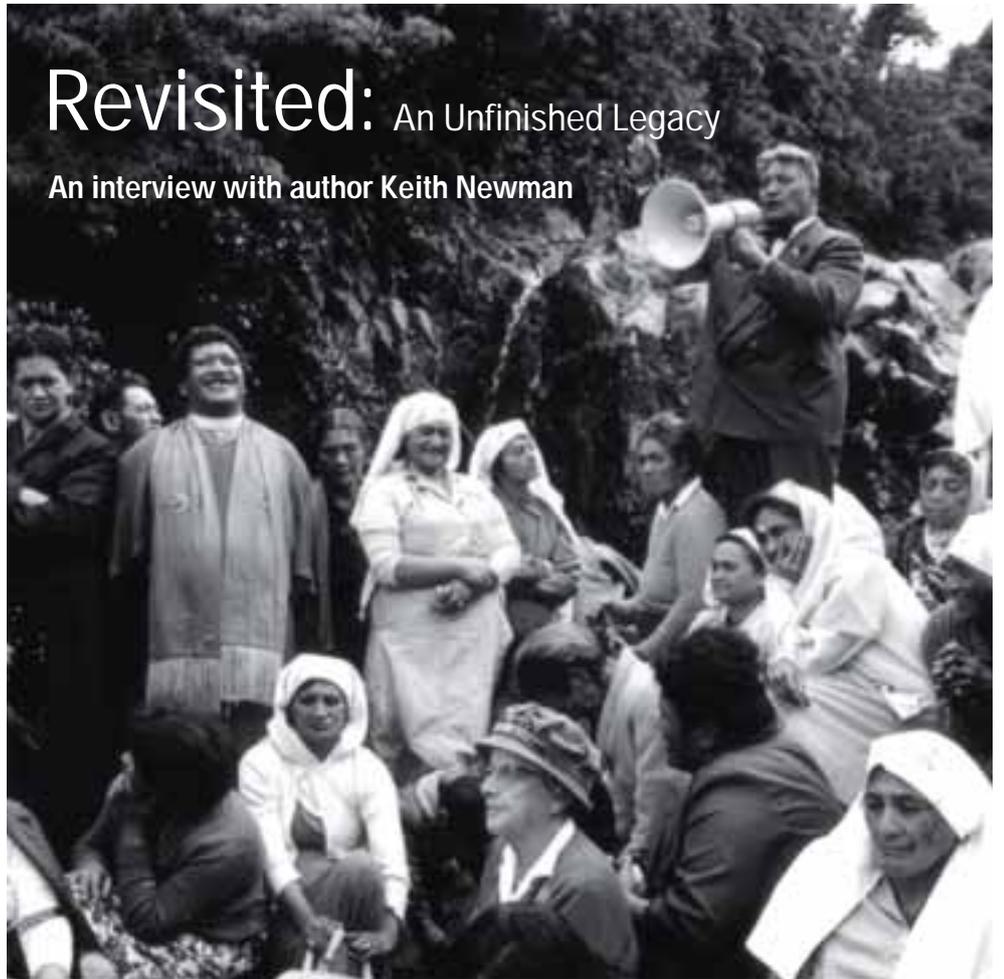


# Ratana Revisited: An Unfinished Legacy

An interview with author Keith Newman



A gathering of Ratana faithful at Te Rere O Kapuni at the base of Mt Taranaki where Ratana would often go to meditate and listen for the voice of the Wairu Tapu (Holy Spirit). Photographer: Ans Westra.

## An urgent message for Aotearoa

Keith Newman shows the fruit of 30 years in journalism with the publishing of this book. It reflects a 20-year research process undertaken against huge odds. The author has taken on an enormous task: to present the life and achievements of TW Ratana to a new generation. The book is structured clearly and logically. Newman combines careful research with a clear and accessible writing style. *Ratana Revisited* is the first published account of the founder of the Ratana movement since the 1970s. New sources have made this account more detailed, precise and accurate. Keith Newman presents the significance of Ratana, with the passion of a visionary, the rigour of a scholar, and the accessible style of an experienced journalist.

Ratana has a story and a message that need to be brought before the nation again. He called for the uniting of the tribes under Ihu Karaiti (Jesus Christ), and performed notable healings in His name. A forerunner in many ways, he was only the second person to take the case of indigenous people to the League of Nations. He called for the Treaty to be enshrined in New Zealand law. He got a third of all Maoridom at the time to sign a petition supporting this challenge. Both the New Zealand and British governments ignored his call.

