

Title of Dissertation

BAPTISM AND REBAPTISM IN THE
METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA:
A CRITICAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE VIABILITY
OF POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES

By

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DECLARATION

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Theology in the Graduate Programme of Systematic Theology,
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I declare that this dissertation/thesis is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Theology in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.

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INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) practices baptism within in the Reformed tradition according to a covenant understanding, and strives to be one and undivided in an inclusive ethos. The practice of rebaptism or repeat baptism is a threat to its unity. The formulation and availability of viable alternative rites could be a compromise gesture, which may enable unity to be facilitated and fostered in the "one baptism" (Eph.4:5) in the church. These rites may go towards circumventing requests for rebaptism.

PRINCIPAL THEORIES UPON WHICH THE RESEARCH PROJECT WILL BE CONSTRUCTED

O.A. Hallesby makes the following claim in respect of water baptism "Christ has instituted neither adult baptism nor infant baptism – he has instituted baptism....Jesus has not said (or commanded) when and where the act should be ministered and who should be baptised – (and even how it should be administered) – that he left to the Church" (Hallesby O, 1964:19)

Hallesby's statement can be understood as a reference to the "adiaphorous" nature of Christian baptism and points to the need to study baptism along this line in an attempt to address the practice of rebaptism which the Methodist Church of Southern Africa regards as problematic. According to the Formula of Concord drawn up in 1577 adiaphora are "Church rites which are neither commanded nor forbidden in the word of God". The approach intended for this study to take could be put under this rubric. Baptism *per se* is a rite practised by all Christian churches. However it is practised in different ways in different christian traditions. What this study will attempt to do is to examine the different theologies used to justify these practices and suggest a dialogical way forward. The Lutheran Augsburg Confession states that for "the true unity of the church, it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, and that it is not necessary that human traditions, that is rites and ceremonies, instituted my men, should everywhere be alike". (Pages 2 and 3, article from Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adiaphora>). If this is the case, and in the light of what Hallesby claims about baptism, it seems obvious that any one form of baptism claimed to be the only true form of baptism is questionable. A study of baptism according to the adiaphoric line would call for liberty in debate and of charitable compromise in regard to the formulation of acceptable alternative rites. The MCSA could justifiably use this line as a counter for the practice of rebaptism as the theoretical approach to be used in this study.

As a starting point it is necessary to provide a biblical basis for the adiaphoric nature of baptism. A superficial examination of all the scripture references on baptism in the bible, of which there are 75, reveals that most of them are didactic, descriptive and exhortative in nature. All are therefore open to debate and this is evident from the fact that they can be and have been variously interpreted. This

outcome is another sign of baptism's adiaphorous quality. Matthew 28:19-20 is the only statement of baptism by Jesus in the New Testament which is prescriptive and is used by all Christian denominations as the basis for their view of Christian baptism and how it should be practiced. It gives the impression of being non-adiaphorous because it is presented in a prescriptive way, and yet it is not clear as to what Jesus was specifically commanding in the commission of the text.

It appears that the MCSA uses the adiaphorous theoretical line when it comes to baptism. It upholds covenant and deems it to be inclusive. This inclusive spirit comes through the oft-repeated colloquial saying in Methodism that the MCSA is a "roof, which covers many opinions" and in its invitation for "ministers to explore the formation of alternative rites" (MCSA Minutes 1989:67)

This study will attempt to arrive at a position of "unity in diversity" in respect of the practice of water baptism. This attempt is based on the "puritan" theoretical ideal as a basis which is expressed in the often quoted saying, "in necessary things, unity, in doubtful things, liberty, in all things, charity".

The value of this approach lies in the possibility of finding an outcome, which, as divisive as the issue of baptism may be, is possible to highlight the inclusive nature of the "one baptism" that Ephesians 5 talks about and could help to facilitate movement in that direction.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research will rely heavily on a wide range of literature both old and new for general information and more specifically will seek for material on critical issues surrounding baptism and rebaptism. The MCSA has invited its ministers to explore alternative baptismal rites, (MCSA Minutes of conference, 1989:67) and while this call is dated, nevertheless gives the researcher an opportunity to investigate the opinions and positions of other members of the Methodist clergy. A questionnaire letter was sent therefore to 40 Methodist ministers randomly across the culture spectrum as a way of testing in a superficial way whether the issue of rebaptism is still a troublesome matter in the church.

The books listed in the bibliography will form the basis of the literature review. The MCSA church archives accommodated in the Cory Library at Rhodes University Grahamstown will be searched for relevant material covering the debate as it has unfolded in the church in decades gone by. The 'Laws & Discipline of the M.C.S.A.', Minutes of Conferences, letters of controversy, objection, support and debate around the central issues and related issues of baptism, and re-baptism will be specifically examined. Attempts will also be made to find relevant materials in the church's monthly newspaper, 'Dimension' dating back to 1970. Catechisms of various Christian denominations will be studied and in particular John Wesley's work on baptismal theology and policy. The Internet will also be a scoured

for information. And importantly the asking of relevant questions which always form the basis of any research endeavour will be asked.

An initial question to be addressed is around whether rebaptism is a current problem issue in the MCSA. Rebaptism has not featured on the agenda of the church's synods and Conferences since 1990. This could be a sign that rebaptism has become a non-issue. On the other hand there are indications that issues around baptism are very much alive for individual ministers and members, as well as in some pastoral constituencies. My own experience coming from speaking to individuals and groupings of people both inside and outside of the MCSA, and from giving lectures on the Methodist understanding together with questions raised, has confirmed that baptism is still a troublesome matter despite remedial steps taken by the church. These steps will be discussed later in this work. It has been said that members and ministers are nervous to speak about a matter that is deeply sensitive in the MCSA and over which there has been so much controversy. Is the issue then not best left alone? The answer is no, particularly as the problem of rebaptism has not been completely resolved in the MCSA and continues to wreak havoc in all sorts of ways.

In 2009 I did some informal empirical research in which I sent out a questionnaire to a cross-section of Methodist ministers which asked several pertinent questions. Only one of the 22 responses received was concerned about the issue of confidentiality, while the others did not wish their responses to be kept anonymous. The reason why the results of this questionnaire were excluded from the original draft of this thesis was that my supervisor was initially of the opinion that it would complicate the study from an ethical clearance perspective. However, in the light of the report from the external examiner and in discussion with my supervisor it has become clear that it is necessary to include a sample of the questionnaire with the responses received, and these are still in my possession. 6 questions were asked in the questionnaire and additional comments were invited. The questionnaire was sent to 40 Methodist ministers, men and women, who were selected randomly from a cross-section of the ethnic groups in the church. The reason for using this method was purely to gauge in a superficial way whether the question of baptism is an alive issue in the MCSA. I have included the results of this research in the appendix to be located on page 164 in the following way: the six questions have been listed, and below each question answers that were given, have been recorded together with the number of people that answered each question. The text that follows contains an analysis of the responses together with a conclusion drawn.

- Is baptism in the MCSA a problem issue for you? If yes, state why.

5 of the ministers said that baptism was still a problem for them. Some of the 17 other responses seemed to indicate that while issues around baptism are still problematic, yet they had accepted the situation as it is and were trying to cope as best as they could.

A concern was that sacraments have been reserved to be officiated by clergy only, and that the church had not brought finality to the task of addressing alternative rites and the question of rebaptism. There was also a huge pastoral problem in that it is difficult to advise members on what they should do in a church that rejects rebaptism on the one hand, but on the other hand which has not brought a satisfactory conclusion to the provision of alternative rites. One minister expressed frustration in that he counsels couples who want their infants baptized, explains the significance of baptism, especially in regard to their need for commitment to Christ and the church, and yet after making the promises at the baptismal service, these couples cease to attend the services and show no sign of Christian commitment and lifestyle. Thus the sacrament becomes a thing of "cheap grace", a phrase used by the famous theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Questionnaire, 2009, Appendix p.165ff). It seems that this experience of frustration around the baptism of infants is an ongoing one amongst ministers in the MCSA.

- Is baptism a problem issue amongst members of your congregation? If yes, state why.
 15 of the replies were that it was not an issue, while seven others contended that it was still a burning one. Reasons given were that some members do not hold to infant baptism but support believers' baptism while other members questioned the validity of their infant baptism and rather opted not to baptize their children as they want their children to decide for themselves. Certain of the more committed members in the church have been rebaptized elsewhere. Not being able to be rebaptized in the MCSA is considered to be a problem. Requests from some, who wanted to renew their commitment to Christ and his church through a rebaptism, were turned down. There was a report that youth were rebaptized at a youth camp. While the minister did not think this was wrong, yet the MCSA policy on this matter was contravened, making this an ethical problem (Appendix I, 2009:165ff).
- Have you had requests for rebaptism? If yes, state why.
 Of the 22 responses there were 16 affirmative replies.
 Reasons for the requests were various. The feeling was that after a major trauma a rebaptism would be an appropriate way of showing gratitude to God. Some, who had gone through an infant baptism followed by a confirmation and who had requested a believer's baptism, left the MCSA and were rebaptized as a testimony of their new-found faith and entry into God's kingdom. There was also doubt over the correctness of infant baptism and a question was raised as to whether the church that performed the baptism was spiritually and morally upright. Rebaptism was also perceived to be more meaningful, especially after a recent conversion experience. People wanted to express their commitment to Christ and his church in that way and argued that by refusing rebaptism the MCSA was denying their right to respond to God's unending grace. Others wanted rebaptism after attending an Emmaus

weekend course; yet others from theological influences as fuelled by the charismatic and Pentecostal movements (Some Pentecostal Christians claim that baptism is necessary for salvation). Some just wanted to be obedient to the command of Christ which they found in the Bible to apply only to adult believers. Others felt that the promises their parents made on their behalf at their infant baptism were not appropriate anymore; their parents were poor Christian examples anyway, so they wanted to follow through with Jesus' command to be baptized. A general feeling by infant-baptized members was that they wanted to make a public stance for objective faith which they had personalised and accordingly sought a believers' baptism which would be more meaningful and biblical than a confirmation service (Appendix I, 2009:165ff).

- Do members sometimes reject infant baptism? If yes, what reasons do they give.

There were 15 yes and 7 no responses to this question.

Reasons given were that infant baptism is deemed to be unscriptural, and also that children should in their adult years decide for themselves as to whether they want to be baptized, which infants are unable to do. Another reason for requests for Believers' baptism was that something needs to be added to their infant baptism and there was no reason for its rejection.

Infant baptism is sometimes not considered relevant in charismatic settings. Some of the responses indicate a belief that believers' baptism is exclusively biblical. Mark 16:16 and the baptism of Jesus were quoted as examples of this claim. Dedication was deemed to be more biblically correct than infant baptism, while the need for people to decide for themselves was considered to be of paramount importance and more relevant (Appendix I. 2009:165ff).

- Do you know of ministers who have left the MCSA because of issues surrounding baptism? If so, how many and what reasons do they give?

15 of the responses to this question were yes. In respect of the 7 no responses some of these ministers did not know whether baptism was the main cause of these resignations.

Amongst various reasons were that some could not accept the validity of infant baptism. This resulted in a crisis of conscience in that they could not believe and teach Methodist baptismal doctrine any longer. Others could not identify with covenant theology as a true biblical basis for baptism. One felt that the MCSA did not accommodate to their understanding, while the church's understanding lacks theological support for infant baptism. It seems that most of these ministers left the MCSA because of an incompatibility with the MCSA's doctrine of baptism. It was also stated that those who did not comply with the prohibition of rebaptism

were "fired". Numbers of ministers known by fellow ministers to have left the Methodist church on account of the baptismal impasse range from 1 to 21 (Appendix I, 2009:165ff).

- Do you know of any lay people who have left the MCSA because of issues surrounding baptism? If so, how many and what reasons do they give?

13 replied in the affirmative and the rest of the responses revealed that they did not know or were not sure about numbers. Member resignation figures ranged from a handful to 200 and more in various congregations. Amongst the reasons for members leaving was that the church was not being true to the Bible; some joined a Baptist church where they could receive a believers' baptism. Others did not agree with the MCSA'S viewpoint or could not understand it but they needed to obey the Bible; infant baptism was not biblical, or because they had had a charismatic experience which they believed could only be expressed by immersion in obedience to Christ which the MCSA was not willing to give them (Appendix I, 2009:165ff).

- Are there any comments you may wish to make?

Under this section, statements from ministers reveal what their thinking is and how they were attempting to deal constructively with the problem of rebaptism in the MCSA.

Some felt that baptism in the MCSA carries some serious issues. A minister had had requests from members who wanted to renew their commitment to Christ and his church by rebaptism. In another response it was reported that two very committed members left the MCSA and went to a charismatic church, which was only too delighted to oblige. This was felt to be a great loss as they were committed leaders. These leaders felt the need to express their recommitment to Christ and his church through a rebaptism. Their argument was that the church (MCSA) was denying their right to respond to God's unending grace, by not allowing them to submit to Christ as committed believers. The argument that a rebaptism denies the first baptism was felt to be a very thin one indeed. Marriage vows (a sacrament in the Catholic Church) can be renewed and many couples do so as an expression of their on-going love for each other, but that certainly does not deny those made on their wedding day. There was also a view that ministers/members seem to do their own thing around the matter and a rebaptism would simply be reported as a matter of course. A statement was also made that many of the confirmation children not baptized as infants, have their baptism, and shortly thereafter go through the rite of confirmation and this appears to be an unnecessary duplication. In one church a porta-pool was installed and adults were baptized in place of Confirmation which seemed to be acceptable to the minister concerned. Another minister reported that when he performed what may be referred to as rebaptism especially of those who did not want to reject their infant baptism, he used these words: "Having being baptized

I now confess to you all the promises that are yours within the context of the new covenant as you come forward, declaring your faith in Christ and desire to go through the waters of baptism even as he did" (Appendix I, 2009:165ff).

It was also reported that some MCSA ministers invite ministers from believer-baptizing churches to perform a rebaptism – either in the Methodist church or in the other minister's church. A Bishop immersed people with the words "Remembering your baptism I now immerse you in this water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Appendix I, 2009:165ff).

Yet another minister reported that he took a stand at a Methodist synod in the year of 2000 and answered NO to the question; do you believe and teach the MCSA doctrine? (This includes baptism). His negative response was based on the belief that the MCSA's stand on Baptism and Holy Communion is problematic. The resolution which he had tabled was unanimously accepted and referred to what he described as "the theological cul-de-sac of the Doctrines Commission and has not been heard of since" (Appendix I, 2009:165ff).

Some of these ministers felt that baptism is a problem issue, because something that is a means of grace has been turned into a law by the church. Ministers have been 'kicked out' of the church and huge numbers of members have left and gone elsewhere. A question that begs an answer is that if the MCSA understanding of baptism is not regeneration (i.e. fundamental to salvation or a form of salvation by works) but simply the sign of having entered the life of Christ, then where is the harm of repeating that sign? (Appendix I, 2009:165ff).

These responses generally confirm the contention that while issues around water baptism in the MCSA may appear to be non-existent, and yet when investigated by means of a simple questionnaire, the opposite is found to be true.

Professor Neville Richardson, who was in charge of the Doctrines Commission (called DEWCOM) in the MCSA for 11 years up till 2010 and who has been at the helm of the training of new ministers in this church for a similar period, has this to say in a letter dated 11 June 2009:

In my experience baptism is not at present a burning issue in the MCSA. I can remember only once in the past that baptism was discussed. On that occasion the issue was about rebaptism. Apparently in one of our churches a big font had been built right in front – like many Baptist churches. It was made clear on that occasion that there was nothing wrong with the font, but that people must be made aware that rebaptism is a no-no. On that occasion we emphasised the desirability of renewing baptismal vows by our people. That happens a lot in the Methodist church of the USA and should be done more often here. Perhaps that could be one of your alternatives. Although I have said that there is not a widespread debate at the moment in my experience, I am aware that the issue of baptism is not fully

settled. There are rumbles among our people from time to time. I take this to be mainly due to poor, inadequate teaching on the meaning and purpose of baptism in the MCSA. Because we don't teach our people the Methodist way they are vulnerable to all kinds of other teaching – the most common of which is a combination of biblical literalism often found in Baptist circles, and a need to 'experience my own baptism' as found in Pentecostal circles (Richardson:2009).

The other point that needs to be made is that the issue of rebaptism has also never been fully resolved in the wider church since the Reformation. This seems also to indicate that problems around water baptism are cyclical and therefore are never ending. Given the fact that the MCSA has not fully and officially provided alternative Orders of Service, contributes to the issue being ongoing, despite the formulation of a resolution by its 1989 Conference stating that "some requests for baptism arise from the need of the person concerned to bear public witness to a new or renewed faith or to perform an act of obedience to mark a new commitment and that provision should be made to meet this need" (MCSA Minutes 1989:66 and 67).

There is added confusion in that it is not known whether water may be used in proposed alternative rites or not. It is known to MCSA ministers that the church fears the use of water in these rites as this could be regarded as a rebaptism.

The claim of Francis McNutt quoted in the UNISA debate on baptism of 1983 is pertinent:

Increasingly I have found that many Catholics were being rebaptized often during a trip to the Holy Land under the leadership of an evangelical leader In 1969 one Catholic priest in New York State went so far as to be baptized in the Niagara River much to the consternation of his bishop and the Catholic people who heard about it. As I see the situation most priests and ministers from denominations that believe in infant baptism do not realise how serious the pastoral problem is, unless they work actively outside their own Christian fellowship. In the United States, at least many members of mainline Christian denominations have left their churches and joined evangelical groups that hold to the necessity of their being baptized as adults by immersion. Countless others have remained within their religious churches but have been rebaptized, leaving them disturbed and confused in their identity. Being rebaptized usually means they have repudiated their infant baptism. I don't think the leaders of the mainline churches have any idea of what a real problem this is since their members usually get rebaptized quietly; they certainly won't talk to their pastors about their plans, and just slip away to join another church without any formal notice. ... Not only did I hear about these problems at a distance, but I was sometimes in a situation wherein I had to make a decision on how to help confused Christians. As a result I believe that there is a pastoral solution to the apparent irreconcilable difference between the proponents of infant baptism and the proponents of adult baptism by immersion ... as a church we need to do something positive about the situation rather than merely forbid rebaptism (Koenig et al 1984:156 and 157).

My experience around baptism in the MCSA since my entry into its ministry in 1961 confirms a number of things: non-acceptance of infant baptism, a preference for dedication and rebaptism by

immersion, divisions in the church over the matter, a loss of members and ministers, a cry for help in regard to finding satisfactory spiritual, pastoral and theological answers regarding a whole range of issues linked to water baptism, that these are some of the main reasons for requests for rebaptism in the MCSA.

Baptism as practiced in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa is based on John Wesley's views. As is evident from the questionnaire letter, despite the MCSA's ethos of being inclusive, requests for rebaptism continue to surface regularly. Moreover, disputes around baptism and the practice of rebaptism have been present in the wider church for many centuries and the Methodist Church of Southern Africa has likely been influenced by this context. There are also various biblical, historical and theological reasons for these disputed issues around baptism; these will be discussed later in this dissertation. The presence of a paradox in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa's (referred to hereafter as the MCSA) baptismal policy in the use of the dual approach of practicing both the baptism of infants of believers as well as of adult believers who have come to saving faith, and an emphasis on the Church being both evangelical and sacramental (MCSA Laws and Discipline, 2000:2), seems also to be a basic reason for the perpetuation of rebaptism. Some members baptized as infants, claim to be convicted of a need to receive a believers' baptism which is viewed by the MCSA as rebaptism which it therefore repudiates. The MCSA is consequently faced with the dilemma of how it can assist these members to go through a believers' baptism without implying a rejection of infant baptism. In its attempts to overcome these problems it has called for the formulation and provision of viable alternative rites in place of rebaptism. The call for these, if found to be viable, would enhance discipleship and achieve unity. Has it gone far enough in its effort to do this? The path that this work will take is to argue for the formulation and official adoption of alternative rites, which hopefully will be logical and coherent theologically, as an important way of addressing the problem of rebaptism.

Chapter 1 will include the question of the origin of rebaptism, and possible reasons. The theory which forms a basic and vital part of the argument is the claim that there is no specific definition of baptism in the Bible, despite the commission recorded in Matthew 28:19ff. That there is no clear biblical definition for baptism is a central reason for the repeated rejection of infant baptism as a biblical rite. It has also led to the formulation of five major understandings of baptism that have tended to be presented and upheld dogmatically resulting in the exacerbation of issues and thereby prolonging the debate. K Barth, O Cullmann, G Lampe, M Barth, J Robinson and J Jeremias, are amongst the principal contributors of meaningful arguments on the matter and they will be featured in this thesis.

Chapter 2 is an account of the MCSA view of baptism which is located in God's covenant provision of salvation and Gods requirements in respect of a covenantal relationship with God. There are certain practices of Christian initiation involving baptism which are forbidden and the reasons for this will be

discussed. Chapter 3 explains why 'dissident' members view these forbidden practices as appropriate, despite being forbidden. Ironically the MCSA and its dissident members appear to strive for the same goal. Chapter 4 investigates three Pre-Christian Jewish initiation practices involving the use of water; Essenian baths, Proselyte baptism and the baptism of John, for possible influence on Christian baptism and rebaptism. The elimination of either infant baptism or believers' baptism will also be examined as possible ways of breaking the deadlock over rebaptism. The third alternative is that of the retention of the status quo, with the possibility of making concessions and compromises through the use of alternative rites. Chapter 5 is a survey of how the MCSA has sought to be inclusive and redemptively positive in its dealings with members troubled by baptismal issues. Chapter 6 is an investigation of alternative rites in order to ascertain their viability or otherwise. It studies the merits and demerits of existing rites as well as of the forbidden ones and gives attention to the need for feasibility in the formulation of additional rites. These are the rites of renewal, remembering, re-affirmation, and the appropriation of a previous baptism and looks at the possibility of the one baptism (Eph.4:5) practiced in two stages. Chapter 7 records the finding that alternative rites are viable and therefore should logically lead to an outcome of a recommendation for the MCSA, in line with trends in the wider Church, to consider making these alternatives official standard practice, and that it look into the possible formulation of a two-stage application of the one baptism.

This work is not a Bible study of baptism per se, but is essentially theological. The Bible is used because it forms the essential basis of Christian theology. The findings of Bible studies around specific texts and passages on baptism are needed as an important ingredient in support of existing rites and for the introduction of additional alternatives, for the possible demise of rebaptism in the church. Giving the work a biblical base is necessary if the argument in this proposal is to be based on evidence from the Bible, which is what the critics of infant baptism and of MCSA baptismal policy say is lacking. The study will not enter into historical critical discussions as to authenticity of texts, unless these are well known, as this would not be germane to the purpose of the study which is to consider different interpretations of texts as they stand in the Bible.

