

Baptismal Ecclesiology changes Anglican Inter-Church Relations in Post-Christendom 21st Century: The Anglican Church of Australia Case Study, by John Littleton 12/6/2024.

Abstract

For at least three decades The Anglican Church of Australia (ACA) and the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) have been in dialogue on the possibility of being in full communion. The main sticking point in the dialogue continues to be the historic episcopate. The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral constitutes the Anglican understanding of the basis for reunion between Churches. Section IV in that Quadrilateral names the historic episcopate along with other topics as an essential aspect. The Anglican emphasis on the historic episcopate rules out any thought that the ACA might be in full communion with UCA. The UCA does not have bishops.

When a difference becomes uncomfortable a ‘conflict transformation’ proponent recommends that the nature of the discussion be changed so other options might emerge. The author proposes that baptism becomes the essential aspect amongst other criteria by which the ACA seeks full communion with the UCA. A baptismal ecclesiology, where baptism is seen as the foundation of the Church and the source of discipleship ministry, would replace the clerical ecclesiology of the historic episcopate as the essential aspect amongst other criteria for Inter-Church Relations, and introduce a new era for ecumenism in the post-Christendom Twenty-First Century.

Keywords: Inter-Church Relations; The Anglican Church of Australia; The Uniting Church in Australia; Baptismal Ecclesiology; Post-Christendom New Era.

Introduction

The Anglican Church of Australia (ACA) and the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) have been in dialogue on the possibility of full communion for at least three decades. The fruits of that dialogue-conversation are available in three significant documents, which outline the many common features shared by ACA and UCA.¹

The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, 1888, decided upon during the Christendom era in England, constitutes the Anglican understanding of the basis for reunion between Churches. Section IV in that Quadrilateral names the historic episcopate as an essential aspect, along with the Holy Scriptures, The Creeds and the two sacraments of Baptism and Holy

¹ *For the Sake of the Gospel: Mutual Recognition of Ordained Ministries in the Anglican and Uniting Churches in Australia*, 2001; *An Anglican-Uniting Church Covenant of Association: Anglican Church of Australia-Uniting Church in Australia Joint Working Group*, 2010; *Weaving a New Cloth: Anglican and Uniting Churches Working Together*, 2014. Accessed 5/4/2024 <https://www.anglican.org.au/uniting-church-conversation> More information about *Weaving a New Cloth* in Footnote 10.

Communion.² The Three Fundamental Declarations of the Anglican Church of Australia Constitution also include these aspects.³

The main sticking point in the conversation continues to be the historic episcopate. The Anglican emphasis on the historic episcopate rules out any thought that the ACA might be in full communion with UCA. The UCA does not have bishops. In the UCA, Councils (a Presbytery is like a Synod) exercise the episcopal functions – like a ‘collective bishop’; *episcopate* is corporate. Oversight (*episcopate*) is very important in UCA. Andrew Dutney writes, ‘In Christian history *episcopate* came to be focussed on an individual, the bishop (*episcopos* in Greek), and to carry a sense of supervision from a position of superiority. But the term is better understood as conveying a sense of focussed, directed, sustained attention coupled with responsibility for care; the kind of attention that a shepherd gives to the flock (1 Peter 5:1-4). It doesn’t imply status so much as focus. The oversight has both personal and corporate dimensions, but, from the perspective of the Uniting Church, in the government of the church *episcopate* is always corporate’.⁴

Essentially the dialogue between ACA and UCA has reached a dead end despite attempts for many years to overcome the differences on the historic episcopate.⁵

² **The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral 1888.**

1. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as "containing all things necessary to salvation," and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.
2. The Apostles' Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith.
3. The two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself – Baptism and the Supper of the Lord - ministered with unfailing use of Christ's words of Institution, and of the elements ordained by Him.
4. The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the Unity of His Church. Accessed 5/3/2024 <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/ecumenism> Document, *Anglican Communion, Unity, Faith and Order 2008-2022*, p.4.

³ **The Three Fundamental Declarations of the Anglican Church of Australia (ACA) in the Constitution from 1966**

1. The Anglican Church of Australia, being a part of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ, holds the Christian Faith as professed by the Church of Christ from primitive times and in particular as set forth in the creeds known as the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed.

2. This Church receives all the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as being the ultimate rule and standard of faith given by inspiration of God and containing all things necessary for salvation.

3. This Church will ever obey the commands of Christ, teach His doctrine, administer His sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, follow and uphold His discipline and preserve the three orders of bishops, priests and deacons in the sacred ministry. Accessed 5/3/2024 <https://www.anglican.org.au/governance/constitution>

⁴ Andrew Dutney, *Angels in this Wilderness: Reflections on the Journey of the Uniting Church in Australia* (Unley, South Australia: MediaCom Education Inc., 2020), pp.38-40. In stating that the UCA is ‘committed to a collective form of *episcopate* or oversight’ Sandy Yule wrote ‘Our Councils are accorded the formal authority that has been given to bishops in the polity of our partner churches’. Sandy Yule, ‘The Ministry of the Laity in the Uniting Church. *Uniting Church Studies* 19, 2 (December 2013), p. 30.

⁵ John Littleton, ‘Interpreting the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia in the light of a Christ-centred disposition’. An exploratory background paper on Australian Ecumenism: A contribution to conversations on Ecumenism and the Anglican-Uniting Church Dialogue in Australia, 3/11/2018. Accessed 5/4/2024. <https://www.tjhlittleton.com> For further consideration of these ecumenical issues see these three publications. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: Faith and Order Paper No.111* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), pp. 24-27; *One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition, A Study Text, Faith and Order Paper No. 210* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2011); *The Church Towards A Common Vision: Faith and Order Paper No. 214* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2013), pp. 26-30.

