

The debate on the United Nations convention for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women: motivated by fear or a clash of ideologies?



In a country where we have an elected female Prime Minister, about to begin her third term in office;¹ a female Governor General for the second time; a female Chief Justice; and a female Attorney General (up until the time she was made Speaker of the House of Representatives), it is difficult to believe that there could ever have been debate over ratifying a United Nations Convention seeking to eliminate discrimination against women. Indeed, for many young women in New Zealand today, the battles won by feminists in the 1970s and 1980s are not recognised at all, so successfully have they been subsumed into the fabric of our society.² However, a little over twenty years ago a battle raged throughout the country amongst conservative Christian women and feminists. It is difficult to see it as anything other

than a “clash of ideologies” set within the context of growing secularisation in New Zealand and a political and social environment more inclined to receive the feminist

also enlightened by the Holy Spirit. The Bible talks about “when the veil falls from your eyes” once you become a committed Christian and the Holy Spirit is in you do actually

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agenda and less interested in the absolutes that the church offered. This “clash of ideologies” was battled out in the context of a larger moralist movement that started in the 1970s. At times the motivation of those in the movement has been analysed in terms of fear and their inability to accept societal changes. In the case of the women involved in the Convention debate, I believe this has shown an unwillingness to acknowledge or engage with the faith that undergirded these women’s actions. In Annetta Moran’s words,

...it was almost like two spiritual forces at work. One group was totally incapable of seeing what the other group meant and it was because they were coming from such a different view point. You know there was the secular worldview point which was compelling the United Nations Convention and all its quarters and they were the vast majority because we live in a very secular country. And then there was the Christian worldview which was

often change your views on a lot of these issues, like abortion, like homosexuality, like divorce, like sex before marriage. So it was like two opposing world views clashing in a very public arena.³

In actual fact the women opposing ratification spanned a full range of Christian perspectives and each became involved for their own reasons. For practicality’s sake, however, it becomes necessary to talk of them collectively. This has the disadvantage of implying homogeneity while also losing sight of the individual stories of those involved. To combat this, the inclusion of excerpts from two interviews provides insight into the motivation behind the women’s involvement within the debate and place the debate squarely in the context of a collision of opposing worldviews.

The Christian women opposing ratification covered the denominational spectrum. Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, Salvationist, and Pentecostal

perspectives were all represented in the debate. While not necessarily united in doctrine they, by and large, collectively represented those within the churches holding more conservative biblical views, particularly with regard to family. Men were obviously also concerned and involved in the debate but it was a cause where it was considered more appropriate for the women to be in the forefront of the dissension. Women's organisations outside the church also stood against the Convention, including the Country Women's Institute NZ and the Women's Division of Federated Farmers. However, it is the reaction of the conservative Christian women I address here.

The *United Nations Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women* (CEDAW) was aimed at bringing ... together in a single international instrument the various international conventions already in existence which define the sphere of women's rights and brings into the legislative ambit many of the recommendations which have been adopted over the years by the Commission [on the Status of Women] since its inception in 1946.⁴

It was drafted by the Commission on the Status of Women, involving representatives from Great Britain, the United States and Canada. In 1976 at the Third Committee of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council the document was deliberated on. By December 1979 it had been approved overwhelmingly at the UN General Assembly – with 130 voting in favour, none against, with 10 abstentions.⁵ New Zealand's commitment to the Convention began with its signing in 1980 by Colleen Dewe as New Zealand's representative at a conference in Copenhagen marking the mid-point of the Decade for Women. Signing a United Nations Convention is the first step to ratification. The signing implies agreement with the central tenets of the document and either an intention to ratify immediately, with subsequent legislative changes, or to first put in place appropriate

legislation and then ratify. New Zealand was to take the latter course of action, building on legislation already in place allowing greater equality for women.⁶ While there was no protest in 1980 over its signing, in 1983 a furious debate began over its ratification between conservative Christian women and a strong feminist lobby.

The 1960s had seen the development of ideologies challenging societal norms. An anti-authoritarian youth culture emerged⁷ and the release of the contraceptive pill in the United States in 1960⁸ and the beginning of second-wave feminism led to major changes in society. Jesson describes the result of such changes on New Zealand.

