

EARLY WESLEYAN MAORI MISSIONARIES AND CLASS LEADERS

From the first, in pre-colonial New Zealand, Maori were active participants in the establishment and spread of the English missionary's Gospel. Rev Dr Allan Davidson, for example, points out that for some fifteen years before 1814 the Bay of Islands chiefs, *Te Pahi* and *Ruatara*, played a significant role in negotiating and facilitating the beginning of Rev Samuel Marsden's CMS mission to New Zealand. Similarly, in the propagating of the Wesleyan faith and missions after 1831, first in the Hokianga, and then down the Waikato and Taranaki-Whanganui coasts, and on to Wellington, Queen Charlotte Sound, and Banks Peninsula and Otago, a number of Maori class leaders, lay preachers, "native" teachers, assistant missionaries and assistant ministers were the first to spread the Gospel, in many cases some years before the first English missionary arrived.

In the Hokianga, some significant Maori evangelists included the young Ngapuhi chief *Hoani Ri (John Leigh) Tutu*. He was one of eleven "converts" baptised on 23 December 1833 at Mangungu by Rev William White, then Chairman of the WMS's New Zealand District. Tutu assisted Francis White, William's brother, on behalf of the mission in March 1836, to purchase 500 acres of land at Te Maire near their Mangungu station. Later he accompanied William White to the Waikato and Taranaki coasts to "tapu" land for mission sites, and guided the Wesleyan missionaries to Ngamotu (now New Plymouth) where they landed Rev Charles and Eliza Creed on 14 January 1841, an event famously recorded idealistically for missionary propaganda purposes by a George Baxter print in 1844.⁴ *Tutu* was appointed as Creed's "Assistant Missionary" and stayed on at Ngamotu until 1843 when he preached at that year's "Anniversary Service".

Kotia, from Ngati Ruanui became a favourite slave of an old Hokianga chief who allowed him to live at Mangungu with the missionaries. In 1832 he was baptised as *Hori More (George Morley)* and put in charge of the mission store. He later became a Wesleyan preacher and returned to South Taranaki. Similarly, *Hoani Waitire (John Whiteley)*, became a preacher at Mangungu, and by 30 October 1843, Rev John Hobbs, Superintendent at Mangungu, recorded, was assuming "more importance than the chiefs themselves".

Rev William Woon was for ten years the Wesleyans' printer at Mangungu. He records Maori assistants at the press who included, *Nikorima (Nicholas)*, and *Hemi Karana (James Garland)*, a Mission servant who had joined the Mission in 1834. Another printer helper was *Aperahama (Abraham) Tautoru Taonui*, another of those baptised by William White, the New Zealand Chairman, in December 1833, and later, an important Ngapuhi prophet, informant of early Ngapuhi history, and founder of Te Kotahitanga (Unity) movement).

Along the Waikato coast, in November 1834 *Simon Peter Matangi*, a chief of the Hokianga, and *Hemi Patene (James Barton)*, a South Taranaki Wesleyan teacher – who two decades later was to give the Woons much grief at Heretua, Waimate South, in South Taranaki – assisted Rev William Woon with starting the Wesleyan's short-lived Kawhia mission at Papakarewa on the ocean side of Kawhia Harbour. But his career was tragically cut short. He died from influenza on 5 January 1839.

In the Taranaki-Whanganui region, alongside the martyrs, *Te Putakarua*, *Te Awaroa*, *Te Matoe*, and *Te Hau Maringi*, significant Maori mission assistants and class leaders included *Wiremu Nera Ngatai*. Rev John Skevington, the first English Wesleyan to be stationed in South Taranaki from May 1842 until his premature death at the Wesleyans' New Zealand District Annual Meeting in Auckland on 22 September 1845, credits that it was through

Wiremu Nera's influence that nearly the whole Taranaki population "of more than 200 miles along this coast had renounced idolatry before a single English missionary had been near them." Sometime early in 1836, or in 1837, Wi Nera *Ngatai* was allowed to return to South Taranaki where he introduced his people to his "Mangungu karakia" form of worship. In later years, Nera was to be prominent in attempting to unite South Taranaki's tribes against further land sales. In 1857 he was a signatory of a Ngati Ruanui tribal letter sent from the inland Waimate Plains village of Keteonetea to Robert Parris, Taranaki Land Purchase Commissioner based in New Plymouth, over the disputed Whaka-ngere-ngere Block today near Tariki, south of Stratford. And in March 1860 he led a Ngati Ruanui war party against the Taranaki tribes fighting British troops at Waireka, just outside New Plymouth, in an attempt to stop Taranaki fighting the British and colonial volunteers. In the later 1860s, reverting to the name *Wi Parirau*, he has been identified as an associate of the rebel leaders, *Te Ua Haumane*, and *Tiwha Titokowaru*, both of whom had been active Wesleyan class leaders, and then engaged in fighting colonial forces. It is said Nera died at the Porirua asylum around 1880.

