

# The body and the bath: how baptism shapes understanding of church, specifically how does its current practice of baptism shape and reflect the perceived ecclesiology of Tikanga Pakeha in the Anglican Church in New Zealand?

A paper presented by Jenny Dawson at the Practical and Pastoral Theology Conference, Dunedin 2009.

## INTRODUCTION:

“Baptism representeth unto us our profession”<sup>1</sup>

“Baptism gives Christians a vision of God’s just order; it makes the Church a sign and instrument of the new world that God is establishing; it empowers Christians to strive for justice and peace within society”<sup>2</sup>

These two statements, three hundred years apart, remind us that baptism has always been the sign and sacrament of Christian identity. Baptism is also a fundamental recognition of a profound truth about what it means to be human, in the sense that being Christian in God’s world is a sign of what humans were created to be. The ecumenical document *Baptism Eucharist and Ministry*, the 1982 Lima statement, described baptism as nothing less than forming “the whole of humanity to become God’s people.”<sup>3</sup> Such understandings have deep far-sighted implications for human relationships and thus for organisational and policy-making dimensions, although baptism has usually been described theologically in individual terms. Baptism is both central to being Christian and to being called to a community of transformative living. My interest is the question: To what extent is baptism seen by those who make up Tikanga Pakeha in the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia as radically transformative, so that the church itself takes on a transformative role in society?

Baptism is clearly stated in the Lima documents as being the unifying initiation event for all Christians, involving Participation in Christ’s Death and Resurrection; Conversion, Pardoning and Cleansing; The Gift of the Spirit; Incorporation into the Body of Christ; The Sign of the Kingdom. These major themes are not only about what happens in baptism but also the ongoing personal and community formation of the life of faith in the ethical implications of what it is to be people of participation, conversion, gift, incorporation, and sign.

At the heart of my research is an ethical understanding of baptism as the sacrament which enables and empowers an ongoing process of conversion, of both individual, Church, and indeed the world. To what extent is this currently true in the perceived ecclesiology of Tikanga Pakeha?

## BACKGROUND – ARE THERE THREE CHURCHES?

Like most strands of the Christian Church active in this country, the Anglican Church has had to examine its ecclesiology and practice over recent decades in awareness of the Treaty

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<sup>1</sup> From the “The Ministration of Publick Baptism to Such as are of Riper Years”, in *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and other rites and ceremonies of the Church According to the Use of the Church of England*, (London: Oxford University Press, n.d.1956?), p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> *Walk in Newness of Life: the Findings of the fourth international Anglican Liturgical Consultation* (Toronto 1991).

<sup>3</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Faith and Order Paper No 111* (Geneva: World Council of Churches 1982) para 1.1.

of Waitangi/Te Tiriti. Many saw as a bold endeavour the constitutional revision that produced *The Constitution/Te Pouhere* 1992, as the legal basis of the now re-named Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia.<sup>4</sup> This enabled a church where Anglicans would be able to express their faith in three different cultural strands, or tikanga, finding unity in instruments such as shared mission, the life of General Synod and *A New Zealand Prayer Book/ He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa*. The immediate motivation was justice and partnership, in a context of calls for Maori sovereignty<sup>5</sup>. Can the church now sustain these hopes?

It is pertinent to acknowledge here an emerging post-colonial perspective beyond the shores of this country. In recent years there has been something of a paradigm shift in the Anglican Communion, or, at least, a power shift which became obvious from the 1998 Lambeth Conference. It was clear that the Communion was no longer Anglo-American, a change had been happening for some time<sup>6</sup> as issues of pluralism and diversity were being questioned. The concern with post-colonisation and its implications for the role of indigenous peoples in church life grew within a context where baptism had been reconsidered since the 1960s. Recent debates within the Anglican Communion have tended to focus on episcopate and on the relationship (or disconnection) of provinces in communion. At the grassroots level across the globe, baptism is receiving new attention, growing from not only a heightened valuing of the laity but a deepening understanding of Christian initiation. A sound theology of baptism could point beyond colonialism towards exploring expressions of power from the underside, enabling and empowering those who have formerly been in a position of weakness. It could also allow growth in partnership and mutuality.