*There appeared to be a collapse of the traditional family structure and the falling apart of age-old moral codes. It was a time of obsessive individualism. This took the usual forms of acquisitiveness, consumerism and ambition, but there was also a preoccupation with the self. Freed from moral constraints and social responsibilities, people were able to concentrate on themselves – on individual desires, gratification, needs and potential.*⁹

By the 1970s the political environment, Coney argues, was an era of activism, creating an environment ripe for the women's liberation movement and consequently by the early 1980s the push for ratification.

People organised around a whole



raft of causes: opposition to war; protests against nuclear testing, strip mining and “think big” dams; anti-racism; support for tenants’ protection, children’s rights, environmentalism and women’s rights. The government, led by Norman Kirk, sent a frigate to protest about nuclear testing at Moruroa, cancelled the 1973 Springbok Tour because the South African team was racially selected, enacted the Equal Pay Act, and established the Select Committee on Women’s Rights to examine the position of women. Full employment and official concern for social justice created a supportive environment within which the women’s liberation movement could flourish.¹⁰

The 1950s by contrast had been a period where church growth burgeoned, family life was revered and where government was seen actively upholding the “social and moral values” of the country.¹¹ Leaving the “golden years” of the 1950s behind and entering into a period of radical change therefore was hugely alarming for conservative Christians. They held grave concerns for their nation if biblical principles, marked by moral standards, were not adhered to. The 1970s saw a reaction by these Christians to the changes. Organisations such as: the Society for the Promotion of Community Standards (SPCS); the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC); the Family Rights Association (FRA); Concerned Parents Association; the Save our Homes Campaign and Feminists for Life (later to be known as Women for Life, WFL) sprang up in response to societal pressures on family and the loosening of moral values. Activity was not limited to the establishment of organisations. In 1972 “Jesus Marches” were held around the country out of a “genuine concern for the moral state of the nation”.¹² This “conservative Christian ‘grass-roots’ reaction to the increasing liberalization of moral standards in the 1960s”, Brett Knowles argues, acted as a medium for further development of a conservative Christian moralist movement within

the country while also encouraging an “informal ecumenism”.¹³

That “grass-roots reaction” and “informal ecumenism” meant by the time of the CEDAW debate there was openness for groups to further coalesce. Conservative Christians had already locked horns with feminist groups over the abortion lobby and the passing of the Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion Act in 1977 and there had been considerable acrimonious debate over the promotion of sex education in schools. The CEDAW debate encouraged further networking channels being established as information began to flow amongst a variety of Christian organizations. Julia Stuart, Co-ordinator of the Wellington Branch of WFL, spoke of it as not being “a rush around and organise” but rather “the most effective networking I have ever come across...there were so many smallish groups of women who were willing to tackle the issue”.¹⁴

By 1983 information on the possible impacts of the Convention had begun to seep across the Tasman, acting as a catalyst for conservative Christian action. In particular an article in the 1 July 1983 edition of the Christian magazine, *The Challenge Weekly*,¹⁵ warned of the inherent dangers of ratification. The article, first published in the Australian Christian magazine *New Life*, reflected the concerns of Rev Dallas Clarnette, President of the Fellowship of Evangelical Churches of Australia.

Responding to Clarnette’s *Challenge Weekly* article, WFL, under the leadership of Connie Purdue,¹⁶ launched a campaign to inform as many Christian men and women as possible to the risks of ratification. Guest speakers from America and Australia addressed meetings throughout the country organised by WFL. They shared insights from recent experiences within their own countries. Babette Francis as National Co-ordinator of the Australian organisation, *Women Who Want to be Women*, spoke of what was happening in Australia since

ratification – the problems being faced over interpretation and practice when the essence of the Convention was enshrined at a Federal level through the Sex Discrimination Bill. Michael Levin, as Professor of Philosophy at City College, New York, spoke from his experience of feminism and the affirmative action programmes within the United States. Such tours increased the debate’s profile, deepening awareness and strengthening opposition.