CHAPTER 1

ORIGINS OF REBAPTISM

As this study constitutes an attempt to address rebaptism, which is problematic to the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), the question of possible origins of rebaptism will be investigated in this chapter. It is contended that as there is no prescriptive definition for the meaning, the purpose and practice of baptism in the New Testament, despite the commission recorded in Matthew 28:19ff, is the cardinal reason for the rejection of infant baptism on the one hand, and for the emergence of at least five broadly disparate major understandings of it in the history of the Christian church, on the other.

As the problem that is central to this investigation is the issue of rebaptism the question is, how is the MCSA to cope constructively with requests for rebaptism? The Church considers the practice of rebaptism to be problematic, and therefore rejects it. Could the use of alternative rites however, if found to be viable within the context of the belief and practice of baptism in the MCSA, be a possible way of breaking the rebaptism impasse?

That there is no clear biblical definition of baptism in the Bible may not only be the cause of rebaptism but also may have given rise to the uncertainty over whether the baptism of infants is biblical. These two issues appear to have been with the wider Church since New Testament times. No resolution of these issues, acceptable to all proponents, has been found. These problems are likely to have been inherited and the MCSA has consequently had to cope with never-ending dispute and division. The practice of rebaptism has come from a belief that the first baptism, having been administered in infancy and deemed to be faulty is a non-event. Rebaptism on the other hand, is viewed by the MCSA to be theologically flawed. Using rebaptism as a practice which is viewed by rebaptizers as being in line with what is believed to be the will of God seems not to enjoy biblical support. The exception to this claim may be that of Acts 19:1-7 which could be interpreted as an instance of rebaptism.

Is a Definitive Statement of Baptism from Text and Verse References to Baptism in the New Testament Possible?

What does the New Testament teach in regard to baptism? Does it spell out in clear imperative terminology what baptism signifies, and how and when and upon whom should it be practiced? Proponents of the different views believe that their particular understanding of baptism is derived from scripture and has been sanctioned by Christ. This is what is believed by the various proponents is what makes their view exclusively correct. And yet what valid basis is there for a contention like this? Ben Witherington III claims that Jesus "gave no inkling of what his views about the baptism of

his followers' children might be" (Witherington B, 2007:53). If this claim is correct then it would be correct to assume that biblical baptism possesses a deictic function as argued by Prof. Lategan. That is to say that baptism in the New Testament is never presented as something that is autonomous; it is mentioned merely as an instrument that is to serve a higher and more important factor. Baptism remains secondary as it presupposes a certain redemptive event in a context of faith in which this redemptive event can be appropriated. This role is a sign of its centrifugal nature, meaning that it points away from itself to another focus, and deictic, meaning that attention is deflected away from itself. Lategan cites two texts as examples in support of his argument. The first one is Mark 16:16 in which the missionary command was accompanied by "He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned". The second part of the statement makes it clear that believing is the factor that makes salvation possible. As baptism is not repeated in the second part of the text, this appears to indicate that it is secondary to faith. I Corinthians 1:10-17 is the other textual example that points to the relativity of baptism in relation to its centrifugal function. Paul stated, "For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel" (v.17). It appears that Paul is claiming that baptism "belongs to the second order of importance and that there is no indication of its autonomous status" (Konig A et al, 1983:11).

In order to ascertain whether the claims made by Lategan and others are credible, a brief examination of some of the standard texts used when defining baptism usually in support of conflicting viewpoints, is necessary.¹

i. Acts 2:38ff. "Peter replied: Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the Name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is to you and your children and to all who are far off – to all whom the Lord our God shall call". This was Peter's response to hearers of the gospel after they wanted to know what they should do to be saved. The disciples had obeyed the commission to go and make disciples by preaching the gospel and had exhorted hearers to repent and be baptized. This passage is open to be understood in different ways. It can be interpreted in a believer-baptist way, with the last part of the text "and to all whom the Lord our God will call," being viewed as the most important factor as a way of determining who should be baptized. In this way, the order is repent, believe, be baptized and be born again, and this would be the meaning of the statement "the promise is to you and to your children". The baptism of adults is thus being insinuated and the basis of the call of God is exclusively to adults and to their children who in their adulthood would be in a position to respond to the call of the gospel by repenting and believing, resulting in their conversion. (Acts2:39). A call to which a response needs to be made is presumed. Peter obviously was quoting from Joel 2:32 which refers primarily to adults. (Witherington B, 2007:55-57).

¹ There are around 75 texts and references to water baptism in the New Testament (Young R, Analytical Concordance to the Holy Bible, publication undated)

Witherington sees in this text however a reference to covenant baptism. He argues that the wording of Acts 2:39 clearly alludes to Genesis 12:7-10, and the Abrahamic covenant of promise is seen in Acts 3:25, while Acts 2:38 identifies the covenant of promise with the gift of the Spirit in which Acts 2:39 repeats the promise to Abraham; "the promise is to you and your children" (Witherington B, 2007:55-57). There is nothing in this scripture which defines or explains water baptism in respect of its meaning even though cleansing, the coming of the Holy Spirit and being included in Christ's flock, are linked with it. Believers' baptism is implied here, and yet the inclusion of the promise "to you and to your children and to those who are far off" could be an expression of covenant baptism. It would be hard to refute that baptism in this text is not only for believing adults but also is for children. The baptism of children is implied, otherwise how does one understand the statement "The promises are to you and your children..." (Acts 2:39).

ii. I Corinthians 1:17. "For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel". These are words of Paul, who in verse 14 says "I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except for Crispus and Gaius – yes I also baptized the household of Stephanus. Beyond that I don't remember if I baptized anyone else". What was Paul actually saying in making these statements? Did he view baptism as unimportant or that baptism was an incidental practice? In Holman's Study Bible it is stated that

Paul did baptize and approved it but only as a secondary step. The primary importance belonged to preaching and the need to believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. Without these two fundamental requirements for the Christian life baptism would be meaningless (Godwin J, 1988:1224).

On the other hand Witherington argues that Paul is saying that water baptism is not necessary for salvation and I Corinthians 1 makes this clear (2007:133). Beasley-Murray does not see in this statement of Paul's "the depreciation of the value of baptism" and agrees with Flemington's remark "that it was because he had such a high sense of what baptism meant that he regarded with abhorrence its debasement by Corinthian partisanship" (Beasley-Murray GR, 1962:181).

iii. Romans 6:3-4 is another text that may be interpreted variously. The text is "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus..... were buried with him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too, may live a new life". Holman's Bible mentions that "burial and resurrection of the Christian believer in immersion baptism bears witness to Christ's death and resurrection and declares death to the old sinful nature, and resurrection to a new life" (Godwin J, 1988:1425).

Believer Baptists argue that the words in this text can only apply to adult believers who are baptized after their conversion (Beasley-Murray G, 1962:146). Other Christians believe that it could apply to those being converted at the time of their baptism, while covenant baptizers claim that while it applies to the converted it could also refer to those who need converting. Witherington believes that

this passage is essentially speaking about baptism as an initiatory rite and not as a confirmation ritual (Witherington B, 2007:90).

iv. Colossians 2:11ff. "In him you were also circumcised in putting off the old sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men, but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead." NIV Bible.

In this text the following concepts are linked to baptism: circumcision, sinful nature, burial, and resurrection from the dead, and they lead to a question about the nature of their relationship. A further question arises as to whether there is a disjunction between Old Testament circumcision done by the hands of men and New Testament circumcision done by Christ, and whether this passage is an example of the practice of baptism replacing the rite of circumcision as a Christian requirement. Beasley-Murray believes that "the belief that circumcision has been replaced in the church by baptism by no means automatically involves the corollary that the two rites have identical significance or identical administration" (Beasley-Murray G, 1962:157).

He interprets this text from an exclusively believers' baptism by immersion point of view. While this way of looking at the text has merit, there is no justification for an interpretation that excludes the baptism of infants. There is nothing in this passage to suggest that there is a disjunction between Old Testament circumcision and New Testament baptism, which is claimed to include men, women and children. Witherington sees in this text a link between Old Testament covenant and New Testament baptism. "What water baptism symbolises for Paul" he says, "is close to what circumcision meant and from what Colossians 2:1-11 states. It is hard not to believe that Paul saw water baptism as in one sense the Christian's circumcision" (Witherington B, 2007:87).

That there is a link between circumcision in the Old Testament and baptism in the New seems to be clearly implied in this text. It has to do with the need to be in some sort of faith relationship with God:

The point of similarity between baptism and covenant is therefore this. Both are only conceivable and can only function aright, within the context of faith. Whatever essential differences there may be, in this respect there is common ground between baptism and circumcision. It is an error, then, to hold that circumcision was a national sign conferring (indiscriminate) membership of the Jewish nation, whereas baptism has a religious function. Even if circumcision had indeed (like baptism!) become externalised in the course of history until it became – or rather degenerated into – a mere mark of national identity, what Paul is pointing out is that this was not its original function. In the beginning circumcision was 'a sign or seal of the righteousness which he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised' (Romans 4:11). (Koenig, et al. 1983:15)

This is another example of a text about baptism which is seen by two scholars in diametrically opposite ways. The merits and demerits of baptism are not mentioned at all in this text, neither is a discussion about the actual meaning and purpose of baptism present in it. In this instance baptism appears to be mentioned as a rite which is in some way connected to the work of Jesus, admission into the body of Christ, discipleship and the ministry of teaching; nothing about what Paul believed was required by Jesus and of what Jesus felt needed to be believed and practiced about baptism, are mentioned in the text.

C.S. Petrie supports the reasoning about a lack of specific definition of baptism in the Bible. He argues that "it is difficult to assume the precise importance Paul and other disciples attached to baptism" (Petrie, 1965:33-40). References to Paul's Christology in relation to water baptism are few and it is difficult to construct a theology of baptism in the same way that Paul did as revealed in his other Christological statements.

In substantiating his argument Petrie states that,

Apart from I Corinthians I, which deals with the specific problems and priorities around baptism, he mentions baptism in I Corinthians 10:2, which is presented as a figure of Moses; baptism in the Spirit, I Corinthians 12:13; the discouraging of baptism for the dead I Corinthians 15:27; Romans 6:3, where the symbolism of baptism along with other figures are mentioned to illustrate the main point of being in union with Christ; Colossians 2:11-14 wherein the usage is similar to that in Romans 6:3ff dealing with outward circumcision as against inward circumcision is linked to baptism; and Galatians 3:27 illustrating baptism as being in Christ and Ephesians 4:5 which is a reference to baptism as being "one baptism" (Eph.4:5) (1965:33-40).

v. I Peter 3:21 and Titus 3:5 are texts which also do not provide clues as to what a specific definition of baptism should be and like Paul, the writer seems to view water baptism as an illustration and a symbol. If there are no specific and clear biblical statements on how water baptism should be defined does this not signify that water baptism is more of a practical issue revolving around the use of rites?

From this brief discussion it becomes evident that various views regarding the meaning and practice of baptism are derived from texts in the Bible. Whether some of these views are correct interpretations and others not, or are all valid in some way, are questions needing to be debated.

Jesus and a Definition of Baptism

If Jesus is acknowledged as the supreme authority in respect of all matters of faith and practice, which includes the rite of baptism, would it not be of primary importance to find out what Jesus believed about baptism? Is there any teaching given by Jesus on baptism, and of what he commanded about it? If Jesus commissioned the practice and regarded baptism as an indispensable

rite, would he not have made it clear as to how it should be viewed and practiced and upon whom it should be administered?

The references about Jesus and baptism are primarily in the John's gospel and these refer to Jesus as the Lamb of God, who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (John 1:19-34, 3:1-5, 22-36 and 4:1-3). A statement is made about the Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus like a dove and of God's approving voice being heard at his submission to baptism. This was a sign of his identification with the salvific mission that God had planned for Jesus. Jesus therefore, needed to be listened to and given a response. Apart from descriptive information provided about Jesus' baptism there is a real lack of statement from Jesus about water baptism. Nowhere in the gospels does he give any statement about baptism or say exactly what it should mean and how it should be practiced.

While the baptism of Jesus at the hands of John is a sign of his humility through obedience to God as well as being an expression of God's pleasure with him (John 1:19-34), yet Prof. Lategan's argument for baptism performing a deictic function seems to be correct. From a reading of all the references to baptism in the Gospels, it is clear that baptism always points away from itself and focuses attention on Jesus as saviour. This pointing away from itself could indicate that Jesus saw in baptism a serving role, and while necessary, baptism was secondary to the more important task of evangelism. The gospel of John makes it clear that Jesus did not baptize anybody with water. John 4:2 states that "only his disciples baptized". Petrie writes "with the sole exception of Matthew 28:19-20 every reference to baptism in the four gospels relates to the practice of John the Baptist and of Jesus succumbing to baptism at the hands of John" (Petrie CS, 1965:33-40). The exhortation by Jesus in John 3:5 could however be a reference to water baptism.

An examination of Mark 16:15ff reveals that this section of Mark's gospel was a much later appendage. Acts 1:5 written by Luke is a quotation by Jesus of John the Baptist's words referring to baptism. Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23, Luke 22:14-22 are texts in which the meaning of Jesus' baptism is connected with suffering rather than water. Luke 3:21 and Acts 1:4-5 are statements attributed to Jesus, and speak of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Did Jesus give a command about baptism in any way, and if so, what essentially did he command? This is the critical question. Nearly every Christian denomination practices water baptism as an act of obedience in the belief that it was commanded by Jesus. Out of the approximately 75 references to baptism in the New Testament there are only three texts that come close to being stated in mandatory form. These texts are located in the Gospels. The other baptismal references in the Bible are mainly descriptive, illustrative, exhortative and didactic in style and nature. Hallesby's argument is pertinent here that

Christ has instituted neither adult baptism nor infant baptism, he has instituted baptism.... Jesus has not said when and where the act should be administered and who should be baptized. That he left to the Church (Hallesby O, 1964:19).

The three texts that are regarded as principle statements made by Jesus about baptism need to be examined more closely to determine what he could have meant when giving the commission in order to test the correctness of Hallesby's claim.

a. John 3:5. In this text Jesus states "I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (N.I.V.). John Wesley believes that this text is a reference to water baptism. He notes that Jesus links being born of water with being born of the Spirit and consequently associates born of water with the practice of baptism. "Baptism is an outward sign as well as being a means for inward change by the Holy Spirit. The outward sign is the application of water demonstrating the inward change that is wrought by the Spirit" (Reist I, 2006:311). Ben Witherington III does not agree with the claim that John 3:3-7 is a reference to water baptism. "If there is an allusion to water baptism, then such an allusion serves here to point away from itself to the realities it depicts" (Witherington B, 2007:94). That baptism is read out of this text seems to be valid. The main point of John 3:5 is the suggestion that physical birth is not enough, which is being born of water, and that spiritual birth is an indispensable requirement for entering the kingdom of God. Witherington's conclusion is; "Whether the water is intended to be a symbol of physical birth, as when water breaks as one of the first signs that the child is coming forth" is open for debate and whatever conclusion is made would seem to be plausible in terms of it being an example of what could or should happen in relation to the practise of water baptism, as well as the need for new birth by the Holy Spirit (2007:93).

b. Mark 16:15 & 16. "Go into the entire world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned". How is this statement to be understood? Holman's Study Bible states that "the proper interpretation of this scripture is difficult to establish and should not form the foundation of the doctrine" for the reason that it was a much later addition to the original manuscript (Godwin J, 1988:1257). Matthew Henry takes the view that baptism in this passage is part of the scripture and regards it as an inauguration rite appointed by Jesus through his Church. He emphasises though, that only unbelief and not a lack of baptism will damn people. Adam Clark believes that baptism is essentially a profession of the gospel (Bethany: 1983:343). It is important to observe in connection with this text that there is no discussion of baptism itself. Baptism appears to be mentioned merely as a passing reference.

c. Matthew 28:19-20. "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." This is the only reference to baptism that is associated with a commission to proclaim the gospel through discipleship and teaching and in Witherington's view is the only statement anywhere in the Bible about the real beginnings of a specifically Christian baptism

as initiated by Christ (Witherington B, 2007:53). It is also generally assumed that this text was written by the Church through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit after Jesus' ascension to heaven. This seems to be specifically indicated by the use of the Trinitarian formula, and is thus a sign of the Church's thinking at that time.

Holman's Study Bible mentions that "linguistically there is only one Greek verb in the Great Commission which appears in the imperative or in command form, which is to make disciples. The principal verb shows Christ's intent that Christians should witness, with the goal of winning people to Himself" (Godwin J,1988:1224). Witherington makes the point that because the emphasis is on making disciples in the command there are two activities "that are subordinate to the main verb, that is to make disciples and these explain how it is to be done, (a) by baptizing and (b) by teaching" (2007:52-53). Baptism is thus not essentially a command.

How then is Matthew 28:19 to be interpreted? Beasley-Murray believes that Matthew 28:19f can only be interpreted according to a believers' baptism view.

It might be considered as self-evident that disciples are made by the preaching of the gospel and that such as have become disciples are then baptized and the baptized proceed to instruction. The two participles – baptizing – teaching – successively follow the action of the main verb (Beasley-Murray G, 1962:88).

The question then is whether Beasley-Murray's interpretation is the most accurate explanation, and how is this question to be decided? Taking into consideration Jesus' words of commission as stated in the other two gospels, viz. Luke 24:4-7 "repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations beginning in Jerusalem", John 20:21 "as the Father has sent me so I am sending you", and in Acts 1:8 "But you will receive power after the Holy Spirit comes upon on and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the world" there is also no indication given about what a correct view of the meaning and practice of baptism should be. These are also merely general statements which indicate that the commission is to be comprehensive and inclusive.

Robinson supports the view that Jesus did not explicitly command his disciples to baptize with water, nor did he make water baptism a special feature of their mission in his name. (Robinson N, 1981:145).

From an examination of these three references, John 3:5-7, Mark 16:15-16 and Matt 28: 19-20, it seems that Jesus did not give attention to how baptism is to be defined and there is some doubt as to whether the command to make disciples of all nations also is a command to baptize. It may therefore be concluded with certainty that Jesus regarded baptism more of a process than a doctrine, a means to an end, the discipling of all nations, rather than end in itself. If this is the case, a study of baptism and of its unity should move towards the use of baptismal rites. It logically follows that an

adiaphoric study of baptism in which all aspects are subjected to debate is therefore relevant and necessary. What also needs to be borne in mind is that there is a difference of meaning between baptism and baptismal rites: baptism is more of a reference to its doctrinal meaning, while baptismal rites have to do mainly with the way baptism is applied and when it should be administered.

A brief survey of baptism in the course of church history

It is possible to argue that a lack of clear definition of the meaning, the practice and purpose of baptism has led to disputes and division in the Christian Church all through its history. This could also be the basis for the question of whether infants should or should not be baptized. In this debate the fundamental question has always been around whether infant baptism is a biblical practice. Different stances have been taken on the matter and are a reason for the practice of rebaptism. When claims are made that infant baptism is not in the Bible, doubts about its credibility arise. Queries follow of why it is necessary to replace believers' baptism with infant baptism, when the former supposedly has clear text and verse reference in the Bible, surface. Whether infants should be baptized or not has been a question in the church from apostolic times.

1. The first example of this comes from the first two centuries after Christ's death. There is very little information about baptismal practice and issues emanating from those centuries, while conclusions are divided over the matter. Bandey states that "the possibility that infants were baptized during the first two centuries cannot be excluded, but there is no direct evidence of it" (Bandey DW, 1976:25-26). Perhaps questions around baptism and especially in connection with the practice of infant baptism did not arise because that was the period when Christians were widely persecuted by secular powers. The church at that time may have been compelled to focus on Christian survival and the need for spiritual purity in the face of an onslaught of false teaching and persecution, and the Church's belief system about the Trinity had not yet crystallized. The practice of water baptism and issues around it, if there were any, would not therefore have been given much attention. Jeremias however, argues that infant baptism would have been practiced at that time because of its covenantal character. Covenant is a distinctive tenet of Jewish religion² and Christianity originated from this source. Covenant was signified by a focus on the family unit involving men, women and children. There is however no record of any controversial issue emanating from the practice of baptism during the first two centuries of the Christian church. Documented debates around infant baptism began to surface only in the third century (1976:25).

2. The view of Tertullian.

² Jeremias' argument for infant baptism will be dealt with in more detail later.

Tertullian, a church father who lived and worked at around the year 200 A.D. began to query the practise of infant baptism. He opposed infant baptism and counselled that children should not be baptized until they were old enough to speak for themselves. What he questioned was both the necessity and the wisdom of baptizing infants, and argued that if children are without sin and "so long as it is believed that children are without sin, infant baptism is not needed" (Dixon N, 1979:35).

3. The Constantinian Proclamation and indiscriminate baptism

The Roman Emperor Constantine in the 3rd century A.D. may have been the progenitor of indiscriminate baptism. He had an experience of conversion and accordingly ruled that every citizen should become Christian. To this end he issued the Edict of Milan in A.D. 313 (Bridge D, 1977:77). This edict required that Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. It afforded protection for Christians, meaning that Christians ceased to be persecuted, yet ironically some of the Christians themselves became persecutors. Infant baptism was used as an instrument for compulsory membership of the church and it then took the place "of believers' baptism as the norm and believers' baptism in fact became very rare" (Dixon N, 1979:38). This development meant that the dividing line between church and state became blurred. The people though baptized, entering the church were not necessarily Christian and many of them had thereafter become entrenched in nominal Christianity. Claims began to be made that as infant baptism was not a biblical practice, this was the cause for this form of Christianity which was moribund. If baptism were practiced in a biblical way it would be blessed and if not, it would not be blessed.

4. St. Augustine and the issue of Original Sin. (c. 400 A.D.)

St. Augustine formulated the doctrine of original sin. He argued that every member of the human race is born sinful by nature and is therefore personally guilty of sin. If that is the case then logically every infant born is under the just condemnation of God and he accordingly linked this doctrine to the practice of infant baptism. Without the reception of baptism for the washing away of original guilt babies who died would have no hope of reaching heaven. Baptism was therefore a ready-made method of achieving the ideal of eternal salvation (Bridge D, 1977:37). This view of infants needing to be baptized had the effect of entrenching infant baptism and causing it to become the dominant rite. The relationship between the washing away of original sin and the practice of baptism consequently became an issue that plagued the church for many centuries from that time onwards leading up to the Reformation. It was this view, which probably caused the Roman Catholic Church of that time to see in baptism an automatic conferment of forgiveness and salvation, i.e. *ex opere operato* (1977:37). This development opened the way for the formulation of a belief that the sacrament of baptism possessed mechanical powers for salvation, and the practice of infant baptism in particular, became a major issue of contention between Christians, resulting in the fragmentation of the Church. The formation of nonconformist groups both inside and outside of the Church was

another outcome, and the relationship between baptism and salvation became a major factor of conflict in the debate (1977:37 and 38).

