC 94/80.
22 Ibid.
was delaying the process of change. The Public Questions Committee utilised these arguments in its own campaign and published their own pamphlets. One, entitled *Why Christians Say No to Apartheid* (1980), outlined what apartheid was, the current situation in South Africa and what New Zealanders could do to address this. The Committee vigorously condemned the actions of the Rugby Union in inviting the Springboks and tried to alert the public about misconceptions they thought were prevalent in society.

Southern Africa deserves combined priority in the church’s combined efforts because of the churches own involvement in the area and because of the legal enforcement of racism there. What is at stake is the faithfulness to the fullness of the message entrusted to the churches.23

This was the resolution that emerged out of the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Nairobi in 1975. God’s command had been ‘let my people go.’ The churches of New Zealand needed to strive for the liberty of the oppressed in South Africa. A number of denominations, including the Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches, the Associated Churches of Christ, the Society of Friends and the National Council of Churches, united in action against the tour. A number of issues were raised in a joint statement by the heads of the churches to the New Zealand Rugby Football Union. They deplored apartheid as unjust, immoral and un-Christian: ‘in opposing the rugby tour we are expressing our abhorrence of apartheid in a way that will not hurt the oppressed people of South

23 World Council of Churches resolution, Nairobi, 1975, PQC 94/80.
Africa. Furthermore, the tour was seen as a distasteful breach of the letter and the spirit of the Gleneagles Agreement, which was conceived in 1977 in direct response to the Montreal Olympic boycott. This stated that it was the:

urgent duty of each of their Governments vigorously to combat the evil of apartheid by withholding any form of support for, and by taking every practical step to discourage contact or competition by their nationals with sporting organisations, teams or sportsmen from South Africa or from any other country where sports are organised on the basis of race, colour or ethnic origin.

The New Zealand Government, according to the joint churches and groups such as HART, did not seem committed to upholding this. The joint statement also predicted that the tour would polarise the country in a potentially dangerous way and heighten the possibility of further boycotts against New Zealand. The churches needed to affirm what they stood for and they did this by standing up for the rights of the oppressed in South Africa ahead of the enjoyment of a few who were intent on watching a game of rugby.

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24 Joint Statement by the Heads of Churches to the New Zealand Rugby Football Union, (hereafter NZRFU), PQC 94/80.
26 The Gleneagles Agreement discouraged sporting contacts with South Africa whilst it insisted on selecting teams based on race colour or ethnic origin. The wording was sufficiently vague and ambiguous not to force a change in Government policy. There were many ‘violations’ of this agreement, HART identified fifteen in the first year alone. Most New Zealanders were probably unaware of this because of the relatively low profile of the sports involved. The proposed 1981 tour highlighted these transgressions. HART memorandum to all Government MPs, 27/6/78, PQC 94/80.
A similar deposition was made to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Interestingly, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Brian Talboys, was the only National Government MP to consistently speak out against the proposed tour. He was seen as the only potential ally within the Government and regular correspondence was exchanged between Talboys and the Public Questions Committee. Talboys wrote to the Rugby Union concerning the seriousness of its invitation and urged them to cancel the tour. In one letter he explained that:

> it is the Gleneagles Agreement which is of paramount importance in this question given the circumstances in which it was adopted and the international consequences that must flow from the deliberate ignoring of it by your Council. As I pointed out in a press statement on 17 September it is not only the NZRFU but the whole country that will have to live with the consequences. Nothing can alter the fact that your decision has implications going well beyond the administration of your amateur sport, however much the Council might wish it otherwise.²⁷

Furthermore, Talboys had stated to HART earlier in 1980 that ‘you may be sure that the Government will, as it has done since it subscribed to the Gleneagles Agreement in 1977, take every measure consistent with its obligations under the Agreement.’²⁸ From this it would seem that the Government was committed to resisting the tour, but in reality Talboys was hamstrung by his own Government who was more

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²⁷ Letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Brian Talboys to the NZRFU, 22/9/80, PQC 94/80.
²⁸ Letter from Mr Talboys to HART, 10/1/80, PQC 94/80.
committed to leaving the responsibility and the decision making with the sporting bodies themselves. The Public Questions Committee was heartened by Talboys condemnation of the Rugby Union but felt that this pledge did not go far enough to include cancelling the tour. In this respect the Public Questions Committee was a leading group influencing public and Governmental opinion.

Two attempts were made by the church to influence opinion and, although unsuccessful, gained some media attention. The first was a delegation of church leaders that met with members of the Rugby Union in November 1980 in an attempt to persuade the Union to cancel the tour. This was a unique event for it was the first outside delegation received by the New Zealand Union. The following month the churches were also required to present their case supporting a petition submitted to Parliament. These two incidents were also important in influencing members of the public whilst maintaining the Church's credibility in moral issues.

The Rugby Union responded to Mr Talboys and the church delegation. Inevitably it raised the issue of sport and politics. 'It is the responsibility of national sporting bodies', said the Rugby Union, 'to administer the sport which they control. It is not their function to determine matters related to international politics or trade. With respect this is surely a matter for Governments.' In a similar sentiment Ron Don, President of the Auckland Rugby Union, asked 'why can't we just stick to sport and leave politics to the politicians? And I suggest the churches to the church people.

And perhaps the church people should leave sport to those of us who are elected to

29 Letter from NZRFU to Mr Talboys 23/1/80, PQC 94/80.
Some of the church laity adhered to this view. Despite the beliefs of some though, the Presbyterian Church had a history of involvement in political issues, and equally a tradition of being divided over these. As one argument suggested, 'you can’t make a political issue out of 15 guys playing rugby.' But in reality politics were involved because South African sport was governed by political decisions. It was a commonly used argument that sport, politics and religion should not mix, but, it could be argued, a relatively naive one. Politics are not divorced from religion, particularly at the national or international level. The 1976, 1980 and 1984 Olympic boycotts were clear demonstrations of the influence politics had in sport. Furthermore, the church hierarchy had involved themselves in politics for some time. The very existence of an International Relations Committee and a Public Questions Committee within the Presbyterian Church serves to illustrate this.

The level of disunity within the Presbyterian Church concerning the tour is indicated by the support, or lack thereof, for a petition submitted to Parliament. This was circulated throughout Methodist and Presbyterian congregations and in asking the Government to prevent the Springbok team from touring New Zealand gained 9514 signatures. These were collected over the course of three consecutive Sundays. A list of arguments against the tour accompanied the petition. These included such things as New Zealand’s obligation to adhere to the Gleneagles Agreement, the

30 Interview with Ron Don on Close Up, 14/9/80, cited in Wishart, p.29.
31 Mr A.G. Hercus, for example, wanted General Assembly to recognise the legal right of the NZRFU to invite South Africa and carry out arrangements without interference, PQC 94/80. In a letter to the PQC, the Waitaki Parish also believed that sports bodies should be free to administer without political interference, PQC 94/80.
32 Gallery interview c1970 cited in Wishart, p.27.
33 Wishart, p.27.
34 PQC 91/70.
prospect of racial issues arising, the possibility of subsequent boycotts, the effective polarisation of New Zealand and the possibility of civil disorder, and the insensitivity of the New Zealand Rugby Football Union.35 'We believe that the prospect of a divided angry country', as the submission that accompanied the petition stated, 'is too high a price to pay for a Springbok Tour.'36

The petition had been organised by the Public Questions Committee in response to a suggestion that it was the Church hierarchy, not the laity, who was opposed to the tour. The Committee was determined to show the Rugby Union what the 'real situation' was. But what was the real situation? It seems very difficult to determine this for there was a petition and a counter-petition, arguments and counter-arguments. The petition generated a significant amount of publicity and this may cloud the fact that it was not supported as universally as often indicated. The co-convenor of the Committee, John Murray, was one of the spokespersons for the campaign. He declared in a press statement that, 'a handful of people have protested against the petition, but the great majority have welcomed the opportunity of making their wishes known to Parliament.'37 On closer inspection, however, this support was not as widespread as Murray purported. Close on 10 000 signatures were obtained, but this was out of a constituency of some 671 733 Presbyterians and Methodists in 1981.38 Admittedly there has been a distinct element of nominal adherence to Christianity in New Zealand's past which complicates these figures. Furthermore, the petition was organised in haste to enable Parliament enough time

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35 Submissions with petition, PQC 91/70.
36 Ibid.
37 Unknown newspaper source, PQC 91/70.
to consider it. It did not reach some parishes, or have time to be extensively
circulated throughout others. It is impossible to ascertain the percentage of
signatories relative to the number of parishioners on these three Sundays. But
reactions to the petition from both individuals and parishes resulted in a number of
letters to the Public Questions Committee. From these a clearer picture of
congregational opinion can be gained.

