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TE HAHĪ O TE KOHITITANGA MARAMA

(The Religion of the Reflection of the Moon)

A study of the religion of Te Matenga Tamati

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Philosophy in Religious Studies
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ABSTRACT

The Kohiti religion was a vital movement in the Wairoa area for more than thirty years. Its positive view and teaching of inclusiveness and unity brought to the believers a hope, a dream, and a promise.

It arose in the last years of the nineteenth century - a time when the Maori was at his lowest ebb numerically and culturally. This, then, was also a time of great spiritual need.

Te Matenga Tamati received a revelation to guide his people. As the Christian church did not provide a theological system fully acceptable to the Maori, he formulated a faith that did - being a synthesis of traditional beliefs, Old Testament teachings, and Christian values.

Taking the new moon as a symbol, the Kohiti made preparations for a great new age to come. Their efforts to construct a great tabernacle to the Lord is an amazing story, and one which clearly demonstrates the belief of the Maori of this period that they were descendants of the house of Jacob.

This study begins with an introductory chapter which briefly outlines the Maori response to the gospel up to the period concerned, then examines the reaction in the Wairoa area specifically. Upon this background the whole story of the Kohiti religion is told, and biblical parallels are pointed out. The phenomenology of the movement is then fully considered.

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NOTE

While the alternative spelling of "kowhiti" is often used elsewhere, the form "kohiti" is used throughout in this case, as this is the form used in the dialect of the Wairoa area.

ABBREVIATIONS USED

- | | | |
|----------|---|---|
| A.J.H.R. | - | Appendices to the Journals of the
House of Representatives |
| A.M.L. | - | Auckland Institute and Museum Library |
| A.T.L. | - | Alexander Turnbull Library |
| C.M.S. | - | Church Missionary Society |
| J.P.S. | - | Journal of the Polynesian Society |
| MS | - | Manuscript |
| TS | - | Typescript |
| W.M.S. | - | Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society |

PREFACE

Being born and brought up in the Wairoa area, and having the good fortune to have a father interested in the local history, I grew up knowing of a religious movement which has been largely forgotten over the passing years.

Te Matenga Tamati exerted a great influence in the Wairoa district around the turn of the last century. In his own area his name is still regarded with much reverence by older Maori people. But otherwise his Kohiti movement has not been accorded the recognition which is due.

My study of Maori religious movements over the past few years shows that the Kohiti religion appears to have been largely overlooked by scholars of Maori religions. It has therefore been my wish that this lack be remedied and that as full a record as possible be made of the Kohiti religion before more years pass and more knowledge is lost.

Little has been published on the subject - to my knowledge only short newspaper articles, and a brief piece in W.J. Phillipps' "Carved Maori Houses of the Eastern Districts of the North Island", (in Records of the Dominion Museum, Vol. 1, 1944) p. 83. Another mention is made by Thomas Lambert in The Story of Old Wairoa, p. 705, but it is unfortunate that this contains a number of errors. (The accounts of Phillipps and Lambert, as well as two relevant letters from the Wairoa Star, have been included as Appendix B, with comments on the content of each.)

My real sources have all been oral; firstly from my father, Bernard Teague, who learned much of the historical fact presented from three kaumatua of the Wairoa area - Mr Johnny Keefe, Mr Mana Langley-Shaw, and Mr Tiaki Hikawera Mitchell - all now dead. Much further

work has been put in by me, interviewing many people of the area in order to bring together all the remaining knowledge, and in particular to learn as much as possible about the religious beliefs involved.

All the people interviewed are in their seventies to nineties, and all acknowledge that so many others who were better informed than they on the subject, have passed away in recent years.

Inevitably there must be gaps - and it is to be greatly regretted that these should occur in the areas which are to me the most interesting, particularly in these days when we seek to understand and appreciate the beliefs and practices of a people in order to gain a deeper understanding of their feelings and motivations. The details of the doctrinal dimension of the Kohiti faith can no longer be fully recovered, but it is hoped that enough has been pieced together here to give scholars and all interested a good appreciation of it.