5. The Waldensians of the Medieval period

During the Middle Ages small groups were formed both inside and outside of the Roman Catholic Church which are sometimes called the pre-Reformation Reformers. These groups rebelled against the dead orthodoxy of the Church and believed that Constantine, who made baptism compulsory for every citizen, was an originator of the abuse of baptism. This group contended that its efforts were directed at returning to a biblical standard by working for reform. During this time a policy of rebaptism was either introduced for the first time or became regular practice. When members of the Roman Catholic Church were converted and joined their movements, these converts were rebaptized, "for they were conceived as turning from the false church to the new. The fact that they practiced infant baptism alongside adult believers' baptism and rebaptized Roman Catholics may indicate they were more opposed to Roman Catholic baptism rather than to infant baptism" (Bridge D 1977:86-92). The practice of rebaptism was thus a sign of a rethinking of the Christian faith by Christians, with infant baptism having become a fiercely contentious central issue. Because no agreement could be reached around the legitimacy of infant baptism, the Anabaptist movement grew and adopted a hardened attitude against infant baptism. Baptism thus became divisive amongst the Reformers of Luther's time.

5. The Lutheran Reformation Period

Because this period was characterised by extensive debate and the emergence of deep division, a recurring question was about what constituted true biblical baptism. Differences between the Protestant Reformers became so sharp that "Protestant killed Protestant for the crime of obeying God's word as he (sic) understood it" (1977:96). These differences crystallised into roughly two dogmatic positions, that of an exclusive kind of believers' baptism on the one hand, and the baptism of believers and their infants on the other. Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin amongst others held the latter position. They upheld the practice of infant baptism on grounds of biblical covenant. In this they adopted a policy of practicing both believers' and infant baptism. The Anabaptists however led by a Dutch reformer, Menno Simons, rejected infant baptism and rebaptized those who came to conversion but only after a confession of personal faith was made (1977:95-112). The Reformation not only gives evidence of a questioning of the Roman Catholic view of baptism which was viewed as being *ex opere operato*, the thing being done through the act, but also caused Protestants to divide into radically opposing camps based on their respective understandings of baptism (1977:112).

6. The Post-Lutheran Reformation period, up to the 21st Century

This period has seen the formation of more reformed denominations including Pentecostal and charismatic movements. While some of these groupings are positioned in the covenant-baptizing

group, yet many of them practice believers' baptism by immersion alone. These modern day reformers, or non-conformists as they are sometimes called, may further be positioned into two broad categories; covenant-baptizers and believer-baptizers.

This brief historical survey reveals that division between the two groupings, paedobaptists and believer-baptists, has never gone away and this has also been experienced in the MCSA. When looked at more closely and narrowed down, it becomes apparent that the only major difference between the two groupings is around whether infant baptism should be practised or not. While all agree that believers' baptism is clearly in evidence in the New Testament, it is however less clear as to whether the New Testament requires baptism by immersion alone as a strict necessity. This factor has also become a point of contentious debate. It may be helpful if it is asked as to what the phrase 'biblical baptism' signifies?

What is true Baptism?

Many Christians believe that a clear definition does exist of what true baptism signifies and that the Bible provides this information. They speak of 'biblical baptism' and by this is insinuated that some forms of baptismal practice are not fully in keeping with biblical revelation and teaching.

Should a Christian rite such as baptism enjoy specific text and verse evidence in the Bible before it can qualify as being legitimate? Or may a Christian practice be regarded as also being biblical when it is indirectly present in the Bible? It is important to clarify this matter especially in the light of the non-acceptance/acceptance of infant baptism. The statement by Hallesby included earlier in this chapter, is also pertinent here.

Christ has instituted neither adult baptism nor infant baptism – he has instituted baptismJesus has not said (or commanded) when and where the act should be ministered and who should be baptized – (and even how it should be administered) – that he left to the Church (1964:19).

Hallesby's assertion hints at the *adiaphorous* nature of Christian baptism. According to the Formula of Concord drawn up in 1577 *adiaphoron* are Church rites which are neither commanded nor forbidden in the word of God. It appears that the MCSA understands baptism in this way, as an *adiaphoric* subject. It upholds a covenant emphasis because covenant from its inception has been inclusive. This inclusive spirit is conveyed through the oft-repeated colloquial saying in Methodism that the MCSA is a roof which covers many opinions. It also tentatively encourages "ministers to explore the formation of alternative rites" (MCSA Minutes, 1989:67). In the light of the *adiaphorous* significance of baptism, any study of it should be an attempt to arrive at a position of 'unity in diversity' especially as the Puritan ideal in this connection is relevant. The Puritan ideal is expressed in the often quoted saying "In necessary things, unity, in doubtful things, liberty, in all things, charity" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/adiaphora>). The value of this approach lies in the possibility of finding an outcome, which, as divisive as the issue of baptism may be, is possible to highlight the inclusive

nature of the "one baptism" that Ephesians 4 verse 5 states. The history of debate amongst most evangelical Christians reveals a view that nothing should be believed or practiced in Christianity if it is not specified in the Bible. The difficulty here is that if this criterion were to be applied strictly, some present day church practices may have to be eliminated, such as the taking of Communion by women. Whilst it is not stated or even implied in the Bible that only men can take Holy Communion, no specific statement of women taking Communion as a formal requirement is recorded. In other words there is no text and verse basis in the Bible for women taking Communion in the church. Yet it is generally believed, based on a cross-referencing interpretation of the Bible, that in the Christian era women are to share in the salvific benefits of Christ's life, death and resurrection. Indeed it would be outrageous to believe differently, especially since Galatians 3:26-28 states that "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus", all having been baptised into Christ.(Gal. 3 :27). While text and verse evidence and sanction might be considered by some as the ideal for all matters of Christian faith and practice, this is not always possible and may not even be necessary since an implied biblical sanction can also be considered to be biblically legitimate. Infant baptism is a case in point. While it does not enjoy text and verse evidence in the Bible yet it is biblically implied and this is what makes it legitimate.

Michael Harper argues for this way of approaching scripture:

While accepting the supreme authority of scripture, it is necessary to be prepared to accept in some instances that which, although not actually contained in the scriptures (text and verse) is not contrary to them. An example of this would be infant baptism, the use of liturgies, and the keeping of Easter, Christmas and other church festivals (Harper M, 1983:67).

When it comes to the practice of infant baptism, Harper argues that

there are possible references in the scriptures to it, and in a number of other passages there are germs of liturgical structure, and the keeping of special days is nowhere prohibited in the New Testament, while the Old Testament has many references to it (Harper M, 1983:67).

If this is the case then it is necessary to recognise that infant baptism does enjoy a biblical basis despite an absence of text and verse evidence. Because there is no clear definition of baptism as well as a lack of any information about what Jesus had in mind when he issued Matthew 28:19ff, it may be concluded that this is the principal reason for the emergence of a range of understandings around baptism. Is this not an additional telling indication that baptism is an adiaphorous subject? All this makes it therefore necessary to be informed about these understandings as they confirm a number of assumptions, namely, that all of them derive from the same texts in the bible, and that there is nothing in any of them which provides an absolute biblical ground for being exclusively correct and also reveal the richness of and the complementary nature of baptism's facets. Not only will this information broaden understanding of baptism, but hopefully will promote a reduction of baptismal legalism and a corresponding increase of baptismal tolerance and inclusivity. That there are a range

of baptismal understandings also requires that that a study baptism should be along an adiaphorous line. This may be the way, perhaps the only way, of reaching some kind of unify in the one baptism.

John Armstrong in his book *Understanding the Four Views of Baptism* makes the point that

in spite of the clear biblical texts and the consensus in the early church, debates and divisions over baptism have continued since the 4th and 5th centuries especially since the east and west divided in a.d.1054 through 'the great schism'. Baptismal debates and the resultant separation in church communions have proliferated in the west especially through the divisions that followed the Protestant reformation in the 16th century (Armstrong J, 2007:18).

Why has this happened despite what Armstrong regards as clear biblical texts and consensus in the early church about baptism? Indeed, are there clear biblical defining texts on baptism, and was there consensus on baptism in the early church? It has also been shown that it is difficult to ascertain whether there were theological problems over baptism in earliest post-apostolic times because information from the first two centuries of the Christian era is claimed to be scant. As a result of the lack of clear definition and uncertainty around the practice of infant baptism, it may be concluded that these are amongst the principal reasons behind the formation of at least five major understandings of baptism and the inability to find specific doctrinal agreement around the meaning and purpose of baptism.

The MCSA view of baptism is to be located in the covenant view and has its roots in British Methodism. British Methodism derives from John Wesley whose thinking in turn was shaped by Anglicanism in the 17th century. It is necessary to mention this brief outline because the British Anglican Church was the denomination in which Methodism was grounded theologically. The Anglican doctrine of covenant baptism seems to have been problematic at that time in that it reputedly practised baptismal regeneration of the mechanical kind. The phrase, 'this child is regenerate', was standard usage in its service rite (Bridge D, 1977:142). Later on, ironically, Anglicanism provided theologians who proved to be at the cutting edge of theological thinking around the problem issues of baptism. Some of these contributions will be used in this thesis.

Avery Dulles holds the view that a person's experience and understanding of church more likely than not influences and shapes one's general understanding of Christianity. This factor will in turn influence and shape one's view of baptism (Dulles A, <http://catholicfaitheducation.blogspot.com/2008/05/models-of-church.html>). According to Dulles there are at least 6 ways of understanding the church. He speaks about the models of church from a Roman Catholic context:

- Institution (including a hierarchy of ministries, to continue Christ's mission and reflecting a need for order, unity and consistency of teaching).

- Mystical communion (including our mysterious and intimate spiritual union with God and each other through the Body of Christ).
- Sacrament (including the responsibility to be, as sacraments are, the visible presence of God on earth).
- Heralds (including the mission of the People of God, the baptized, to proclaim God's Word).
- Servant (including dialogue with society and assisting persons in a variety of needs).
- A Community of Disciples (including Catholics' sense of always being learners, being formed by the scriptures, acting lovingly, sharing in Jesus' mission and service, and being co-responsible for the Church's mission and identity) (Dulles A, 1974:1)³.

The implication of what is claimed is that as there are different models of church so there are different models of baptism. These models take their rise not only from a biblical basis, but more especially from a denominational perspective of how a church views itself. Dulles further states that when he taught

a church history course to senior high school students (he) would use these models to help them perceive that various understandings of the nature and mission of the church could exist side by side and that they were not necessarily contradictory or mutually exclusive. In fact, a too great insistence on one model at the expense of others impoverishes our understanding. (Dulles A,1974)⁴.

This claim about the influence of church models in shaping the views of its members in terms of how Christianity is understood and practised and the need to hold these different models in balanced tension in the life of a particular denomination seem to be feasible, and should be helpful towards the acquisition by Methodists of a balanced appreciation of the different understandings of baptism in the wider church. This insight may also be of assistance in regard to understanding the reasons for the baptismal impasse in the MCSA.

In the light of the aforementioned factors it should be helpful to gain a cursory understanding of the context in which the Methodist view of baptism exists and functions. The context is made up of the five categories of baptismal theology four of which are expounded by J Armstrong in his book *Understanding the Four Views of Baptism*. All five show basic similarities as well as differences and could also reveal how they have contributed to the problems experienced around baptism in the Methodist church, as well as provide some possible answers.

View number 3 of the four views as presented in Armstrong's book carries the title "The Christian churches and Churches of Christ view:- Believers' baptism as the biblical occasion of salvation" is

³ In 1974 Fr. Avery Dulles (now Cardinal Dulles) published his book '*Models of the Church*' in which he described 5 ways of understanding the Church. Later, after the publication of this book, he added a sixth model to this list which is included in the above list.

⁴The page number of the book is unknown as the article was taken from the website

probably not as well debated and documented as the other views but appears to be well known in American Christianity. Elements of this understanding could however also be present in the South African church context. It will be surprising if this were not the case. The title of this understanding is also problematic in that all views of baptism are purported to be Christian. This does not mean however that this view should not be understood or critiqued.

The existence of these 5 views of baptism may be little known in the MCSA and yet they have emerged because of denominational belief systems and the practise of mission. In an age of information cross-pollination, resulting in the exposure of Christians to a variety of baptismal understandings could be a reason for confusion about which view is supposed to be the correct one. However, when it is understood that these views arise from the different theologies in the wider Christian church, Christians may come to accept that baptism is rich in variety and nature. In the words of Dulles they may perceive that the various understandings of baptism could exist side by side, and are not necessarily contradictory or mutually exclusive. Rather than being erroneous, impoverishing and splintering, they could be enriching, complementing and unifying.

That there are various models of church and as a consequence various models of baptism, and if this is an example of a direct outcome of a lack of a clear biblical definition of baptism in the New Testament makes it necessary to state and examine cursorily the five major views. All are believed by their proponents to possess a valid biblical emphasis. Becoming convinced of this will hopefully be another reason leading to a minimization of baptismal dogmatism, and conversely provide growth in tolerance towards other views in the MCSA.

The first one is the Roman Catholic view, and the four other views are detailed by John Armstrong in his book, *Understanding the Four Views of Baptism*.

- a. The Roman Catholic/Eastern Orthodox view:- The Church as possessing God's authority to baptize and save.
- b. The Lutheran view: - God's baptismal acts are regenerative.
- c. The Believer-Baptist view: - Baptism as a symbol of Christ's saving work.
- d. The Christian churches and Churches of Christ view: - Believers' baptism as the biblical occasion of salvation.
- e. The Reformed view: - Baptism as a Sacrament of covenant.

Below is an attempt to expand on these positions.

1. Five Principal Views of Baptism

i. The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox understanding.

These two branches of the church, which were originally united before the Great Schism which ended in A.D.1054 carry the same views in salient features of baptism and only differ on minor aspects (Roman Catholic Catechism, 1994:329). This section will expand mainly on the Roman Catholic position.

Baptism and Scripture

Roman Catholic baptism is based on Matthew 28:19-20 as a starting point and interprets the other baptismal texts in the light of its understanding of this text. To understand the Roman Catholic position on baptism correctly, initiation into the Church involving the sacraments of Confirmation and the Eucharist are closely linked. Baptism is the beginning of new life through and in the church. Confirmation is practiced for the initiate and the Eucharist nourishes the disciple with Christ's body and blood. The purpose of all this is for Christian transformation (1994:315). Baptism is not seen as being separate from the church but is an essential part of it. Neither must it be compartmentalised away from the other two sacraments. In this way the initiate is provided with a complete and continuous ministry for all of life and the church believes that no-one can be Christian without going through this process (1994:328).

Baptism, Grace and Salvation

The Roman Catholic Church uses John 3:3 & 5 to emphasise that becoming a Christian involves being born of water and of the Spirit and this experience also signifies entrance into the Kingdom of God. "Through baptism the initiate is freed from sin and reborn as a son or a daughter". (1994:315 & 319). In this sense the grace of God is present before baptism is given. Grace operates in a particular way to the initiate through the proclamation of the word, acceptance of the gospel, the reception of conversion and a profession of the faith, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and admission to the Eucharist. All this happens through baptism within the context of the church (1994:322-325) and it believes that conversion is the outcome of this process.

Saving Faith

As the individual is converted at the time of the baptism, faith is granted as well. "It is the sacrament of faith". This faith is not a perfect and mature faith, but the beginning of a faith that is called to develop. (1994:320).

The nature and role of the Church

Baptism and all its related components must not be seen separately and in isolation from the Roman Catholic Church. Initiation is a journey involving several stages and these are indispensable processes for the Christian life. They are the proclamation of the word, the acceptance of the gospel entailing conversion, the profession of the faith, baptism itself, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, admission to

the sacrament of Communion and the Confirmation service. All these are baseline requirements for becoming Christian. God has given the church to the world and in it has provided baptism for the Christianising of people. The initiate is "incorporated into the church and made a sharer in her mission" (Roman Catholic Catechism, 1994:323 and 327).

Next to the bible the church is the highest authority in all matters of faith and practice. This means that the initiate is incorporated into the church and it is within the church that new birth is conveyed, faith is born and the Holy Spirit works. The church,- made up of baptized believers, members, parents of infants, the priests being responsible for ministry, and being the community of God,- is to be the environment in which the baptism and all the other Christian functions are to take place. For the grace of baptism to unfold, the parents help is important and so too is the role of the Godparents who must be firm believers, who are able and ready to help the newly baptized child or adult on the road in the Christian life. Their task is truly a church function. The rite is carried out by the bishop or priest, and in the Latin Church can be done by a deacon. Baptism according to the Trinitarian formula is to do what the church does, and the reason for this possibility is to be found in the universal saving will of God. Baptism is therefore necessary for salvation. By entering the church through all these processes, and having been granted salvation by Christ through baptism, the Christian is then "made a sharer in the priesthood of Christ" (1994:327). In this view baptism carries a sacramental function. Its sacramental component conveys an *ex opere operato* impact, i.e. the work of salvation is done by the process of baptism. Roman Catholicism therefore conveys the message that the moment an initiate enters the church through baptism, the initiate becomes a Christian.

ii. The Lutheran Understanding: Gods baptismal acts are regenerative

The Lutheran understanding also uses Matthew 28:19ff as a basis for its doctrine on baptism. It emphasises that the regenerative nature of the act is both demonstrated and carried out when the word is preached and the act of baptism is performed.

It plays down the authority of the church without undermining the important place that the church holds in the process. It is not so much regeneration by water carried out by the church which is God's authority in succession, which conveys the benefit of baptism, but rather is the consequence of obedience to the command of Christ.

When people have been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in a community that confesses the Trinity, Lutherans believe that God has placed his (sic) claim on them no matter how they may have understood or misunderstood what he (sic) was doing through his (sic) baptismal word at the time of the baptism. When people who trust in Christ come to a more complete realization of God at work, they need not ask God to respect his(sic) promise in baptismal form, they need only to give the continued attention to the word of God in other forms (Armstrong J 2007:105).

As a contrast to the Roman Catholic position which emphasises that God has placed all the aspects of God's regenerative work surrounding baptism in the Church, Luther's view signifies that all the salvific processes associated with baptism are contained in the word of God and the church is the place where all usually takes place. The church does not grant the benefits of baptism to the initiate but it is Christ within the church, by God's word which does it. This difference between Lutheranism and Catholicism is one of the basic reasons for the Reformation. In reacting against the Roman Catholic Church as viewing itself as the highest authorities next to the Bible, for all matters of faith and practice, Luther gave that place solely to scripture, i.e. *sola scriptura*. If the Bible is to be the highest authority above church tradition, then this is how it also is to be in respect of water baptism.

iii. The Believer-Baptist view: Baptism as a Symbol of Christ's Saving Work

The starting point for this view is also Matthew 28:19-20. It believes that baptism is only for believing adults who have had an experience of conversion and it must be carried out as an ordinance of Christ. Immersion is the only method of baptism to be used as the truest representation of Christ's death, burial and resurrection. Subjectively it is a sign that the initiate has benefited from Jesus' saving work through having received personally that gift of salvation which is required to be confirmed by an inner experience of conversion.

Baptism is a symbol of Christ's saving work. It is an ordinance because Christ has commanded it. Believers' baptism is the immersion in water of a believer in Jesus Christ performed once as the initiation of such a believer into a community of believers, the church" (Armstrong J, 2007:25).

The objective side of baptism is witnessed to in the act of immersion because it is the first order symbol of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. (Romans 6:3-5 and Colossians 2:11-13). Baptism is also a second order symbol because it expresses the spiritual condition of the baptized one – that of an adult believer. As this second order symbol refers to its subjective side it depicts the candidate's personal conversion involving repentance, belief, cleansing and new life. At the same time it points to Christ and his church by indicating that the initiate has not only become a member of the human side of his Church, but also of the invisible body of Christ. Baptism according to this meaning is used as a strict requirement for membership and generally there is no deviating from it (2007:39-40).

Baptism is always preceded by new birth and is followed by reception into church membership. This practice is strictly adhered to and is believed to give the church its true spiritual vitality. The intention is to avert nominal church membership, and the possibility of the church becoming cold spiritually is by this policy believed to be avoided. Because infants lack the ability to understand, to repent and to believe, they cannot be spiritually regenerated. They are therefore precluded from baptism but are not excluded from being included in the fellowship of the church. A more biblical way of initiating infants into the fellowship of the church is through the rite of dedication. These initiates will

eventually become true members of the body of Christ when they undergo a believer's baptism, after conversion. As believers' baptism is the only way of entering the true spiritual life of the body of Christ every one wanting to join the Church regardless of whether they have been baptized before or not, must meet this requirement.

iv. The Christian Churches and Churches of Christ view: Believers' Baptism as the Biblical occasion of Salvation ⁵

This view of baptism is similar to the view of the believer Baptists and is also deduced from Matthew 28:19ff. Baptism is not viewed so much as a sacrament as it is in Roman Catholicism. This grouping of churches wants to avoid the possibility of baptism being viewed as a rite that conveys *ex opere operato*, a power inherent in it as an outward act. It reasons that although baptism is a divinely appointed channel of grace,

its impact is contingent upon personal experience. This happens through a personal response of faith in Christ, who alone can save, before baptism and at the baptism. Baptism is regarded as in some sense being a channel of grace but this group is reluctant to view baptism as a sacrament and in this way it avoids placing too much emphasis on the rite itself as 'a procuring cause of salvation' (Armstrong J, 2007:135).

Baptism is God's act.

Baptism is defined therefore as a religious act involving much water (baptism by immersion alone) performed before many witnesses. It is the occasion when God enters into a covenant relationship with an individual and that individual in turn directly and willingly accepts God's offer of restored fellowship. (2007:138-141). The key to this view is that God acts in the baptism but not because of baptism. In this way God sovereignly bestows upon the repentant believer the salvation achieved by Jesus.

Baptism is also a human act of obedient response.