The argument most often utilised against signing the petition was the belief that the
petition should be addressed to the Rugby Union rather than to Parliament because
the 'Government won't act.' There was a belief that the Government would not
accept such a suggestion willingly. The Waitaki Parish concurred with the
argument of the National Government and the Rugby Union in saying that sports
bodies should have the freedom to administer without political and religious
interference. Some asked whether opposing the tour was the best way of breaking
down apartheid and would such opposition be harmful to New Zealand society.
Conflict and division within society, they said, could lead to conflict and division
within congregations.

Another issue that raised the ire of some parishes was the outspokenness of the Public
Questions Committee in speaking on behalf of the Presbyterian Church as a whole.
The Waitaki Parish let its feelings be known in saying that 'we believe it quite
irresponsible of a Committee purporting to represent the Churches in public
questions, to embark on such a campaign without first soliciting congregational

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39 Letter from the Waitaki Parish to the PQC, PQC 94/80.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
The Public Questions Committee’s terms of reference were outlined clearly and many felt that they were in breach of this. Objections were raised that the Committee was trying to fulfil a political agenda of its own, possibly to the extent that one Pukerau elder alluded to a possible takeover, by the liberal sector, of the direction and administration of the churches.

Colin Robertson Scott, an elder of the Pukerau Session, expressed a common sentiment. He stated that, ‘I do not accept that by having sports contacts with South Africa we are condoning apartheid.’ In addition he believed ‘that when compared with the happenings in some other countries apartheid may be the lesser of two evils.’ Scott also saw anti-tour statements made by church leaders as a lack of faith in the power of Christianity. ‘The relaxation of apartheid’, he said, ‘should be a gradual process.’ There was another purpose to his letter. Scott believed that liberal groups within the Presbyterian Church were trying to create the right climate for a takeover of the Church and to discredit the Government, law and the police. This was reflective of arguments being made concerning the question of homosexuality and the church. It could be interpreted as a conservative backlash against the activities of the ‘liberals’.

A number of other reasons were put forward for not signing the petition. The Waikanae Parish touched on problems in New Zealand stating that ‘before we attempt to force our ideas on South Africa we should ‘have a go’ at some of our own

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42 Ibid.
43 Letter from Colin Robertson Scott to the PQC, PQC 91/70.
44 Ibid.
45 Letter from Reverend Ray Rose to Reverend Denis C. Clow, 23/10/80, PQC 94/80.
problems.' Foremost were such issues as illegitimacy, violent crime, alcohol consumption, gambling and drugs. Others were surprised to find the Christian church leaders calling loudest for judgement on South Africa. After all, the Scriptures had stated: 'judge not - that you be not judged.' Similarly, Nichol and Veitch criticised the actions of the church in arguing that 'the Church supported boycotts of a group of rugby players and in so doing demonstrated an un-Christian and uncharitable attitude towards fellow human beings. It overlooked the virtues of forgiveness, love and reconciliation through dialogue.' But Nichol and Veitch also used New Testament arguments. They quoted the Scriptures in stating that through faith in Jesus Christ there is 'no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free, between men and women...all are in one in union with Christ Jesus.' This was an important feature of the debate. Theological issues were raised on both sides to suit respective arguments. It was convenient to use the Scriptures in one context and not in another.

The minister of Paterangi bemoaned the fact that the predominantly farming community there saw the debate as a 'minor' issue. 'People still maintain the old belief that politics and sport are not to be mixed other than with alcohol.' Similarly no signatures were obtained from the St Andrews Church in Te Kauwhata. The respondent there commented that the petition had 'provoked some opposition and controversy and has enabled me, in a couple of situations, to challenge whether

46 Letter from the Waikanae Parish to the PQC, PQC 94/80.
48 Nichol and Veitch, p.301.
49 Ibid, p.296.
50 Letter from the minister of Paterangi to the PQC, PQC 94/80.
people were making Jesus or Rugby Lord of their lives.\textsuperscript{51} Figures supplied by the St Andrews Presbyterian Church in Marton indicate the level of 'support' for the petition there. Over the course of the three Sundays 273 attended Church. Twelve affirmed their support for the tour, whilst twenty recorded their opposition.\textsuperscript{52} ‘These figures show of course that most Marton Presbyterians either did not care about the issue one way or the other, or have not made up their minds.’\textsuperscript{53} Many New Zealanders were ambivalent or even apathetic about the whole issue. This fits in with the idea of New Zealand’s secularity.

The St Andrews Presbyterian Church in Mt Maunganui argued that the Government was inconsistent in its commitments to international issues. The Session decided not to pass on the petition to its congregation, instead preferring to write to the local MP outlining that Government inaction in the Springbok Tour issue was inconsistent with its stance concerning New Zealand’s non-participation in the Moscow Olympics.\textsuperscript{54} The National Government had adhered to international pressure in this issue, publicly stating this themselves, but remained steadfast in defiance of international opinion concerning the tour. This is an important point that was not often considered. It seems that it was convenient for the Government to utilise the sport and politics argument when it sufficed.

The petition received support from other countries, including South Africa. Archbishop Desmond Tutu was appreciative of the efforts of the New Zealand

\textsuperscript{51} Letter from St Andrews Presbyterian Church, Te Kauwhata, to the PQC, PQC 94/80.
\textsuperscript{52} Letter from St Andrews Presbyterian Church, Marton, to the PQC, PQC 94/80.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{54} Letter from St Andrews Presbyterian Church, Mt Manganui, to the PQC, PQC 94/80.
churches in demonstrating their opposition to the tour and the oppressive system of apartheid. Tutu had this to say:

> on behalf of the Churches in South Africa and many of the Christians here, I want to say that we are very deeply appreciative of your peaceful efforts on our behalf in trying to oppose the system of apartheid and to say straight away that what you are doing in your country is giving very considerable encouragement and support to people who are voiceless.55

This must have been heartening for many within the church and vindication that they were doing the right thing by taking a stand against apartheid.

A counter-petition was submitted by a number of parishes, the St James Presbyterian Church in Wanganui East was one.56 The wording of this is noteworthy: 'We the undersigned, are opposed to petitions on controversial issues being placed before Church people without the opportunity for opposition to the issue also being expressed.'57 This was a visible attack on the actions of the Public Questions Committee, but it may also have been an indication of tacit approval for the tour. The Union Parish of Cambridge believed that a survey would give a truer picture of opinion whilst another parish felt that a referendum was more appropriate.58

Although accurate figures on the level of support and opposition are not extensive

56 Letter from the St James Presbyterian Church, Wanganui East, to the PQC, PQC 94/80.
57 PQC 94/80.
58 Letter from the Union Parish of Cambridge to the PQC, PQC 94/80.
and wholly representative of opinion, it does show that the Presbyterian Church was not as united as some believed.

As the tour loomed closer the Presbyterian Church became less visible relative to groups such as HART and CARE. These were more aggressive bodies that openly challenged the New Zealand Rugby Football Union and the Government, and the Church was less disposed to this more ‘radical’ protest action. One important factor was that, in comparison with the Church, they were united organisations staunchly committed to the realisation of their objectives, as in HART’s case to halt all racist tours. Many clergy and laity were active within these organisations, but on the whole the church had an uneasy relationship with the more confrontational style of HART.59 It is perhaps not surprising that the issue of violence was raised considering the sharp divisions within society. This was heightened by Muldoon’s desire to make the tour into a law and order issue. The Public Questions Committee recognised that normally Christians should uphold the law, ‘but there is a higher law for Christians, the law of love, which may supersede other laws, if the need to help and save people demands.’60 The Committee recognised that some would see it necessary to break civil law at times in the interest of God’s law. God’s command had been ‘let my people go.’61 To the Public Questions Committee ‘the opposing of the tour is the Christian way to express our beliefs.’62 The Committee’s apparent disregard of the law would have alarmed many.