If it is a community whose identity emerges from baptism, the Church must always be engaged in God's work of transformation even where this may challenge its own use of power. The Anglican story involves an ongoing flexibility, which goes back even before the Reformation struggles, to engage the Church of Jesus Christ with society, reflecting an ecclesiology of a redeemed creation as a whole. Richard Hooker, unlike some of his more rigid-thinking opponents, saw 'Church' in institutional terms as a living body, as an organism which needed to adapt in shape as circumstances changed.<sup>7</sup> The constitutional changes that brought about the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia were welcomed by some in the wider Anglican Communion but are still not well understood either there or at home, particularly by Pakeha. Claims of there being "three Anglican churches" in these islands call for response with a theology of unity, which I contend could be located in a stronger more overt theology and practice of baptism.

Nearly two decades after *Te Pouhere*, the openness to transformation it requires continues to offer an ongoing challenge to the Pakeha part of the Church in particular. There is need to engage all the Anglican people, not only the leaders, in commitment to *The*

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<sup>4</sup> The name was formerly The Church of the Province of New Zealand.

<sup>5</sup> The history cannot be explored here but the move came after decades of Maori people calling for their own Bishop and to recover their own expression of being church. Anglicanism in New Zealand had been primarily Maori from 1814 when Samuel Marsden arrived to 1857 when the first Anglican Constitution was signed (and coincidentally the number of Pakeha in the country now outnumbered Maori). Despite many years of the Anglican Church being in its practice and governance "the English Church", increasingly since about 1980's the challenge for Pakeha has been seen as a task of justice and decolonization on the basis of Treaty of Waitangi

<sup>6</sup> Callum Brown has demonstrated in *The Death of Christian Britain - Understanding secularisation 1800-2000* (Routledge, London and New York, 2001) the phenomenon of the considerable time it takes for the Church to become aware of change in itself and wider society.

<sup>7</sup> In response to the varied circumstances of history, Richard Hooker saw that the Church may rightly do in one time something different from that which it had rightly done at another: "The Church hath authority to establish that for an order at one time, which at another time it may abolish, and in both do well. Richard Hooker, *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, ed. John Keble, V.viii.2: 2.38, lines 17-19. <http://anglicanhistory.org/hooker/5/5.030-039.pdf> (accessed 12/10/09).

*Constitution/Te Pouhere* and to the full mission of the Church.<sup>8</sup> Informally, words such as “race-based” and “unjust” are used by some Pakeha in discussing the new structure. Such a gap was shown in the results of a Church-commissioned a survey<sup>9</sup> addressing the brief from General Synod to “find a collective view of this Church on proposals for new constitutional arrangements for the Nation.”<sup>10</sup> There had been hopes expressed, especially by some of Tikanga Maori, that the Anglican model could be adapted for the country as a whole. The survey report stated that Tikanga Maori especially “have experienced growth, and their identity has become more visible because they have been free to devise their own structures, strategies and visions.”<sup>11</sup> Similar affirmation was heard from Tikanga Pasifika. It was different for the third partner: “Within Tikanga Pakeha, the experience has been more complex. Some have embraced the constitutional changes wholeheartedly, others have had limited experience, and yet others have yet to engage in the principles of the partnership.”

Because all those who belong to the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia are bound by the liturgy and theology of *ANZPB/HKMOA*, by one rite of baptism, this may well be the spring from which might flow a deep understanding of truly being Church together in this place. It also provides for the self-understanding needed for mission. The 1989 book appears to make baptism central for both individual and congregation. Uniquely in the Anglican Communion, the water rite in *ANZPB/HKMOA* happens before the faith commitment is asked of candidate or parents and sponsors. The emphasis is very much on the baptizing community’s responsibility for incorporation and nurture into the baptized life that they have themselves received, with words such as promise, response, welcome, and nurture. Ironically while this may seem like the “soft” initiation of Christendom, when the new and old service are compared, it is the 1662 Book of Common Prayer rite that gives more emphasis to being baptized into the death of Christ and taking on the discipline of the new life.<sup>12</sup> How then is the Church now ensuring that the call and challenge of baptismal life is set before Anglicans, in their baptism discipline, in their church buildings and in the teaching they receive? It is often said “If you want to find out what Anglicans believe, then come and worship with them”. From current observed church life, baptism seems somewhat insignificant in the life of Anglicans of Tikanga Pakeha.