In this act the individual submits to the physical action of baptism. This rite also marks the time when the individual appropriates the promise of God's word. It is a rite of initiation into the church and the church is the place where Christ is present and the gospel is preached. A personal response to Christ is given at the same time, which is both an act and sign of repentance and of faith, as required by the gospel. Salvation is not however conferred from the baptism itself. The *ex opere operato* factor is located in the act of Christ which coincides with the act of baptism. The individual is not saved because the source of salvation is baptism. Salvation is not by works, the work of baptism, but it comes by grace conveyed at the baptism based on a repenting, believing response by the individual coinciding with the baptism. There is no possibility of practicing baptismal regeneration in

⁵ In Armstrong's book 'Christian Churches' and 'Churches of Christ' are the names given to a number of similar groupings that are loosely bound in Christian outlook.

the 'magical' sense because baptism in this view is not granted unless the individual has confessed personal faith in Jesus Christ and professed as chosen Lord.

The difference between infant and adult believer's baptism in this theology is that while infants do not possess any capacity to respond personally to the Lord both immediately before and during its application, adults do have this ability. The argument therefore in this view is that infants were not baptized in the apostolic era – there is no record of infant baptism anywhere in the Bible – infants should therefore not be baptized.

v. A Reformed View: Baptism as a Sacrament of Covenant

This view is held by Christians in the Reformed tradition. Broadly speaking proponents of this view believe that the Christian faith, from Genesis to Revelation is covenantal by nature. Baptism is to be defined in terms of God's revelation of God to humanity. This revelation is the Biblical record of God's salvific mission to this world, which runs through from Genesis to Revelation like a golden thread. In a bid to restore fallen humankind into a relationship with God, God started the process by taking the initiative not only to reveal God but also acted in various ways of liberation and restoration. Westminster theology, which is essentially covenant theology, demonstrates a strong relationship between baptism and covenant, and emphasises that it is all based on God's mercy and condescending love. The Westminster Confession of Faith 7.2.3 states that God has made one covenant in two stages. The first covenant with man was one of works, but contained a promise of life to Adam, yet by reason of the fall, Adam made himself incapable of possessing life by the covenant. God then made a new covenant which was specifically an expression of grace which would succeed. The grace of God was the central feature and is the essence of God's saving work. In the Old Testament the tendency was to respond to this covenant of grace, by works, and in the New Covenant it is by faith alone (Armstrong J,2007:64 & 65).

The Westminster Confession 7.6 states that there are

not therefore two covenants of grace, different in substance but are one and the same (arrangement) under various dispensations. Old Testament believers found salvation by placing their faith in the gospel of Christ who was to come; New Testament believers find salvation by placing their faith in the gospel of Christ who has come (2007:65).

In the Old Testament grace was ministered by:

promises, circumcision, the slaughtering of the paschal lamb, other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews. Yet when Christ, the substance of the covenant was exhibited, the ordinance in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the word, the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper (Westminster 7:6). The central link, demonstrated by circumcision in the old is replaced by baptism in the new, is solely by the grace of Jesus Christ. Baptism does for the Christian what circumcision did for the Jewish people (Article 34 in the Belgic Confession, Colossians 2:11-18).

Covenant was cut with Abraham. Genesis 17:1-12. It was both inward and outward. Deut. 10:12-16 instructs that the Lord's command and decrees are that the heart must be circumcised and that the people must no longer be stiff-necked (Jeremiah 4:4 and I Peter 3:21) (2007:65).

In this understanding, baptism is to be an inclusive exercise. Covenant baptism on this basis is provided and offered to adults who themselves have entered into covenant with God through God's saving work, with their infants and children, and anyone else who is a part of the household and who may be a God-seeker. Responding adults and members of their households are to be baptized

to initiate them into covenant with God and to incorporate them into the visible church. As infant boys were circumcised and became visible members of the nation of Israel, so by baptism children of Christians are brought into the visible church (2007:70).

The important place of children in covenant

The covenant view of baptism justifies the practice of including infants and children in the church on biblical covenantal grounds. While the New Testament may not clearly illustrate the baptism of children yet just as Abraham was commanded to circumcise his son before faith (Genesis 17:12) and as the Bible requires faith before or during baptism for adults, so the children of these declaring adults, born again, who may not be capable of faith, should receive the sign. Romans 4:11. The inclusion of children in this structure of grace in the old covenant "Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and David, gave special place to children as heirs of covenant promises" Genesis 9:9, 15:18, Deut. 7:9, Psalm 89:28 & 29, Psalm 132:11 & 12 (2007:71).

It is out of Old Testament covenantal teaching and practice that the New Testament emphasis on children originates. Children also occupied a special place in Jesus' ministry; he laid his hands on them and conferred a covenant blessing on them. (Luke 18:15 Mark 10:16, Matthew 19:14). Peter included the children of believers when he said, "the promise is to you and your children and to all who are far off, to all whom the Lord shall call". (Acts 2:39ff). Paul believed that unbelieving spouses and their children are blessed covenantally, "otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy" (I Corinthians 7:14).

Proponents of this view of baptism claim that this position is distinctive because of its covenantal and sacramental character. Reformed churches therefore oppose rebaptism on the strength of a belief in the inclusiveness of baptism which is an essential part of what covenant means.

The status of covenant baptism

In the covenant view, baptism is not a mere symbol. "Spiritual realities occur in conjunction with baptism, but Scripture does not explain in detail how baptism and divine grace are connected" (Armstrong J, 2007:61). There is however a link between baptism and salvation though it is not too closely identified. On the other hand grace and salvation are not utterly inseparable and this means

that it is possible for a person to be regenerated without baptism. Not everyone therefore, who is baptized is certainly regenerated. It is a mystery as to when and how the regeneration is effected. Following the Lutheran emphasis, Reformed baptism theology involves a process wherein the primary role of the preaching of the word in the power of the Holy Spirit is given great prominence and is therefore by God's grace the primary means by which faith and salvation come. (See Romans 10:17). This view does not rule out that baptism could be the occasion when faith and salvation are transacted objectively speaking, that is, God carrying out God's side of the deal. Whether this actually happens will become obvious during the person's spiritual maturation. The need to respond to God personally based on baptismal commitments for a personalisation of the promises of faith and salvation is critical in this view. It becomes clear then that there is no room for belief in a 'magical' type of baptismal regeneration in the covenant understanding. (MCSA Minutes: 1989:61)

A brief comparison and assessment of these views

An exercise listing the differing viewpoints helps to show how the MCSA's interpretation of baptism fits in, and points to dynamics at work around the issues of baptism with which it struggles. It also may provide a better understanding of the reasons for its dilemma surrounding rebaptism. Avery Dulles' theory is pertinent, as it speaks about models of church, namely that if the church is seen as an institution, the view of baptism will be different to that of an understanding which sees the church as being a servant of humanity. As each Christian denomination possesses a distinctive personality trait that is likely how the corresponding view of baptism will be.

The MCSA is located in the Reformed covenant grouping and views itself primarily as a missionary, revivalist movement and therefore practises covenant baptism. That it is missionary and revivalist is apparent from its general policy which impacts on its view of baptism.

Methodism had its birth in the great work which God performed through the revival of religion in the 18th century by means of the preaching and apostolic labours of John and Charles Wesley and their fellow helpers. These founders of Methodism were constrained to provide, step by step, in the wisdom God had given to them, for the spiritual needs of a multitude of Christ's shepherd-less sheep which they were gathering in from the wilderness. In making this provision they reproduced many of the modes of church life indicated in the New Testament. Led thus by the Spirit of God the early Methodist societies were gradually fashioned into a distinctive Christian church (MCSA Laws & Discipline 2000:3).

The Methodist church throughout the world confesses the headship of our Lord Jesus Christ Loyally accepts the fundamental principles of the historic creeds and of the Protestant revelation, following also the practice and teaching of the New Testament, the Methodist Church is at once evangelical and sacramental The MCSA lays particular stress upon certain privileges and duties which belong to the company of all faithful people. These may be briefly stated: The primary vocation and responsibility, in accordance with the value set upon the apostolic ministry in the New Testament and in the early Church, of declaring the universality of the grace of God by preaching the gospel of a 'free, full, present salvation' for everyone who repents and believes upon our Lord Jesus Christ ... a change of heart

wrought by the grace of God, issuing in a new birth, in a conscious personal experience of the forgiveness of sins the necessity of a living fellowship in the realities of the Christian experience in order to nourish the life of God in the soul and to enrich the Body of Christ the reaffirmation and consistent exercise of the New Testament truth of the universal priesthood of believers (2000:2 and 3).

It seems that a tendency of the MCSA in recent times is more towards an institutionalised form of Christianity as against its stated ethos of being mission orientated and evangelistic. Is this a dynamic that is also being played out in respect of baptism? The clashing between the believer baptism in which evangelism is emphasised, as against infant baptism in which more of an institutional nurturing is required. And yet the MCSA, in line with Wesley, takes up a both/and stance; the need for adults to be converted, and their children to be evangelised. The MCSA does however experience a never-ending struggle to work out a theology of how it can practice the two baptisms without the one minimising the importance of, or of refuting the other?

This comparison hopefully, will show that various views of baptism are a direct influence of different ecclesiological views of church all based on understandings of texts in the bible and should serve to refute the claim that there is only one correct view of New Testament baptism. An understanding of this nature should go towards making proponents of the different views of baptism more tolerant of, and accommodating towards other views. This exercise of comparison and assessment should also reveal that so called biblical baptism is actually multi-faceted in its meaning and practice. In this regard it will deal with,

- A. Baptism's scriptural basis.
- B. Who is to receive baptism with regard to faith and entrance into the church?
- C. The nature of baptism: symbol, ordinance or sacrament in relation to regeneration.
- D. Modes of baptism.
- E. Rebaptism and unity.
- F. Debate in the 20th Century and beyond.

A. THE SCRIPTURAL BASIS OF BAPTISM

The comparison reveals that all views commence from Matthew 28:19-20. They seek to be obedient to Christ's command by interpreting the other baptismal references in the Bible according to particular pre-suppositions in the light of Matthew 28:19-20. The information provided confirms that the five different views of baptism emanate from a Biblical origin.

B. FAITH AND ENTRY INTO THE CHURCH

Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. These denominations believe that God provides faith through the delegation of Gods authority to the church. God's faith in Christ has been in the

Church since apostolic times and simply needs to be passed on to the people entering the church (Matthew 28:19). Faith is generated through the preaching of the gospel and instruction is given to adult catechumens before baptism is granted. In respect of infant initiates brought in by baptism, a post baptism catechism class is provided to enable the child to grow in the Christian faith.

Faith is available and may be appropriated before baptism, during baptism and after baptism, in the church when it assembles in a church building. Baptism is thus "always connected to faith". Baptism is not only the time when an individual joins the church but is also the moment when the person becomes a Christian⁶ (Dixon N, 1979:15). Adults either come with faith after their conversion or as seekers yet to be converted. They may come with an intellectual faith; saving faith will follow in and because of the baptism. In the case of infants "baptism is the sacrament of faith, but it needs the community of faith in which each of the faithful can believe" (R.C. Catechism, 1994:320 and 322). Baptism at the same time is the sacrament of initiation so there is a close connection between baptism as the preached Word, the obeyed command, the rite of initiation, the instrument of salvation, and the generator of faith within the community of faith in the church. God has endowed the Church with the authority to pass on these Christianising benefits to the initiate.

The Lutheran Church. Lutheranism is similar to Catholicism in regard to the presence of faith in the church, and its' association with baptism. Lutheranism does however play down the Church's authority in the granting of faith by locating the authority of God to generate faith in the Word of God proclaimed and practiced.

For those who can understand, faith should come before baptism, but for infants, faith is given during baptism and is passed on vicariously "by a believing church". Faith is conveyed by the preaching of the Word especially as an expression of obedience to Jesus' command to baptize, during the application of the rite. While the act of baptism is also the occasion for membership of the church, it also plays a nurturing role. Baptism creates community and the community which is the Church, generates a life of faith and service (Armstrong J, 2007:102-108).

The Believer-Baptist View. Faith must be present in the initiate before baptism is administered. The faith that is required is not so much a seeking faith (for conversion) or an intellectual assent to the gospel type of faith, but a realised faith. This faith is already in the possession of the initiate through conversion and it is the witness given at the baptismal service. Baptism is then granted and the person is thereafter welcomed not only as a member of the church but is given due recognition as having been baptized into the body of Christ. In this view the church is to be made up exclusively of born-again believers. Believers' baptism is the rite that ensures that only people who are born of the

⁶ Here and elsewhere in this book *ex opere operato* is used in its commonly accepted sense to mean 'by reason of the work performed', that is to denote a mechanical view of the efficacy of the sacraments. I am indebted, however, to A. Raymond George for the information that, in Roman Catholic theology, the phrase means 'by reason of the work done by Christ', and is contrasted with *ex opere operantis* ('by reason of the work done by the celebrant') (Dixon N, 1979:15).

Holy Spirit can enter. It is believed that this was an indispensable requirement in the apostolic church.

The Christian Churches and Churches in Christ view. Faith is deposited during the baptismal service in the life of a repenting seeker who generally comes to baptism initially with an intellectual response of faith. The seeker gives assent to the gospel, makes a confession, is then baptized and in the process is believed to be given saving faith by Christ. The initiate then becomes a true member of the church. As infants cannot repent and believe, baptism is not granted to them.

Covenant Baptism View. Adults are required to come to baptism with a pre-baptism conversion experience which according to Ephesians 2:8, is termed saving faith. Infants of these members are baptized on the basis of their parents being Christian, and a church is made up of Christian believers who make disciples of their infants. The church is the cradle of faith in which infants are placed because it is made up of all who have been saved and baptized. Bringing an infant into this environment should in due course ignite a response to the prevenient saving presence of Christ aided by the believing community. In this way infants will be saved by the grace of Christ.

C. BAPTISM AND SALVATION

Roman Catholicism. God gives salvation to the Church, which has been created by God, and appointed as the highest authority under God in baptism. This appreciation of baptism generates an impression that Catholicism practices an *ex opere operato* form of baptismal regeneration, i.e., salvation is automatically conferred by reason of the act of baptism.

The slight correction made by A.R. George to the commonly accepted view by non Catholics of Catholic baptism has been noted earlier. He states that in Catholic practice *ex opere operato* "by reason of the work performed by the priest" should rather mean "by reason of the work done by Christ" (R.C. Catechism, 1994:321-322) (Dixon N, 1979:15).

The Lutheran View. The Lutheran view of baptismal regeneration is that salvation happens as the baptismal water "is used according to God's (Word) command, and is connected to God's Word". Baptism grants eternal salvation to all who believe, as the Word and promise of God declare. The Word of God is connected with the water, which Christianizes the initiate. Baptismal regeneration is located in the Word of God rather than in any miraculous power that the water may possess (Lutheran Church Catechism, undated: 348 & 349).

The Believer Baptist view. The initiate has got to be saved before baptism is administered. Baptism does not in any way convey salvation but is rather a sign of salvation already received. This happens according to the command of Christ in Matthew 28:19.

Christian Churches and Churches in Christ Believers' Baptism View. Regeneration coincides with baptism after a personal confession of repentance is made and a believing response, formal or informal, is given to Christ at a baptismal service. There appears to be an *ex opere operato* component in this view in that conversion is believed to happen automatically after the requirements of response to the gospel have been met.

The Reformed Covenant View. As baptism signifies covenant and covenant signifies God entering into a relationship with people, baptism therefore signifies God's prevenient action of saving grace being conveyed to the individual. Baptism is a sign of God's action going before salvation but also indicates that the individual is to be "saved by grace through faith alone" (Eph.2v8). Baptism is not a work of salvation but primarily is a sign of God's prevenient saving action. It also indicates the need of personal acceptance of the saving work of God. The sacramental component of covenant baptism speaks of God's sheer mercy directed to a response of sheer helplessness. If there is an *ex opere operato* factor present in this understanding, it lies in the view that baptism is a means of grace carrying the possibility of the power of new birth connecting with the individual. This view does not seem to rule out that God is able to save an individual, be it an infant or adult, commensurate with baptism. The issue of how and whether salvation will happen during the baptism is both a mystery and a possibility.

D. WHO ARE TO BE THE RECIPIENTS OF BAPTISM?

Roman Catholic Baptism. "Adult baptism is the common practice of catechumines". More infants are baptized than adults. "The church and parents would deny the sheer gratuitousness of the grace of salvation, of becoming a child of God, were they not to confer baptism shortly after birth" (R.C. Catechism, 1994:322).

Lutheran baptism. Adults seeking the Christian life and infants of households whose adults have responded to the Lord and are in good standing membership with the Church are eligible for baptism.

Believer-Baptist baptism. Regenerated adult believers who are capable of giving witness are admitted to baptism. Infants are not baptized because of their inability to understand and to respond to the gospel, and especially because the baptism of infants is not scriptural.

Christian Churches and Churches in Christ baptism. Only those who are repenting and responding to the gospel by faith and who believe that they are being born again at the time of the baptism are granted this gift. Children are excluded from baptism on the same grounds as those for believers' baptism.

Reformed Covenant Baptism. Only those who have been evangelised, similar to the practice of the previous two views, and those seeking to be Christian are baptized. The individual must however be

repentant, humble and believing. Only infants of believers are baptized and thus are brought into the covenant community, which is the church. This is the environment in which it is possible for infants to receive regeneration and grow in the faith of Christ.

E. THE MODE OF BAPTISM

Roman Catholic Baptism. "The essential rite of baptism consists of immersing the candidate in water or pouring water on the head, while saying 'I baptize you in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' Matthew 28:19." (R.C. Catechism, 1994:320 & 327). Sprinkling is not excluded in this view, since before Easter when members renew their baptismal vows they are sprinkled with water by the priest.

Lutheran Baptism. Baptism can be administered by any mode. Sprinkling appears to be the mode that is mainly in use. Matthew 28:19.

Baptist Baptism. Immersion is used exclusively because it is believed to be the only biblical representation of Christ's death, burial and resurrection. It witnesses to the new birth appropriated before baptism. Sprinkling and pouring are rejected, as they are believed not to be biblical.

Christian Churches and Churches in Christ Baptism. This group of churches holds the same view about the mode of baptism as that of believer-Baptists. Baptism by immersion alone is practiced.

Reformed Covenant Baptism. Generally, sprinkling, pouring and immersion are used flexibly. These three examples are considered to be derived from the Bible. No directive about which method of baptism and of the amount of water which is to be used is found anywhere in the New Testament.

F. REBAPTISM

Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches do not rebaptize any person previously baptized either as an infant or as an adult. As baptism is given "once-and-for-all" it cannot be repeated. The Roman Catholic Church however practices the renewal of baptismal vows. This renewal is not to be confused with rebaptism.

Lutheran and covenant-baptizing churches also do not practice rebaptism of their own members or of members from any of the other Christian denominations. They believe that as baptism is an unrepeatable act that "any practice which might be interpreted as rebaptism" is to be avoided. This position was agreed to by all participating groupings belonging to the World Council of Churches (Lazareth WH, 1985:33-34).

Modern day Anabaptists of both Baptist and Pentecostal variety also reject the rebaptism of their own members. On the other hand when believer baptized members transfer from another denomination into their membership they are required to go through a believers' baptism as a rite of entry. Yet

ironically believer-baptizing denominations also experience difficulty with the quest for rebaptism by their members. A Baptist minister, by the name of Brian Russell, writes the following in connection with rebaptism:

More and more people are asking for rebaptism even though they were baptized by immersion on profession of faith in Jesus Christ as their lord and saviour. On trips to Israel Baptists and Pentecostals were rebaptized in the River Jordan because they wanted to be like Jesus, who was baptized in the Jordan. Others want rebaptism because they feel that their previous baptism was not valid. It had not been preceded by a genuine conversion (Russell B, 1968:18).

Russell argues that as

Baptism is an initiation ceremony proclaiming the beginning of an altogether new life – like physical birth; it is both necessary and unrepeatable. Rebaptism therefore is a travesty because it makes nonsense out of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It also calls the verities of the gospel into question. (1968:18).

While the history of church life in the various denominations is littered with on-going differences, debate, dispute and division over the practice of rebaptism yet baptism in the Bible is described as being "one baptism" (Eph.4:5). It seems that there is therefore no point in performing a baptism on a person who has already received a perfectly normal and legitimate baptism. It does not make theological sense to do something which has already been done. From time to time movements of religious revival raise again the problems associated with different baptismal positions, and possible solutions to the controversy are proposed. It seems that baptism in the 20th century has once more become a subject of major controversy in the Christian church.

F. THEOLOGICAL DEBATE DURING THE 20TH CENTURY

The debate since the Lutheran Reformation, which attempts to define the true meaning of baptism, may be narrowed down to two central issues: who may be baptized, and how they should be baptized, i.e. the practice of infant baptism as against believers' baptism. Was infant baptism practiced in the early church? If so, what were its antecedents and were infants baptized during the first two centuries after Christ? Various prominent scholars in the paedobaptist school, having put their minds to these questions, produced theology bringing clarification, and thus gave more direction towards progress in terms of what the "one baptism" Eph 4:5 means. Work which is pertinent to this dissertation is from Karl Barth (1948), Oscar Cullmann (1950), GW Lampe (1951), Marcus Barth (1959), JAT Robinson (1962) and J. Jeremias (1963).

The reason for the choice of these theologians is that they were at the cutting edge of theological study in respect of the issues and divisions around baptism in the 20thC. Prior to the two world wars the church appeared to have become more institutional than evangelistic. "Much of European

Christianity was purely nominal, except when touched by times of revival” (Bridges D, 1977:153). The secularisation and de-Christianising effects of two world wars, together with a rise of materialism pressured Christians in Europe and Europe’s colonies to re-examine their values and place in society (1977:149). This also eventuated in a reappraisal of the relationship between the state and the church. Was it correct for a country to be regarded as Christian simply because its people were compelled to become members of the church? The need for evangelism and the spreading of the gospel increased and much like in Lutheran Reformation times Christians attempted to revert back to Christianity as it was practised in the early church. Infant baptism was particularly affected and indiscriminate baptism, as formerly practiced became anachronistic and irrelevant, while adult believers’ baptism was resorted to more and more (1977:150).

The rise of ecumenism, the attempt to unite different denominations both formal, i.e. the formation of the World Council of Churches, and informal, those organised as Christian centres with an emphasis on Christians needing to be in one fellowship, uniting in evangelistic endeavour, and the nomadic movements of Christians, all gave rise to a process of theological cross-pollination as Christians crossed denominational boundaries. (1977:150). “As soon as this kind of thing happens the practice of baptism becomes a key issue” of thought and debate amongst Christians (1977:150).