61 cited in Ibid.
62 Ibid.
The Presbyterian Church predicted that violence would erupt, though perhaps not on the scale and intensity that it did. In a message from the Churches to congregations they asked that people oppose the tour, but without bloodshed.\textsuperscript{63} Instead protest should be based on faith and non-violence. 'Protesters, should not', according to the Church statement, 'in removing evil, create evil.'\textsuperscript{64} The Reverend John Mabon, the Co-Convenor of the Public Questions Committee, actually called on the police, protesters and pro-tourists to 'cool it' Instead massive passive resistance, such as sit ins, were the best weapons in the campaign against the tour. Coupled with this, Reverend Mabon reminded people that the focus needed to be apartheid, not law and order, as Muldoon was inferring.\textsuperscript{65}

One form of peaceful protest was a day of mobilisation. The first was held on May 1 1981 with the intention of illustrating to the Government the widespread opposition to the tour. It was estimated that around 65,000 people marched throughout the country and included within the ranks were large numbers of clergy and Christian laity. A second mobilisation was held on July 3 but the combined efforts were unsuccessful in persuading the Government to cancel the tour. Brosnahan has argued that there was a new aim of the anti-tour campaigners following the unsuccessful attempts of the mobilisations. He suggests that this new aim was to create conditions that would render the tour unmanageable and stretch police resources thereby forcing its cancellation.\textsuperscript{66} Peaceful protests had traditionally been

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid, p.168.  
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{65} PQC 91/70.  
\textsuperscript{66} Brosnahan, p.226.
more unsuccessful than civil disobedience campaigns. The aim, it would seem, was to adopt an 'aggressive' form of civil disobedience. This mass based non-compliance would take 'direct protest to the edge of the law'. In reality, however, many protesters overstepped this mark, as the opening match of the tour demonstrated.

The Waikato match was a significant event, not only in the protest campaign as a whole, but for the Presbyterian Church in particular. The game was cancelled after 400 protesters forced their way through the boundary fence and onto the playing field. The efforts of the police to clear the surface were slow, intensifying the frustration of those who had gone to watch the game. Fears of a riot were heightened following the cancellation of the game for incidents of violence between rugby supporters and anti-tour demonstrators were common. Five members of the Public Questions Committee were involved in the protest and three of them were injured, perhaps exemplifying the outlook of the Committee. The Warden of the University of Waikato and leader of the Hamilton’s Citizens Against the Springbok Tour, the Reverend John Denny, had his house damaged and his children harassed. Death threats and other obscenities were issued to known protesters, people were physically assaulted, property was damaged and relationships were strained. This illustrates the passion that was ignited over the tour. The violence was not confined to the Waikato match and aftermath. Police also confronted protesters at Molesworth Street in Wellington, in Palmerston North and Auckland. As Brosnahan has suggested 'the remaining five weeks of the tour turned into

67 Ibid.
68 New Zealand Listener, 7/8/82, p.22, PQC 91/70.
something of a 'war' between the protest movement and the police waged on New Zealand streets every Wednesday and Saturday.\textsuperscript{69}

An ugly side effect was that many within the protest movement began to lose sight of their objectives, the dismantling of apartheid and opposition to the tour, and were clouded by such things as police brutality and racial issues in New Zealand. There were accusations that some groups actually went out looking for a confrontation with the police. Wishart has suggested that the King Cobras, a local gang, went to the third test demonstrations with the intention of 'dealing to the cops' and that the police themselves were equally looking for a last fight.\textsuperscript{70} This not only alienated many within the churches who objected to the methods of 'protest' employed, but also within society as a whole. It is perhaps not surprising that the churches, with their more peaceful agenda, were overshadowed by more aggressive organisations like HART. The Waikato game was also significant in that it hardened attitudes. Ideologies were entrenched at both ends of the spectrum, but suggestions that New Zealand society, including the church community, became polarised are inaccurate. Nichol and Veitch, have said that the bi-polarisation of society left less people in the middle ground.\textsuperscript{71} Brosnahan has echoed this view.\textsuperscript{72} But in reality the level of violence served to increase confusion and disillusionment already prevalent. A middle ground did exist and perhaps swelled. Moderate liberals were still committed to the dismantling of apartheid and opposition to the tour, but this commitment was expressed through peaceful means. The disruptive and

\textsuperscript{69} Brosnahan, p.229.
\textsuperscript{70} Wishart, p.107.
\textsuperscript{71} Nichol and Veitch, p.301.
\textsuperscript{72} Brosnahan, p.227.
aggressive tactics of the radical groups were out of the question, prayers and vigils were more appropriate. The family of one minister demonstrated but the minister found that he could not participate because of the constant threat of violence. Instead he held his own protest through prayer.\textsuperscript{73} The Auckland Diocesan Synod Resolution urged all Christians not to attend matches in opposition to apartheid\textsuperscript{74} whilst Assembly asked Presbyterians to consider participation in 'responsible' protest action.\textsuperscript{75}

The aftermath of the tour allowed New Zealanders to reflect on what had taken place. Within the church community there were many unwanted results: deep divisions within families and between friends, racial prejudice, violence and a sense of sadness, bitterness and disenchantment throughout the land.\textsuperscript{76} The tour changed people, it challenged political, social and moral objectives and it forced many to reassess what New Zealand stood for. Many parishioners did their talking with their feet and left, others stopped financial contributions.\textsuperscript{77} At one congregation in Dunedin some parishioners left because of the liberal stance of its minister.\textsuperscript{78} This is not to say, however, that some who left one congregation did not attend another with similar ideological views. Conversely, some churchgoers felt revitalised.\textsuperscript{79} Feelings ranged from a sense of betrayal to shame, gratitude to cowardice,

\textsuperscript{73} PQC, 91/70.
\textsuperscript{74} Auckland Diocesan Synod Resolution 1980, PQC 91/70.
\textsuperscript{75} PCANZ, 1981 White Book, p.131.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid, pp.156-157.
\textsuperscript{77} 1981 Census figures show that the number of Presbyterians between 1976 and 1981 declined by 40 004. Although this does not show that the numbers dropped as a result of the tour it does show the relative decline of this church during this period. New Zealand Listener, 7/8/82, p.22, PQC 91/70.
\textsuperscript{78} Anon, private correspondence, 10/10/95.
\textsuperscript{79} New Zealand Listener, 7/8/82, p.22, PQC 91/70.
ambivalence to questioning. One Presbyterian changed his theological outlook during the tour. This person stated that:

by becoming heavily involved in protest activities I ceased to be an arm-chair liberal. Coming from the Evangelical wing of the Church, no longer can I sit silent while other people argue that the way to change society is to change people’s hearts, changing hearts is not enough. Taking my stand against the system opened my eyes to the oppression endured by many in our society. An incipient racism and fascism lie not too far below the surface of our Pakeha world.80

A university professor, who preferred to remain anonymous, felt that the churches had helped foster the level of violence in response to the tour.81 A lawyer, who also wished to remain anonymous, was grateful, however, for the lead the church provided: ‘the tour gave me an opportunity to stand up and be counted. I believe it was most important that the churches and the church leaders came out so strongly against the tour.’82 The editor of the Catholic magazine, Tablet, Mr John Kennedy felt the church lead had been too strong. ‘The churches’, he suggested, ‘through being too rigid, had alienated many of their own people and had undercut their own moral authority through not fully loving their neighbours - much of the protest (both pro and anti-tour) had “reeked of hate” not love.’83 For Jesus, one of the greatest

80 Nichol and Veitch, p.308.
82 Ibid, p.303.
83 Paterson, p.164.
commandments was 'love thy neighbour'. This over-riding imperative for Presbyterians was foresaken on the 'battlefields' that were New Zealand's newspapers, committees, congregations and streets.

The pages of the *Outlook* throughout 1981 were indicative of the changing nature of the debate. Articles and letters prior to the arrival of the Springboks debated whether the tour should go ahead. During and after the tour these focused on whether the church acted correctly in being associated with various anti-tour protests.\(^{84}\) It was more than just a debate about a game of rugby, it was about how the church should be viewed in modern society. Was it appropriate for the church to take such an active role in the political sphere, especially one in which the church, hierarchy and laity, was not of one mind? Paterson asked the question: 'was not the problem of human rights being attacked by denying other humans their rights?'\(^{85}\)

There are three themes that run central to the Presbyterian Church's involvement in the 1981 Springbok Tour. The first is that the church was not a united body. A broad spectrum of positions were occupied which were reflective of societal opinion. Secondly, there was a significant group of opinion that was ahead of other groups in society on this issue. This tended to be the church hierarchy and more liberal groups within the Presbyterian Church. The Public Questions Committee, for example, had been a consistent voice in opposition to sporting contacts with South Africa and the system of apartheid since the 1950s. Conversely, there were other sections of the church community who were lagging behind society. It has often been asked whether the churches are leaders or followers in New Zealand. They are

\(^{84}\) Ibid, p.163.
both. Thirdly, the cancellation of the Waikato game was a significant factor in hardening attitudes. It did not, however, lead to a polarised community as Nichol and Veitch, and Brosnahan have suggested, for there was a large middle group. These Presbyterians often deplored aspects of the protest campaign, primarily the level of violence employed by both sides. This deepened internal friction already inherent. As a consequence, it is inaccurate to speak of the Presbyterian Church as a united body. This was further highlighted by the controversy surrounding the issue of homosexuality and the church which will be examined in the next chapter.