In 1921, TW Ratana called for the Treaty to go in one hand, and the Bible in the other: 'Ko te paipera Tapu ki taku ringa matau, ko te Tiriti O Waitangi ki taku ringa mau'.

## Boarding the Morehu Express

Keith's long-standing interest in Ratana evolved some time ago. I asked how did his interest in Ratana develop? 'I read Jim McLeod Henderson's book *Ratana: the Man, the Church, the Political Movement*<sup>1</sup> and that inspired me further. I couldn't resist an invitation to go to Ratana Pa with Littlejohn's rock-reggae band Heartwarrior, which had taken its name from one of my poems. We joined about 700 others boarding the 'Morehu Express', the first train from the Far North since the late 1960s, to attend the 25 January 1986 celebrations.

'The rich symbolism in the temple and other buildings captured my attention, as did the frequent lament from Ratana adherents that they knew so little of their own heritage. I met many young people who knew fragments of the stories about Ratana, which were all fascinating—but it seemed to me that for someone who had allegedly done so many amazing things within living memory there was a sad lack of information in the public domain.'

## Writing despite himself

Keith unfolded the story of 20 years of determined effort in writing the book. On asking what sustained him the writer replied: 'I was confident that there was a story here that needed to be told. For a long time I felt as though I had reached a dead end. A breakthrough was obtaining a copy of Hector Bolitho's 1921 *Ratana: the Maori Miracle Man*<sup>2</sup> ... I think it was at that point I began trying to seriously piece something together. I kept gathering as many copies

of the *Whetu Marama* [Ratana publication] as I could. No one wanted to publish what I had written. Around 1997 I did some contract work with the *New Zealand Herald*, and copied anything related to Ratana from their archives. I think I had most of what was in the public domain by that stage. However there were several times when it all seemed too hard. I wondered if I was wasting my time. Who was I to be trying to write such an important history? Every time I had that thought, I would get at least two encouragements—often in the same day.

‘There were several rejections from publishers over several years, and again I was about to put the project to one side when I gave it one more shot—and was truly surprised when Reed called me in for a meeting and said they wanted to publish *Ratana Revisited*. From that time onward I worked on completing the project with as many hours as I had to spare in the day.

‘To be honest, there was a sense that this was happening despite me, not because of me. Yes, I was determined and passionate, but this wasn’t just journalism or writing a history book. I felt after a while that this was for all those people who wanted to know more about the movement their parents, grand-parents, uncles and aunties grew up in.

## Prophet, healer and political visionary

‘This was their story, but it was my story as well because so many had dismissed Ratana as a cult movement, the stories of his healing mission as myth,

and there was only a shallow representation of his political and social impact in the history books.

‘Here I was learning about a man of God who had been given an extraordinary mission—a prophet and healer, a political visionary, whom the world really ought to know about. When a book like this starts to take on that kind of dimension, when you see how all the pieces start to fit together, whether it’s the prophecies, or the healing—some of which are really well documented—or the removal of curses, or the restoration of a broken people, then it’s no longer just a history book.

‘It’s something living, and that’s what motivated me...’

The author leaves us with his own prophetic challenge and hope: ‘The Ratana story is a unique history, a legacy for all New Zealanders, and indeed for the world to marvel at and be inspired by. For those who are prepared to accept that the Paipera Tapu (Holy Bible) and Te Tiriti O Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi) go hand in hand, a new dawn may arise.’

### Peter Crothall

- 1 J McLeod Henderson. *Ratana: the Man, the Church, the Political Movement*, A H & A W Reed in association with the Polynesian Society, Wellington, 1963, 1972 (revised edition).
- 2 Hector Bolitho, aka Rongoa Pai, *Ratana: The Maori Miracle Man. The story of his life, the record of his miracles*, Geddis and Blomfield Printers, Wyndham St, Auckland, 1921.

Top: *Ratana Revisited: An Unfinished Legacy*, Reed Publishing, New Zealand, 2006. ISBN 10: 0 7900 1057 7.

Bottom: Keith Newman.

Right: ‘For many years the curious could come and see the artefacts, the taiaha, pendants, carvings, sacred stones and other items discarded as people gave up tohungaism, and the walking sticks, crutches, spectacles, wheelchairs, and other evidence of Ratana’s healing ministry. Each item had a story of healing and restoration and faith in the healing and restorative powers of Ihoia to tell.’ –Ans Westra. Photographer: Ans Westra.