Named after Reverend William Naylor, one of the WMS supporters in London, Wi Nera *Ngatai* should not be confused with *Wiremu Nera Te Awaitaia* the great Ngati Mahanga warrior chief and Wesleyan mission friend from Whaingaroa (Raglan), along the Tasman Sea Waikato coast north of Kawhia. In 1834, Te Awaitaia briefly brought the Christian Gospel to South Taranaki when he tried to mediate between Waikato musket raiders and Ngati Ruanui defenders at Te Ruaki pa. But his Gospel message of peace was not then successfully established.

Other prominent South Taranaki mission helpers included *Hare Tipene (Charles Stephens) Karoro*, and *Ngawaka Tauroa (Richard Watson)* a Pakakohe chief from Patea.

At Port Nicholson, Wellington, *Minarapa Te Rangi-hatu-ake*, his name could mean "Minarapa of the foreign or strange god", was the most prominent early Wesleyan "native" teacher and assistant missionary. At Mangungu, among the Mission Maori who were appointed as lay preachers, Minarapa was made "principal preacher" and "minister for Ngapuhi". For his work he was paid £1 a month, plus four white shirts. After Rev John Bumby reached Mangungu in March 1839, until May when they sailed for Port Nicholson, in his 1893 letter Minarapa states that "as his boy permanently" he lived with Bumby in his house at the Wesleyan Mission station.

It is Minarapa's claim that it was he who persuaded Revs John Bumby and John Hobbs to sail to Wellington, arriving there on 7 June 1840, just as the New Zealand Company surveyors arrived to begin the Wellington settlement - "When I had been a minister for five years we came to Wellington; it was I who induced them to come to Wellington." Minarapa had been anxious to return to his own people who were now settled at Port Nicholson and expressed his desire to take the Gospel to them. The Wesleyan missionaries for their part were anxious to extend their Mission's influence southward to counter the influence of the New Zealand Company and its settlers.

Minarapa writes that he asked the people of Te Aro pa for a small site on which to build a Christian chapel along the western side of the Wai-ma-pihi (later, Te Aro) Stream. Three acres were set aside. "80 blankets, a box of shirts, white shirts, 200 [twists of] tobacco and 1 cask [of gun] powder [were given] in payment for that piece of land as a site for the church."

After the English missionaries departed on 14 June, Minarapa was left in charge as the Wesleyan preacher at Te Aro Pa. He was paid in advance in goods, garments, tobacco and money. According to Minarapa, Bumby's departing exhortation to him was:

“Be energetic in upholding Christianity and in impressing it upon your people; take care of your people do not allow dissensions to arise, be energetic in impressing such things”.

It is recorded that “several of the other native Christian youths were retained as teachers until two European missionaries could be sent. They were equipped with books, slates and pencils.” *George, Paora (Paul), and Hemi (James)*, who had sailed from Kororareka (Russell) with Minarapa were probably some of these teachers.

Unfortunately for Minarapa, while returning north from Wellington, John Bumby was drowned on June 26 when his canoe capsized off Whangaparaoa Peninsula in the Hauraki Gulf. Minarapa immediately left Te Aro for Mangungu to attend his former mentor's funeral and was absent for 18 months. He briefly returned to Te Aro in early 1842, until his relatives in Taranaki called for him to return to them. Minarapa appointed a Te Aro elder, *Wi Omere Te Ipu* or *Rangiwahia Wi Upo*, to act as lay preacher there in his stead and for the rest of his long life lived at Te Uruhi near Cape Egmont.

He only once visited Wellington again, briefly, in 1850, to pursue his tribe's land claims. It is said that he introduced to the Bible, and taught, *Tohu Kakahi* and *Te Whiti O Rongomai* before a Lutheran missionary, Rev Johann Riemenschneider, was employed at nearby Warea by the Wesleyans from 1846. Minarapa never gave up the cause of his lost three acres and “my church” at Te Aro. As late as 1888 he petitioned the government about the issue.

Minarapa died at Te Uruhi sometime around late 1893 when well into his 80s.

Other faithful early Wesleyan Ngatiawa elders at Te Aro included *Mohi Ngaponga*, *Hemi Parai*, and *Te Teira Whatakore*.

The last of our early Wesleyan Maori heroes of the faith I invite the Church to commemorate is a rather mysterious and, today, unknowable figure by the name of *Taawao*. An early Maori source says he was the first, in 1839, to preach the Gospel at Koukourarata, the little Kai Tahu settlement at Port Levy, on the northern coast of Banks Peninsula. He is variously referred to as “*Taawao*”, “*Tawai*”, “*Towai*”, by the much fuller name of “*Tawaonui-a-Tane*” (*Son of Taawaonui*), and by a baptismal name, “*Rawiri Kingi (David King)*”, by which the early Otago Wesleyan missionary, Rev James Watkin, stationed at Waikouaiti from May 1840, evidently baptised him at Moeraki on 27 September 1843.