All the informants mentioned were interviewed by me on at least one occasion. I listened to their stories, asked questions, took notes, and checked details between them. In some cases further details have been checked by telephone calls and letters after visits have taken place. In all cases I have been welcomed and hospitably received by the people in their homes, and have been warmed by their response.

I wish to record my sincere and grateful thanks to the following people who shared their knowledge and their memories - without their co-operation the knowledge of this movement would not have survived to the next generation. Ka whakapai ahau ki a koutou mo ta koutou atawhai. Kia ora koutou.

- Mr Timi Kara Tewai Bell (Ronny Bell), Mahanga. (b. 1908) The grandson of the Prophet Matenga, he supplied useful family details and memories.

- Mr Api Hape, Wairoa. (b. 1908) Mr Hape refers to himself as the only remaining follower of the Kohiti faith. His parents and family were all followers of Te Matenga Tamati, and he remembers in his youth his people speaking of it. Mr Hape has been my most valuable and willing informant, sparing me hours of his time on several occasions. To him I am most indebted.

- Mr Rua Niania, Iwitea. Personal recollections. His brother, Mr Jimmy Niania, now dead, was a Kohiti member.

- Mr Teti Peka, Kihitu. Recollections. His family were all followers.

- Mrs Maria Thompson, Wairoa. (b. 1892) Personal recollections.

- Mr Turi Tipoki, Wairoa. (b. 1911) His family were followers of Matenga in the Prophet's time.

- Mr Horace Whaanga, Wairoa. His family were all members of the Kohiti faith.

Some of these informants, according to their wishes for privacy, will not always be identified in the text specifically with the details they contributed, but their help is again gratefully acknowledged.

In addition, my thanks to Mr A. Knight, Mrs M. Fyson, Mrs M. Hawkins, Mr J. Smythe, of Wairoa; Mr and Mrs Mac Whaanga, of Mahia; Mr and Mrs J. Robinson, of Iwitea, Mr Mo Delamere, of Opotiki, for their help. My thanks and love to my parents, Bernard and Thelma Teague - particularly to my father who died before this was written. My husband, Ken Elsmore, who accompanied me on some of the excursions, took the photographs.

Little information has been available from other sources. Missionary journals and reports had ceased by this time. Copies of the Wairoa paper for the period in question are not now available, though the Wairoa Guardian for the year 1914 (records from 1907 being kept) was searched for an obituary of the Prophet, but without success. Copies of the Daily Telegraph (Napier) for the period 1896-1915 were unfortunately destroyed in the 1931 earthquake fire. One very short mention of an incident related to the religion was located in the Hawkes Bay Herald. Despite efforts, other official sources which may have been able to provide corroborating evidence (particularly a death certificate of the Prophet, and the log-books of two ships) proved to be untraceable.

While there are problems often associated with information gained from oral sources (failing memory after so many years, and perhaps additions as the result of hindsight), in this case the oral information should be regarded as vastly superior to any alternative. The Maori of the nineteenth century saw little need to create written records, even though he was quite literate and perfectly capable of doing so. As will be seen in Chapter One, those much earlier Maori religious movements which were referred to by the missionaries and/or other Pakehas, suffered from the bias of the writer, and no native sources are available to show the movements in their own perspective. Naturally, a movement which has been set up by Maori people precisely for the purpose of making a foreign system acceptable to them, can offer no possibility of being rightly understood from a European viewpoint.

It is for this reason that the oral sources must be regarded as the treasures which they are. We have, as a result, a study of a nineteenth century Maori religious movement seen (as far as possible now) within its own perspective. The little that has been written

from a Pakeha viewpoint can be seen to be rather subjective in interpretation, and in addition must also be subject to the same criticisms as may be levelled at the oral sources as they were recorded much later than the event.