85 Ibid.
Chapter 2  Selection Policies

The Issue of Homosexuality and the Presbyterian Church

The liberal church wants to ordain homosexuals, the radical conservatives want to hang them. In between, a lot of good people are confused.¹

Dr Harold Turner, a moderately conservative theologian, has seen the 'homosexual position as the deepest moral issue confronting our culture.'² It has probably also been the single most divisive issue within the modern Presbyterian Church. Church hierarchy and laity, as well as the wider society, have grappled with it for over 25 years, yet the issue remains unresolved. Like the 1981 Springbok Tour, two vocal and powerful sides have emerged within the church, diametrically opposed, their ideologies firmly entrenched. As a consequence, the church is often viewed in terms of these two parties. Yet there is, in fact, a large group who occupy positions somewhere between. Liberal Presbyterians have argued that, as with apartheid in South Africa, the issue of homosexuality is about the denial of human rights such as freedom of association to a certain sector of the community. Conservative Presbyterians, on the other hand, have argued that homosexuals do not deserve these rights. There are, however, much deeper issues involved. The discord over

¹ Brian Whitehead, PQC 95/111/12, AO5/6.
² PQC 95/111/12, AO5/6.
homosexuality has also been a struggle for control over the direction of the church. The more fundamentalist and conservative sections of the church have increased in strength throughout the past 20 years and the homosexuality issue has been the principal focus of contention. The Public Questions Committee, with its more liberal outlook, is a direct challenge to the conservative community. A Dominion editorial has identified the magnitude of this contest: 'the issue is whether fundamentalism will succeed in driving out the liberals.' Some churchgoers hold deep fears for the church. There is in fact a grave possibility that this issue could split the Presbyterian Church. This is one of the reasons why General Assembly has repeatedly sidestepped the issue to preserve some semblance of unity.

The issue of homosexuality and the church surfaced as a result of cultural changes that were taking place in wider society. Liberal politicians proposed an amendment to the Crimes Act that would decriminalise homosexual acts between consenting males. A variety of Bills were brought before Parliament throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the most notable the 1985 Homosexual Law Reform Bill. This challenged the Presbyterian Church to outline its view of homosexuality. A significant amount of information and correspondence has been entered into concerning the issue. This second chapter examines the issues concerning the debate surrounding homosexuality and the church. It examines the medical and scientific evidence that both the liberal and conservative sectors of the church have drawn on to highlight their respective arguments. Interpretation of the Scriptures is the key issue in the discord and this will be addressed in some detail. It raises other important considerations, not least of which is the relevance of the Bible in today's society.

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3 The Dominion, 22/11/91, p.6., PQC 95/111/19, AOS/7.
The discussion also focuses on the 1985 General Assembly which asserted that homosexual acts were sinful. This had repercussions for the 1985 Homosexual Law Reform Bill and amendments that were made to the Human Rights Act in 1993. Various committees have been appointed by the Presbyterian Church to consider the issue and these have drawn a number of replies from presbyteries, parishes and individuals. Arguments have not changed much over time. It is important to consider the reaction of homosexuals themselves to developments within the church as well as the current situation. Initially, however, it will be useful to examine the outlook of the Presbyterian Church when the issue of homosexuality came to prominence in modern New Zealand society in the late 1960s.

Anger is a common response among homosexuals who have felt rejected by the church. Yet the Presbyterian Church was actually a leading force in society calling for rights for homosexuals. The 1968 General Assembly registered its support for amending the law so that homosexual acts between consenting adult males in private were no longer a criminal offence. There was a discrepancy in the Crimes Act that Assembly felt needed to be addressed. ‘It is patently unjust’, Assembly noted, ‘that homosexual acts between females should be permissible within the law, while those between males are not.’ Similarly, male prostitution was not a crime but female prostitution was. Assembly was quick in qualifying its position. ‘The homosexual,’ members said, ‘may be abnormal’, but ‘is not a threat to society.’ Furthermore, many believed that it was possible to cure the homosexual ‘condition’.

The Crimes Amendment Bill was brought before Parliament in 1974 and aimed to

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4 Assembly Statement 15/10/74, PQC 95/116.
5 Ibid.
decriminalise homosexual behaviour between consenting males over 21 years. It was narrowly defeated in Parliament, but interestingly there is evidence to suggest that the Public Questions Committee, a traditionally liberal body within the Presbyterian Church, strongly opposed the Bill. Fraser Paterson has argued that it was clear in 1974 that Assembly wanted to take a stronger line than in 1968. The Public Questions Committee reiterated this in suggesting that homosexual acts were contrary to God’s law. ‘We believe that as a nation we stand by God’s goodness and favour and that to flout God’s law is to invite national decline of all that Christian ethic and virtue stand for.’ The Committee saw homosexuals as a threat to family life and feared that the same thing which led to the downfall of the Roman Empire would happen in New Zealand. Furthermore, if homosexuality became legalised this was a message of acceptance which would consequently lead to the homosexual becoming more visible in society. The stance of the Public Questions Committee, however, does not seem consistent for the Committee’s report in the 1974 White Book outlines their support for the Crimes Amendment Bill along the lines of the 1968 Assembly recommendation. The 1968 Committee felt that homosexual acts needed to be decriminalised so that homosexuals could seek medical treatment to help ‘cure’ their ‘condition’. This was illustrated when they stated that ‘we feel that society is not served by making such acts criminal offences, and we further consider that any serious move to assist and treat homosexuals will only succeed when the threat of criminal prosecution is removed and the persons affected can feel safe in

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6 PQC 95/116.
7 Paterson, p.88.
8 PQC 95/116.
9 Ibid.
seeking medical treatment.'\textsuperscript{11} The Public Questions Committee revised its outlook in the ensuing years believing that homosexual people were normal. The sexual revolution of the 1960s may have had some influence in this along with greater openness about sex generally. The Committee became one of the most ardent supporters of homosexual reform throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

More attention was focused on the study of homosexuality within the area of sexuality and the church during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Public Questions Committee encouraged the church to be more open and to seek direction from the Scriptures. The Committee produced a series of reports and papers to promote greater discussion among congregations. These examined such things as the Bible, scientific knowledge, the existence, nature and 'treatment' of homosexuality, and some common myths. The Committee was quite open in stating it was not speaking for the church, rather speaking to the church, and welcoming congregational responses.\textsuperscript{12} This was consistent with its charter in ascertaining the mind of the church, but its more aggressive tactics in the 1980s and 1990s drew a wide variety of criticism from certain sectors of the church community.

Some Presbyterians felt very uncomfortable talking about homosexuality. The 1978 White Book reported that a number felt that it was 'horrid' and 'dirty' while others were embarrassed about sexual areas of their own lives and even more so about homosexuality.\textsuperscript{13} Up until recently 'sex; even within marriage, was barely spoken

\textsuperscript{12} PCANZ, 1975 \textit{White Book}, p.299.
of in respectable church circles.'\textsuperscript{14} An important distinction made consistently by liberals and conservatives concerning the issue was that it was the homosexual act that was being addressed, not the homosexual person, it was not the sinner but the sin.\textsuperscript{15} Twenty-one of the twenty-five Presbyteries replied to the 1978 remit produced by the Public Questions Committee and the majority expressed the need for better understanding of the homosexual in society. Some Sessions were unsure. One felt that the 'topic was completely beyond the lay person's understanding and we could offer no answers to such a problem.' Another stated that 'we did not wish to study or comment on the subject.'\textsuperscript{16} It is probable that, as with the 1981 Springbok Tour, many rural areas did not see homosexuality as a major issue. Ministers and Sessions may not have wanted to address the question because of the potential for division. Rural areas were already struggling to maintain attendance numbers consistent with the overall decline of the Presbyterian Church in New Zealand.

Medical and scientific evidence was increasingly utilised in the debate on homosexuality. In certain respects, however, this complicated the issue for a great deal of opinion could be found to support both sides of the argument. The Kinsey Report (1948) has often been cited as the classical examination of homosexuality and the one most often referred to. In a sample of over 12,000 Americans homosexual behaviour was found to be widespread. Kinsey et al. reported that 4% of males were exclusively homosexual in their lives, 10% of the population was predominantly gay or lesbian and that 37% had had a homosexual experience to

\textsuperscript{14} Paterson, p.83.
\textsuperscript{15} PCANZ, 1986 White Book, p.79.
orgasm. This represented a significant proportion of the population and other studies conducted in the United States, Britain and New Zealand seemed to confirm these findings. More recently, however, it has been contended that there were gross generalisations in the Kinsey data. Studies have shown that it is more likely that around 1% of the population is exclusively homosexual, rather than Kinsey’s 4%, and that between 5% and 7% have had some homosexual contact during adulthood. These results had implications for the debate within the churches to determine what sort of ‘problem’ the homosexuals posed.