Conflict Transformation

When a difference becomes uncomfortable a proponent of ‘conflict transformation’ recommended that the nature of the discussion be changed so other options might emerge. Jan Love wrote about shifting the conversation to another topic as a way of transforming communities; handling and managing conflict ‘in a way that it gets you to new creative outcomes rather than having a destructive influence in your life’. Love wrote ‘Good managers, I think, are good at transforming conflicts. They may not call it that, but one of the techniques is always just to shift the nature of the discussion, if you are locked in battle over some concept or some idea or some relationship or some ability to get a particular issue tackled’.⁶

Current approach

For decades Anglicans have been locked in a conversation about finding ways and means to be in communion with UCA, which does not have the historic episcopate, and the answer to these explorations has been in the negative.

In 2018, Archbishop Justin Welby, commented on the limitations that church legal structures place on ecumenism. He highlighted the difficulties involved when a Church of England leader wants to work closely with another denomination on ministry and mission. He noted that ‘The paperwork is that thick and ends with the word “No”’.⁷ In Australia too Anglican leaders have said “No” to official communion with UCA.

Archbishop Aspinall, The Anglican Diocese of Brisbane, for example, after a discussion about closer formal ties with UCA, at a meeting in September 2019 of the ACA General Synod Ecumenical Relations Commission of which he was Chair, responded negatively. That group considered the author’s paper ‘exploring the Constitution of Anglican Church of Australia and how it might be interpreted in a way which encourages and invites the Anglican Church of Australia to authentically reconsider issues of difference with the Uniting Church of Australia and remove such issues which are a hindrance to unity and full communion with UCA’.⁸ His formal negative response was based on the Constitution of the ACA Section 74(1), the Lambeth Quadrilateral, and the ACA Fundamental Declarations which emphasise the essential importance of church order.⁹ When creative opportunities for the official

⁶ Jan Love, ‘How do we transform the communities in which we live?’ in *Faith & Leadership*, Monday, August 1, 2011. Accessed 5/3/2024. <https://www.faithandleadership.com>jan-love-how-do-we-transform-the-communities-which-we-live>

⁷ In his 2018 address at the World Council of Churches 70th Anniversary in Geneva, The Archbishop of Canterbury spoke about an “Ecumenical Spring: From Negotiated Frontiers to Open Borders” He said, “The effort of recognising that the Spirit of God is at work equally among others is hard to assimilate. Within churches our legal structures preclude the support of other churches across the frontier. If an English bishop in the Church of England sees that there is a church of another denomination doing wonderful work, it is immensely complicated to bless that work by supporting that church, licensing its pastor and enabling it to work with us and us with them. The paperwork is that thick and ends with the word “No.” We tie ourselves down through our inability to imagine who we really are. The beloved people of God”. Accessed 5/3/2024 Justin Welby, ‘Ecumenical Spring: From Negotiated Frontiers to Open Borders’. Address World Council of Churches 70th Anniversary, Geneva, 16/2/2018. <https://www.oikoumene.org/en.press-centre/news/visiting-wcc-archbishop-of-canterbury-speaks-on-ecumenism-of-action>.

⁸ General Synod of ACA Sessions 2022, Report of the Ecumenical Relations Commission (ERC), in Reports of General Synod Bodies, Book 4, 4-017, ERC Meeting 18/9/2019. Accessed 6/3/2024 <https://www.anglican.org.au> under The General Synod. The paper considered is referenced in Footnote 5.

⁹ Details derived from Archbishop Phillip Aspinall’s Official Email Letter to the author thanking him for his papers discussed at the ERC Meeting 18/9/2019 and reporting back about the general outcomes of the discussion of his papers at the ERC Meeting. Email from The Archbishop of Brisbane, The Most Reverend Dr Phillip Aspinall, Anglican Church of Australia, Brisbane, 23 October 2019. Information about ACA Constitution Section 74 (1) is available in Footnote 58.

recognition of ministry in shared mission projects between the two churches occur, as they might through *Weaving a New Cloth* co-operation, church leaders respond in the negative.¹⁰

Another Way Forward

The fact that ACA is not in full communion with the UCA has gone on for far too long and hinders the quest for Christian unity and shared mission in the name of Christ. Another way forward needs to be explored.

The paper proposes that baptism rather than the historic episcopate, as stated in the Lambeth Quadrilateral, be the basis for ecumenical pilgrimage of the ACA towards Christian Unity and formal shared ministry and mission. Baptism would be the fundamental criterion amongst other criteria by which the ACA seeks full communion with the UCA. A Baptism-centred Ecclesiology, where baptism is seen as ‘the foundation of the Church and the source of a common ministry by all baptised believers’,¹¹ would replace the clerical ecclesiology of the historic episcopate.

Pre-Christendom, Christendom, Post-Christendom

Various descriptions of the Christendom era in the history of our churches are available.

¹⁰ *Weaving a New Cloth: Anglican and Uniting Churches Working Together, 2014*. This document outlined a framework for local cooperation between Anglican and Uniting Churches throughout Australia, even when those two churches are not in formal full communion. The possibilities outlined in this document, approved by the two churches at a national level, are significant steps for Anglican and Uniting parishes and congregations to consider taking together in their local worship, education, and mission.