WFL produced pamphlets summarising the issues with the Convention while encouraging the reader to write a letter to Warren Cooper, the National Government’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, asking for a delay until the “economic, political, social and moral cost” could be assessed.¹⁷ Letters were written to politicians and a petition addressed to the Governor-General, Sir David Beattie, was circulated at the instigation of an anti-ratification group, the Council for a Free New Zealand, in conjunction with Christians for Life. The petition was seen as the only constitutional means available to prevent ratification; signatures were collected from around the country, 46,000 in total.¹⁸ Women who had never spoken out on an issue before felt strongly enough to write letters to politicians,¹⁹ sign petitions, and even hold public meetings. Jean Brennan, a farmer from Rangiwahia, was one such woman. Encouraged by other concerned Christian women Jean agreed to speak to a small group of women at Hunterville Woman’s Club on the Convention. The meeting was to escalate into a formal debate – with Jean, who had never spoken publicly before, pitched against the Secretary to the Ombudsman, Brenda Cuttress, a qualified lawyer. Jean’s sense of urgency toward this issue, she recalls, carried her through this debate and led her into other public speaking engagements within the Manawatu.²⁰

By May 1984, Muldoon had decided that his Government would not ratify, recognising that the Convention had “some good points

to it” but “that it cut across the views of a very large section of our people, including many, many women, and my view is – we don’t need it, we can do without it, so why do it?”²¹ It became an issue of conscience for MPs. For WFL, it was a victory. The euphoria was short-lived, however. Labour won the July snap election of that year and the incoming Prime Minister, David Lange, had stated ratification, with reservations, as one of the policies under the Women’s Policy Backgrounder, a document supporting the enhancement of women’s position in New Zealand. Labour’s commitment to women also focused on establishing a Ministry of Women’s Affairs.

Being a “consensus” government, Ann Hercus, Minister for this new Ministry, quickly organised forums to give women the opportunity to prioritise the Women’s Affairs agenda. Initially eleven forums were organised, but due to interest twenty-one were actually held between October and December of 1984. For the conservative Christian women the forums were seen as an opportunity to rally together and voice their concern over the establishment of the women’s Ministry²² and proposed ratification of the Convention. Bus and car loads of conservative Christian women turned up at the forums. Churches had banded together and encouraged their women members to attend the forums, with information distributed to interested parties throughout the country by a variety of groups opposing ratification. In the case of Tauranga, three planning meetings were held before the forum, while in Hamilton, women prayed outside the forum.²³ The forums by and large were a frustration to these women. They felt the agenda was too inflexible and discussion and voting on the Convention was tightly held in check. Dissatisfied with the workshop facilitators and scribes, they claimed misrepresentation of discussions and votes ultimately leading to inaccuracies in the final summation document for the Ministry of Women’s Affairs. With hindsight the Christian women saw

the forums as a *fait accompli*. The oft times hostile debate was quickly extinguished with one brief ministerial statement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister, the Right Honourable David Lange. “On 17 July 1980 New Zealand signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Today, [20 December 1984] as Minister of Foreign Affairs, I have signed the instrument of ratification....”²⁴

Central to the arguments of the Conservatives opposing ratification was the belief that the Convention would further undermine families and erode the freedoms of New Zealanders. They believed the family – that is the nuclear family: father, mother and children – was under attack. The Convention ignored the biologically determined distinctions between male and female established by God²⁵ and promoted a “uni-sex society”, where there would be no pre-determined roles for male and female. By implication, women would be coerced into the work force, and subsequently the government would place greater value on paid employment than the role of mother.²⁶ The provision of child-care in Article 11(2c) aiming to prevent discrimination on the grounds of “marriage or maternity, and to ensure their effective right to work”²⁷ only reinforced this concern. It provided for “the provision of the necessary supporting social service to enable parents to combine family obligations with work responsibilities and participation in public life, in particular through promoting the establishment and development of a network of child-care facilities”.²⁸ The financial cost of such child-care was seen as prohibitive. Ultimately they believed it would increase taxes and thereby again push women into the workforce.