The reasons why people are attracted to the same sex are not really known. Medical and psychological researchers, according to liberal Presbyterians, generally agree that sexual orientation is usually established in early childhood, probably before the age of six. This evidence is not conclusive but it is also believed that biological and genetic factors, familial and cultural influences, hormones a child is exposed to in a womb, or a combination of these may help explain the development of this phenomenon. This was central to the debate surrounding homosexuality and the church because it raised the question of choice, that is, do homosexuals have a choice in the matter and should society punish this group?

Conservatives also employed scientific research in asserting that the homosexual condition should be treated. In the past homosexuality was treated as a mental

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17 cited in Christian Action, September 1985, PQC 95/116, also John H. Court, Christian Attitudes to Human Sexuality With Special Reference to Homosexuality, pp6-8, PQC 95/111/18, A05/7.
18 Court, p.7.
19 Ibid, pp.7-8.
21 Court, pp.10-12, PCANZ, ‘An Issues Paper’, prepared by the Special Committee to explore issues regarding homosexuality and the church, 1994, p.7.
disorder or some other psychological abnormality. The Kaikorai Union Church cited significant success in this treatment by William Masters and Virginia Johnson, authorities on sexual behaviour.\textsuperscript{22} Throughout twenty years of treating homosexuals a 71\% success rate in reversal was achieved. This led certain sectors of the Presbyterian Church to suggest that homosexuality was not fixed. The Southland Presbytery utilised Harvard Medical Mental Health research. They suggested that 'in some cases both hereditary and environmental factors play a role (in determining sexual orientation) but the bulk of clinical research...indicates that homosexuals are not born that way; rather, they develop their condition as a result of early and in many cases, later life experiences.'\textsuperscript{23} In certain respects scientific evidence, instead of helping resolve the situation, has heightened complications.

Scriptural interpretation was absolutely central to the debate concerning homosexuality and the church. Conservatives have a higher view of the authority of the Bible than liberals and, consequently, see it as the authority that settles the issue. More liberal Presbyterians interpret God’s intentions and commands in the Bible differently, questioning what weight and moral authority the Bible should have in today’s society. The Scriptures have little to say regarding homosexuality, but what is said is seemingly clear. Conservatives have consistently cited Leviticus 18: 22 which emphatically states, ‘you shall not lie with a man as with a woman; it is an abomination.’ Furthermore, ‘if a man lies with a male as with a woman; both have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them.’\textsuperscript{24} Similarly, Paul outlined in Romans 1: 23-27 that ‘their woman exchanged

\textsuperscript{22} Letter from the Kaikorai Union Parish to the PQC 3/4/94, PQC 95/111/14, A05/6.
\textsuperscript{23} Letter from the Southland Presbytery to the PQC 9/11/93, 95/111/11/, AO5/6.
natural relations for unnatural, and their men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error. The Old and the New Testaments, according to conservatives, are the Word of God and ‘we are clear as a church, that the Scriptures contained in the Old and New Testaments are our supreme rule of faith and life’. The Bible, they said, is clear on this issue and the matter should be laid to rest.

More liberal Presbyterians, however, have argued that biblical passages that seem to refer to homosexuality need to be examined in the wider context, that is, in relation to other commandments in the Old and New Testaments, and to modern day cultural and societal norms. Modern culture, they argued, is radically different from that of biblical times. In the past procreation was seen as the purpose of sexual acts, now it is largely viewed within the context of loving relationships, and personal growth and development. The sexual revolution, the changing role of women, and the importance of contraception in limiting population growth are all significant factors. Today we know a lot more about human sexuality, so what weight should be placed on passages written up to 2600 years ago?

The Bible is more important for some than for others. As the Public Questions Committee argued in 1985, ‘it is easy to take single verses from the Bible and claim them as the ultimate truth while ignoring the general theme running through the whole Bible’; love, compassion and tolerance. Furthermore, ‘it is clear that the

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Christian church has been unjustly selective in the use of the code over the centuries.\textsuperscript{28} In Leviticus, for example, there are a variety of laws and prohibitions which disallow such things as wearing clothes of mixed fibres, eating shellfish or rare meat, and having intercourse with a menstruating woman.\textsuperscript{29} A liberal argument presented in the 1991 Issues Paper stated, 'we believe it is inappropriate to condemn only sexual relations between people of the same sex, as if this one part of the holiness code is applicable to our contemporary situation.'\textsuperscript{30} A report prepared by a group bearing the name ‘Veritas’ were more to the point. They stated:

as far as are concerned those few Christian theologians who refer to Leviticus 18 and 20 in their condemnation of homosexuals, their extreme selectivity in approaching the huge corpus of Levitical law is clear evidence that it is not their respect for the law which created their hostility to homosexuals, but their hostility to homosexuals which led them to retain a few passages from a law code largely discarded.\textsuperscript{31}

The Presbyterian Church of Canada, however, presented a different point of view which was highlighted in the 1991 Issues Paper. In 1985 the Presbyterian Church of Canada stated that:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{29} PCANZ, ‘An Issues Paper: Homosexuality and the Church, 1991, p.4.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Veritas, \textit{Scripture and Homosexuality: A Guide to the Perplexed Parliamentarian}, Wellington, 1985, p.6. Veritas was a small group of classical scholars, Christians and non-Christians who expressed that they were ‘interested in correcting ignorance and the denial of human rights by adherents of religious prejudice’.
\end{itemize}
we maintain a number of the laws of Leviticus, most notably, perhaps, a certain injunction to love one's neighbour. Many of the regulations that deal with sexual matters, laws dealing with incest, bestiality and adultery are also still widely accepted...In other words, we may neither automatically accept or reject as authoritative any particular commandment in Leviticus. We must consider them in the wider context.32

The church has always been selective in its acceptance of certain sections of the Bible. Depending on one's interpretation the Bible still makes a good case for the continued existence of slavery, and divorce is not the biblical ideal. This has complicated the issue because not all Presbyterians agree on which passages to accept and which to reject.

The Bible, according to the liberal position, has very little to say concerning homosexuality. There is nothing condemning homosexuality in the prophets or the Gospels, which prompted the liberal contribution within the 1994 Special Committee Report to suggest that it was not a very important issue for Jesus, or contemporary society.33 Leviticus is the only place where homosexual acts per se are mentioned.34 Other passages seem to imply homosexuality or have been interpreted by conservatives to imply a condemnation of homosexual acts. The story of Sodom, from which the term sodomy originates (Genesis 19: 1-11) was commonly cited.

33 PCANZ, 'An Issues Paper', prepared by the Special Committee to explore issues regarding homosexuality and the church, 1994, p.5.
34 Veritus, p.6.
Some see this as a straightforward account condemning the sinfulness of homosexuality, while others see it as an abuse of hospitality or condemnation of gang rape. Only recently, according to Veritas, has this passage been interpreted to include homosexual connotations. There are no further references in the Old Testament that indicate the passage is a condemnation of homosexuality and the refusal of Old Testament writers 'to see the story as a moral about homosexual behaviour cannot be lightly disregarded.' Similarly, liberals have cited the Presbyterian Church in the United States who agreed that 'to say that this account condemns homosexual behaviour is to read into the story what is not there; it should not be used in the homosexual debate because that was not its original intent.' Corresponding arguments were presented concerning the Genesis accounts of creation and their relevance in the issue.

The discord is not just about homosexuality and the Bible, it would seem that there are much deeper issues involved. It is essentially about how relevant the Scriptures are in today's society. This is a critical issue. Fundamentalists base their Christian outlook on the Bible, the Word of God, and any attack on aspects of the Bible can be construed as an attack on their Christian faith. The interpretation of Scripture has always been important, but it has also brought division. In the 1880s and 1890s, for example, heresy trials were brought against William Salmond and James Gibb over the authority of the Scriptures. Similarly, Lloyd Geering was accused of heresy in the 1960s for his theological views. The relevance of the Bible has implications for

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36 Veritas, p.2.
38 bid, p.8.
the direction of the church today. Liberals have proposed that the Scriptures need to be considered in terms of developments within modern society. Any ground lost by either conservatives or liberals on this issue would damage the standing of one group as a whole. That is why the issue surrounding homosexuality is so important and so hotly contested.

Similar 'battles' have been waged in other countries and within other denominations. The discourse there has paralleled that which has taken place in New Zealand and the proceedings there have been utilised by both conservatives and liberals in New Zealand to back up their arguments. The New Zealand Presbyterian Church has followed these debates within predominantly Western Protestant churches as a source to guide their own decisions. The United Church of Canada has probably been the most accepting of homosexuals in arguing that sexual orientation should not be a factor in membership and leadership within the church. Other churches have recommended this and none has so far prohibited outright the ordination of homosexuals. The Presbyterian Church are perhaps looking for a lead in making a decision, or even a decision from an outside body that would help vindicate a particular stance one way or the other. The Presbytery of Southland also recognised this in stating that 'it is as though the church is frightened of making a decision and is either trying to allow the prevailing secular culture to decide for it or is hoping that in the passages of time the issue may lose some of its steam.'