Commonalities The six Theological Affirmations approved in “Weaving a New Cloth” summarise the outcomes of years of dialogue and represent ACA and UCA understandings in relation to the two churches:

1. Each of our churches stands in the continuity of the apostolic faith, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.
2. Each of our churches is part of the one holy catholic and apostolic church. Acknowledging our failure to enact fully our calling, both our churches witness faithfully to the gospel and seek to be more fully engaged in God’s mission in the world.
3. In each of our churches the Holy Spirit gives to the whole people of God gifts for the upbuilding of the church and for its continuation in the mission of Jesus Christ.
4. The ordained ministry in both our churches is given by God as an instrument of grace, notwithstanding our different understandings of it. By this ministry, the people of God are called to faith, strengthened to witness to the gospel and empowered to serve in hope and love.
5. In each of our churches the word of God is faithfully preached, and the sacraments of baptism and holy communion are duly administered in accordance with each church’s tradition.
6. Personal, communal, and collegial oversight (episcopate) is exercised in both our churches, albeit in different forms, to serve the church’s unity and its faithfulness to the gospel.

This six-fold *Weaving a New Cloth* framework is more like a ‘whole body ecclesiology’, where many identity markers of the church are recognised, not just doctrine and belief, but also an emphasis on the importance of all disciples in polity, leadership, ministry and mission. John Littleton, *Learners-Disciples-Together: within and beyond Church Communities* (Unley, Adelaide, SA: MediaCom Education Inc.2023), p. 81; United Reformed Church, *Conversations on the way to unity, 1999-2001* (The report of the informal conversations between the Church of England, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church). (London: United Reformed Church, 2001), p. 10.

¹¹ Alexander J.D. Irving, ‘Baptismal Ecclesiology and the Ordination Rites of the Church of England in the 2005 Common Worship Ordinal’, *The Churchman*, Autumn 133.3 (2019), pp. 203-224.

In *Leaving Christendom for Good* James McEvoy argues that from the 1960's the Church in the West began to leave the Christendom era, which lasted for over a millennium. Having left that Christendom era the Church, he argued, must now practise, in a secular society where Church and State are separate, a dialogical view of the Church 'a vision of the church in dialogue with the world' based on listening to modern culture and discerning through theological reflection an authentic Gospel response.¹²

In *The Church, Authority, and Foucault*, Steven Ogden describes the Christendom like church culture as a practice of empire, a church 'under sovereign power, which is hierarchical, focusing on the instrumental value of persons and pursuing order over love'.¹³ This sovereign power over people reflects a monarchical church model. Those words *sovereign* and *monarchical*, reminiscent of the Christendom era of Church history, emphasise that this type of church culture is still a reality and involves power over others, obedience, control and compliance. This type of church culture has to be unlearned.¹⁴

Ogden then outlines a new church culture, described as an "open space of freedom," a place of possible transformation. These more satisfying words "open space of freedom" describe a church culture, which values power to, with and amongst people. It values shared authority and leadership in a Christian space, a space established by Jesus and his friends, and the early church in its understanding of *ekklesia*, a gathering or assembly of equals in discipleship.¹⁵

Bruce Kaye in essays published in *Frozen Institutions: Questions for the Church after Christendom*, indicates that Christendom 'is the underlying context of these essays'.¹⁶ He describes how "English Christianity existed for fifteen hundred years as a Christendom which united civil and ecclesiastical together into one unity of government", and explains that 'While most of the overt marks of Christendom have gone now, the effect of over a thousand years of Christendom has left traces of the tacit assumptions that underlay that socio-political condition. Coming to terms with the tacit assumptions of Christendom is not easy and is still a continuing challenge to Anglicans'.¹⁷

For Kaye the centrality of Christ is always to be paramount in the church's theological conversation and shape of its structures.¹⁸ As in the biblical texts from the early church New Testament canon, early Christianity, as revealed by modern biblical scholarship, 'displays significant diversity'.¹⁹ But the 'Christ-event' is the central idea. The centrality of Christ, Kaye wrote, 'the acknowledged priority of Jesus whom Christians call Lord' is basic in any 'serious conceptual refiguring' of the character and shape of our Anglican tradition into the post twentieth-century era'.²⁰

¹² James Gerard McEvoy, *Leaving Christendom for Good: Church-World Dialogue in a Secular Age* (Maryland, USA: Lexington Books, 2014), pp. xi-xii, 157, 173-175.

¹³ Steven G. Ogden, *The Church, Authority, and Foucault: Imagining the Church as an Open Space of Freedom* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 4.

¹⁴ Ogden, *The Church, Authority, and Foucault*, p. 145.

¹⁵ Ogden, *The Church, Authority, and Foucault*, pp. 115-121.

¹⁶ Bruce N. Kaye, *Frozen Institutions: Questions for the Church after Christendom* (Eugene, Oregon, USA: Pickwick Publications, 2022), p. xiii.

¹⁷ Kaye, *Frozen Institutions*, p. xiii.

¹⁸ Kaye, *Frozen Institutions*, pp. xix-xx.

¹⁹ Kaye, *Frozen Institutions*, pp. 66-70.

²⁰ Kaye, *Frozen Institutions*, p. 70. In addition, on pages xvii-xviii, Kaye wrote that 'Anglicanism has been shaped by a very long period of life as the English Christendom' (xvii). The 'imperial looking' elements sometimes have 'grown their own power politics'. He noted that the

Each Australian author mentioned above, McEvoy, Ogden and Kaye identified Christendom as an era in the life of the Christian Church. Each suggested that the character and shape of the Church may need to be reviewed and reconfigured in the twenty-first century post-Christendom era. Each looked to the early first-century pre-Christendom Church Communities, as reported in the New Testament scriptural canon, for guidance into the future.

Pre-Christendom unity-in-diversity pattern in the New Testament Canon as a guide for ecumenism

An analysis of the New Testament reveals much diversity in the expressions of Christianity across early Christian communities. The pre-Christendom pattern of unity-in-diversity relates to and impacts upon the ecumenical decision-making of post-Christendom Christian communities and denominations.