The key vehicle for what was considered social engineering²⁹ by the conservative Christian women would be the education system.³⁰ The Convention was understood to encourage co-educational facilities to eliminate discrimination, to

remove sexist language and stereotypes, through “the revision of textbooks and school programmes and the adaptations of teaching methods”.³¹ From the conservatives’ perspective, the right to bring up their children in the manner they thought best was overridden. Further parental rights and responsibilities were seen as usurped by Article 10(h) of the Convention³² which promoted the offering of family planning advice irrespective of age. Ultimately this was giving the State too much power to interfere with how parents chose to bring up their children.

While these Articles were worrying, Articles 12 and 16(e) were of extreme concern. The lack of definition of the term “family planning”³³ in these Articles meant, in the opinion of the conservative women and that of the three lawyers approached by WFL, a broad definition could be applied and in effect allow abortion on demand.³⁴ The licence this would potentially give pro-abortionists was not acceptable to those against the Convention. This, along with advocacy of affirmative action – the loose interpretation allowing for the possible acceptance of lesbian marriages – the lack of acknowledgement or incentives for full-time mothers, and its denigration of that role, all further undermined the family in the view of the conservative Christian women. Ultimately it played into the hands of the radical feminist lobby, the views of which were an anathema to the conservative women.

Such concerns were intensified when placed in the larger context of a threat to New Zealand’s sovereignty. An International Supervisory Committee was established to monitor the progress of ratified nations. The potential for the Convention to be interpreted in a manner detrimental to New Zealand society was perceived as a real threat. Clarnette argued that this committee would “have the right to enter our countries, conduct investigations, and initiate action which could interfere with our national sovereignty as a state ruling in its own right.”³⁵ In light of the human

rights abuses of a number of the member countries and New Zealand's good human rights record, it was also seen as inappropriate for the Committee to have any "power to diagnose problems in Western countries",³⁶ particularly when there was no reciprocal arrangement. In the pamphlet *No, minister. What every man should know*, WFL wrote:

The present Committee of Supervision represents Bulgaria, Canada, China, Ecuador, Egypt, East Germany, Guyana, Hungary, Mexico, Mongolia, Norway, Panama, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Sweden, USSR, Uruguay, Vietnam and Yugoslavia. These are the "twenty-three experts of high moral standing"..... Most of those ratifying have appalling records in human rights, while our country stands high. In a recent survey on human rights, N.Z. won 96 out of 100, the Soviet Union rated 27, China 32.

In fact the integrity of the United Nations itself was called into question with regard to its interpretation of "human rights". A letter to the editor in the 16 March 1984 issue of the *Challenge Weekly*, outlined just how the United Nations human rights record, in their view, lacked credibility.

The UN has never condemned the communists for assaulting religious freedom in Latvia, destroying the sanctity of the family in China, abrogating property rights in Cuba, abolishing free elections in Hungary, keeping millions of East Europeans' prisoner (against their will) behind the Berlin Wall, etc. Even worse, the UN violated its own Charter, when UN troops in the Congo massacred civilians, bombed hospitals, destroyed churches, and slaughtered women and children. In 1974, Yasser Arafat – leader of the same PLO that committed cold-blooded murder at the Munich Olympic Games – addressed the UN Assembly amid enthusiastic applause, and as the communists boasted of killing 1.2 million Cambodians in one year, top leaders of the Angka Loeu were greeted with applause in the UN Assembly.³⁷

This, along with concern over the imbalance between communist and totalitarian member states to western democracies, meant that the United Nations was treated with some suspicion. For some conservatives there was even a sense that a socialist agenda was being pushed through the United Nations document – "The overall tone of the Convention is flavoured with Soviet ideology which has no place in our democratic society. It glamorises a way of life totally alien to our own, and to what most New Zealanders desire."³⁸ Others identified direct Soviet involvement.³⁹

The conservative Christian women felt that while the intent of the Convention may have been good there had been too little discussion and debate and the implications needed to be properly assessed before a full commitment to the document was made. While recognising that some elements were beneficial, the "all or nothing" nature of the Convention meant, "Even if you like some clauses remember it's a package deal, to be totally accepted or totally rejected...."⁴⁰ Seeing no real advantages to be gained for New Zealanders, but a significant loss of freedom, thousands of New Zealand women stood up in opposition to the Convention.