The shift from an institutionalised church which tended to promote infant baptism, to a confessing evangelistic church in which mission was a major concern, began to materialise. Practical problems also emerged, for example

What should a crypto-Baptist do when children are born to him (sic) within the fellowship of an Anglican church? How should the crypto-Methodist, who has baptized his (sic) children in infancy, advice his (sic) teenage sons and daughters when they come to apply for membership of a Baptist church? It is because these problems lead to the heart of the baptismal question that consideration must now be given to the practical issues which arise from the various practices of infant and adult baptism (1977:150).

As clear theological answers were needed, it was in this post World War II context that the six theologians in question lived and worked. As five of these theologians were of European and English orientation, this group as can be expected, provided contrasting views, especially as the Barths, both father and son, having been schooled in traditional Lutheranism came to view water baptism as being more of an evangelistic confession rather than a mere rite in the church. Karl Barth, and later, his son Marcus, claimed that infant baptism was not taught or practiced in the New Testament. As this claim would have devastating consequences for the practice of baptism in infant-baptizing churches, the other theologians came to its defence and endeavoured to provide theologies which demonstrated not only that infant baptism is biblically legitimate but also focussed on the need for it to be kept in theological balance with the practice of believers’ baptism.

The View of Karl Barth: 1948

Barth looked at baptism from the perspective of how the church of his time understood and taught it. If the church was to present baptism as it is portrayed in the New Testament then it would have to favour believers' baptism as against infant baptism. His is an unusual thesis in that it involves a critical analysis of a tradition in which he was schooled and his effort was no doubt aimed at being as objective about the matter as possible. As a Reformed theologian he upheld a *sola scriptura* biblical pre-disposition. His argument therefore arose from a literal reading of the scripture. In this he posed a number of questions: Is baptism in the Bible a command, and if not, what about the baptismal commission in Matthew 28:19-20? Are there examples and demonstrations of baptism in the Bible and what do they reveal and teach?

While Barth concluded that infant baptism was not to be found anywhere in the Bible he was prepared to admit that infants may have been present during the baptism of households, in the five instances recorded in the New Testament. He claimed however that the presence of infants in the household baptisms referred to, are "more than a weak basis for infant baptism" (Barth K, 1948:45). He went on to write,

I know only a thin thread to which one may perhaps hold (and then hardly) and for a proof of infant baptism from the New Testament; the fact that Acts 15:16; 18:8, and I Corinthians 1:16 speak of the baptism of households and Acts 16:33 of the baptism of *oi autoi* of the Philippian jailer, that these passages do not explicitly forbid the supposition that babies may have been included: one thinks however, of the sequence that is invariably kept even in these narratives – the preaching of the Word, faith baptism – and wonders, whether one really wants to hold to this thread..... One can hardly come to any other conclusion but that the case for a New Testament proof of infant baptism is more than weak (Barth K, 1948:45).

The baptism of infants is also not correct on exegetical grounds.

By exegesis it cannot be established that the baptized person can be a mere passive instrument (*behandelter*). But by exegesis is established that the baptized is an active partner (*Handelnder*)... no *infants* can be such a person.... Baptism in the New Testament in every case... is by a man(sic) who has come to faith... one is not brought to baptism; one comes to baptism (1948:42). It is true that baptism is in Colossians 2:11ff called the circumcision of Christ, which we may enter upon instead of the Israelite circumcision, but from this it no ways follows that baptism, like circumcision, is to be carried out on a babe. Christians may be a minority and would they not be of more use to their surroundings, if they were allowed to be a healthier church? What is needed is a church of the people instead of for the people (Barth K, 1948:53).

Prevenient Grace and Baptism

As regards the question of prevenient grace, Barth stated that "the argument for an antecedent grace would carry weight only if the rightness of infant baptism could have been proved in some other way – in free and responsible baptism" (1948:53). Barth did not totally reject infant baptism. While he believed that infant baptism is biblically incorrect yet infant baptism must not be rejected as a Christian baptism, if it was performed in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Barth also speaks about infant baptism which could be viewed as half baptism, with confirmation being the other half. He states that Calvin and Luther rightly emphasised the divine component of infant baptism but they left out the need for baptism to be the ratification of baptismal covenant which is what baptism within itself requires. For this ratification to happen another rite has to be invented, which is what confirmation, signifies. He quotes from Schleiermacher who recognises that

Infant baptism requires completion and supplementing. Infant baptism is a complete baptism only when the profession of faith, which comes after further instruction, is regarded as the act which consummated it (1948:47).

What is true Biblical Baptism?

Barth argues that if baptism

has no reference to the conscious acknowledgement of regeneration and faith, to the complete divine-human reality which is portrayed within it; if it cannot be in a reality intelligible sense the confirming in allegiance of the second of the chief actors, the one baptized; if it cannot be a matter of decision and confession at all; is it in this case full baptism? Is it not rather, and notoriously, half baptism? (1948:48).

He goes on to ask that if confirmation is regarded as a half sacrament by what authority is this done? He concluded that confirmation does not carry sacramental status, and neither is it a biblical rite (1948:48). "Infant baptism can hardly be preserved without exegetical and practical artifices and sophisms.... And one wants to preserve it only if one is resolved to do so on grounds which lie outside the biblical passages on baptism and outside the thing itself" (1948:49).

The Baptism of Adults

Only adults can be the proper recipients of baptism. He relies for this part of his argument on the linguistic factor.

The Greek word *Baptizein* – the German word is *taufen* (from *tiefe*, meaning depth). It originally and properly describes the process by which a man (sic) or an object is completely immersed in water and then withdrawn from it again" (p.9)... One can hardly deny that baptism carried out as immersion – as it was in the West until well in the Middle Ages – showed what was represented in far more expressive fashion than did the effusion which later became customary. Romans 6:1ff describes a critical happening in the life of a Christian and that of a believer. It speaks of identification with Christ in his death and resurrection (Barth K, 1948:10 & 11).

Baptism as a Witness

Baptism bears witness to the Word, to God, to Jesus, to covenant grace, to faith, and to the Church. It is an

Event in which God, in Jesus Christ makes man(sic) his(sic) child and a member of his(sic) covenant, awakens faith through his(sic) grace and calling a man(sic) to life in his(sic) church (1948:14). Baptism is a practice in which man (sic) is not the most important figure, but is certainly the second most important.... It is the visible sign of the invisible *nativitas spiritualis* at the gate of the Church and at the beginning of every Christian life. (1948:15).

The power of baptism

Its power lies in the fact that it is the Church's message as a free word and deed of Jesus self – it is a living and expressive word. The Church does not invent baptism and its proclamation – she administers it as instituted by our Lord and the Church obeys the command (1948:17). Luther stated that baptism is 'God's Word in water'; as such it carries symbolic power (1948:18). Truly water cannot do it, but the word of God which is with and on the water, and the faith which believes such word of God in the water. For without the word of God the water is simply water and not baptism. But with the word of God it is baptism. Baptism cannot be potency-dependent on itself or one which itself produces its effects. It is the Lord's power alone that can save (1948:20 & 21).

The central meaning of baptism in relation to the candidate is clear.

With divine certainty there is given to him (sic) for the glorifying of God and the up-building of the church of Jesus Christ, the promise that in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ the grace of God avails for him (sic) and is directed to him (sic) that in this happening he(sic) is also reborn; that, on the ground of this happening even he(sic) may have assurance of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit; that even his(sic) sins are forgiven; that he(sic) also is a child of God; that the hope of eternal life is his(sic) also (1948:32).

Barth appears not to have prioritised biblical passages that imply baptism which could also signify the baptism of infants such as in biblical covenant and Matthew 28:19. In this text the statement is made that all nations need to be discipled and baptized. This is a clear reference to the inclusiveness of the practice. Barth puts an emphasis on what the texts say but seems to underplay the primary role of divinity in the process. He also says nothing about the implication of Acts 2:38 which speaks about baptism and the promise of the Holy Spirit being to you and your children and to all who are far off. What is interesting in Barth's argument is his statement about the possibility of infant baptism being viewed as a half baptism. When is it possible for infant baptism to be viewed as a whole baptism and in what way?

The View of Oscar Cullman: 1950

The focus of Cullman's study on baptism in the New Testament is that both adult believers and their children qualify and baptism is located in Christ's saving work and is an expression of biblical covenant. Cullmann defended infant baptism on grounds that it is altogether biblical and he viewed Barth's conclusion on baptism as a serious challenge to the practice of infant baptism. He claimed that broadly speaking, Barth dealt with infant baptism in isolation (Cullmann O, 1950:7-8). As the origin of Christian baptism is in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the foundation of all baptism is thus divinely and soteriologically provided. According to Cullmann Matthew 28:19 does not have enough textual material which should explain a connection between baptism and Christ's person and work. The text only contains a demand for baptism but says nothing about its origins. The connection between Christ and baptism is loose when it is considered "that Jesus himself did not baptize, at least not during his public work". What is new in Jesus' baptism as against John the Baptist's is the imparting of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:17 and 2:38) (1950:7, 8, 9). The connection of Christian baptism with John's baptism is that John's baptism is a preparatory one by repentance, whereas Jesus baptizes with the Spirit. Christian baptism therefore is based in forgiveness and emerges from a life of death and burial which also means walking in the Spirit and in newness of life. The anchoring of baptism in the work of Christ has thus three consequences: - "a forgiveness of sins, b. the transmission of the Spirit and c. both are acts in a new and significant relation to the one and the same external baptismal act" (1950:14 &15).

Why did Jesus allow himself to be baptized by John who baptized for repentance, despite Jesus' sinlessness? It was because he received "the role of suffering servant of God, who took on himself the sins of the people" (1950:18). Christian baptism goes back to Jesus' baptism in the River Jordan. He was baptized for sin and not because he was a sinner. John 1:29:"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world...." Cullmann spoke of the baptism of Christ as the baptism of suffering and redemption, which was an event that carried universal significance. He called the baptism of Christ a general baptism because in that way he became the Saviour of all people. This event in the life of Jesus is inclusive as it is to benefit all who may respond to the call of the gospel, men, women and eventually children. "Christ's death and resurrection procured for all men, and independent of them, is a general baptism" which is to be understood as the prevenient grace of God in action and as such fulfils the role of the objective side of baptism (Cullmann O, 1950:70).

Baptism is also incorporation into the church where Christ is present and where the once-and-for-all saving work of Christ is carried out in all who are responding "and where conscious faith is born and communicated". In this sense baptism takes the place of circumcision as a sign of Christ and his gospel work. Cullmann concluded therefore that both adult and infant baptisms are to be regarded as equally biblical. "The essence of the act of baptism is therefore the reception of a member into the divine covenant of the body of Christ in whom the covenant with Abraham is fulfilled" (1950:46).

As regards baptism and the requirement of faith the question is, how does Cullmann justify the inclusion of infants in the act of baptism when it is generally believed that baptism requires faith and infants are incapable of faith? Cullmann reasoned that "within the mortal life of the person baptized, that is of one who has been received into the church of Jesus Christ; baptism is the starting point of something that happens" (1950:48). The gift of regeneration is available in that context, which is how baptism is designated in Titus 3:5 and John 3:3ff. By being in the church through baptism "the individual has been made the object of salvation". Paul speaks of the baptism of his listeners as an event which happened in the past in which they were merely passive objects. Romans 6:1ff does not refer to those not yet baptized but teaches that what happened to the Romans by baptism was an act of salvation (1950:49).

Adult baptism can be held to be distinct from infant baptism only insofar as prior confession of faith is demanded which applies to adults transferring from Judaism or heathenism. The question of what happens in baptism is nevertheless in the case of adults and of infants the same, "Since even with adults the faith that is to be confessed after baptism by mouth and deed is decisive. Faith thus essentially belongs to the second and not to the first act of the event of baptism." (1950:52).

The first act of the baptismal event speaks of God's provision of salvation which excludes human effort or merit, and the second act refers to a person's response, not as a work but as a belief in Christ's saving grace. Even though there is no proof in the Bible that infants were present when household baptism were performed

There can be no question of preceding instruction or of a faith present at the moment of baptism on the part of the member of the family. This is certain, quite independently of the insoluble question of whether there were infants in these houses or not (1950:53).

As an example in support of his argument Cullmann quotes Acts 16:31 – salvation is promised to the Philippian jailer and his house. The record has it that he and his family were baptized. I Corinthians 7:14 is another example of the influence of faith on those who do not possess faith (Cullman O, 1950:53). He concluded that:

The New Testament relation between faith and baptism does not so unambiguously and indisputably affirm that faith leads to baptism. Biblical references to baptism can be read as baptism before faith, baptism after faith, and saving faith after baptism. The faith of the congregation is critical as it belongs to the act of baptism. And the congregation imparts the influence of faith through devotion and prayer that God may complete the miracle of baptism his (sic) saving work in the baptized person, whether adult or infant (1950:54).

Cullman cites Mark 2:5, Matthew 8:10, Mark 9:14ff, Mark 9:23ff and Matthew 17:19ff as examples of how the faith of individuals and the community can be used by Jesus to heal others. The connection between faith and baptism is necessary in the following instances:

- After baptism, faith is demanded of all those baptized;
- Before baptism, the declaration of faith is the sign of the divine will that baptism takes place, demanded from adults who individually come over from Judaism or heathenism, but in other cases where this is lacking;
- During the baptismal act faith is demanded of the praying congregation (1950:55).

Cullmann believed that Christian baptism is both a fulfilment and repeal of Old Testament circumcision. This concept is already explicitly present in Colossians 2:11ff and implicitly in Romans 2:23ff, 4:1ff, Galatians 3:6ff and Ephesians 2:11ff. He claimed that Barth's argument in regard to this aspect is his weakest point in his doctrine of baptism.

Even if it is conceded that the Reformers proofs of infant baptism are not quite water-tight, the Reformed argument at least merits more attention. It is inexplicable to me how Barth, while conceding that baptism is the fulfilment of circumcision, yet denies at the crucial point the inner relationship between the two, and can affirm that circumcision is in itself something quite different; so that the fact that children were circumcised has no bearing on the question of Christian infant baptism (1950:57).

Cullman believed therefore that there is a correspondence between Jewish circumcision and infant baptism in the sense that "Jewish circumcision is reception into the old covenant just as Christian baptism is reception into the new" (1950:57).

G.W. Lampe's View: 1951

Following hot on the heels of Barth's conclusions about infant baptism and Cullmann's defence of infant baptism, Lampe's contribution to the debate was an investigation of the "relationship between baptism and confirmation particularly in regard to the sacramental reception of the indwelling of the presence of the Holy Spirit". (Lampe G, 1951: Introduction, vii). He looks at the 'sealing of the Spirit' in relation to baptism in the New Testament and the apostolic church up to the second century. In this he deals with the patristic theories of sealing and the meaning of the Spirit in baptism, confirmation and the laying on of hands. (Lampe G, 1951: Contents: v). Not only are these complicated theological issues which he tackled, but it is difficult to fathom what definitive conclusions he came to about these matters. Was this investigation intended to be debate-provoking but open ended with no clear-cut definitive conclusion? Was he saying that as paedobaptists believe that the Holy Spirit is somehow at work in prevenient grace during the baptism, and then later at the confirmation of the one baptized as an infant, that this is what is meant by the phrase 'the sealing of the Spirit'?

Stated differently Lampe's work is a study of the other half of baptism which is viewed as a confirmation. If a person is born of water and the Spirit, even if confirmation is not specifically stated in the New Testament, is there not a link between confirmation and the working of the Holy Spirit?

He points out that according to the biblical record the Holy Spirit is connected with baptism and surely must be present in some way at the confirmation, yet there is nothing in the Bible about whether the laying on of hands and the sealing of the Spirit have anything to do with the rite of confirmation. He believed that after the apostolic era the Christian church began to use the sealing of the Spirit in connection with the rite of confirmation. He disputed this and showed that the laying-on of hands for the reception of the Holy Spirit was not in any way connected with a rite of confirmation.

The laying on of hands for the coming of the Holy Spirit had more to do with certain special occasions and this ceremony which symbolises fellowship, solidarity and incorporation into a single unity of those who performed it and those who received it, was regarded by St. Luke as a means whereby special charismata of the Spirit, appropriate to the missionary enterprise, were bestowed upon certain converts, so that the apostolic character of the missionary church was transferred from the original apostles to recruits for its evangelistic task (1951:308). Lampe did not reject the rite of confirmation which follows infant baptism, even though not recorded directly in the Bible. He viewed it as a rite that "preserves elements of doctrine and practice" (1951:322).

My conclusion of a book whose material and debate is very difficult to fathom is expressed in Lampe's own words:

If we keep in mind the implication of the teaching of the New Testament and in the early church we shall refuse to accept the doctrine that is in this rite of confirmation that a man (sic) can receive the seal of the Holy Spirit, by which he (sic) is signed for eternity; we shall not see in it the means by which alone one can be made a full Christian (1951:322).

The materials in his book are thought-provoking and relevant in as much as Lampe shows that it is possible that the Holy Spirit is busy during the practices of baptism and confirmation. Confirmation may be viewed as the occasion when the working of the Holy Spirit is demonstrated in personal conversion. The sealing of the Spirit with the laying on of hands may not provide evidence of a clear-cut link between baptism and confirmation according to the biblical record. Dixon, however, has this to say about Lampe's claim:

"the connection between the 'sealing of the Spirit.... and the sacrament of baptism is so close that the one can be regarded as the thing signified by the other" (Lampe GWH, 1951:4), that "this concept is best regarded as another way of describing initiation or incorporation, though it has the added reference to the work of the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit's action in baptism a person comes to share in the new covenant, just as he might have been admitted to the old covenant by means of circumcision. The baptized are 'sealed' as God's possession" (Dixon N, 1979:4).

The View of Marcus Barth: 1959

Marcus Barth's study on baptism offers a conclusion that the purpose of baptism in the New Testament cannot be separated from evangelism. He cites I Corinthians 1:17 and Matthew 28:19. These texts....

Tend to say, like other baptismal texts of the New Testament, that baptism is inferior to evangelism and serve evangelism, and will be performed wherever the Gospel is preached in obedience to Christ. Baptism is related to mission work and preaching, as John the Baptist is to Jesus Christ or as the servant is to the master. Baptism cannot rule, begin or replace evangelism, but it has a necessary function in its service (Barth M, 1959:32).

The Church has been sidetracked in regard to the meaning and purpose of baptism. Baptism has rather become a doctrine with an emphasis on the sacramental. He also argues that the practice has assumed a celebrity status around incorporation into the church and around Jesus Christ. This emphasis has led to a belief that baptism possesses a mysterious and miraculous power when it is applied. It has become a sacred act which is believed to represent the unrepeatable nature of the saving work of Christ and it is from this understanding that the practice of baptism is required to be a once-off act (1959:34 & 35). In this the

church is busy with herself when she teaches and administers baptism, and many Christians as well as non-Christians have reasons to understand that baptism is like a magical act or like an initiation ritual (*rite de passage*) or like a sort of *kabbala*. All these expressions of baptismal teaching and practice show how far baptism has become separated from evangelism. (1959:35).

How does Barth justify baptism's evangelistic purpose? Like Karl Barth he believed that any enquiry which is of a theological nature must start with passages in the Bible that speak explicitly and primarily of baptism, with a focus on Jesus' baptism. John's baptism was a call to repentance and Jesus' baptism at the hands of John was an incarnational, identificational demonstration of the divine salvific plan of God for all people. This is the central purpose of baptism and God confirmed this purpose when he said "You are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased". Luke 3:22, Matthew 3:13-17 and Mark 1:9-11.

The preaching of John shows, in agreement with Jesus' own baptism, that baptism is a public declaration of God's rights over rebels, of his(sic) way to them, and of the way of repentance and hope in forgiveness as the people's only preparation. Luke 1:17, 7:6ff and 7:29ff. Christian baptism after the resurrection is essentially identical with John's baptism (Acts 2:38 and 19:4-5). (Barth M, 1959:36).

Even the Greek word for liturgy signifies not so much an interaction of mutual remembering but "the fulfilment of a public service" (Barth M, 1959:37) which is essentially that of evangelism. Even Jesus' investiture into this ministry of witness was not a nice uplifting ceremony, but was a descent into shame, humiliation and death, and was connected with confession and repentance.

Baptism is the unique, necessary, public beginning, pledge, investiture into that ministry of witnesses and as such is a ministry of repentance into the death, the burial with Christ (Romans 6:4ff and Colossians 2:12 ff), whose essence is a public attestation and proclamation (I Corinthians 11:26) of what has been completed by Christ. This is God's self-proclamation and is an act of evangelism. Baptism which does not serve this purpose is not New Testament baptism (1959:38-39).

The conclusion that Barth came to, is that "Biblical baptism and authentic evangelism are inseparable". Baptism emphasised and practiced in this way will have the effect of promoting evangelism (1959:40).

If biblical baptism is authentic, meaning that evangelism and baptism go hand in hand, why are infants excluded from the process of evangelism even if they cannot understand? Why can't infants also be subjected to the process of evangelism on the basis of prevenient grace? If baptism signifies that adults need to be saved before baptism is administered, there is no biblical reason why this sign cannot also signify the need for infants to be evangelised. This is the intention behind covenant baptism.

John A.T. Robinson's View: 1962

Robinson's study of baptism from the New Testament led to the conclusion that the practice of the "one baptism" (Eph.4:5) should lead to unity amongst Christians over the matter. Using Ephesians 4:4ff as a text-and-verse starting point, Robinson spoke about what the "one baptism" (Eph.4:5) means. He supported Cullmann's research on baptism and states that the origin of baptism should be located in the baptism of Christ at the hands of John the Baptist and not from any ritual as originated by the post-apostolic church. Christian baptism originates from the offering that Christ made once-and-for-all through his life and death and in the process, baptism became a general baptism for all people (I Corinthians 10:17, 12:13 and Galatians 3:27). The experience of Christ, tying in with his suffering and death on the cross is what makes baptism one, and consequently should promote Christian unity.

The purpose of the "one baptism" (Eph.4:5) is to make all people Christian and all Christians one. In spite of Christendom being divided, it still recognises a single baptism. Why baptism should promote unity is because it brings people under a baptism "once made" (Robinson JAT, 1962:158). Baptism was not "created by the church, but is that which the church administers" (1962:158).

In agreeing with Cullmann's concept of the baptism of Christ as being a general baptism, he states that "it is a sound generalisation of the meaning and purpose of baptism" (Robinson J.A.T, 1962:159). Jesus' baptism with water was the commencement of his service and of the suffering that Jesus went through until he was ascended. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was the consequence of it.

The baptism of Jesus is his whole existence in the form of a servant, and all that is included in his being upon the earth. He came "not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many" Mark 10:45. See also Isaiah 53 (1962:160).