For my own part, I have tried to bear these points in mind in my examination of the Kohiti movement, while still attempting to satisfy the conventions of the academic study of religions. If the result is not acceptable to my informants who shared with me their knowledge, I give them my sincere apologies.

I am grateful for the assistance of the staff of the following libraries - Alexander Turnbull Library (Wellington), Auckland Institute and Museum Library, Hocken Library (Dunedin), Napier Museum Library, National Archives (Wellington), Saint John's Theological College Library (Auckland), Sladden Library (Tauranga), University of Birmingham Library (England).

I must also record my sincere thanks to my two supervisors who have given me their time and advice - Dr B.E. Colless (Religious Studies), and Dr J.M.R. Owens (History), Massey University.

INTRODUCTION

The Maori religious response to the Christian gospel has been written about in many ways - from the point of view of church histories, as part of the whole history of Maori-Pakeha relations, and as studies of specific movements. In this latter category, works on the Pai Marire movement of Te Ua Haumene,^{*1} the Parihaka movement of Te Whiti,^{*2} the Ringatu movement of Te Kooti,^{*3} the Iharaira movement of Rua Kenana,^{*4} and the Ratana movement founded by T.W. Ratana,^{*5} have ensured that these have become well known in New Zealand and further afield.

What is not so well known, except by those with a special interest in the subject, is that these movements form only a small proportion of the total of such Maori religious movements. Certainly these examples have reason to be better known, for each one, in its time and since, has spread far beyond the specific people to whom it was initially directed.

For instance, the fame of the Pai Marire response was first due to the terrified reaction of the settlers to it. From the period 1860 onwards, the rapid encroachment of colonists across the land sparked anti-land-sale movements in which the element of anti-Pakeha feelings

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1. See, for example, S. Barton Babbage, Hauhauism, An Episode in the Maori Wars (Wellington, 1937), and Paul Clark, Hauhau, the Pai Marire Search for Identity (Auckland, 1975).
 2. See, Dick Scott, Ask That Mountain (Auckland, 1975).
 3. See, William Greenwood, 'The Upraised Hand' (Jnl Poly. Soc. 51, 1942); W. Hugh Ross, Te Kooti, (Auck., 1966)
 4. See, Judith Binney & others, Mihaiia (Auckland, 1979) and Peter Webster, Rua and the Maori Millennium (Wellington, 1979)
 5. See, J.M. Henderson, Ratana - the Man, the Church, the Political Movement (Wellington, 1972)

was certainly a factor. But the fearful reaction of many of the newer settlers was even greater, and this in turn caused a deterioration in Maori-Pakeha relations which was to encourage the original "good and peaceful" motives of Te Ua himself to eventually give way to the less pacific acts of some of his followers. It is to be regretted that such unfortunate happenings which were undoubtedly socially motivated, have been ever since taken as aspects of a religion of which they rightly formed no part.

The Ringatu movement had very similar factors which were bound to guarantee its infamy - so much so, that even in the present day the uninformed regard the Church bearing that name with some apprehension. In addition, the mysteries of Te Kooti - in particular his allusions to a huge diamond, his prophecies, and the mystery surrounding his burial - together with the glamour of the renegade figure and the military campaigns against him in the remote parts of New Zealand, are more than sufficient to ensure that Te Kooti's name has been prominent in any historical appraisal of New Zealand's past century.

Rua Kenana became widely known far beyond his own people for a number of reasons too. His claim to be successor to Te Kooti was not sufficient on its own, for others all but forgotten made this claim also.*⁶ But on his own behalf his charismatic leadership, his newsmaking exploits such as his journey to Gisborne to welcome King Edward, the reports of the plans to ransom New Zealand with a casket of jewels, the setting up of a new Jerusalem at Maungapohatu, and the police raid which led to the Prophet's arrest, were all material of which legends are made, and ensured Rua's fame in more than his own area.