The larger moralist movement that this debate is incorporated into has been interpreted to some degree as being about the fear of change. Brett Knowles in his *The History of a New Zealand Pentecostal Movement* quotes Colin Brown as saying that: "so long as the pace of social change continues and security continues to elude us...the forces of conservatism will be strongly represented in the churches.... Religions have a special attraction to those made anxious by the pace of change and for whom security in other areas appears elusive."⁴¹ Knowles talking of the conservative Christian response to change also talks of opposition in terms of their response to change, "While this conservative opposition represented an attempt to maintain a traditional Judaeo-Christian ethic in the face of rapidly changing social

morality, it was also partly a response to the process of change itself."⁴²

In terms of the Convention debate those in favour of ratification certainly saw those opposing it acting out of fear. Dismissive of the conservative women's concerns Helen Paske in the editorial to the *Listener* 22 December 1984 – 4 January 1985, wrote:

Primarily, it is about fear of change.... When change comes rapidly and times are difficult, when problems are complex and solutions unpalatable, fear lends strength to calls for a return to "traditional values". Rigid formulas for living, which remove the need for individual decisions, look increasingly appealing, and a backlash against liberal thinking develops.⁴³

The Ministry of Women's Affairs' conclusions on the forums also viewed the conservative's reaction in terms of fear

...it is clear also that another main element underlying the dissension was fear, and in particular fear of change. Some women obviously find it disturbing to contemplate the implications of equality for women. They have never been given a vision of any alternative to the traditional role, and they perceive the only way of life they know as seriously threatened. The usual human reaction to fear is retrenchment, a dogged defence of the known...⁴⁴

For feminists it was incomprehensible that those of their own sex would oppose a document that sought to end discrimination based on gender; the only feasible interpretation was one of fear. To state that the conservative women's reaction was for lack of an alternate vision or to imply they were incapable of dealing with "complex problems" was not only condescending but showed an unwillingness to engage with these women. It was convenient to label the women's response in terms of fear thus negating the possibility for them to have had any valid arguments or an ideology that was of any value.

In researching this topic I

conducted interviews with five women involved in the campaign opposing ratification. At the time I saw the interviews as a means to gain a greater understanding of the process of opposition, a means to elaborate on other research. Some eleven years later I sat and listened to the interviews again and what stood out to me in two interviews particularly, is the individual faith of the women and not the mere facts about the Convention, the forums and the issuing debate. It was this faith that motivated them to oppose ratification.

A nineteenth-century French historian, Jules Michelet, seeing the limitations of traditional historical research methodology, began to use the stories of ordinary people as “living documents”. Today oral history provides opportunities to explore individuals’ frameworks of meaning while also providing insight into a greater range of subjects, in particular social and cultural history, previously considered difficult to research through written documentation.⁴⁵ For the purposes of this paper, oral history provides the opportunity to offer individual stories of those who have been subsumed into a homogenous mass. The two interviews discussed also enable the charge of fear to be disputed and to place the debate within the context of “two world views colliding”.

At the time of the debate Annetta Moran was a member of WFL, active within a Presbyterian church in Auckland and was also a teacher. Annetta had been drawn into the debate through her involvement with WFL working closely with Connie Purdue in ensuring New Zealanders understood the risks of ratifying the Convention. Jean Brennan farmed with her husband in Rangiwhahia in the Manawatu. Active within the Anglican community in the district she had become aware of the Convention through an advertisement for a conference in church mail. Both women in the interviews reveal a faith understood in absolutes and based firmly on the inerrancy of Scripture.