James Dunn's enquiry into the character of earliest Christianity revealed that The New Testament Canon recognises the existence of diversity rather than one standard uniform pattern of faith and ministry. Dunn wrote that the canon 'canonises very different expressions of Christianity'...It affirms 'the diversity of Christianity'.²¹ And, 'the unifying strand that unites the divergent patterns is Jesus, the man of Nazareth now exalted, still providing the essential focus of authority and still serving as the pattern of ministry'. The canon canonises 'Jesus and faith in him' as the 'one focus of unity'.²² Dunn concluded his book with these words 'Or, more concisely, only when we recognize the unity in diversity of the NT and the diversity in unity of the NT and the ways they interact, only then can the NT continue to function as canon'.²³

Respect for the canonical diversity of Christianity is revealed in Dunn's work. However, as Dunn stated, there are 'limits to acceptable diversity'. 'Diversity which abandons the unity of the faith in Jesus the man now exalted is unacceptable; diversity which abandons the unity of love for fellow believers is unacceptable'.²⁴

In his work Dunn addressed the consequences of his conclusions for the twentieth century ecumenical movement in recognising denominational diversity.²⁵ The contemporary multiplicity of expressions of faith needs to be respected as they were in earliest Christianity; even when there are disagreements as there were in earliest pre-Christendom Christianity.²⁶ Different faith and order Christian denominational traditions, conservative and liberal 'must both learn to *accept* the other as equally 'in Christ', must learn to *respect* the other's faith and

importance of power in the Christian community was reported in the New Testament as an issue in the group of Jesus' disciples, Mark 10: 41-45. Jesus responded by saying that their power 'instinct was contrary to the nature of his kingdom and the kind of community he envisaged' (xviii). Christian community practice of 'humility and service' contrasts 'with power that lords it over'. Then Kaye wrote 'Clearly Christendom is a liaison that flirts with what Jesus calls the way of the gentiles'. Contemporary officers of the church institution 'can increase their power and distort the exercise of their responsibilities', as in clericalism within the Anglican Church for example, mentioned in the recent Australian Royal Commission on Institutional Responses to Child Abuse (xviii).

²¹ James D. J. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1977, Second Edition 1990), pp. 372-377.

²² Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, pp. 122-123.

²³ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, p. 388.

²⁴ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, p. 378.

²⁵ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, p. 122.

²⁶ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, p. 376.

life as valid expressions of Christianity, must learn to *welcome* the other's attitude and style as maintaining the living diversity of faith'.²⁷

Review the current approach.

The dominance of the historic episcopate as the crunch factor in deciding whether ACA can be in communion with the UCA, may indicate that some features of Christendom remain to influence ecumenical decisions of the Anglican Church.

The Lambeth Conference of Bishops during the Christendom era in England 1888 highlighted the episcopate as an essential aspect for reunion.²⁸ As previously mentioned, the historic episcopate aspect has turned out to be the key deciding factor in considering reunion with the UCA. The Lambeth Quadrilateral was endorsed in the early part of the twentieth century 1920, included in the ACA Constitution, which was written around 1962, endorsed again at the 1978 Lambeth Conference,²⁹ and more recently in the 2022 Lambeth Conference Calls on 'Anglican Identity' and 'Christian Unity'.³⁰

Considering the role that the historic episcopate has in Inter-Church Relations today, that whole approach needs to be put under review in the very different post-Christendom context.

In the Anglican Communion Bishop-in-Synod is the form of governance. Through their synodical processes the People of God community of faith in the Anglican Church continues to accept the teaching that the historic episcopate is the main factor, amongst other factors in the Lambeth Quadrilateral, which is to be used as the basis for reunion between other Churches. Now is the time for the ACA National General Synod and the twenty-three Diocesan Synods, comprised of bishops, clergy, and laity, through collaborative decision making as the People of God learning community of faith, to review this current approach for Inter-Church Relations and consider an alternative way forward.

Baptismal Ecclesiology

The New Testament is regarded as the standard norm in the Anglican Church. The normative value of scripture inspires disciples in 2024 to learn from the first century Christian communities through the biblical and historical scholarship on the early church, which has come to the fore through the last half of the 20th Century and into the post-Christendom 21st Century. An example of such scholarship is Dunn's discussion, previously mentioned, on acceptable canonical diversity in the earliest Christian communities. Baptismal ecclesiology is another example of contemporary scholarship on the early pre-Christendom church

²⁷ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, pp. 376-378. Australian Anglican academic theologian Scott Cowdell quoted Dunn's conclusion that 'acceptable canonical diversity emerges in the New Testament period' and affirmed Dunn's ecumenical understanding of holding together opposed positions and seeking God's truth 'in patient dialogue of ecclesial solidarity'. Scott Cowdell, 'Theology in the School of Humility' in *Church Matters: Essays and Addresses on Ecclesial Belonging* (Bayswater, Victoria, Australia: Coventry Press, 2022), p. 231.

²⁸ See Footnote 2.

²⁹ Lambeth Conference 1948: The Encyclical Letter from the Bishops; together with Resolutions and Reports (London: SPCK, 1948), p. 50; <https://www.anglican.org.au/governance/constitution> accessed 13/3/24; The Report of the Lambeth Conference 1978 (London: CIO Publishing, 1978), pp. 99-100.