6. For one such example, see pages 32-33

Tahupotiki Wiremu Ratana received a divine call to be a leader to his people. But to the world at large he became best known for his healing ability. To his home came streams of sufferers for a number of years, with the result that reports of cures travelled even outside New Zealand. A tour overseas to Britain, Europe, and Japan, was a very newsworthy event, and Ratana's political involvement since has meant that the existence of this Church is constantly reaffirmed in the mind of the public generally.

The factors mentioned are those which are mainly external to the religions proper. In other words, they are not important from the point of view of doctrine or belief, but the point of their mention is to show that each one of these movements included aspects which made them interesting, significant, or newsworthy outside their immediate area of effect.

The point to be made again is that in the seventeen or so decades since missionary contact, there have been many more religious responses by the Maori to the new message, and most of these have been all but forgotten.

Amongst these are those founded by persons who can be regarded as local visionaries, who experienced some form of revelation which was a response to the Christian message. Others attempted to administer to the ills - both physical and mental - brought about by the clash of the two cultures, and may be classified generally as 'healers'. Others again were charismatic figures who exerted much influence over their own people for a greater or lesser period of time. Other movements evolved as an attempt to find an acceptable Maori Christian theology.

The charismatic leaders referred to, were often just as great in their own time and area as were the better known examples previously mentioned. Their mission

might be just as significant, their following just as strong. The difference often lies solely in the lack of anything which tended to bring them to special notice of the European part of the community.

This could well be seen as a very positive factor as regards the religion proper, for it supposes the lack of some of the negative aspects that characterized others - negative in the minds of the Pakeha onlookers at least. These outsiders who, rather naturally, misunderstood that which was not a part of their own cultural inheritance, would tend to ignore any local movement which did not appear to be undermining the Pakeha position as colonists and rulers in the new land, or providing a threat to peace, or blatantly opposing the Christian gospel.

Generally speaking these movements did not spread very far outside their own region, and did not last for a very long period; and for these reasons too they were not regarded so seriously. Also, lacking any events which might make for publicity (such as the arrest of the leader on any anti-social charge, the failure of some widely known prophecy or attempt at miraculous happenings, or perhaps a newsworthy venture such as the setting up of an exclusive community based on millennial teachings or messianic expectations) the new and localized movement would be generally accorded little more than mild curiosity from the outside.

Some of the minor movements did indeed include such aspects. In the movements of Rimana Hi, for instance, in the Waihou area in 1837, the Prophetess and several followers were arrested and gaoled after a very dramatic incident at their sacred enclosure. Prophecies were made and did fail in a number of other cases - for instance, at least two prophets other than Te Kooti also predicted a further great eruption following the 1886 disaster at Tarawera.

It therefore appears that the controlling factor as regards the memorability (and hence the 'importance') of the various Maori religious responses is the degree to which they affected the Pakeha side of existence. So long as they remained totally Maori they were accepted as just that - of Maori significance only - but when they exerted any influence in European society they were subjected to scrutiny from that area.

The conclusion, then, is that any judgement as to which of the Maori religious responses may be regarded as 'major' and which 'minor', is based solely on Pakeha considerations and not on Maori factors. This means that some of the movements which are now almost forgotten might well have been of greater significance to the religious life of the Maori in their times than those which are remembered.

While the Prophet Te Matenga Tamati has not excited more interest for lack of those negative considerations mentioned earlier, his contribution concerning the Maori religious response to Christianity is indeed major.

This study includes the story of the Kohiti movement, giving details of the Prophet, the history of the movement, and the phenomenology of the religion. Some historical details which might not be strictly necessary in a study of the religion are included in order to record as full a picture as possible, so that with the passing years knowledge of it will not be lost.

But before this, as necessary introduction to the area, chapter one gives an account of the previous post-European religious response in the great Wairoa district. In this it will be shown that this area has long been to the fore in the matter of Maori response to the Christian message.



Map 1 THE WAIROA DISTRICT showing places mentioned