While the two women obviously had very different lifestyles their reaction to the plans to ratify was very similar – one of deep concern followed by a desire to inform others. Jean and Annetta’s language reflects their beliefs. They both talk in terms of a personal God guiding and leading them. In Jean’s case she relates how she became involved in the campaign she talks of the compulsion she felt to go to a conference at the Bible College of New Zealand in Henderson. “I knew I must go”. It was there she was first made aware of the Convention. She talked of how she later, as a consequence of what she heard, stuck her neck out in the community when she spoke at a public meeting. Despite her inexperience she talked of feeling a “...real compulsion – I knew that God really put me there and he wanted me to do it and so I was just so motivated”. The implication is that her actions were not ones that came naturally, but she believed that God was leading her to become involved. This perhaps seems to have been confirmed to her when she talks of how information on the Convention just kept being given to her unsolicited:

I knew that I had to do it and I don't know why now when I look back on it – I honestly don't understand why – but I was given so much – information came into my hands and I didn't seek it out. It just kept coming. It was the most amazing thing that had ever happened to me. I had never spoken in public in my life.

She fully believed she was “moved by the Lord to do it” the source of such leading she explains in terms of the Holy Spirit. “I just had this leading to do it from, I believe, through the Holy Spirit.”

Both Jean and Annetta talk of their sense that the whole movement against ratification was in essence a move of the Holy Spirit. Annetta related how those with different views came together on this issue,

But on this one issue it was as if something happened and I can only put it down to a movement of the Holy Spirit.... I personally believe

that the Holy Spirit moved through the country and touched people. As if it was a spontaneous drawing together and different churches were having different meetings.

Jean confirms this when discussing whether the bus loads of women turning up at the forums were orchestrated. She felt:

...it was a sort of a grassroots, a rising up. How could you motivate that many people to do that all over the country, who would orchestrate it? I really believe that it was God's work – I know for myself it was. I wasn't told by anyone to go out there and speak against it. Nobody told me to do it. I was moved by the Lord to do it – I believe. And I really believe that those women were. That they wouldn't all get on a bus just because their Vicar or their Pastor told them to. I believe there was a much deeper thing than that. They saw there was a threat.

This talk of God’s guidance through the Holy Spirit is natural in light of their understanding of a God who personally communicates through sub-conscious promptings, through confirmation of thoughts by a third party, by events unfolding that are not considered coincidence, for example, being given material on the debate without prompting. This I believe is at the heart of many women’s involvement in the Convention debate. Women were involved not out of fear but because they believed they were being led by God and stirred into action by the Holy Spirit. Jean, when specifically asked whether the women were acting out of fear explained,

I think it was convenient for them to think it was fear because the Ministry of Women's Affairs was something set up and cut and dry by a few people in Parliament to run a certain section of what was happening to the legislation at that stage. And we could see that it was all going to be foisted upon us whether we wanted it or not. And I don't see it as being fear at all. I certainly wasn't acting out of fear. I think they may have acted out of their beliefs and their convictions but not fear. No. I think it probably suited them to call it that.

The views of feminists and conservative Christian women are diametrically opposed. It is not difficult therefore to understand that there was little room for compromise or understanding. Annetta saw the debate in terms of a battle between secular and Christian values and she did not want those secular values imposed on her.

We were coming from a Christian world viewpoint and we were saying this was a very secular document that left out God – because if you believe in God and think that God is the creator of life you cannot be witness to a document that has a clause that is militantly pro abortion. Also I think the Christian view of family is very different to the secular view of family – because I believe when I have children they're my children. I have a duty and responsibility for them. I may not be a perfect parent but the State shouldn't interfere in matters of morality. Not that I was imposing my morality on them – this document was imposing this morality on the women of the world, of the families of the world.

Jean's opinions reflect a similar ethos.

Because I was a Christian I just knew that it wasn't really right. What they were advocating and what was going to come out of this Convention was not as it was meant to be as far as Christians were concerned.

She had come to understand, what she considered, a better way of living and she did not want that compromised.

I suppose I had come – I had learned so much through having become a Christian as to how things worked best. And I know we don't live in a perfect world and we never will – but I knew that the Biblical principles worked because I'd applied it to my own life and I saw – I suppose, that's where I was coming from – but I saw that being undermined.