³⁰ Lambeth Conference Calls 'Anglican Identity' and 'Christian Unity'. <https://www.lambethconferenceresources.org> >series>the-lambeth-calls Lambeth Calls, May 2023, Phase 3 Lambeth Conference Journey. Accessed 13/3/24.

communities and is well understood today within the Anglican and other Christian traditions.
³¹ The baptismal disposition of turning to Christ is the Christian commitment. ³²

That baptism held a primary place in the first century church communities is evident in the pre-Christendom New Testament. Equality of discipleship existed in *ekklesia* and in Galatians 3. 27-28. The Galatians passage, written c. 55 CE reads: ‘As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave and free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus’. ³³

The Letter I Peter written c. 90CE is about Christian identity as God’s People in Christ. It is addressed to ‘all of you’ (1 Pet. 5.5) and ‘all of you who are in Christ’ (1 Pet. 5.14). The author of the letter draws on Old Testament metaphors (Exod. 19.6, Isa. 43.20–21) to describe the church. ‘Christians are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people’ and their vocation is to proclaim, ‘the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light’ (1Pet. 2.9). Biblical commentators suggest that this verse may have derived from a baptismal context. Peter’s audience, as disciples, would have a ‘sense of self-worth’ in their new status through their baptismal commitment. ³⁴

These verses from Galatians and I Peter add strength to the view that baptism is when disciples are appointed to their vocation. Baptism is a key benchmark of discipleship for the whole church. Contemporary understandings of the priority of baptism abound.

In the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, South Australia, Archbishop Geoff Smith spoke about helping the People of God grow in discipleship ministry during the annual Synod October 2021. He said ‘I think in our contemporary church we may have forgotten that all the baptised are called to be disciples, ministers, sent into the world by Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. All who accept their baptism, who are followers of Jesus, are called to be disciples, ministers, fellow workers with Christ’. ³⁵

Australian Dorothy Lee wrote, ‘Baptism is the primary symbol that draws women and men into relationship with Christ that transcends all human barriers, whether of race, class, or gender, and unites them in a communion of persons without discrimination. Through baptism all Christians have the capacity to communicate Christ to others and to share his life in multiple forms of ministry’. ³⁶

³¹ See significant quotations on baptism as the paper progresses.

³² *A Prayer Book for Australia*, Shorter Edition, Anglican Church of Australia (Alexandria, NSW, Australia: Broughton Books, 1995), pp. 56, 75.

³³ Littleton, *Learners-Disciples-Together*, p. 77; Ogden, *The Church, Authority and Foucault*, pp. 115-121.

³⁴ Littleton, *Learners-Disciples-Together*, p. 76; Jennifer Strawbridge, Ed. *The First Letter of Peter: A Global Commentary* (London: SCM Press, Kindle Edition, 2020), Loc 697-756.

³⁵ The President of Synod October 2021 Pastoral Address for the 44th Triennial Synod, Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, pp.10- 14. Available at: <https://www.adelaideanglicans.com>

³⁶ Dorothy A. Lee, *The Ministry of Women in the New Testament: Reclaiming the Biblical Vision for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), pp.11-12, 183.

Australian Scott Cowdell emphasised that ‘every baptised Christian has a vocational calling within the Church’s wider mission of knowing, worshipping and serving the God of Jesus Christ’.³⁷

Sarah Coakley and Matthew Bullimore asked the question ‘More fundamentally, how do the vows made in the sacrament of baptism (the anchor for any further vows thereafter in the Christian life) relate to, and unfold into, the vows and commitments of the sacrament of confirmation (if it is undergone at all, these days), and then - rather differently – into the specific and we might say vocationally *intensified*, vows of marriage, ordination, or the Religious life?’.³⁸

Paul Avis wrote ‘A moment’s reflection teaches us that there can be no hierarchy of callings in the body of Christ. All the baptised are level in status before God, having a full and equal standing in Christ; all are called to discipleship and service’.³⁹

³⁷ Scott Cowdell, ‘Baptismal Ecclesiology and its Enemies’ in *Church Matters*, p. 95.

³⁸ Sarah Coakley and Matthew Bullimore Eds., *The Vowed Life: The Promise and Demand of Baptism*, (London: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2023), pp. x-xi.

³⁹ Paul Avis ‘The Roles of the Ecclesial Orders in the Governance of the Church.’ *Ecclesiology* 18 (2022), pp. 3-9. Other quotations on the significance of baptism are:

Kingdom Calling: The Vocation, Ministry and Discipleship of the Whole People of God (Church of England Faith and order Commission, London, Church House Publishing, 2020), p. 33. ‘The centrality of baptism for the theology of calling and vocation is affirmed in this Report. The participation of all the baptised in the ministry of Christ, their different roles and responsibilities in the church as ministries are affirmed. ‘For everybody, bishops, priests, and laity together, the great sacrament of our common calling is our baptism, which signifies our glorious new life in Christ’.

Alexander J.D. Irving, ‘Baptismal Ecclesiology and the Ordination Rites of the Church of England in the 2005 Common Worship Ordinal’. *The Churchman*, Autumn 133. 3 (2019), pp. 203-224. ‘Baptismal Ecclesiology – the perspective that baptism is the foundation of the Church and the source of a common ministry by all baptised believers...’

John Littleton, ‘The People of God, Discipleship and Ministry in the Anglican Church Today and Tomorrow’. *Journal of Anglican Studies*, 21, 1, May 2023, p. 3. doi:10.1017/S1740355321000334 First View online September 2021. ‘The church is to be understood as a community of equals through baptism with a diversity of ministries of service, recognising co-responsibility and servant leadership by all’.

Paul Collins, *Recovering The ‘True Church’: Challenges for Australian Catholicism Beyond The Plenary Council* (Bayswater, Vic 3153: Coventry Press, 2022), p.19. ‘Where the baptised faithful are, there is the church. What I am arguing is that the New Testament, especially in the Pauline writings, which underpinned the theology of Vatican II, seeks to emphasise the priority of baptism and the gifts of the Spirit that come with it, creating ‘a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God , that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9-12)’.