## **CURRENT PRACTICE – IS THIS A BAPTISING COMMUNITY?**

In statistics taken over the decade from 1997, baptismal figures for all dioceses show a pattern of decline, especially in Auckland and Waiapu, that is the largest and one of the smaller dioceses, where the drop was almost half. The other five dioceses declined by about a third. Along with the decline in numbers of people being baptized, there seems to be also a decline in the overt links being made between baptism and communion. In the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia all those who are baptized are

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<sup>8</sup> That lack of engagement is expressed in by writing such as that of Hugh Bowron in “Our Primary Allegiance is to the Mystical Body of Christ’s Church” in *Anglican Taonga*, Easter 2005, p.50, to be discussed below.

<sup>9</sup> The results were used for reflection by members of the General Synod at a hui held at Te Wananga o Raukawa Otaki in November 2001

<sup>10</sup> In his lecture “The Reconciliation of Kawanatanga and Tino Rangatiratanga”, Winiata, a member of Ngati Raukawa and one of the architects of *Te Pouhere*, stated “In the last six years Te Pihopatanga o Aotearoa has encouraged the Church to present the 3-house model to the Nation for its use. The Pakeha side of the Church has been hesitant to take this step, believing that the Nation ‘is not ready’ and that an initiative in this direction would lead to adverse effects on the Church and could be damaging to the Nation.”

<sup>11</sup> *Anglican Taonga*, Easter 2002.

<sup>12</sup> From the “The Ministration of Publick Baptism of Infants”, in *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and other rites and ceremonies of the Church According to the Use of the Church of England*, (London: Oxford University Press, n.d.1956?), p.173, the priest prays “...we beseech thee to grant that *he*, being dead unto sin and living unto righteousness, and being buried with Christ in his death, may crucify the old man, and utterly abolish the whole body of sin...”

regarded as fully initiated and can receive communion, which means that the invitation to the communion table is properly made to those who are baptized. However despite this expectation, many priests now openly welcome everyone who comes to receive communion, whatever their personal understanding of baptism or – more importantly – their relationship with a faith community who might nurture them. In many places there is little encouragement to be baptized before joining the communicants. The decline in numbers being baptized is continued in the drop-off in numbers being confirmed.

Another place to observe current baptismal theology and practice is amongst Local Shared Ministry/Mutual Ministry where baptismal principles provide for an ecclesiology that acknowledges and exercises authority in community. Such forms of collaborative ministry, a logical and proper expression of baptism, require living within the paradox that to be an individual we have to take on group identity and responsibility. This could be seen to be closely related to the concept of tikanga, as a recognisable cultural stream where the collective life is normative – and if allowed to flourish may have something to offer the self-understanding of Tikanga Pakeha.

It would seem from my research, baptism is not regarded highly in this Church at the present time. The statistics appear to show that the demands and significance of baptism do little to shape or reflect the current direction and life of the Church in this Diocese. Within Tikanga Pakeha, as a whole, LSM is currently the most significant factor responsible for bringing baptism to the fore, in some parts of the Church. However LSM does not exist in all dioceses,<sup>13</sup> nor does it necessarily play a role of strength and influence.

#### **ONGOING ISSUES:**

If the “body” is defined by the “bath”, does the liturgy of ANZPB need sharpening to focus more clearly on the transformed and transforming life? As the community of those who are baptised, that is a people initiated to share in proclamation of the Kingdom, the Church is called to offer in the words of Elisabeth A. Johnson “discourses of emancipatory transformation, pointing to new ways of living with each other and with the earth”<sup>14</sup>. A baptismal ecclesiology of a Church that is open for the transformation of its very self would pay serious attention to the key liturgical and theological concepts of conversion of life and rigour of practice, as well as making baptism central to its life. Then baptism in the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia might properly be both transforming and transformative in the way that was envisaged at Toronto in 1991.

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<sup>13</sup> It has been practiced for at least a decade in six out of the seven dioceses but by late 2009, several – notably Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin – were making changes influenced by new leadership, which could lead to policies that would reduce support for this way of being Church.

<sup>14</sup> Elisabeth A. Johnson *She Who Is: the Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), p. 5.