Christian baptism simply reproduces in the life of the Christian the "one baptism" (Eph.4:5) of Jesus, begun in Jordan and completed in the resurrection (1962:164).

As this baptism is once and for all, as well as being universal, it signifies the provision of salvation for all people of all time. Nothing new has been produced since, or will be, but it still requires the individual's appropriation for it to be effective.

Robinson's theory of the "one baptism" based on Ephesians 4:5 was taken from a whole number of New Testament texts and passages, such as Mark 10:35ff, Luke 12:49ff, Matthew 3:13-17, Romans 6:4, 8:14-16, Colossians 2:11-15, John 7:37-39, 13:8-10, 19:34ff, Acts 1:4ff, 2:38 and 10:47ff, 11:15-17, 19:1-6 I Corinthians 1:13, 6:11, 10:1ff, Ephesians 5:25-27, Titus 3:4-7, Hebrews 10:19-23, I Peter 3:21, Revelation 14:19ff, 16:17-19 and 19:11-16. (1962:160-175). His message seems to be that Christians should therefore agree to disagree, but be united despite a diversity of views on it. The debate around what is to be defined as true baptism continues.

The View of J Jeremias: 1963

In focussing on the origins of baptism Jeremias concludes that baptism in the New Testament is an outcome of covenant in the Old Testament and therefore should include infants.

In this work Jeremias responds to Kurt Aland's opinion on the question of whether the early church baptized infants or not. Aland had refuted Jeremias' earlier work *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*. In the sections of his book *The Origins of Infant Baptism* he endeavoured to clarify and strengthen his argument for infant baptism based on the *oikos* formula: the baptism of "Houses", and secondly by refuting claims of an age-limit for baptism in the first two centuries, i.e. that infant baptism was an innovation round about A.D. 200. In both instances he reaffirmed his conviction that all children were included in the baptism of the households on their parent's Christian conversion (Jeremias J, 1962:32), and ...

Neither Tertullian nor Origen nor Cyprian give us the slightest support for the hypothesis that infant baptism was an innovation in their time or was felt to be such. On the contrary, they were unanimous in showing that it was then the natural and traditional practice of the church (1962:75).

Jeremias asked the question that, if adults were most commonly to be converted during the first two centuries, what they did with their children. He conjectured that they must have brought them along and "presumably had them baptized as well" (1962:76). He went on to argue that if there was an increase of numbers of children in the Church around the end of second century which Aland claims is

the explanation for the rise of child or infant baptism, it cannot be conclusively concluded that this was the reason for the introduction of the baptism of infants. Children and infants were always present and "played a significant part in the Church" (1962:77). Jeremias justified this claim by quoting texts from the New Testament: Acts 21:5 and 21, I Corinthians 7:14, Ephesians 6:1 and 4, Colossians 3:20, I Timothy 2:15, 3:4 and 12, 5:4, 10 and 14, and Titus 1:6. These texts are all in addition to the instances recorded in the Gospels featuring Jesus and children. There is moreover the record of the practice of household baptism, of which there are at least four examples in the New Testament. Jeremias's argues that even though the focus of evangelism followed by baptism was on adults, children were likely to have been included (Jeremias J, 1962:77).

Aland's other argument was the belief that up to the second century, children were innocent and that they therefore did not need to be baptized. "They need baptism only when sinfulness awakens, that is to say at a more advanced age" (1962:77-78). Jeremias found that aspects of Aland's argument were not in accord with facts as revealed in the records of the second and third centuries after Christ.

A superstitious misconception of baptism, which regarded it merely as a charm by means of which forgiveness granted once and for all could be obtained, became more and more common. This resulted in the postponement of baptism to a time when disaster struck or death threatened the 'dissenters'. Dissenters are threatened from all sides therefore let us baptize our children as quickly as possible (1962:84).

This statement indicates that infants were likely to have been baptized at that time, albeit sometimes for wrong reasons. Jeremias continues his argument by emphasising that "New Testament theology about baptism is wholeness in its character" (1962:84) which means that children were therefore included.

The same applies to the Christian community and their families. The whole people of God were baptized when they passed through the Red Sea (I Corinthians 1:10ff), the whole family of Noah was saved in the Ark, symbolising baptism (I Peter 3:20ff); the promise of the Spirit referred to the 'houses' ('to you and your children', Acts 2:39). They are seen as one unit in the sight of God. The faith of the father of the 'house' as representing his family, along with the faith of the mother, embraces the children as well, and the universal character of Christ's grace reveals itself in that it is the 'houses' which are summoned to believe and are baptized (1962:85).

Since early times the prevailing question has been, should only believers be baptized or should their infants be included? A comparison between these 6 theologians reveals what each one believed about who should be baptised:

- K. Barth believed that there is no evidence for infant baptism in the New Testament. The New Testament gives witness through text-and-verse only to the practice of believers'

baptism. Even though infant baptism is lacking in that sense in the Bible, it should not be rejected if it has been carried out in the name of the Trinity.

- O. Cullmann's view is that the baptism of infants of believing adults and of believers is very much in evidence in the Bible. It is to be located in the general baptism of Christ which was derived from His life, death and resurrection. Because he loved the world, made up of men, women and children, children should be included.
- G.W.H. Lampe. The Holy Spirit plays a vital role in the application of baptism as well as being closely associated with all the other Christian rites associated with baptism, i.e. confirmation, the laying on of hands and sealing. Baptism is for Christian families.
- M. Barth. The baptismal texts in the New Testament have reference only to people who have become Christian. Baptism is not primarily an institution to be used and cherished in the Church. References in the New Testament to baptism indicate that invariably baptism and evangelism go hand in hand and therefore it is only for those who have been evangelised.
- J.A.T. Robinson. Christian baptism is derived from Jesus' baptism by John, which was a prefiguring of Jesus' life of serving and suffering. This is the "one baptism" (Eph.4:5) which is inclusive of men, women and children, and should be unifying because it is based on Jesus as Saviour for all.
- J. Jeremias. Baptism is an expression of covenant and as infants were included in households, in both the Old Testament as well as in the New, baptism is for men, women, children and infants. The *oikos* factor, which is a central feature of covenant, is a thread which runs through from the Old Testament into the New and this is a biblical justification for all views of Christian baptism.

We have seen in the summary of the work of these 6 theologians how the post World War II church in Germany and Britain struggled with the need to determine the nature of a relationship between the practices of both infant and believers' baptism which were in competition, and therefore seemed to be irreconcilable. A fresh look at this scenario, with the primary need for the church to get back to evangelism for all people based on Matthew 28:19f as the central focus is what is again required.

This study has endeavoured to show that differences, disputes and division over the practice of baptism and the casting of doubt upon differing understandings may have arisen because of the absence of any definitive statement over the various aspects of water baptism and its practice in Biblical times. Yet the Bible speaks about baptism as one in Ephesians 4:5. Ideally baptism should be viewed as a unity in diversity. And yet how are the questions concerning the disputes over baptism going to be answered in a way that unites Christians on valid scriptural and theological grounds while at the same time making it possible for rebaptism to become redundant? This is the task that lies ahead.

Matthew 28:19 is an important common denominator between views as it is regarded by all as the reason for baptism. This applies whether baptism is viewed purely as an ordinance or as ordinance and symbol, or thirdly as an ordinance, symbol and sacrament. Furthermore the chapter reveals, as has been demonstrated by the exposition of the 5 views detailed earlier, that all views are firmly based in and derived from scripture. It has become obvious that baptism in scripture is open to being interpreted in many different ways and all these ways have their merits and demerits. As to whether it can be ascertained that any one view of biblical baptism is more correct than others in a way that provides broad agreement between proponents, seems impossible to achieve. A study of Matthew 28:19ff and of other leading baptismal texts shows that a conclusion on the matter will be difficult to come by.

And yet, if the brief investigation carried out as recorded in the introduction to this dissertation has provided biblical evidence and cogent argument that a biblical definition of baptism is lacking, and if this work reveals that the formation of several views of baptism as illustrated by the five principal views has been occasioned by the absence of a biblical definition, then the possibility exists that baptismal legalism may recede, the acceptance of the biblical validity of other views will begin to materialise and these outcomes should contribute to a possible reduction of requests for rebaptism.

The MCSA was born into this context and is likely to have inherited the difficulties around baptism and these will be dealt with later in this study. In the following chapters the MCSA position on baptism will be examined. I will also mention and discuss unacceptable practices that are located within the church and go on to deal with questions around these forbidden practices. MCSA policy and practice is at a cross-road, and why is this so? And why is there a clashing of views and division amongst members within a church which claims to be one and undivided. What could the MCSA do about this difficulty? With its Anglican background one would have thought that the MCSA would follow the progressive Anglican way of coping with these issues from the outset. The Anglican Church has proved to be broadly accepting of the diverse views of baptism and has pursued an ethos of peaceful diversity over the matter with seeming success.

To this end I will attempt to set out and evaluate the MCSA understanding of baptism and show that it practices baptism within a Wesleyan understanding of covenant theology. Mention will be made and discussion engaged in around unacceptable practices in the MCSA. All this will be done in the light of Methodist policy with the focus on its attitude to the practice of rebaptism. I will go on to examine what the MCSA could do as a sign of flexibility and accommodation towards the other viewpoints in the church. While the MCSA does not seem to have produced telling theological work on issues mentioned in this discussion, the Anglican Church has done so. If theological debate on baptism seems to be lacking in the MCSA, especially in recent times, probably because of the MCSA's evangelical and missionary emphasis to which it generally gives most of its attention (MCSA Laws & Discipline, 2000:2) and while not ignoring all the material provided by the church as a starting point

and as a central basis for baptismal discussion, it will nevertheless draw on the theological expertise and practical insights and trends as provided for in its parent body, the Anglican Church. It is for this reason that, amongst a whole range of theologians, the theologies of Harper, Bridge, Green and Robinson will be utilised in this work.

The route that this study will take is not to do a doctrinal, moral or sacramental examination of baptism but rather focuses on baptismal rites in the context of the MCSA view. It will show how the MCSA has endeavoured to cope with requests for rebaptism, as well as discuss steps it is taking to maintain and advance the unity of the "one baptism" (Eph.4:5) in the need for peaceful diversity. It will not however be a detailed study of biblical texts, even though results of bible studies as a foundational exercise will be included and discussed. Neither will it be an attempt to solve doctrinal problems between different views of baptism but will be a theological study demonstrating the differences in views on baptism around a range of baptismal rites and endeavour to provide some viability for these alternative rites.

CHAPTER 2

THE MCSA POSITION ON BAPTISM AND REBAPTISM

In this chapter I will deal with MCSA policy on baptism, which is located in John Wesley's viewpoint on the subject because Wesley is the MCSA's spiritual and doctrinal forbear. A broad but cursory summary will be given on questions of how water baptism is currently understood and practiced in the MCSA, and reasons why the MCSA has a problem with the practice of rebaptism. This question begins to be answered by a listing of unacceptable practices around baptism and why the MCSA prohibits these. They are indiscriminate baptism, rebaptism, baptism by immersion alone, the dedication of infants and private baptism.

This study will feature: scripture as the basis of all Christian theology; who should be the recipients of baptism; the significance of baptism; faith and baptism; the role of the church in baptism; redemption and baptism, and the mode of baptism. These are features of baptism from which controversy and division originate. They are all used in some way either to defend MCSA baptism or to justify rebaptism.

A broad summary:

- i. The MCSA has existed as an independent body for approximately 100 years and is therefore relatively new. It has inherited and incorporated much of Wesley's teaching on baptism into its system. MCSA doctrine on baptism is essentially covenantal and it is from covenant that it derives its bid to exercise an inclusive ministry.
- ii. It practices both infant baptism – the infants of believers – and adult believers' baptism.
- iii. The belief is that while baptism is an ordinance it also carries symbolical and sacramental meaning. It is sacramental because it is a command of Jesus and emphasises the primary role of prevenient grace. Baptism is evangelical in that it requires grace to be appropriated for personal redemption.
- iv. It believes that its position on baptism is thoroughly biblical and puts emphasis on the very important role that the church plays in baptismal practice, the necessity of a personal faith and the need for all who have been baptized to experience personal regeneration. Any of the three modes may be used, as all of them derive from the Bible.

The inclusive nature of baptism in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa is stated from its rulebook, the Laws and Discipline:

- Methodism had its birth in the great work which was performed through the Revival of religion in the eighteenth century by means of the preaching and apostolic labours of John and Charles Wesley and

their fellow helpers...These founders of Methodism were constrained to provide, step by step, in the wisdom God had given to them, for the spiritual needs of a multitude of people...In making this provision they reproduced many of the modes of church life indicated in the New Testament. (MCSA Laws and Discipline, 2000:3)⁷.

Because it follows the tradition of doctrine and practice of John Wesley, the MCSA views its position on water baptism as an expression of covenant and it is to a very large extent, a copy of what Wesley taught and practiced. It uses the Wesleyan double practice of baptizing believing adults and their infants which Wesley had inherited from the Anglican Church as an Anglican minister. Believers' baptism in this sense is a basic requirement and demonstrates its inclusive nature. The belief is that by using this double practise, the needs of all its members and of those being evangelised from a secular missionary environment, will be catered for.

The Minutes of Conference states: "While its tradition is that of infant baptism, the Methodist Church needs to assist those of its members who in conscience lean towards the tradition of believers' baptism" (MCSA Minutes 1989:59)⁸. The statement goes on to declare "there is no good reason why the Methodist Church should not make provision for both traditions in its present practice" (1989:59).

The MCSA intentionally promotes an inclusive ethos in its life and ministry as part of its calling towards the maintenance and building of unity between its members as well as between itself and other Christian denominational traditions willing to pursue this path. "The Conference declares that it is the will of God for the Methodist Church to be one and undivided, trust in the will of God to bring this ideal to ultimate fruition, and that this be the general basis of its missionary policy" (MCSA Minutes, 1979:65).

Its inclusiveness is demonstrated not only through its policy of practicing both believers' baptism and the baptism of the infants of believers, but also through the use of any of the modes carried out "with water, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit by sprinkling, pouring or immersion". Its Laws and Discipline states that baptism is for "older people who have not previously been baptized and who desire, upon profession of faith in Jesus Christ, to become members of the church" (MCSA L & D, 2000:5) and "those children only whose parents, one or both are (believing) members of the MCSA, of the local congregation" (2000:5).

Rev. Prof. N. Richardson, in his capacity as the convenor of the Department of Doctrine, Education and Training for Methodist ministers for more than 10 years wrote that

The MCSA is very inclusive – I do not know of any denomination more inclusive than we are. We say yes to all the options regarding the who and the how of baptism. The problem arises with those who

⁷ MCSA 'Laws and Discipline is the handbook of official MCSA laws and policy

⁸'Minutes of Conference': The MCSA holds an annual Conference, which is its highest working and decision-making authority. The record of this assembly is referred to as 'Minutes of Conference'

are exclusive – who say that only adult believers may be baptized and only by means of total immersion (Richardson N, 2009).

Theoretically its inclusiveness precludes the possibility of division, but in practice this is not the case. It is still plagued by requests for rebaptism, dispute and division. Some ministers do not believe that the problem is an issue any more, saying that no requests for rebaptism have come to them. Formal debate in the MCSA around rebaptism has been dormant for the last 20 years. No official workshop or seminar on baptism focussing on the need for viable alternative rites as decreed by MCSA has been held recently in an attempt to bring the issue to final settlement. Requests for rebaptism in the MCSA, evidence of which has been provided in the introduction to this dissertation, have not gone away. It would be interesting to do research among all the active ministers in the MCSA and its members, to gain unqualified accuracy over the claim that baptism is still a thorny issue in the church. In my view, rebaptism will continue to be divisive as long as the MCSA pursues an evangelistic and missionary policy thrust, while the need for alternative viable rites, though called for, has not been included in its official policy. A study of the Reformation, the Wesleyan revival and other revivals, reveals that when there is evangelistic and spiritual vibrancy in the church, Anabaptism again becomes a contentious issue. The Acts of the Apostles, which is a record of some of the missionary exploits carried out by the early church, reveals that adult believers baptism, brought on through the regenerating work of the Spirit, was the usual corollary. When people go through a Christian conversion, it is my experience that there seems to be very little care over whether they are from paganism with no background of baptism, or from within the church where they possess a background of baptism, a believer's baptism invariably is sought after. Yet the practice of rebaptism has been prohibited by the MCSA and the instruction is that, "baptism shall not be administered to persons who have previously been baptized" (MCSA L & D, 2000:5).

A. HOW IS WATER BAPTISM CURRENTLY UNDERSTOOD IN THE MCSA, AND REASONS FOR ITS POSITION

1. THE USE OF SCRIPTURE AS A THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR BAPTISM

The MCSA became autonomous from British Methodism in 1926 (MCSA L & D, 2000:11). It is logical that as British Methodism was its parent body and British Methodism being steeped in the theology of John Wesley from whom it originated, that the doctrines of the MCSA would adopt Wesleyan baptismal theology in broad terms. An important point is that the doctrines and practices of Wesley have been worked out from a *sola scriptura* view of the Bible. Although the Bible may be the final authority in matters of faith and practice, Wesley did not imply that tradition and experience have no value, but rather that these "further sources of insight must be congruous with the revelation recorded in scripture" (Williams C, 1960:26). Wesley invented the notion of the quadrilateral – scripture, reason, tradition and experience – because he believed that the principle of *sola scriptura*, which he strongly upheld, could be abused "by the vagaries of unchecked and enthusiastic exegesis"

(Williams C, 1960:30). Using the quadrilateral did not displace the Bible as needing to be the highest authority for all matters of faith and practice. As regards tradition he gave an important place to it, and used it "in checking his own interpretation against the great interpreters of the church" (Williams C, 1960:28). Reason is used in theological exercise as "it is a fundamental principle with us (Methodists) that to renounce reason is to renounce religion, that religion and reason go hand in hand, and that irrational religion is false religion" (1960:30). Reason does not however serve as another source of revelation "but is a logical faculty enabling us to order the evidence of revelation, and that with tradition it provides us with the necessary weapons for guarding against the dangers of the unbridled interpretation of scripture" (1960:33). In regard to experience, it "is the appropriation of authority, but not its source" (1960:33). "It is not the test of truth, but truth is the test of experience" (1960:34). While experience can be a divine tool for learning, yet it must be subject to the test of scripture, tradition and reason. Wesley insisted on the priority of the Bible: "The scriptures are the touchstone whereby Christians examine all, real or supposed revelations... for though the Spirit is our principal leader, yet He is not our rule at all; the scriptures are the rule whereby He leads us into all truth" (1960:35).

Wesley wrote:

We believe, indeed, that all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God; and herein we are distinguished from Jews, Turks, and Infidels. We believe the written word of God to be the only and sufficient rule both of Christian faith and practice; and herein we are fundamentally distinguished from those of the Roman Church (1960:23-24).

Colin Williams comments that as for Wesley the final authority in matters of religion is the Bible, all other writings must be judged in the light of this once-for-all revelation. The MCSA has adopted a similar stance and states that the "practice and teaching of the New Testament on baptism is at once evangelical and sacramental" (MCSA Laws, 2000:2). The authority of scripture, however, comes from a higher authority, which is by confession of the headship of Christ and proceeds from divine revelation.

It acknowledges the divine revelation recorded in Holy Scripture as the supreme rule of faith and practice. It rejoices in the inheritance of the apostolic faith, and loyally accepts the fundamental principles of the historic creeds and of the Protestant reformation (2000:2).

In what way then is covenant baptism in the MCSA based in the Bible, and if this is legitimate, can the church properly claim that what it believes is a true basis for what is called biblical baptism? The MCSA is often criticised because there is a perception that it does not have a clear biblical basis for its doctrine of baptism; also that Bible references are abused by being made to fit its baptismal theory rather than the other way around. The inclusion of baptismal texts as used by Wesley and the MCSA show that Methodist baptism policy is thoroughly biblical and reveals how it uses these references in its baptismal system.

The Bible as the basis of baptism in John Wesley's theology

According to Wesley Deuteronomy 29:10-12 teaches that covenant is made of parents, their infants and households, and is ratified through the circumcision of infant males (Wesley's Treatise on Baptism, 18thC.194-195). Colossians 2:12 speaks of the goal of baptism: circumcision is replaced by water baptism and is a sign that points to redemption (Wesley's Journal Notes, 18thC. 746). Ephesians 2:8 is a summary of the gospel. The gospel is not the gospel plus baptism as an appendage. In Acts 2:38ff, Acts 22:16, Titus 3:5 baptism as new birth is linked to John 3:3-7 (Wesley's Sermons, 18thC.45). In I Peter 2:17 and Titus 3:5 baptism is cleansing and is a means of new birth. John 3:5 is a key scripture in respect of baptismal regeneration – i.e. an outward sign as well as a means for inward change stemming from the operation of prevenient grace. (Wesley's Journal Notes 18th C.:311). Romans 6:4 and Ephesians 5:26 teach that baptism signifies death and resurrection and is a sign of being grafted into Christ (Wesley's Journal Notes, 18th C.:540).

The Bible as the basis of baptism in MCSA usage

Matthew 28:19ff. Christ commanded his followers to preach, make disciples, baptize and teach.

Acts 2:37ff. The early church practiced baptism immediately after its spiritual birth.

Acts 2:44. Adults were baptized initially as the circumstance was a missionary one. The practice was also directed as a "promise to you and your children". Acts 2:38 & 39.

Household baptism was practiced after the conversion of the father, mother, or head. Acts 16:11f and verses 15-34.

Romans 6:3-4. Baptism is into Christ's death and resurrection.

Colossians 2:11 & 12. Baptism replaced circumcision as a sign of entry into the family of God. In John 3:5, baptism is with water as a sign of Holy Spirit baptism and of rebirth from God (MCSA Open Letter to Parents, Undated, Referred to in MCSA Minutes 1976:69).

2. RECIPIENTS OF BAPTISM

What is the biblical sanction in respect of who should receive Christian baptism? Following Wesley the MCSA believes that both infants of believers and believing adults are valid recipients of baptism. It believes that the command to disciple all nations, includes infants and adults. While it is taken for granted that adult believers should receive baptism, this on clear biblical grounds, yet infants should be included even though there are no specific examples of infant baptism in the Bible. Infant baptism points to the value Jesus placed on children when he said that children were to be brought to him. By this statement Jesus indicated that the initiative was his alone on the matter (Chongnaham J, 1993-2005:6).