John Littleton, ‘The limitations of the word ‘lay’ (laywomen, layman) when discussing discipleship and ministry amongst Anglicans in the 21st Century: Implications for Christian Learning’. Pp. 17-18, 2022. Accessible <https://www.tjhlittleton.com> ‘A viewpoint to discuss through dialogue within Anglican church life is that everyday disciples and parish leader disciples are ordained and qualified, and so can no longer be described as ‘lay’. They are ordained through baptism, commissioned from the eucharist and qualified through their Christian faith, abilities, and skills. Baptism is considered as incorporation and ordination of all the People of God, who are commissioned to a ministry of service in church and society, set apart as the Church is set apart. The bishop ordains those disciples who are called to a subsequent special ordination.’

John Littleton, ‘The Emancipation of Christian Learning in Anglican Parishes, from the ‘Lay’ Era to Another Discipleship Era without the ‘Lay’ Tag’. *Journal of Anglican Studies*, 2023, pp.1, 2, 22. doi:10.1017/S1740355323000128 ‘The paper introduces the reform and invites Anglican Church members to release Christian education from discipleship inequity, moving towards a disposition or set of attitudes where most church members, currently called the laity, are seen to have a positive vocation and ministry in their own right within the People of God faith community. These disciples are incorporated and ordained through baptism-confirmation, commissioned through Holy Communion, and qualified by their Christian faith and abilities, uniquely participating in the *missio dei*’.

Implications for Ecumenism

The importance of baptism in the pre-Christendom early church and in the post-Christendom Anglican and other Churches has implications for ecumenism today. Contemporary understandings of baptism emphasise the centrality of baptism as the common calling to ministry in Christ for every person, laity, deacons, priests, and bishops. The focus is on baptism as the source of the discipleship ministry of all disciples. Baptism then can become the deciding factor for Inter-Church Relations for ACA. The ground has shifted towards seeing the Church through a baptism lens, where baptism is the deciding factor in Inter-Church Relations with the UCA, rather than seeing the Church through an historic episcopate lens, where the historic episcopate is the deciding factor in Inter-Church Relations with the UCA.

Significant quotations already mentioned support the contention that our common Christian discipleship identity derives from our baptism. As with all disciples, including bishops, ‘the great sacrament of our common calling is our baptism’.⁴⁰ Baptism becomes the key identity marker for Inter-Church Relations for the ACA in the post-Christendom era. Bishops are very important in the life of the Anglican Church, but their calling and episcopal ministry also derive from their baptismal commitment in turning to Christ, through loving God and their neighbour as themselves (Mk.12. 28-34; Mt. 22. 34-40; Lk. 10. 25-37) and living the Beatitudes (Mt. 5, 1-12).

A New Era

Baptismal Ecclesiology introduces a new era for ecumenism in the post-Christendom Twenty-First Century Inter-Church Relations between ACA and UCA.

A guide for this new ecumenical relationship already exists. In 2004 the ACA and the UCA agreed ‘to recognise the Sacrament of Baptism administered in each other’s church and to promote the use of the common Certificate of Baptism’.⁴¹ During 2014-2015 the ACA and the UCA approved the *Weaving a New Cloth* document which stated that ‘In each of our

The Nicene Creed, ‘We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins’. *A Prayer Book for Australia*, p. 123.

Richard Baxter, *The Cure of Church Divisions*, 1670, p. 117. ‘As your *Baptism* maketh you Members of the Universal Church in order of nature before you are members of a particular Church; so your *relation* to the Universal Church is more *noble*, more *necessary*, and more *durable*, than your relation to any particular Church’. This quotation on the significance of baptism made by Richard Baxter, English non-conformist church leader and theologian (1615-1691), was quoted by Professor H.G.G. Herklots, ‘The Church and ‘The Churches’ in *The Triumph of God: A Series of Essays*, Edited by Max Warren (London: Longmans, Green And Co., 1948), pp. 179-180. Herklots wrote that some prominent Church leaders of the time, like William Temple, ‘took their view of the Universal Church into the positions of prominence to which they were called. The result was that in important positions in many of the denominations were men who felt a unity transcending denominational barriers’. The author of this paper accepts their view of the Universal Church.

⁴⁰ See Footnote 39: *Kingdom Calling*.

⁴¹ *Australian Churches Covenanting Together: The NCCA Multi-Dimensional Covenant 2004*. Part B, d. Covenant signed by 15 member Churches at its 5th National Forum, Minutes Part 2. <https://www.ncca.org.au> and Search online ‘Australian Churches Covenanting Together’. Accessed 18/3/2024.

The Common Certificate of Baptism. ‘The following churches have agreed that a certificate used by them in this form is evidence of Christian Baptism: The Anglican Church of Australia, The Catholic Church in Australia, The Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia and New Zealand, The Armenian Apostolic Church, The Congregational Federation of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia, The Lutheran Church of Australia, The Presbyterian Church of Australia, The Romanian Orthodox Church, The Uniting Church in Australia’.

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churches the word of God is faithfully preached, and the sacraments of baptism and holy communion are duly administered in accordance with each church's tradition'.⁴²

ACA full communion with UCA would enable each Christian tradition to continue with their approach to ministry and mission knowing that the acceptable canonical diversity of the New Testament period is being practised in the twenty-first century. Christian Unity with shared ministry and mission would be shown to be possible today. ACA would still have episcopal ordering and UCA would still express *episcopate* through the councils of the Church.

Changing the topic strategy, as suggested by a proponent of conflict transformation earlier in the paper, has proven to be beneficial in moving the ecumenical conversation to a more creative and positive conclusion. Through understanding baptismal ecclesiology and an appreciation of the New Testament Canon's various expressions of Christianity, ACA and UCA can now proceed from the proactive co-operating and collaboration stages of working together through the *Weaving a New Cloth* 'whole body' ecclesial framework to being in communion with one another as Christian Churches; in co-existence; with a unity-in diversity biblical outlook; formally and officially equal with one another in Christ.