39 PCANZ, 'An Issues Paper, prepared by the Special Committee to explore issues regarding homosexuality and the church, 1994, pp.2-3.
40 Reply to the PQC from the Presbytery of Southland concerning the 1991 Issues Paper, PQC 95/111/11, AO5/6.
The Homosexual Law Reform Bill which came before Parliament in 1985 challenged the Presbyterian Church as a whole to confront the issue, and state its position. The Bill aimed to remove from the criminal code homosexual acts between consenting adult males and to outlaw discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. The Public Questions Committee was quick to promote discussion. They strongly supported the Bill believing that society needed to accept diversity and promote the equality of opportunity to all regardless of religion, race, sex or sexual orientation.\(^{41}\) The Committee also believed that people should not judge the morality of homosexual acts, rather the discrimination that homosexuals were forced to endure emerging from the criminal code.\(^{42}\) This stimulated some feedback. The Public Questions Committee received 117 letters from individuals, parishes and Presbyteries. 65% of respondents indicated their opposition or marked concern about the Bill or the Committee’s support of it.\(^{43}\) A number of reasons were cited, the suggestion that the Bible forbids homosexual acts the most frequently used. Others expressed their opposition on the grounds that the Bill suggested that homosexual acts were acceptable and that this would likely result in increased homosexual activity and the prevalence of AIDS, the welfare of society is not promoted, the church should uphold moral standards and that the family unit and marriage would be undermined.\(^{44}\) AIDS is an important factor in the debate. Some Christians see AIDS as God’s judgement on those who live immoral lives. The Issacharian Report has plainly argued this. 'We are under siege,' the Report suggests. 'The homosexual did not create this plague: God did...Judgement has

\(^{42}\) Ibid, p.234.  
\(^{43}\) Ibid, p.235.  
\(^{44}\) Ibid.
come. As a Public Questions Committee Broadsheet pointed out, however, AIDS may have been more easily controlled up to 1985 if admission of homosexuality was not also a criminal confession. Homosexuals are not the only ones to suffer from the disease, but they do make up a large proportion.

Sessional replies to the 1985 Homosexual Law Reform Bill also show a general trend. Twenty-four South Island and twenty North Island Sessions were opposed to the introduction of the Bill while only one recorded their support. These results cannot be regarded as representative of Presbyterian opinion for this was out of a total of some 433 parishes in 1985, but it does show widespread opposition. A number of Sessions and parishes were divided and could not reach a consensus, while others wanted more information. Further up the hierarchical structure there seems to be, today as in the past, more liberalism. Liberals have tended to be more prominent in church committees and the church hierarchy because these bodies have tended to be more urban based and theologically educated. The Public Questions Committee is one such example. Only eight Presbyteries replied to the Public Questions Committee paper in 1985, but three of these indicated their support for the Bill, one was undecided.

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46 PQC Broadsheet, 14/5/85, PQC 95/116.
47 The Columbia Encyclopedia, Fifth Edition, Columbia, 1993, p.39., cited statistical data that showed that 94% of AIDS sufferers in the United States and Europe were homosexual or bisexual men. No further information was given concerning the nature of the study.
48 Replies to the PQC concerning the 1985 Homosexual Law Reform Bill, PQC, 95/116.
50 Replies to the PQC concerning the 1985 Homosexual Law Reform Bill, PQC 96/116.
As it did in the 1981 Springbok Tour, the Public Questions Committee became the target of some of the opposition. The Oamaru Presbytery, for example, were averse to the Committee speaking on behalf of the church. They felt that the position of the Committee was at variance with majority opinion and that the Committee were interpreting Scripture to fit in with their own agenda. They asked General Assembly to rebuke the Public Questions Committee, instruct the Committee not to make announcements and direct them to submit controversial matters to Presbyteries before making media statements. The Mataura Presbytery passed a resolution that disassociated itself from the views of the Committee. The Public Questions Committee represented the heart of the liberal body within the church and more conservative sections wanted to limit their voice. This was part of the struggle for control of the church.

The 1985 General Assembly resolution was a victory for conservative Presbyterians. Assembly affirmed that homosexual acts were sinful. This drew congratulation and condemnation, compliments and criticism, but others were also confused or uncertain. This last group was reflected in the large number at Assembly who asked for their dissent to be recorded. They did not necessarily condone the actions of the homosexual and had reservations about ordaining them within the church, but equally did not believe that they should be subject to discrimination within areas such as housing and education. The dissenting group felt the resolution that all homosexual acts were sinful was debatable. The Public Questions Committee, for one, felt that more study needed to be devoted to the issue and more consideration

52 Ibid.  
53 Letter from the Mataura Presbytery to the PQC 18/10/85, PQC, 95/116.
to the consequences undertaken than was given at an Assembly. They felt the decision had been made in haste.

The homosexual issue remained at the forefront of discussion within the Presbyterian Church during the late 1980s and into the 1990s. Special committees were appointed to investigate how the church should respond to the ongoing dialogue, and the Doctrine Committee was also approached to consider Biblical teachings. The 1985 decision also had implications for the licensing, induction and ordination of homosexuals. This was addressed at the 1991 General Assembly. What was carried was essentially an expansion of the 1985 resolution. Assembly offered love and compassion to 'those who in their sexual behaviour have fallen short of God's standards'. The most important decision in terms of the leadership of the church was the affirmation 'that those who continue in sexual acts in any context outside of heterosexual marriage are not appropriate to be persons in the leadership of this church'. According to the Presbytery of South Auckland, Christian leaders were supposed to be exemplary in all spheres of morality. This was based on the Biblical assumption in Timothy 3: 1-13 that leaders of the church must be 'above reproach' and godly examples of Christlikeness. But this raised another important issue that the 1991 Issues Paper noted was not just theoretical. 'There are a number of people in our church families', the Paper stated, 'members, elders, ministers - whose orientation is towards members of the same sex. What are we wishing to say

to them? A minister, for example may have been a 'model of virtue' for a number of years but his or her sexual orientation may not have been known or had been accepted by the local church community. As the 1991 Issues Paper asked, 'should they be disbarred? Should a celibacy clause be applied?' Liberals argued, if sexual orientation is fixed during early childhood as some medical and scientific opinion was stating, then how can one be asked not to express these feelings? Sexuality, as the St Paul's Presbyterian Church in Wanganui maintained, is not something that can be turned on and off.

Other sectors of the church posed differing questions. The Southland Presbytery Youth, for example, argued, 'if homosexual ministers were ordained, then this would open the door to many other questions; the Christian marriage between two homosexuals or the adoption of children into the care of a homosexual couple; where does it all stop!' They felt that a decision needed to be made to reaffirm the church's morality. Some members of the Ahuriri Session asked: 'why does the church feel it has to bend over backwards to accommodate all sections of people? Why should we lower our standards to do this?' The 1985 and 1991 resolutions would have been seen by these two groups as steps in the right direction.

The proposed amendments to the Human Rights Act were presented before Parliament in 1993 and these had implications for the Presbyterian Church. One clause outlawed discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, including

59 Ibid.
60 Letter from the St Paul's Presbyterian Church, Wanganui, to the PQC, 95/111/13, AO5/6.
61 Letter from the Southland Presbytery Youth to the PQC 14/8/91, PQC 95/111/11, AO5/6.
62 Letter from the Parish of Ahuriri to the PQC, PQC 95/111/13, AO5/6.
heterosexual, homosexual, lesbian or bisexual orientation in such things as employment, provision of goods and services, accommodation and access to education institutions. A similar amendment had been defeated in 1985. The churches were exempt, however, as ministers were employed under an ecclesiastical contract, not an employment contract. Paragraph 1 of Section 28 provided exceptions to the Act for the purposes of religion in an employment situation. In effect this meant that homosexuals could be legally excluded from ministerial positions although some argued that the church should abide by the spirit of the Human Rights Act. The actual process of appointment remained in the hands of the individual congregation that was involved and it was their job to ascertain the appropriateness of a candidate. Furthermore, under the Privacy Act, one's sexuality became a matter of confidentiality that did not need to be disclosed.