Just as Jesus (as an infant) entered the covenant with God through circumcision so Christians are admitted into the church by baptism and this fact requires that children be included in the rite (Wesley's Treatise, 18th.C: 190). Infants should be baptized with parents because Deuteronomy 29:19-22 is a teaching that indicates that 'infants can make a covenant with God through their parents' (18th.C:195). Circumcision as a sign of the old covenant rite has been replaced by baptism, which is a sign of the new covenant (18th C: 194). As Hebrew infants were circumcised, so infants of Christian parents, being under the evangelical covenant, should be baptized" (18th.C:195).

As to the question of why infants should be baptized, Wesley believed that the New Testament sanctions and even gives evidence of the baptism of infants. In addition he believed that this practice is of great importance because babies are guilty of original sin (Augustinian Doctrine). As baptism washes away original sin infants should therefore be baptized (18thC.193). The apostles baptized both responding believers and their infants. Infants of believers can come to Christ by no other way than through baptism (18thC:195-197). As the Church is the means by which people come to Christ there is no means of entering the Church and of coming to Christ and then entering heaven, except through baptism (18thC:192). All this is evidence of his adherence to a *sola scriptura* pre-supposition upon which he based his theology of covenant.

That the MCSA holds the same view is expressed in the following pronouncement:

In the case of believers the initial profession of faith precedes the baptism. In the case of infants, parents and sponsors who are themselves believers and members of the church.... promise to provide Christian nurture and to prepare the child for a personal profession of faith. In both cases believing adults and their children will be supported by the faith of the Church (MCSA Laws 2000:4-5).

Thus the origin of the double practice of adult and infant baptism in Wesley and of the MCSA is believed to derive from divine covenant which is biblical through and through and because whole families were included.

3. THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

How should the practice of baptism be viewed in respect of its purpose and meaning? There are various possible ways of categorising its face-value significance in the Bible. These are broadly speaking, ordinance, symbol and sacrament. Some groups view baptism as having ordinance value alone. Others view it as being both symbol and sacrament. A third position carries the belief that baptism signifies all three of these meanings while it is also a means of grace.

A christian ordinance is a statement given as an authoritative directive or in the form of a decree, and involves a religious rite, - the rite of water baptism is one such example. Baptism's ordinance value is

generally accepted by most Christians because it is viewed as a commandment from Jesus recorded in Matthew 28:19ff. While many Christians also accept baptism as a sacrament yet the question is whether the ordinance factor carries symbolic value alone or whether it is also in some measure sacramental? Wesley believed in all three meanings of baptism which he also inherited from the Church of England. In reply to a question asked about the issue, he responded, "Baptism is a sacrament wherein Christ has ordained the washing with water to be a sign and seal of regeneration by his spirit" (Mohn D, no date: Questions 163 and 165). The MCSA position is similar: "The sacrament of baptism was given to the church by Jesus Christ" (MCSA Laws, 2000:4). In explaining what sacrament meant, Wesley stated, "I mean an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. The outward visible sign is water and the inward spiritual grace, which it signifies, is a death to sin and new birth to righteousness (Mohn D, 2006:163-165).

How is sacrament to be defined? During the earliest times of the Church the sacraments were discussed by Tertullian and the church fathers in Alexandria, while St. Augustine later on made the remark that "signs pertaining to things divine are called sacraments", and accordingly gave a definition of sacrament as being "the visible form of an invisible grace" (Hastings J, 1989:810). It was only in the 12th.C that Hugo of St. Victor listed about 30 sacraments that were recognised in the Church. The Council of Trent however laid down that not all things have sacramental value and that visible forms are sacraments only when they represent an invisible grace and become its channel (Hastings J. 1989:810). The number of sacraments later on became fixed at 7, namely baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Orders and Matrimony. This number was apparently influenced by a belief that seven is a sacred number. On the other hand reformed churches rejected this number of sacraments because it was deemed to be an arbitrary figure. They retained the term 'sacrament' as a convenient one which helped them to express what they believed the Lord had prescribed.

They agreed that the distinguishing mark of a sacrament fundamentally lies in the fact of it being instituted by Christ himself, which he commanded his followers to observe. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the only two rites for which this can be claimed. The uniqueness that belongs to these two rites rests upon Christ's personal appointment of them and that they are bound up with his own words. (1989:810).

A justification of this view that baptism and the Lord's Supper are different in quality from all other rites is to be found in the New Testament by Acts 2:41-42 and I Corinthians 10:1-4. Another justification for these ordinances as being sacraments can be located "in the fact that St. Paul traces an analogy between circumcision and the Passover the two most distinctive rites of the old covenant on the one hand, and baptism, (Colossians 2:11) and the Lord's Supper (I Corinthians 5:7 with 11:26) on the other" (Hastings J. 1989:810).

As to the question of efficacy,

the Roman view was that sacraments are efficacious *ex opere operato*, i.e. by a power inherent in themselves as outward acts. The Reformed doctrine, on the other hand, maintains that they are divinely appointed channels of the heavenly grace, their benefits to the recipients are contingent upon subjective spiritual conditions, and above all upon the exercise of faith in Christ Himself (Hastings J, 1989:810).

While emphasising the role of divinity in sacrament, and the prevenience of God's grace towards people, the need to observe these commands is regarded as an expression of obedience. It can therefore safely be claimed that the MCSA observes baptism and the Eucharist as ordinances to be obeyed but which stand primarily as a sign of grace in action. This view can be gleaned also from statements made by both Wesley and the MCSA. As sacrament is something that is commanded, as well as being a sign that stands for something outside itself, the MCSA understanding of it is explained in these words:

When the church celebrates the sacrament it proclaims at a particular time, in a particular place and for a particular person what God has accomplished in Christ for all people – the forgiveness of sins, the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit and the adoption as sons and daughters of God into his family, the church. Baptism involves both God's gift and the response to that gift on the part of the baptized and the church (MCSA Minutes, 1989:60).

'Sacrament' also stands for what God has done by his own initiative. It therefore points to his initiative in terms of the provision of redemption with particular reference to prevenient grace. Baptism as such is believed by the MCSA to be endemic in Biblical covenant. In his treatise on baptism, which Wesley copied virtually verbatim from his father's earlier treatise, he wrote:

By baptism we enter into covenant with God, into that everlasting covenant we are admitted into the church and consequently made members of Christ, its head – we who were by nature children of wrath were made children of God (Wesley's Treatise, 18thC.:154-156).

It is in this sense that baptism is sacramental which means that it is more than a symbol or an ordinance to be obeyed. In this connection no statement has been made as to what the saving impact is for the one being baptized. Some Christian denominations seem to prefer to refer to baptism as having ordinance or symbolic value alone without calling it a sacrament, probably because of the negative connotations that have developed down the centuries around baptism as 'a sacrament'. Theological differences no doubt have also played their part.

4. BAPTISM, CHURCH AND FAITH

Since the proponents of all views of baptism regard the faith factor as being an indispensable component of baptism, what is the view of the MCSA on this matter, especially in the light of a claim that infants are not able to exercise faith? Both Wesley and the MCSA have a high appreciation of

the place of the Church in God's scheme of salvation and baptism plays a vital role in this plan and both follow Irenaeus' model of church. The Church is the place where God dwells and deals with his people. The Church is the creation of the Spirit, and is a sacred temple dedicated to the Lord in which the Spirit of God lives and works. Stated in Irenaeus' words "Where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God, and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and every kind of grace" (MCSA Laws, 2000:1).

If baptism is a sign of prevenient grace through covenant, then the Church is both an expression and a vehicle of these two aspects of the Christian faith. Baptism provides admission into the Church and the Church responds by implementing the benefits of the sign of baptism, which is covenant with God and these people are thereby made members of Christ its head.

Colin Williams quotes J.H. Riggs as saying that by baptism

We who were by nature children of wrath are made the children of God; we are admitted into the Church and consequently made members of Christ, its head.... By water as a means, the water of baptism, we are regenerated or born again. The first of these is the washing away of the guilt of original sin by the application of Christ's death. Herein a principle of grace is infused which will not be wholly taken away unless the Holy Spirit of God is quenched by continued wickedness (Williams C, 1960:116).

A question is, whether baptism should be the occasion when the initiate is made a member of the Church? What about the need for faith as required by baptism? Should baptism be viewed as a sign of prevenient faith or as a sign of the person moving towards faith for the purpose of becoming saved by faith? In what way can an infant fit into this requirement of baptism and in what sense can the infant become a member while not being able to exercise faith?

5. FAITH AND THE CHURCH

If people who are able to demonstrate faith are solely to become members according to biblical evidence, how is it that infants, who are not able to give such a response, can be regarded as members? The MCSA regards itself as a community of faith in the Christian sense. It is made up of members who have been saved by grace, through faith. Regeneration is an indispensable requirement which is viewed as constituting the essence of what the church of Jesus Christ means. The church is available in a welcoming role and also serves as the nurturing Christian environment in which for an adult who is baptized faith can grow, and for the infant, wherein faith can be born.

"The effect of baptism is to engraft into Christ, through faith, in a Christian environment, the Church" (Wesley's Treatise, 18th.C:38). As such, the Church is the cradle of faith. This structure and purpose of the church is no different from the purpose of covenant in both the Old and New Testaments. The

Church therefore carries the purpose of covenant and should seek to fulfil it, and baptism is a means to that end. The church made up of adult believers uses baptism to bring infants to Christ by bringing them into the church. Baptism is therefore

an ordinance of divine, not human inception. It is a movement from God towards man (sic), and as regards infants, baptism places the infant into an environment of covenant which is the church, and the church in obedience to a covenant commitment to God encourages the child to come to Christ. In the thought of Wesley the baptism of infants cannot therefore be interpreted in terms of dedication by men (sic) alone (Chongnaham J, 1993-2005:6-12).

In regard to an adult believer who requests baptism "Faith is demanded from the adult who is capable of it and must be present both before and after baptism" (1993-2005:6-12).

According to the intention of Jesus there is no other means of entering the church or heaven. Baptism was an outward necessary means to gain an inward entry. Infants are capable of entering into a covenant. And since infants of believers are included within the covenant of grace, these ought to come to Christ and enter the church, and since the apostles baptized infants, infants were the proper subjects of baptism (Dixon N, 1979:48).

Wesley's requirement in this connection was that "the infant within the community of believers and under the care of the community needed to be baptized because they were and still are under the evangelical covenant" (Chongnaham J, 1993-2005: quoting Wesley's Works: 196).

While saving faith is required for adults before baptism, faith for infants comes after baptism. Chongnaham describes this requirement as baptism demanding faith, rather than faith demanding baptism. Baptism is the starting point of faith but faith is necessary whenever the baptized are capable and responsible. Everyone must be in a living relationship with God, which is the possession of faith and should be firmly entrenched in the covenant community. The requirement of faith on behalf of the infant is initially sought by the believing parents. The parents present the child to the Church, which is the community of faith. Chongnaham states that Wesley did not believe "in a vicarious form of faith but in a kick starting, and influencing kind of faith" (1993-2005:6-12). A kick-starting faith in the life of the infant is the influence of Christ upon the infant through the lives of practicing Christians with whom the child is in regular contact. This would facilitate and encourage a personalisation of faith described as conversion as soon as the infant is able to respond in personal surrender.

The MCSA's position in this connection, once again is a replication of Wesley's view, but is stated in different words.

Baptism marks the entry of the person baptized into God's family, the Church. It calls for faith, which is also a life-long process. In the case of a believer, the initial profession of faith precedes baptism. In the case of infants, parents and sponsors who are themselves believers and form part of the church, promise to provide Christian nurture and to prepare the child for a personal profession of faith. In both cases, the person baptized will be supported by the faith of the church (MCSA Laws, 2000:4).

Baptism therefore is always into the church, the body of Christ in a church building, in the presence of a congregation. In the Methodist church, as for Wesley, there is no such a thing as a private Christian life and there is also no such a thing as a private baptism except in a circumstance of emergency. There are three features of baptism that are closely linked, i.e. the baptism of believers and infants of believers; the personal assurance of faith in adults; the influence of faith upon the child through the church. These are all regarded as interlinking vital components of covenant baptism. After the baptism of infants the parents and their children, and any adult baptized as a believer, are placed under the special pastoral care of the Leaders' Meeting, the Sunday school, the Cradle Roll and of those who are specifically appointed for this task (Methodist Service Book, 1975:A2-A5).

The intention behind this policy is to emphasise the message that is central to the Gospel and is stated in Ephesians 2:8: "By grace are you saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is a gift from God". It is in the above sense that baptism is not a sacral event but is sacramental. Sacralism refers to a view "That all members of a particular nation should be bound together by loyalty to the same religion...being members of the same religion gives political authority to the leaders of that nation" (Bridge D, 1977:85). An example of sacralism is when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire under the reign of Constantine, and this happened also during various periods after the 4th century (1977:85). The meaning of baptism at that time took on an Orthodox Roman Catholic stance which was the belief that as baptism is a rite commanded by God it "brings salvation and entry into the church by its very administration without any response being necessary in the life of the one being baptized". Explained colloquially, and rather technically "God's grace is kept in a box. Only by living in the box can you receive the grace. The box is the Church and baptism puts you in the box" (1977:24).

The MCSA does not believe that by living in a so-called Christian state every citizen should be compelled through baptism to become a church member without the requirement of personal conversion and faith. The MCSA would oppose sacral baptism because it is a practice that will likely generate the view that baptism is redemptive within itself and this would be contrary to its stance.

6. REDEMPTION AND BAPTISM

In what way and to what extent is water baptism regenerative in MCSA belief? And if it is regenerative then how can the MCSA avoid the problem of giving out a message which leaves the

impression that regeneration is automatic when it practices baptism? In what way can baptism be sacramental? Sacramentalism essentially signifies anything commanded by Christ and emphasises God's pre-eminence and work before human beings are able to give any response to the Lord. Is God bound by baptism to act redemptively in the moment of baptism? Or is baptism redemptive as a means of grace, but not the only means of grace, as there are other channels used by God to convey redemption. The Roman Catholic Church claims that baptism is an agent of salvation but does not claim that there are no other means: "God has bound salvation to the sacrament of baptism, but he (sic) is not bound by his (sic) sacraments" (R.C. Catechism, 1994:323). The MCSA would not subscribe to this kind of view because it believes that prevenient grace is directed at the saving of people rather than is bound to the rite of baptism, and yet also believes that God can use any means, inclusive of baptism, to redeem anyone.

Wesley's position on the baptism of infants seemed to contain two seemingly contradictory theological statements. On the one hand the initiate has been regenerated, but on the other hand it gives the impression that the person still needs to be regenerated. In order to understand this theory of infant baptism Wesley worked from the biblical basis of John 3:3-7: "Except a man (sic) is born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God". He wanted to say that all infants baptized are 'born again'. This is a sign of covenant and of prevenient grace which constitutes the objective side of baptism. On the other hand he saw a lack Christian fruitfulness in the lifestyles of the baptized and this was the reason why he was adamant that the baptized person needed also to be born of the Spirit (Bridge D, 1977:141). Wesley used a specific explanation for what he meant by the baptismal regeneration of infants. The expression 'being born again' was a well-known one to the Jews before Jesus used it in his conversation with Nicodemus in John Chapter 3:1-7. When an adult heathen was convinced that the Jewish religion was of God and desired to adopt it, it was custom for that person to be baptized before circumcision was administered. The baptised person was said to be born again, and this was the illustration that Wesley repeatedly used in his preaching and teaching about baptism⁹. He discovered that a good number of his converts were in fact baptized as infants and these people regarded themselves as Christians and had become members of the church. Their lifestyles however contradicted their claim to be Christian. Wesley took great pains to explain that new birth is not the same thing as baptism and therefore does not always accompany the rite. A person may be born of water by baptism, and yet not be born of the Spirit. Sometimes they received the outward sign of baptism (born of water) but not the inward grace (being born of the Spirit).

Wesley would therefore regularly evangelise those 'born of water' i.e. baptized as infants, declaring

For in your baptism you renounced the devil and all his works. Whenever, therefore you give place to again, whenever you do any of the works of the devil, then you deny your baptism. Therefore you

⁹ The source that Wesley used for the illustration of 'of being born again' is unknown.

deny it by every wilful sin, by every uncleanness, drunkenness or revenge, by every obscene or profane word..... Be you baptized or un-baptized you must be born again, otherwise it is not possible that you should be inwardly holy, and without inward as well as outward holiness you cannot be happy (Mohn D, 2006: Wesley's Sermon No.45).

Neil Dixon claims that by calling those baptized in their infancy to repent, Wesley did not in any way undervalue infant baptism, and he quotes Wesley's words in this connection:

Why deny that ye were then made children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven? But notwithstanding this, ye are now the children of the devil. Therefore, ye must be born again (Dixon N, 1979:44).

Wesley's hearers were mainly baptized Anglicans, and he urged them therefore, not to "lean on the staff of that broken reed, that ye were born again in baptism". Wesley did not "mean that their baptism was ineffective at the time of their baptism, but meant that they had rendered it ineffective since" (Bridge D 1977:141). They needed to go on to be converted as a sign of the effectiveness of grace acknowledged by their infant baptism. This theology reveals a tension between baptism as being purely sacramental, and baptism as both evangelical and sacramental. He was confronted with the difficulty of needing to say that God's offer through prevenient grace in terms of the new birth was somehow connected with the baptism of infants on the one hand, while on the other, the offer of prevenient grace for salvation needed to be appropriated by the individual and shown in a Christian lifestyle. A personal decision was therefore needed to appropriate the grace that had already been granted. This is sometimes stated as possessing one's possessions.

In this connection the circumstance in which Wesley operated must be taken into account. As an Anglican Minister Wesley was compelled to accept the baptismal regeneration of infants as the Anglican Church understood and practised it, and needed to be true to the doctrine of his church. He must have grappled with the issue in regard to the Anglican Church being a State Church which meant that the church and state were inextricably linked. This had led to sacralism - the view that every citizen in the country was Christian. Some people however did not accept this belief and transferred to dissenting denominations but as Wesley strongly believed in the unity of the Church he never left the Anglican Church. He believed that these dissenting churches made up of ex-Anglicans were illegitimate "so he baptized again the children of dissenters" (Dixon N, 1979:43). Infant baptism continued to be viewed not as regeneration but as a means of regeneration in Wesley's belief system and was signified by "the washing away of sin, admission into the new covenant and into the church, and was an inheritance of the kingdom of heaven" (Williams C, 1960:121).

Wesley published his Treatise on baptism in 1756 specifically with the purpose of making clear that baptism was a means of regeneration, and this position was never retracted. Rupert Davies does not see a contradiction in this position.

Wesley believed that a child, once baptized was cleansed from original sin, and if he did not commit sin, would go to heaven. But every child who remained alive did commit actual sin, and needed to be born again for the second time (Wesley believed that up to the age of 10 years a child had not sinned away the washing of the Holy Spirit given at baptism (Dixon N, 1979:43-44).

Colin Williams also argues for Wesley's position on baptismal regeneration:

There is no evidence to suggest that Wesley ever abandoned his belief that God has appointed a means of grace through which he normally enters our life, and that these ordinances are to be accepted not only because Christ commanded them but also because they give the individual the visible assurance of his presence and serve as a sign of the initiative that he takes in the realm of redemption (Williams C, 1960:121).

Another problem relates to how the baptismal grace of regeneration can irresistibly be conveyed to infants when they cannot either believe or repent? And yet Wesley emphasised strongly that the primacy of prevenient grace is both God at work and a person's response to God's work. Dr. Chongnaham argues that Wesley could have been more consistent in his theology of grace and salvation in answering this question of the relationship of baptism and infant salvation. He reasons that if Wesley were to have linked the baptism of infants not to the grace of new birth but to the grace of adoption into the body of Christ, which is prominent in Wesley's teaching anyway, he would have been more consistent in his general theological structure (Chongnaham J, 1993-2005 Quoting Wesley's Works: 509). This indicates that baptism based on prevenient grace brings about a change of relationship and not so much a change of nature. This line of theology would still give a high place to God's role in baptism on the one hand and on the other make the requirement to respond personally by faith, prominent. Adoption into Christian faith is an important element of Christian soteriology, and baptism in the Bible refers to it in Galatians 3:26. Space is present in the concept of adoption for the working of prevenient grace, which is what covenant signifies.

Speaking about Wesley's non-committal approach as to what happens in the sacrament of baptism Methodists of that time were

Unimpressed by Wesley's theology, and instead adopted a very casual approach to the sacrament. The words 'this child is regenerate' disappeared from the Service Book and was replaced by a non-committal formula. This development led to the oft repeated assertion that every Methodist minister has his own view of what baptism means (Bridge D, 1997:142).

While the theology which states that there is a need to be born anew after being born again in baptism which seems to be a contradiction in Wesley's theology, yet his theological design of salvation is generally logical.

Salvation begins with what is usually termed 'Preventing Grace' which includes the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his(sic) will and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned against him(sic). All these imply some tendency towards life, some degree of salvation... Salvation is carried on by 'convincing grace' which usually is termed repentance in Scripture... afterwards we experience the proper Christian salvation whereby 'through grace we are saved by faith', consisting of these two grand branches, justification and sanctification (Chongnaham J, 1993-2005: Quoting Wesley's Works: 509) ¹⁰.

The MCSA similarly maintains a non-committal stance towards regeneration in baptism.

When the church celebrates baptism it celebrates it as 'gospel sacrament'. All who are born of earthly parents need to be born again, for in the gospel Jesus tells us that unless one is born anew (or from above) he (sic) cannot see the kingdom of God. (John 3:3-7). In baptism being born of water, which signifies being born again requires the initiate infant to be born of the Spirit, i.e. personal salvation. God has objectively accomplished in Christ a salvation which he has made available for all people – the forgiveness of sins, the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit and adoption as sons and daughters into his (sic) family, the church (MCSA Minutes 1989:59-60).

The words stated in this MCSA policy document are a close replication of Wesley's belief. There is a noticeable difference however in that baptism in the MCSA is linked more to adoption into the body of Christ while nothing is said about baptismal regeneration itself.

Baptism involves both God's gift and the responses to that gift on the part of the one baptized and the church. It looks forward to a growth into the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13) and is therefore related not simply to a momentary experience but to a lifelong growth in Christ, in the fellowship of the church. Thus the response of faith is essential for the personal appropriation of salvation embodied and set forth. The response, like the gift, involves not only an initial act but also a lifelong process. All this applies hitherto to the baptism of infants of believers. As regards the believer-baptized person – upon profession of faith, will have to grow in faith and he or she lives within the fellowship of the church, by whose faith the member will be supported and enriched. The person baptized in infancy needs to make a profession of faith (from an experience of conversion) at a later stage and Christian nurture is directed to the eliciting and growth of this profession. In both cases the act of baptism signifies God's redeeming act in Jesus Christ which does not depend upon human merit or achievement but witnesses to the truth that God first gives his(sic) grace to his(sic) people before they can respond to it. In the case of infants, the sign precedes the personal profession; in the case of the believer, the initial profession precedes the sign (of baptism). The sequel is different; the

¹⁰ Wesley used the terms 'preventing grace' and 'convincing grace', both of which are aspects of prevenient grace.

profession is the same... Because baptism signifies the once--for-all act of Christ and makes the baptized a member of the covenant community, it is unrepeatable (MCSA Minutes, 1989:60-61).