Where does the name, “*Taawao*” come from? Is it a very ancient Polynesian name? Or does it originate from the particular form of the Kai Tahu dialect? What, then, does it mean?

It is just as uncertain as to exactly where *Taawao* came from. One source suggests the South Island West Coast near Greymouth. Another tradition says, Onetahua or Golden Bay. A third source suggests he came from somewhere in the Marlborough Sounds. A fourth reference suggests he was of Ngapuhi extraction.

All that can be said for certain today is that the historical record as set down by Rev P.W. Fairclough in 1902 is that one, “Hoane Hape, an aged Maori at Kaiapoi, says that the Kaiapoi then living at Port Levy, first heard Christian teaching from a native called *Taawao*, who came from the West Coast where he was taught by a Ngapuhi man from North of Auckland.” And that he got around. Between 1839 and 1843, we find scattered references to *Taawao* with Rev Samuel Ironside at Ngakuta, Cloudy Bay, to the east of Picton, at Koukourarata at Port Levy, and at Waikouaiti and Moeraki in North Otago with James Watkin.

History also records that it was Taawao's pioneering preaching and teaching that greatly facilitated the establishment of the Wesleyan Mission in the South Island and the later organised European settlements of Otago and Canterbury. He is remembered and named on a Canterbury Methodist centennial monument erected at Port Levy on 2nd September 1950.

Additionally, it is arguable that Taawao's legacy is the stream of southern Kai Tahu chiefly leaders, preachers and teachers who carried on the Wesleyan cause through the nineteenth century in Otago and South Canterbury long after the Otakou Wesleyan Mission ceased and were important interpreters of the faith to their people: men such as, *Hohepa Korehi*, Taawao's colleague at Koukourarata, who was almost certainly from Cloudy Bay; and *Rawiri (David) Te Maire* from Arowhenua, near Temuka, South Canterbury. In February 1843 he was the first young Ngai Tahu chief Watkin baptised. He was followed on 18 June by *Iwikau or Horomono (Solomon) Pohio* of Ruapuke Island in Foveaux Strait who was born near Waimate in 1815. In the 1840s Horomona was a signatory to the Otago and Canterbury land purchases. In the 1870s both men were spokesmen and aides of the Arowhenua prophetic leader, *Hipa Te Maiharoa*, and his messianic movement known as "Kaingarara".

Two Waikouaiti chiefs, *Hoani Wetere (John Wesley) Korako* and *Tari Wetere (Charles Wesley) Te Kahu*, also baptised in June 1843, became leaders and teachers at Ruatitiko and Tahakopa (Catlins area). The most prominent of other chiefs baptised in July 1843 was *Matiaha (Matthias) Tiramorehu* of Moeraki.⁹⁵ Originally born in Kaiapoi, in 1837 Tiramorehu led a migration of his people in a flotilla of canoes to settle near John Jones's whaling station at Moeraki to escape from Te Rauparaha. Under Watkin he became the foremost teacher at Moeraki. An expert on ancient Maori learning and lore, "he was without a rival in his knowledge of genealogical antiquities." In 1864 the Government appointed him a "Native" Assessor or Magistrate. After thirty years of service to the church he died on 7 April 1881 and is buried in the graveyard of the Moeraki Maori church.

Also baptised in July 1843 were *Anaru Takairaki* of Rakiura (Stewart Island), and *Rawiri Waitiri (David White) Mamaru*, who was appointed a Class Leader at his kaika (kainga, village). Other Maori teachers Watkin trained included *Kurukuru* who drowned soon after in a tragic flax gathering trip, and Watkin's first convert *Mahaka* who on being baptised in December 1842 took the name "*Hemi Watekini*" or *James Watkin*.

Today's scholarship is increasingly coming to recognise a shift is necessary from the historical emphasis of the past on the English missionaries, to focus on such Maori as named above who in the missionaries' systems became mission teachers, class leaders and lay missionaries and who played a major role in transmitting the Europeans' religious ideas and concepts into Maori society. As Dr Raeburn Lange of Canterbury has recently pointed out:

"A focus on this early phase of Maori Christianity clearly reveals the essential role of indigenous players in the drama of conversion and religious change among the tribes. [European missionaries] were of course largely responsible for introducing Christianity, and they greatly influenced the character of the resultant Christian movement. But in the dissemination of new religious ideas, the bridging of the gap between British and Polynesian religious concepts, and the insertion of Christianity into Maori culture, Maori initiatives were no less significant than the much chronicled deeds of the missionaries from Britain and Europe."

Perhaps along with *Matiu* and *Rihimona* on 22 January, or on Parihaka Day, November 5th, when *Te Whiti-o-Rongomai* and *Tohu Kakahi* are remembered, these men named above might also be remembered by the Church for the heroes of the faith they, indeed, were.