Discussion

The historic episcopate provided the basis for full communion in the late 19th century and the 20th century for ACA, along with the other criteria already listed. The sacrament of baptism provides the basis for full communion with the UCA in the 21st Century in association with the other criteria named in the Lambeth Quadrilateral, and the Three Fundamental Declarations of ACA, namely the Holy Scriptures, The Creeds, the Sacrament of Holy Communion and the Historic Episcopate.

The ACA, by recognising full communion with UCA, would partake in 'the great adventure of obedience' (to quote Lesslie Newbigin in *A South India Diary* 1951)⁴³ to the prayer of Jesus for Christian unity, 'May all be one; as you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me' (John 17. 21).

Vicky Balabanski explored the significance of this biblical text.⁴⁴ In her published essay on the biblical passage John 17:20-21, Balabanski acknowledged the impact that this great Johannine prayer of Jesus had on the decisions of 20th century Christian councils 'as it gave inspiration to the ecumenical movement and church unions in many parts of the world.' Balabanski referred to the formation of the Church of South India (1947) and mentioned the Uniting Church in Australia (1978) as examples of church unions.

During the essay Balabanski reaffirmed that these verses reflect the actual concerns and actions of Jesus, corroborated historical evidence from the synoptic tradition for the portrayal

⁴² See Footnote 10.

⁴³ J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, *A South India Diary* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1951), p. 22.

⁴⁴ Vicky Balabanski, 2013. 'The Prayer of Jesus as an inspiration and call to ecumenical unity: looking for "Jesuanic resonance" in John 17:20-21', in *Jesus – Gestalt und Gestaltungen. Rezeption des Galiläers in Wissenschaft, Kirche und Gesellschaft, Festschrift für Gerd Theissen*, eds. P. von Gemünden, M. Küchler, D. Horrell, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht): pp. 635-650.

of oneness in the relationship between Jesus and God, and legitimized the theme of unity proclaimed in this Gospel according to John.⁴⁵

Anglicans today are also invited to live with diversity and difference, with baptism in common, like their first century biblical ancestors, and learn to be church together across different traditions and groupings.

As reported in the Acts of the Apostles 15. 1-35, written around 85 CE, apostles, elders and the whole assembly of disciples, meeting in Jerusalem around 48 CE, made a key decision together. After listening, much debate and leadership from Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and James the leader of the Jerusalem apostolic community, the meeting decided that Gentile Christians could formally be Christian disciples. This decision ‘seemed good to the Holy Spirit and us’ (Acts 15. 28) and meant that ‘Jewish and Gentile Jesus followers could live together in harmony and share table communion’.⁴⁶ This inclusion of non-Jews or Gentiles ‘into the Jesus movement’.⁴⁷ assured ‘the ecclesial reception and *koinonia* in friendship between two culturally different groups’.⁴⁸

In their work on Colossians and Acts, Australians Balabanski and Trainor ‘identified a process of listening in which ‘word’ is remembered, discerned, valued and acted upon in a way that deepens communal *koinonia*. Friendship results. This strategy from the earliest years of the Jesus movement reveals how to be church’.⁴⁹

Balabanski and Trainor suggested from the evidence in the Colossians and Acts biblical texts, that the origin of this strategy and the resulting *shalom (koinonia)* ‘stems from the Galilean Jesus’. They wrote that ‘His practice of *shalom* was absorbed by his followers and the movement that came from him which expanded in subsequent generations into the Greco-Roman world’.⁵⁰

This ‘*koinonia* of Jesus of Nazareth’, the process ‘of being church together, learning afresh how listening, remembering, discerning and valuing the word leads to deeper communal and transformational *koinonia*’ is possible today too.⁵¹

The 2022 Lambeth Conference *Call* of the Bishops on ‘Discipleship’ asked, ‘all Anglicans in every aspect of their lives to learn and learn again the way of Jesus Christ’. The 2022 Lambeth Conference *Call* on ‘Christian Unity’ is a call to action, and ‘to seek opportunities for dialogue to overcome those theological and ecclesiological differences that remain as barriers to the full, visible communion of Christ’s Church...’.⁵²

⁴⁵ Balabanski, ‘The Prayer of Jesus...’, p. 649) stated ‘We have examined John 17:20-21 carefully and critically for resonance with the historical Jesus’ actual concerns and actions ... and conclude that the 20th century impulse to take them as an inspiration to unity has not been misguided.’ She wrote that ‘where the Church consciously acts on these words as the Body of Christ, prompted by the Spirit, it *makes* these words the words of Christ’.

⁴⁶ Michael Trainor, *Acts An Earth Bible Commentary About Earth’s Children: An Ecological Listening to The Acts of The Apostles* (London, New York, Dublin: T&T Clark, 2021, Paperback), p.104.

⁴⁷ Vicky Balabanski and Michael Trainor, ‘Learning to Be Church: Virtues and Practices Leading towards *Koinonia* in Colossians and Acts’ in *Receptive Ecumenism as Transformational Ecclesial Learning: Walking the Way to a Church Re-formed*, Edited by Paul D. Murray, Gregory A. Ryan, Paul Lakeland (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 400.

⁴⁸ Balabanski and Trainor, ‘Learning to Be Church’, p. 402.

⁴⁹ Balabanski and Trainor, ‘Learning to Be Church’, p. 403.

⁵⁰ Balabanski and Trainor, ‘Learning to Be Church’, p. 403.

⁵¹ Balabanski and Trainor, ‘Learning to Be Church’, p. 403.

