



Tarore and the Spread of the Gospel

By David Moxon

In the fields to the north of Waharoa, near the Waikato country town of Matamata, there is a small grave. A white cross adorns the resting place of a 12 year old girl who died in the year 1836. Around this grave from time to time there this site has seen the ordination of Maori deacons, special pilgrimages and a steady trickle of people of all sorts who make their way to this ordinary field. Why? The name of the girl buried in the grave is Tarore and the story of her life and death demonstrate how the gospel of Christ is able to bring peace and reconciliation.

Tarore was the daughter of the Maori chief Ngakuku. She studied at the mission school in Matamata where she was given a copy of the Gospel of Luke in te reo Maori by her teacher Charlotte Brown. It was a treasured possession and she kept it safe by wearing it in a kete (a woven bag made from flax) around her neck.

One night while camping in the Kaimai Ranges at the foot of the Wairere Falls, a raiding party from the Arawa tribe came across Tarore's group and attacked their camp, pillaging what they could find. In the action and skirmish, Tarore remained asleep when she received a fatal blow to the head. Her attacker removed the Gospel of Luke she was carrying, thinking it might be tradable.

Her death immediately created a desire for 'utu' (revenge) but back in Waharoa during her funeral Ngakuku, her father, preached against reprisal saying there had been too much bloodshed between the tribes already. Instead he called his people to trust in the justice of God. No blood revenge was sought. This revolutionary act set in motion a sequence of events that paved the way for restoration and reconciliation between tribes.

No one in the Arawa camp was able to read the book. It was not until a literate visiting slave named Ripahau read the text aloud that the people understood its true value. Tarore's murderer, Uita, was convicted by the message of peace displayed in the Gospel of Luke and humbled himself to go and seek forgiveness from Tarore's father.

Visiting Ngakuku was an extremely dangerous move and could easily have resulted in death. A local re-telling of this story claims that as the men approached one another tears were shed and they embraced. After Uita humbled himself and repented peace prevailed between the two men and a church was built to honour the message which brought about this reconciliation.

Later Ripahau left Uita's pa and returned to Otaki. There he came into contact with Katu Te Rauparaha (later known as Tamihana Te Rauparaha) from Kapiti Island, the son of the great Ngati Toa chief. Ripahau was again invited to read from the scripture to Katu and his nephew Te Whiwhi. In this way the gospel began to warm the hearts of the people in that place. Some years later Katu (who was now called Tamihana) took Tarore's book with him when he travelled to the South Island to revisit his father's traditional enemies, bringing the gospel of peace there for the first time. The dramatic reconciliation of enemies that had followed Tarore's martyrdom was repeated. Tarore's story and the gospel she bore has long been amongst the taonga (treasures) of the Church in Aotearoa.

On the white cross above Tarore's grave there is written in Maori a reference to the death that brought peace to the tribes. The blood of this child became the seed of the Church. At her tangi, Tarore's father prayed that vengeance would belong to God; he never gave up hope in divine justice. The vengeance of God was the repentance and transformation of his daughter's murderer, and her story became a parable of hope forever.