The Special Committee to explore issues regarding homosexuality and the church published its report in 1994. It outlined the extreme difficulty in its task and attempted to produce an objective report that covered both sides of the argument equally. The usual issues were covered: scientific evidence, historical analysis, Biblical considerations, and the debate within other countries and other denominations. The issues paper drew a large response from presbyteries and parishes. Unofficial results indicate that 86 parishes were opposed to the ordination of homosexuals, and 78 also found homosexuality unacceptable. Conversely, 13 favoured ordination while 21 believed homosexuality to be acceptable. 15 proposed maintaining the status quo in which individual parishes appointed ministers. This

63 PQC, 95/111/16, AO5/7.
64 Letter from the St Paul’s Presbyterian Church, Wanganui, to the PQC, PQC 95/111/13, AO5/6.
was a significant rejection of homosexual behaviour and the proposal to ordain practising homosexuals, but there were also 27 parishes who were divided on the issue and made no recommendation one way or the other.\textsuperscript{65} These were the confused or the undecided trapped in the middle of the discord between the conservative and liberal sectors of the debate.

The Public Questions Committee cited an AGB McNair Survey conducted in September 1992 in which 85\% of New Zealanders were against discrimination based on sexual orientation.\textsuperscript{66} Most of those surveyed felt that discrimination was mainly based on stereotypes and false assumptions. Similarly, in a survey of 186 Wellington residents by the Homosexual Law Reform Society in 1978, 78\% expressed the belief that homosexual acts should be removed from the criminal code.\textsuperscript{67} 50\% also felt that there was no reason why homosexuals could not become good parents. This survey, although providing valuable information, cannot be seen as representative of New Zealand opinion because of the limited nature of the survey and its restriction to Wellington which is made up of a large proportion of middle-class citizens. But how sure can an historian be about the AGB McNair survey? The 1993 White Book, which cited this investigation, has neglected to state any more about it; the nature of the survey, how many people were consulted and the age and location of these people, and the questions that individuals were asked to respond to. The survey maintains that 85\% of New Zealanders were against discrimination based on sexual orientation, but this seems inconsistent when placed against the

\textsuperscript{65} Replies received by the Special Committee to explore issues regarding homosexuality and the church, PQC 95/111/11, AO5/6.
\textsuperscript{66} PCANZ, 1993 White Book, p.299.
\textsuperscript{67} Homosexual Law Reform Society Newsletter, October 1978.
huge petition objecting to the 1985 Homosexual Law Reform Bill that was presented to Parliament. Parliamentary debates record the number of signatures to be in the region of 835,000 by the end of 1985, and the final figure could be in excess of 855,000.\textsuperscript{68} There were, however, doubts surrounding the validity of many of the signatures that accompanied the petition. In the Hamilton West electorate, for example, there were more than 100 cases of multiple signatures and many cases of the same handwriting being used for more than one name. Some schoolboys even reported that they signed 27 times.\textsuperscript{69} These expose the nature of some of the dubious aspects of the petition, but the large number of valid signatures does suggest that the AGB McNair survey substantially overestimated the support for the amendment Bill.

This also raises questions about the extent of the support within Presbyterian Church. It is clear from the evidence that there was a vocal conservative group, and that there was a smaller, articulate liberal group, but not much is known about what the silent parts of the church thought. This middle group may be where most stand. They cannot be fitted neatly into either the conservative or the liberal group. They may have expressed some reservations concerning such things as the ordination of practising homosexuals but did not believe that homosexuals should be subject to discrimination in access to accommodation and education. Further research needs to be undertaken to identify the nature and size of this group.

\textsuperscript{68} New Zealand Parliamentary Debates, Vol 467, 24 October-21 November 1985, p7733.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
Homosexuals themselves have often expressed feelings of deep hurt and anger through what they perceive to be the rejection of the churches and other sectors of the community. A lesbian and gay rights publication has said that it is ‘miraculous’ that not all homosexuals are hostile to religion.\textsuperscript{70} Other ‘gay people’, the publication went on to state, ‘believe that the hostility of the early Christian church to homosexual activity and the adoption into the statute law of its prohibition is the root of the persecution which gay people have endured (and this) makes it too difficult to forgive.’\textsuperscript{71} This feeling of resentment due to marginalisation has prompted some homosexuals to leave the church. Others stayed enduring deep hurts. Many homosexuals want to be accepted by the church because Christianity is something that remains intrinsically important to them. The Wellington Gay and Lesbian Christian Fellowship was consulted by a member of the Public Questions Committee. This group was tired and angry that its members were being labelled because of their sexual orientation.\textsuperscript{72} They did not like the stance of the Roman Catholic Church, but at least knew where they stood, whereas with the Presbyterian Church times were uncertain. Many homosexuals wanted to be accepted by the church because, as some scientific evidence was suggesting, their ‘condition’ was fixed at birth. Others, however rejected this argument as condescending and demeaning in that it left homosexual people tolerated as an ‘unfortunate deviation’.\textsuperscript{73} Gay and lesbian people wanted the freedom to express themselves fully without condemnation and retribution. As a letter from the Gay and Lesbian Christian Support Group to the Waikato Times commented, ‘asking a gay or lesbian person

\textsuperscript{70} Lesbian and Gay Rights Resource Centre, November 1992.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{72} PCANZ, PQC consultation with the Wellington Gay And Lesbian Fellowship, 5-6/2/94, PQC 95/111/16, A05/7.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
not to express their sexuality is like asking a left-handed person not to use their left hand or demanding that black people camouflage their skin colour.\textsuperscript{74} An interesting parallel was made with the story of Sodom. The Lesbian and Gay Christian Support Group argued that the ‘main sin in the Sodom story was the lack of common hospitality to strangers. Ironically the church is often guilty of the lack of such hospitality.’\textsuperscript{75} It seemed inconsistent to say that all individuals were equal before God and then impose these distinctions and requirements. ‘The denial of one’s natural sexual orientation can lead to a life which is not very gay at all.’\textsuperscript{76}

The 1991 Issues Paper recognised that in the debate concerning homosexuality and the church there was a ‘great deal of talking “about” and “at”. There is not nearly as much “listening to” and talking “with”.’\textsuperscript{77} Ideologies were, and continue to be, so entrenched at both ends of the spectrum that dialogue has often been based on an ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality. As Ray Galvin, a Presbyterian who has published an ecumenical approach to homosexuality and church leadership has argued, ‘both sides believe their view is the appropriate one for a Christian who takes the Bible seriously. The thing we most have in common - our zeal for the Word of God - is what is leading us to be so deeply divided.’\textsuperscript{78} The divisions are so widespread because it is about the authority of the Bible and because it is about who controls and directs the Presbyterian Church into the future. The discord over homosexuality has translated into a ‘battle’ for the church because it raises crucial moral and Biblical

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Waikato Times}, 7/11/93.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Lesbian and Gay Rights Resource Centre}, November 1992.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
issues. A number of observers believe that this issue could lead to a split in the church.\textsuperscript{79} A range of sentiments has been expressed. Some have deep fears for the church because of the ‘conservative’ direction it seems to be taking and the message it seems to be affirming. Some conservatives think the Presbyterian Church is in danger of abandoning sacred moral values, while liberals fear that the church is in danger of building such walls about itself as to become a sect. Another group is gladdened by Assembly decisions while others have wondered whether there is any place left for them.\textsuperscript{80} Ray Galvin believes that a definitive statement one way or the other would effectively ask one group to leave.\textsuperscript{81} Liberals would be morally outraged and feel that they cannot be part of a church that excludes people. Conservatives would be equally outraged at an acceptance of homosexuality by the church prompting them to leave and form their own church. Others would be caught in between, not knowing which way to turn. This would be a sad chapter in the history of the Presbyterian Church, an institution that has forged a proud tradition and occupied an important place within New Zealand society.

The Special Committee appointed by the 1991 Assembly to explore homosexuality and the church has been one significant group that has progressed very cautiously. Commentators often talk of two sides to the debate, but there were also many in the middle. The Special Committee occupied a central position. They recognised that a split could ensue and have suggested that a major decision be postponed so as not to shatter ‘unity’.\textsuperscript{82} There is no single mind in the church and no one can claim to

\textsuperscript{79} Galvin, PQC 95/111/20, AO5/7., Dominion 22/11/91, p.6., PCANZ ‘An Issues Paper’ prepared by the Special Committee examining issue regarding homosexuality and the church, 1994, p.13.
\textsuperscript{80} PCANZ, 1993 White Book, p.214.
\textsuperscript{81} Galvin, PQC 95/111/20, AO5/7.
\textsuperscript{82} Draft Report of the Special Committee to explore issues regarding homosexuality and the
represent a purely Christian position. Instead Presbyterians should ‘continue to pray and engage in dialogue as the church seeks the wisdom of God on this matter.’ The report recommended that no changes be made to the church’s rules and regulations. Local congregations would continue to appoint the minister of their church. The Committee tried to harmonise the relationship, and promote dialogue between the conservative and liberal sectors of the church. Many of the laity did not want to see a split in the church either. Assembly proceedings have attempted to prevent this as well by postponing any resolution that would make a definitive statement.