⁵² Lambeth Conference Calls ‘Discipleship’ and ‘Christian Unity’. <https://www.lambethconferenceresources.org> >series>the-lambeth-calls Lambeth Calls, May 2023, Phase 3 Lambeth Conference Journey. Accessed 13/324.

These Lambeth Conference *Calls*, Baptismal Ecclesiology, and the evidence of our biblical ancestors in the first century early church communities as reported in the New Testament Canon, and mentioned in this paper (for example, The Letter to Galatians, The Letter to Colossians, The Acts of the Apostles, and The Gospel according to John, The First Letter of Peter), encourage Australian Anglicans to re-examine Inter-Church Relations. Learning anew or learning and learning again the way of Jesus Christ applies to ecumenism and learning to be Church together. That new learning involves all disciples, with baptism as the common source of their ministry: everyday disciples, parish and diocesan leader disciples, deacon disciples, priest disciples and bishop disciples.⁵³ Full communion between UCA and ACA would reflect the intent of the ‘Galilean Jesus’.⁵⁴

Conclusion

To make baptism the essential aspect of Inter-Church Relations with the UCA is a huge ask, but it is a sign of strength in completing the ‘great adventure of obedience’ to Christ’s prayer for unity, John 17.21.

Those opposed to the change may see it as a sign of weakness in abandoning a long-standing teaching tradition about Anglican identity as understood in the worldwide Anglican Communion. Some may be concerned that the paper does not address the consequences of the baptismal perspective for the ACA membership of the Anglican Communion and the breaking of the thus far Anglican consensus on the criteria for ecumenical relations. Others may be concerned that the paper does not consider the difficulties this perspective may create for ecumenical relations with other episcopal Churches, like the Roman Catholic Church and Orthodox Churches. Some others may also fear that once the baptismal calling is prioritised in relation to the UCA, other Church traditions, which do not have bishops, might become included in ACA conversations. Such an eventuality may or may not happen.

The purpose of this paper is to propose an alternative perspective for a conversation on Christian unity; an alternative to the current compromised approach towards the UCA; compromised by side stepping the urgency of Jesus’ prayer for unity, the significance of the canonical New Testament pattern of variety of Christianity in the early church, and the essentialness of the baptismal commitment as the foundation of the Church and the source of ordered ministry.

Papers on other options may follow, arguing possibly for the sufficiency of the view expressed in current Inter-Church dialogues that degrees of practical unity, working closely together, can be achieved through various agreements and covenants⁵⁵ keeping the requirement of episcopal ministry for full communion, thus accepting the negative response to full communion with the UCA, as mentioned earlier in this paper.

Let us consider one thing at a time in the Church situation today and focus on the potential of full communion with the UCA for the *missio dei* through Jesus Christ and his prayer for unity.⁵⁶

⁵³ Littleton, *Learners-Disciples-Together*, pp.8, 61, 74.

⁵⁴ See Footnote 50.

⁵⁵ For example, see Footnote 10 *Weaving a New Cloth*, or the Anglican-Methodist Covenant in Great Britain in Andrew Louth ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (4 ed)* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2022).

⁵⁶ The Rev Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay in his sermon entitled ‘Christian Unity Matters’, 30 April 2024, at the United Methodist General Conference, Ecumenical Service, Charlotte, North Carolina, USA said ‘It is clear from this statement that Christian unity is needed to

ACA is no longer in the Christendom era context controlled by the features of Christendom.⁵⁷ Some Christendom assumptions, processes and practices do nevertheless remain active in church life and need to be reconsidered; and that includes the priority given to the historic episcopate in ecumenical decision making, a priority evident in the practice of ecumenism by the Anglican Church in relation to the UCA which does not have bishops.

The Church, as the People of God, faith community is now in a post-Christendom era, free and open to be 'in Christ' (Col 2-3) through prioritising baptism in a 21st Century context, as it was in the pre-Christendom first century New Testament unity-in-diversity period of church history. Baptismal Ecclesiology provides a fruitful way forward in ecumenical conversations, enables ACA in 2024 onwards to 'turn to Christ' anew in ecumenical dialogues and progress towards full communion with UCA.⁵⁸ The Baptismal Commitment guides the Church forward 'in peace to love and serve the Lord: in the name of Christ'.⁵⁹

witness to and transform the world as we address conflicts, brokenness and pain. Christian disunity is nothing but a feeble, weak and contradictory message to a fragmented world'. Accessed 7/6/2024 from <https://www.oikoumene.org> in News search WCC general secretary to Methodist General Conference-Christian Unity Matters. The Synoptic Gospel authors also reported what Jesus said metaphorically about a divided household, that 'if a household is divided against itself, that house cannot stand'. Mk 3. 25; Mt 12. 25; Lk 11. 17. The common statement 'United we stand, and divided we fall' often used in the public domain may also apply to the lack of unity between different Christian traditions.

⁵⁷ Kaye, *Frozen Institutions*, p. xvi.

⁵⁸ A frequent stumbling block to ACA being in communion with the UCA has been Section 74(1) of the *Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia* on membership. In the ACA Constitution membership is defined: "Member of this Church" means a baptised person who attends the public worship of this Church and who declares that he is a member of this Church and of no Church which is not in communion with this Church'. Accessed 5/3/2024 <https://www.anglican.org.au/governance/constitution> One focus is on 'a baptised person'. The ACA already recognises the baptism of UCA. Once ACA agrees and accepts that baptism is the criterion among the other criteria which permits ACA to be in communion with UCA, the importance of this excluding membership clause would be downplayed and no longer apply to Inter-Church Dialogue with the UCA.

⁵⁹ *A Prayer Book for Australia*, p. 144.