

# RATANA BIRTH REBIRTH

by  
**Selwyn Muru**

Once again followers of the Ratana faith flocked in their thousands to Ratana Pa earlier this year to celebrate the birthday of Tahu Potiki Wiremu Ratana. The hui was particularly well-attended this year — partly because a new building was dedicated and opened, partly because of the highly charged political and ecumenical climate these days, and partly perhaps because all our hui seem to be getting larger and larger.

*Selwyn Muru was there, and provides us with this penetrating but entertaining account of an important hui. He also drew the accompanying pictures. The photograph over the page is by Henare Everitt.*

Heaps of fleecy cottonwool roll in from the Tasman and hang exquisitely over Ratana Pa. A sense of surrealism pervades above. The wind conjures up heads of chiefs, prophets, canoes ad nauseam as the cloud formations glide and twist their way across the heavens.

To a mind continually puzzled by the Ratana phenomenon, there is no end to the passing images. Perhaps similar clouds were seen by Tahu Potiki Wiremu Ratana when a voice came to the prophet at this very spot in 1918. Fear not, I am the Holy Ghost. I have travelled around the world to find the people upon whom I can stand. I have come back to Aotearoa to choose the Maori people. Repent! Cleanse yourself and family.

For the past three days, the mana of this man sees buses, cars, motorcycles — vehicles of all descriptions — bring in the hordes from the seven tribal winds. There is also a chartered plane from the Chathams.

They come to honour the birth of Tahu Potiki Wiremu Ratana, founder of the Church; and also to witness the opening of the Manuao accomodation building. The pilgrimage is an annual affair.

On arrival the manuhiri enter the temple, make peace with their maker, then on to the marae for the welcoming mihi.

Sentiments are paid to the living and dead, the tapu lifted off the visitors, and another group mingles with the throng that builds up on the third day to 37,000 plus.

There are the run-of-the-mill manuhiri like the ardent followers of the faith, and those with a vested interest in the spiritual and political realms. I take special interest in the latter, easing into their orations.

A sizeable group of Catholic priests with their disciples arrives, led by the venerable Father Durning. For nigh on forty years the good father has continued to minister to the river folk of Wanganui where he's mastered every nuance of the language and its use, in a way that only the great orator knows how. His use of proverb and metaphor makes those to whom the language belongs feel uneasy.

One asks, why the preponderance of priests at a Ratana hui? Is there truth after all in the rumour that more and more Catholics are defecting to Ratanaism? There is a brief lull, then another huge ope arrives; the Ringatu from the East,