The 1995 General Assembly resolved to postpone a decision on the issue for another year and to continue to engage in prayer and dialogue. Jim Wallace, Chairperson of the Presbyterian Renewal Ministries, felt that the church has had enough time on prayer and discussion. ‘By not making a decision’, Wallace suggested, ‘we believe the church has not given leadership to the world.’ Wallace, a conservative Presbyterian, felt that ‘it is time for the church to make a strong, unambiguous statement that homosexual acts are sinful and that we will not ordain, license or induct self-avowed, practising homosexuals into leadership positions in the church.’ Similarly, a group comprising 82 delegates signed a statement registering their dissent with the Assembly’s decision soon after it was made. They felt that Assembly was in danger of forfeiting its credibility and moral leadership by failing to vote on whether practising homosexuals should be ordained to church.

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83 Ibid.
leadership.\textsuperscript{85} One of the group, the Reverend Stuart Lange, of Auckland, believed that the 'majority viewpoint and the best chance of unity is a loving, moderate and biblical stance, consistent with both historic Christian sexual ethics and the church's official standards.'\textsuperscript{86} This group recorded their disappointment that a decision was not made but another group also expressed their disappointment in a very different way.

'Of all the Assemblies I have attended, never have I left feeling so angry, bruised and bewildered.'\textsuperscript{87} This was the response of one lesbian and feminist who attended the 1995 General Assembly. This person also asked whether there was any place left for her within the Presbyterian Church. Objections were directed against the group of 'fundamentalists' who, according to a gay Presbyterian, 'still put their perceived 'truth' above inclusiveness, love and justice.'\textsuperscript{88} These people felt sickened by the Assembly proceedings and the vigour with which in their view, the conservative group attacked the homosexual person and their sexuality, whilst still maintaining that the church needed to offer homosexuals love, grace and transformation. The lesbian respondent said that she found it 'sad that where membership and leadership is concerned, my sexuality could come to hold greater significance than my commitment to the Jesus of the Gospels and my journey with Christ.'\textsuperscript{89} On reflection, a homosexual man wondered whether the issue should have been brought to a head at the Assembly and forced a split. At least that way homosexuals would

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\textsuperscript{85} Otago Daily Times, 19/5/95, p.3.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} Matik, Methodists and Presbyterians for Lesbian and Gay Concerns, Volume 2, Number 3, Winter 1995, p.7.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid, pp.6-7.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid, p.7.
\end{flushleft}
have known where they stood in connection with the Presbyterian Church, instead of feeling, as one did, ‘out in the cold’.\textsuperscript{90}

The discourse surrounding homosexuality and the church has raised a number of interesting issues about New Zealand society. The three main Protestant churches in this country, Anglican, Methodist and the Presbyterian Church, have experienced a gradual decline in support as well as an increase in the age of congregations over the past thirty years in this supposed secular society. But how secular is New Zealand? There seems to be a substantial proportion that are not as secular as they are supposed to be. This can be seen in the quarrels over the interpretation of the Bible in connection with the homosexuality debate. The Bible is the central area of contention concerning the ongoing issue. The Scriptures are important to both liberal and conservative Christians, but conservatives have a much higher view of the Bible and see it as the authority that settles the issue. Liberal Presbyterians, on the other hand, have suggested that the Bible needs to be viewed within its wider historical context and changes within New Zealand culture. This again raises more poignant issues. Whatever side ‘wins’ this contest concerning homosexuality and the church, if indeed there is to be a ‘winner’, could dictate the direction of the Presbyterian Church into the twenty-first century.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid, pp.5-6.
Conclusion

A rugby metaphor has been utilised throughout this dissertation. One team, represented by the Presbyterian Church, was not united. Within the forward pack the tight five, the conservatives, seemed to want to go it alone, and not pack down with the loose forwards, the liberals. But an effective forward pack, and particularly a scrum, is one which works together and provides good service to its backline. Too often, the backs, the middle group within the Presbyterian Church, were like spectators as the forwards dominated the play. The game though, is not yet completed, the final whistle has yet to be blown, and the after match function may be a bitter and sombre affair.

There have been a number of on field incidents throughout the course of the game. The first half, that is, the 1981 Springbok Tour aroused the passions of many New Zealanders. The credibility of the church, according to the church hierarchy, was at stake and they responded by calling for the cancellation of the 1981 Tour and condemning apartheid. Most New Zealanders by the 1980s recognised the injustice of apartheid, but the desire of many church members to watch a game of rugby (maybe New Zealand's actual religion?) seemed to outweigh their desires to see apartheid dismantled. The focus of the debate, however, was not entirely clear. The replies to the petition organised by the Public Questions Committee asking the Government to cancel the tour, varied considerably. There was not one clear argument for or against. More often than not respondents claimed that politics and
religion should not be connected, however, the lack of support for the petition itself showed that the issue of the proposed tour was a minor one for the church. Certainly the minister of Paterangi was left with this impression after the congregation there stated that the proposed tour was a 'minor' issue. But apartheid was something that did not affect New Zealand directly, it was a system that operated on the other side of the world. It was someone else's responsibility, it was not on their doorstep.

The second half, that is, the debate regarding homosexuality and the church has yet to be completed. The play has been just as bitterly contested as the first half, more so in a personal way. Unlike apartheid and sporting contacts with South Africa, which focused on other people, the homosexuality issue has forced individuals to look at themselves. The central issue of contention has been the interpretation of the Scriptures. Conservatives have a higher view of the authority of the Scriptures than liberals, but theological positions have been firmly entrenched. Each group is unmoving and uncompromising on this issue. This has implications for the direction of the church in the future for it seems that whatever decision is reached regarding homosexuality and ordination will determine who holds the power within the church. Liberal Presbyterians have often portrayed conservatives as moralistic preachers, but the same can be said of liberals. The Public Questions Committee has often been labelled as such by more conservative members.

The Public Questions Committee has been a leading liberal voice which conservatives, both clergy and laity, have tried to limit. Needless to say they have been an important group that has stimulated discussion and controversy. The
Committee gave the church a high profile in the media and much of this was not always welcomed by some sectors of the church community. It is difficult to ascertain the degree to which the Public Questions Committee’s reports and media statements influenced society. It is certainly easy to overstate their importance as they were only one out of a number who were providing information for the church and society. At times the Convenors of the Committee seem to have had a high media profile, but it is not clear from the source material which party initiated the contact. A number of overtures to the General Assembly expressed concern that the Public Questions Committee seemed to be making statements on behalf of the whole church. The Committee’s function was clearly outlined - to ascertain the mind of the church - but some believed that they had a political agenda to fulfil. The Committee has been a leading voice in condemning apartheid and sporting contacts with South Africa, as well as calling for the decriminalisation of homosexual acts not only within the church, but also within wider society.

The Public Questions Committee reports and discussion papers represent a large proportion of the primary source material, particularly as a number of General Assembly debates were held in a closed session. What was debated in these sessions, and by whom is unclear. What is known is that a decisive decision regarding homosexuality, membership and ordination has not been made. This seems to illustrate the existence of an undecided and confused middle group, and indeterminate in size. Evidence shows that more conservative groups than any other viewpoints replied to the reports and Issues Papers, but it must be noted that a large majority of parishes were silent about both of the issues discussed in this

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1. PCANZ, 1985 White Book, p.364
dissertation. Therefore, an historian can only interpret the evidence available. Perhaps the minutes of Presbyteries and Sessions should be examined to 'ascertain the mind of the church'. Further research might well be cocentrated here.

The current stance of the Presbyterian Church perhaps represents the age of its members and clergy. This may also be a reason for the conservatism within the church over the last twenty years. This raises an interesting point about the nature of New Zealand society and the Presbyterian Church, for it could be argued that these are more conservative today than they were thirty years ago. The 1960s was an era when many things were questioned, much of the church's moral and religious foundation was challenged. The 1980s was also a period of significant and rapid change in New Zealand due to the far-reaching reforms introduced by the Fourth Labour Government. Many of these were intensified under the present National Government when they assumed power in 1991. Much of society seems to be yearning for a period of consolidation, for societal and reform pressures to be eased. This has been reflected in the Presbyterian Church particularly as the conservative element within the church has increased in strength over the past twenty years. Conservatives have called for a return to a society in which the Bible is the basis of morality and Christian ethics. Another sector, however, has felt that the Presbyterian Church needs to press ahead and adapt to society as New Zealand rapidly changes in this era of the global village. This liberal sector believes that Christianity needs to be redefined and take on a more contemporary outlook to offset the general decline of religious observance in New Zealand. If this rugby team cannot bind together, there may not be a team in the future. The rugby world would certainly notice its absence.
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