If there was fear, it was not fear of change, with the image of women clinging to a bygone era, but fear of what their nation would become without the moral absolutes that their faith offered. Annetta, believing that the Convention promoted

socialist values which denied God, elaborates,

...once you separate God from the State you really are a nation in trouble. We are countries in trouble because we've moved away from moral absolutes.... We've moved into a whole way of governing and thinking that everything has equal value. Well everything doesn't have equal value all forms of behaviour are not equal and I do believe that we have a God who's not just inside of us, a personal God, but is transcendent, is outside of us, and that there are spiritual truths. You know, that you don't lie, you don't cheat, you don't take someone's life, you don't commit adultery. I mean this is going back to the Old Testament the basic sort of rules for living are there and when you take God out of government, take God away from the State, you actually are living in a totalitarian – you know – and I think many Christians would oppose that sort of government.

Annetta's and Jean's accounts are representative of the views of many of the women involved in the campaign against ratification. Their belief in an active and living God meant they understood events transpiring with God's direct involvement. Their understanding of Scriptures meant they held a clear vision for society based on what they saw as a biblical mandate. A mandate they were willing to, and believed they were led to, protect. Colin Brown in his chapter "The Charismatic Contribution" in *Religion in New Zealand Society* states that addressing the issues of relating the natural and supernatural are not issues for the historian, sociologist and psychologist but believer and theologians.⁴⁶ To a point I agree with him, it is problematic to discuss events in a historical sense in terms of God's involvement or leading. It is difficult to talk of being "led by the Holy Spirit" without assessing the psychological health of the individual. It becomes easier to interpret events in terms of "fear of change" rather than attempting to engage with the metaphysical. For this reason oral history at least allows people an opportunity to

explain facets of their life experience in terms of their faith. Where interpretation of events comes through a belief in a spiritual reality the language of that faith is then able to be heard and where assumptions have been made gives opportunity to explain an alternate understanding. Jean and Annetta's interviews offer a voice to refute the charge of fear as a motivating force behind the campaign against ratification instead presenting it in terms of two world views colliding.

Endnotes

1. At the time of writing Helen Clark is leading a caretaker government while the final special votes are being counted.
2. Sandra Coney, *Into the Fire. Writings on Women, Politics and New Zealand in the Era of the New Right* (North Shore City, NZ: Tandem Press, 1997), 79-80.
3. Annetta Moran interview, Auckland, 4 September 1984.
4. N. Burrows, "The 1979 convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women" in *Netherlands International Law Review* (32): 419-460 at 419, cited Mai Chen, *Women and discrimination: New Zealand and the UN convention* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1989), 3.
5. Chen, 3.
6. Such legislation included: the Human Rights Commission Act 1977, introduction of the Maternity Leave and Employment Protection Act, the repeal of: legislation discriminating against women: Boilers Lifts and Cranes Amendment Act 1980 s 2, Domicile Regulations 1980, brought into the force the Domicile Act 1976, the Citizenship Act 1977 ss 6-7; and the Factories and Commercial Premises Act 1981.
7. Bruce Jesson, "Right-wing politics in contemporary New Zealand" in Bruce Jesson, Allanah Ryan, Paul Spoonley, *Revival of the Right. New Zealand Politics in the 1980s* (Auckland: Heinemann Reed, 1988), 2.
8. The pill offered women greater control of their reproduction and consequently "loosened traditional constraints on sexual relations." Brett Knowles, *The History of a New Zealand Pentecostal Movement* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), 142.
9. Jesson, 2.
10. Coney, 77-78.

11. A mark of this was the furore over allegations of sexual activity amongst adolescents in Wellington's Hutt Valley, the subsequent hearings of the "Special Committee on Moral Delinquency in Children and Adolescents" and the release of *The Mazengarb Report* in 1954.
12. Trevor R. Shaw, *The Jesus Marchers 1972* (Auckland: Challenge Publishers, 1972), 7, cited by Knowles, 189.
13. Knowles, 199.
14. Julia Stuart interview, Wellington, 27 August 1994.
15. Rev Dallas Clarnette, "UN convention on women not what it seems", *Challenge Weekly* 41:24 (1 July, 1983): 8.
16. Prior to becoming a practising Catholic and founding Women for Life, Connie Purdue had been a communist party member and Union activist.
17. Women for Life, *No Minister. What Every Man Should Know* (Auckland, 1983).
18. "NZ finally ratifies UN convention", *Overview* 16 (March, 1985): 4.
19. Hauraki MP Graeme Lee (National), spoke against ratification and received 5,000 letters and telegrams alone. "Convention mail mountain surprises MP", *Dominion* (29 November 1984).
20. Jean Brennan interview, 30 August 1994.
21. "Government won't ratify", *New Zealand Tablet* (9 May, 1984): 1 Muldoon was seen as courting the vote of conservative Christians and as he was about to call a snap election one could argue that it was politically astute not to ratify.
22. The establishment of the separate Ministry for women became another area of contention for conservative Christian women. They saw it as unnecessary expense and more importantly it was perceived as a means to legitimise feminist dogma.
23. "Mass Christian protest against UN convention", *Challenge Weekly* 42:45 (23 November, 1984): 1.
24. *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 460 (1984-1985), 2814 (D. Lange)
25. Article 1: any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. *Convention the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW)*, 4.
26. Helen Clarke's recent Statement to Parliament on lifting participation rates in the workforce (1 Feb 05) is an interesting aside: "While overall New Zealand's labour force participation rates are high, coming in seventh in the OECD in 2003, our women's rate lags – and in particular sits below the OECD average for women aged 25 – 34. Treasury estimates that our GDP per capita would rise by 5.1 per cent if we lifted our participation rates overall to the average of the top five OECD nations. That's a worthwhile objective and at this time of labour shortage, it's a good time to be pursuing it. In last year's Statement I highlighted the need to increase women's participation in the workforce, and a number of steps have been taken to do that."
27. *CEDAW*, 8.
28. *CEDAW*, 4.
29. Article 5: the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women. *CEDAW*, 6.
30. "any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education....". *CEDAW*, 7.
31. *CEDAW*, 7.
32. Ensuring "specific educational information to help to ensure the health and well-being of families, including information and advice on family planning". *CEDAW*, 7.
33. "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning." *CEDAW*, 8. "The same rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education and means to enable them to exercise these rights.", *CEDAW* 10.
34. Commentary and comments on the provisions of the convention, 7. Annetta Moran private papers.
35. Clarnette, 8.
36. John Steenhof, Defence of position against ratifying the United Nations Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. A submission to the Foreign Affairs Committee (Wainuiomata, March 1984), 14.
37. Mies Oomen, Letters to the Editor, *Challenge Weekly* (16 March 1984): 16.
38. Press release from Integrity centre *Women for life newsletter* 32 (August, 1984).
39. "The question of Soviet involvement in the UN Convention has been dismissed by our critics. However, we note Connie Purdue's advice as an ex-Party member, and the comments of our sister organisation in Australia that they have detailed evidence of considerable Soviet influence in the drafting of western sex discrimination laws. A 1978 Moscow publication 'Soviet Legislation on Women's Rights', details how a pro-Soviet international women's group WIFE, has spearheaded a campaign throughout the UN Decade of Women, to use Soviet law on women's rights as a model for all countries. Betty Friedan in her book *It Changed My Life* mentions these women telling her that they were responsible for initiating the UN's International Year for Women." Annetta Moran, letter to the Prime Minister, (Auckland, 15 October 1983), Moran private papers.
40. Women for Life, *No Minister*.
41. Colin Brown observes in "Religion in New Zealand: Past, Present and Future" *Religion and New Zealand's Future*, ed. Kevin J. Sharpe (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1982), 17, cited by Knowles, 184.
42. Knowles, 184.
43. Helen Paske, Editorial, *Listener* (22 December 1984 – 4 January 1985).
44. Ministry of Women's Affairs, *The 1984 Women's Forums Policy Priorities* (Wellington, 1984), 3.
45. Anna Green "Unpacking 'the Stories'", in *Remembering. Writing oral history*, ed. Anna Green and Megan Hutching (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2004), 12-13.
46. Colin Brown, "The Charismatic Contribution" in Brian Colless, Peter Donovan (eds), *Religion in New Zealand*, (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1985), 111.



Ruth Low completed her Masters with distinction from Massey in 1999. Since then she has been full-time at home with family. Ruth carries out some freelance oral history research and is waiting for the right opportunity to start work on her PhD.