7. THE MODE OF BAPTISM

The question is, can baptism by immersion be considered as the only legitimate mode of baptism? Wesley believed in all three modes of baptism - immersion, effusion and sprinkling. He argued that while immersion was the 'ancient manner of baptizing', sprinkling and pouring are recognized especially in Hebrews 10:22. If immersion symbolizes dying and rising with Christ, the pouring of water upon the individual symbolises the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and sprinkling the cleansing factor of Christ's saving work. He did not undervalue or overvalue baptism and seemed not to be particularly concerned about which mode may be more biblically correct than the others. For him the important question was, what are you now, having been baptized? Dixon quotes Trevor Dearing, who states that Wesley baptized adults by total immersion and signed each child on the forehead with the sign of the cross (Dixon N, 1979:43).

The American Methodist church also allows a flexible use of mode. It states,

While only one manner of baptism is used on a particular occasion all three taken together witness to the nature of sacrament, i.e. God's cleansing from sin, and brings us to newness of life through the death and resurrection of Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit the gift of a new heart that we may serve faithfully (United Methodist Church of the U.S.A., 1976: Alternate Text: 10).

MCSA Laws and Discipline similarly stipulates that baptism is with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt.28:19ff) and may be by sprinkling, pouring or immersion. The MCSA therefore also does not take up a legalistic stance on the matter of mode. It is, however well known in the MCSA that sprinkling is preferred to immersion despite its belief that all three methods are biblically legitimate. (MCSA Laws 2000:5).

B. THE UNACCEPTABLE PRACTICES OF BAPTISM

WHAT IS CONSIDERED UNACCEPTABLE IN THE MCSA WHEN IT COMES TO BAPTISM AND THE REASONS FOR THIS?

The basis for baptismal inclusiveness in the MCSA derives from Wesley and emanates from covenant which is the intention behind the commission in Matthew 28:19 ff. The MCSA practices the baptism of believers, the baptism of the infants of believers and adults who seek to become believers through a personal salvation (MCSA L & D, 2000:4). Despite this inclusive ethos there were certain developments in the church which were contrary to its policy. These developments include a number of unacceptable practises sought after by members, namely:

i. Indiscriminate Baptism

The policy of the MCSA is not to baptize anyone who has not first come to faith or who gives no evidence of seeking the Christian faith, neither is it permitted to baptize the children of these people. Laws and Discipline states,

The Sacrament of Baptism shall in general be administered... to those children only, whose parents, one or both, are members of the church or congregation. Instruction in the meaning of baptism shall be given beforehand... to older people who have not previously been baptized and who desire, upon profession of their faith in Jesus Christ to become members of the church (MCSA L & D, 2000:5).

This policy statement rules out the practise of indiscriminate baptism. Indiscriminate baptism refers to the baptism of people who have no interest in the faith or seek to by-pass the need for faith, but want baptism for unknown or unacceptable reasons. The Constantinian policy of requiring every citizen to become Christian through the use of baptism is a good example of this. This practice would be unacceptable to the MCSA because it states that,

Baptism is not merely a sanctimonious event in which God's blessing on children is invoked... an indispensable social asset... a mere name-giving ritual... a guarantee of entry into heaven - such entry depends on a personal response of faith to Christ which results in conversion... - a magical protection against evil, illness or accidents... a venerable tradition that must be maintained at all costs... a certificate that the family and the baby are normal and respectable...or a work done that earns God's salvation (MCSA Open Letter to Parents, undated extract referred to in Minutes, 1976:69).

Indiscriminate baptism is also not a biblical practice. There is no instance in the Bible that records this kind of baptism. Simon Magus, in Acts 8 may be an example of indiscriminate baptism, and yet even he was called to repent of his wickedness and presumably from his abuse of this sacred rite.

Indiscriminate baptism is also not acceptable on theological grounds. It ignores the redemptive work of Christ in favour of a religious work "done by a person as a way of earning salvation" (MCSA Open Letter: Ref.1976:69f). The MCSA does not believe in a mechanical form of baptismal regeneration, which in its view is a form of indiscriminate baptism. The baptisms that are recorded in the Bible were always preceded by an act of preaching or discipleship, a call to repentance and faith and an injunction to commit oneself to Christ.

This is an important requirement as the MCSA has been criticised for practicing indiscriminate baptism by its baptism of infants. And yet the church requires that infants needing to be baptized must come from parents who are practicing Christians in order that they too may become Christian.

ii.Rebaptism

The MCSA from time to time receives requests from its members for a second baptism. Requests like this are rejected categorically and the reasons for this are that the church believes that baptism is unrepeatable, neither is there a text-and-verse example of rebaptism in the Bible. Acts 19:1-7 could however be interpreted as a rebaptism, and may be a precedent. The MCSA does not deal with this reference at all in its theology on baptism. Rebaptism is ruled out by the church also because it contradicts the unrepeatable act of Christ and the belief that the baptized one is already a member of the covenant community in the universal Christian church. Rebaptism generally signifies that the previous baptism is invalid insinuating that preventive grace was not active at the original baptism and implies that the responses of faith and obedience are more important than the grace of God (MCSA Minutes 1989:65-66).

It is often argued that the faith of the parents or sponsors who brought the child to baptism was in some way defective and that this invalidates the rite. The MCSA contradicts that claim and teaches that the act of baptism signifies God's action which is not related to a momentary event at the time of baptism, but to life-long growth in Christ and that the response of faith is likewise a life-long process which is therefore not limited to the faith exercised at the moment of baptism. Thus the profession of faith by a person baptized in infancy should be welcomed as a response to that baptism and should not be regarded as a reason for a repeat of the ceremony. It also needs to be recognised that the faith of the person baptized as a believer may also have been immature and defective and yet in the MCSA view would not be a justification for a rebaptism.

If it is argued that many persons baptized at infancy do not come to a profession of personal faith, it should also be noted that many persons baptized as believers also do not persevere in the faith. The reality of baptism does not depend on the quality of the faith exercised at the moment of baptism but upon the faithfulness of God whose saving work is signified by the act (MCSA Minutes, 1989:66).

The maintaining of MCSA doctrine on infant baptism arises from a covenantal understanding of sacrament and an emphasis on preventive grace, both of which give cogency to its view and policy. It emphasises the primacy of Jesus' presence from which the work of salvation follows.

The MCSA moreover agrees with the view that all forms of baptism practiced in all Christian denominations in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit are valid and therefore do not need to be repeated (MCSA Minutes, 1989:59). The MCSA therefore aligns itself with the World Council of Churches view contained in the Lima text:

Baptism is an unrepeatable act. Any practice that might be interpreted as rebaptism must be avoided. As the churches come to fuller mutual understanding and acceptance of one another and enter into closer relationships in witness and service, they will want to refrain from any practice which might call

into question the sacramental integrity of the other churches, or which might diminish the un-repeatability of the sacrament of baptism (Lazareth WH, 1962:34).

The MCSA may have a problem in this regard as Wesley sometimes found it necessary to rebaptise people. In certain cases Wesley did not hesitate to do this. He never rebaptized people already Christened in their infancy in the Church of England, but rejected baptism as practiced by nonconformists and those baptized as infants in dissenting chapels (Bridge D, 1979:141). His reason for doing that was because he found that some people were wicked and immoral despite their baptism. They needed to be born of the Spirit and have their lives changed. By implication any individual fitting that description could be rebaptized (Mohn D, 2006:3). This practice on Wesley's part does not find accord with the current MCSA position which states that "baptism, wherever administered signifies the once and for all action of Christ and makes the baptized one a member of the covenant community. It therefore is unrepeatable" (MCSA Minutes, 1989:65).

iii. Baptism by Immersion Alone

Requests for immersion alone are made by people who desire a believers' baptism in the belief that immersion is the only correct mode of baptism in the Bible. While the church accepts all three modes of baptism, sprinkling, pouring and immersion, it does not subscribe to a narrow theology which excludes any of the other modes. The practice of baptism by immersion however, does not feature too prominently in the MCSA. If an adult becomes a believer this person is baptized by sprinkling or pouring, and seldom by immersion, because the church believes that the meaning of any mode is less important than the meaning of baptism *per se*.

According to Wesley, if the use of water is a sign of the sacrament then it is immaterial as to which sign is used, provided that the use of the sign was practical and appropriate within the context in which the baptism was being conducted "The sign is distinct from the regeneration, the thing signified" (Reist I, 1993-1998:3). According to the Large Catechism of the Church of England which Wesley used extensively, the form of baptism used was effusion with "Water, wherein the person is baptized is in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Reist I, Large Catechism of the Church of England: Questions 162-165). He argued that while immersion was the ancient manner of baptizing, "Sprinkling and pouring are recognised in Hebrews 10:22" (Wesley's Treatise on Baptism, 18th.C:193-201). All the modes; immersion, which signifies death and resurrection; sprinkling, signifying cleansing, or pouring which is the sign of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit may be used because all are valid. It is not how a person is baptized that is of primary importance but what baptism actually means in terms of God's salvific plan of grace towards people. Wesley wrote:

We read (Mark 7:4) of the baptisms.... of pots and cups and tables and beds. Pots and cups are not necessarily dipped when they are washed, and as for tables and beds, no one will suppose that they will be dipped. The word baptism then in its natural sense is not taken for dipping, but for washing and

cleansing, and that this is the true meaning of the word 'baptize' is testified to by the greatest scholars and most proper judges in this matter (Richey, Undated pamphlet).

Because the MCSA believes in baptism as being an inclusive doctrine which is of the essence of the Christian faith, it argues that to restrict baptism to one mode alone would not be biblically and theologically accurate. Baptism by immersion alone does not find a basis in prescriptive baptism in the Bible as all the modes of baptism enjoy biblical sanction. Hebrews 10:22, Acts 2:37, Romans 6:7, Titus 2:5 are examples of diverse texts used in regard to how baptism could be applied. "Baptism is usually by sprinkling or pouring, or when specially desired, by immersion" (MCSA Minutes, 1989:59). The MCSA has however tended to play down the mode of immersion for the reason that "Infant baptism is the traditional practice of the MCSA and ministers are expected to adhere to this position and they should not encourage adult baptism to the detriment of infant baptism" (1989:59).

MCSA church buildings generally do not contain immersion baths as the practices of sprinkling and effusion do not require a bath but simply a small quantity of water¹¹. When there have been conversions of people who have not been baptized before, and immersion has been requested, the baptism has been administered in a river, a swimming pool or in a believer-Baptist church where such a facility is available. In regard to the use of alternative rites of renewal, it is not clear at this stage what the official MCSA's policy will finally be, as also in respect of the use of water. The issue of water will be debated in the last section of this study.

The claim for baptism by immersion alone is sometimes made from linguistic grounds. The argument for this view is usually based on the Greek origin of two prepositions, "In the name of *en* (Matthew 28:19), and into the body of Christ, *eis*, (I Corinthians 12:13). These two prepositions are believed to signify that baptism is exclusively to be by immersion (Russell B 1968:11).

The MCSA rejects this narrow interpretation and believes that while immersion is biblical, yet this interpretation has no basis for being exclusive. Studies are to hand showing that the Greek prepositions *en* and *eis* can also be interpreted as signifying sprinkling and pouring. A demonstration of this is from the work done by James W. Dale in the 19th century. Dale examined every occurrence of the word *baptizo* in the bible as well as all the extra-biblical examples that were known in his day. His analysis of the use of *baptizo* demonstrates "beyond reasonable doubt that the word does not only mean by immersion... but shows that it also means to dip (i.e. to put into and to remove from), and also to put together so as to remain together" (Dale JW, 1874 reprint 1995:1). The MCSA likewise views the use of water as being a mere symbol and therefore does not believe that to put a legalistic interpretation on *baptizo* is the way to handle the issue about what is supposed to be the correct mode.

iv, The Dedication of Infants

¹¹ Effusion: pouring out upon or over

There is nothing in Wesley's writings mentioning the rite of dedication and so there is no idea as to what Wesley thought about the pros and cons of this rite. For Wesley there was no other rite of entry for infants into the Christian life and the church, except through baptism. The rite of dedication, which may well have been in use by the Anabaptists, does not appear to have been a debated issue in the Church of England at that time. The practice of dedication however, as an alternative to infant baptism is categorically forbidden by the MCSA, "Conference affirms that the dedication of infants is not an appropriate alternative to the sacrament of infant baptism and may not be practiced with that intention in the MCSA" (MCSA Minutes, 1985:60).

Having taken this stance on the matter, the MCSA has not given a clear statement about the biblical and theological merits and demerits of infant dedication. In the light of its belief in sacramental theology it would argue that there is no theological equality between the rite of infant baptism and the rite of infant dedication. The argument would be along the line (a) that infant dedication is not a biblical injunction with text and verse support, leading up to believers' baptism, and (b) it was not practiced as a formal ritual in New Testament times despite Jesus' presentation by his parents at the temple (Luke 2:22-40). While Jesus' presentation at the Temple was in line with Old Testament practice and used therefore by proponents of infant dedication (I Samuel 1 & 2, especially I Samuel 1:11, 22, 28), it is not a rite that is sanctioned in the Bible, or by Jesus (Bridge D, 1977:176). Infant dedication proponents also argue from Matthew 19:13-15, Mark 10:13-16, and Luke 18:15-17 for its biblical basis, and yet all these examples have nothing to do with "infant dedication as it is practiced today" (Bridge D, 1977:178).

While these texts can be interpreted in support of the rite of infant dedication, the problem with dedication for the MCSA would be that it possesses no covenantal theological significance nor is it a sign of sacrament. The texts used do not enjoy imperative status as baptism enjoys in a theology of covenant. Nowhere does dedication signify the presence of divine initiative or prevenient grace and does not speak of God's willingness to work in the child's life for salvation. The rite is more of a human act demonstrated by the handing of the child over to God, rather than being a rite that emphasises what God does. Michael Harper makes a valid point when he asks as to what it is that God does in response to the offer of dedication, and concludes that there can be only one answer: "He receives the infant". If he receives the infant then according to Jesus' teaching the infant is already in the kingdom of God, based on Jesus' statement in Mark 10:14. If that is so then what hinders infants from being baptized? Only one answer can be given, and it is, nothing (Harper M, 1983:76). The MCSA's criticism of infant dedication amounts to the same as that which is for infant baptism by Anabaptists, which is that there is no text-and-verse evidence in the Bible for it.

v. Private Baptism

The practice of baptism is not to be performed outside of church life but in a church service on a Sunday, or during any other time when church members assemble for services of worship (Methodist

Service Book, 1975:A3 and A4). In this it follows scripture as well as takes the line of John Wesley, who carried a high appreciation of the Church's role in the ministry of Christ. The church is viewed as the body of Christ, which exists in the covenant of grace and because of that, anticipates baptismal growth as a consequence. It is the place in which the promised Holy Spirit is active and the initiate is assisted with the appropriation of the free gift of God's grace for salvation. Wesley stated that no Christian is an island and there is therefore no such a thing as a private Christian. Christianity may be personal but it cannot be lived in isolation from the Christian community. It is within the church that Christ is particularly active, and in which the one baptized will have a Christ-encounter, be disciplined, and learn to respond to the gift of new life and nurture (Chongnaham J, 1993-2005:7).

Private baptism is forbidden by the MCSA also because it believes that in this kind of baptism there is an absence of a close connection between baptism and the church. A most basic meaning of baptism is the vital role that the church plays in the process of incorporation. A biblical basis for this role is the church's belief in covenant which signifies a family orientated entity. That the church is the family of God and the body of Christ, is a strongly held principle in Methodist theology and is based on I Corinthians 12:13: "By one Spirit are you baptized into the body of Christ and made to drink of the one Spirit".

God ordained and established the church to call people into communion with God's self and with one another according to the eternal purpose in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son, our Lord. The Church is the company of the disciples of Jesus, consisting of those who confess as their Saviour and Lord, love one another and unite with those who serve the coming of His Rule on earth. These constitute the family of the redeemed children of God, who in the New Testament are described as Believers, People of God, and Christians. This Church, the creation of the Holy Spirit, also grows into a sacred temple dedicated to the Lord in which the Spirit of God lives and works. Where the Church is, as Irenaeus has said, there is the Spirit of God, and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and every kind of grace (MCSA L & D, 2000:1).

Minutes of Conference state; "The justification of infant baptism on the basis of biblical witness is that children have a place within the covenant community and that baptism emphasises the primacy of God's grace at work" (MCSA Minutes, 1989:64).

The church's role in this belief system is that it is an instrument for ministry. When baptism is administered to infants, both the church and parents accept a special obligation to nurture them in the Christian life of faith so that they may be led of the Holy Spirit in due time to make their own profession of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and then to enter fully into the responsibilities of being Christian and members of the church.

The sacrament of baptism shall be administered in the church building in the presence of the congregation either at a worship service or in a Sunday school session. It shall be conducted at Sunday

services, planned at regular intervals. In cases of emergency and in the case of those persons who reside in places remote from the church, exceptions may be made at the discretion of the minister (MCSA Laws, 2000:5).

Minutes of Conference state the following in connection with the relationship between baptized adults and the church; "When baptism is administered at an age of responsibility, upon profession of faith, the baptized person at once enters fully into the privileges and responsibilities of membership of the church" (MCSA Minutes, 1989:62). Private baptism is therefore precluded because the MCSA does not encourage individualism which it believes leads to a lifestyle of isolation. Private baptism is sometimes requested by those who seek rebaptism.

A SUMMARY OF REASONS LEADING TO REQUESTS FOR THE FORBIDDEN PRACTICES

The forbidden practises are sought after because of differing views around the meaning and purpose of baptism in the MCSA. As MCSA ministers and members have been schooled in a covenantal understanding of baptism there is broad acceptance of the central tenets of its meaning, and yet there are also sharp differences on some aspects. These differences are to be located in respect of (i.) baptism being a remedy for original sin, (ii.) being a rite of entry into the church which is the covenant community, (iii.) baptism serving as a door-way of initiation into the way of Christ, (iv.) the three modes of baptism, (v.) the function of the Holy Spirit and the purpose of baptism. As these aspects seem to mean different things to the different proponents, it is from these points that rifts have emanated and are likely to be amongst the reasons for requests for rebaptism.

Taking the question of the baptism of infants as a remedy for original sin, both sides would agree that all people are born in sin (Psalm 51), and that baptism is a sign of God's undeserved love, showing the need for cleansing (Ephesians 5:26). That "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son" also indicates that he can and will cleanse (John 3:16). (MCSA Minutes 1971:63). Anabaptists, as they have sometimes been called in the MCSA, tend however to underplay the issue of cleansing, and, like believer-baptists of other denominations seem to support a non-committal approach in regard to the question of original sin. They simply speak about the dedication of and presentation of infants to Jesus in the same way that Jesus was presented in the temple. (Luke 2:21-24). Their attitude seems to be that there is no need to theologise on the question of original sin when a biblical example of initiation is to hand, the presentation of Jesus in the Temple. Nothing is said in this text about a need for cleansing. In the rite of infant baptism on the other hand, infants are brought to Jesus without text and verse evidence.

There is also a difference of view in respect of incorporation into the church, God's covenant community. The MCSA policy uses Matthew 28:19 "Go and make disciples". It believes that the church must be obedient in the making of disciples ..., and by this act it demonstrates the Lord's commandment of love "If you love me you will keep my commandments" (John 15:12). The MCSA

believes that it has always obeyed this command particularly as it is used as evidence for its view of baptism and its practise. As regards the work of the church, all who desire to be baptized are to be disciplined, and initiates comprising men, woman and children must first be made members of the church. While both proponents broadly agree on this task of incorporation, yet they part company over what this means in practice, and to whom this should apply. The Anabaptist group believes that baptism can only be meaningful when it is granted to believing adults. They ask as to how being incorporated into the church can apply to infants, as infants cannot become members without understanding the gospel and its requirements. Infants are therefore not in a position to decide personally or able to respond to the gospel call. They contend that many infants who through baptism are made members and because of that come to believe that they are Christian. Logically this makes personal conversion unnecessary. MCSA Anabaptists also believe that a contradiction and duplication exists in MCSA baptismal practise in that the church seems to teach that confirmation is the occasion when the infant baptized person is made a member of the church, and yet membership was obtained through infant baptism. Infant baptism, presented in this manner is a theological impediment in that "It admits (knowingly) unbelievers into church membership. It regards baptized children as Christians until they deny it. It requires that the word of God be preached differently to those baptized in infancy and to those not so baptized"(Pedersen D, July 1983).

There are also differences and dispute over the understanding of what is meant by the claim that baptism is an initiation into the way of Christ. Does 'into the way of Christ' mean baptismal regeneration? For adults this makes sense, because having accepted Christ through conversion baptism usually follows. And yet how can this be applicable to infants? For the MCSA however, this means that infants are placed into a Christian spiritual environment – the covenant community. As to what this means in relation to the redemptive work of Christ is the matter that is being queried. Wording in orders of service reflect a meaning of baptismal regeneration even though the MCSA does not believe that that is the case. The order of service uses terminology which could be read as signifying that the grace of God is an institutional transaction achieving conversion brought on whenever baptism is ministered. This issue then leads onto the question as to whether God always grants conversion to people when they are baptized. If that is true then how infants are to be converted, and then again, do they need conversion in their infancy if they have not committed actual sin? Anabaptists believe that by leaving this impression in the wording of the order of service will do the gospel of Christ a great disservice and will dilute and compromise the church's spiritual wellbeing and witness. It is faulty theology to tie baptism with salvation. Baptism should rather be linked to what the church does in the proclamation of the gospel of salvation which is transacted by grace through faith alone.

The fourth issue, over which there are different meanings attaching for the different groupings in the MCSA, relates to the question of mode. The MCSA explains why it believes the different modes of baptism are valid. These are to be located in the Bible but

nowhere in the New Testament is it laid down how baptism must be ministered. Three modes have been practiced in the Christian church, sprinkling pouring and immersion, and are recognised in our own order of service for baptism. The first converts to Christianity were adults from whom we learn that the New Testament doctrine of baptism naturally has the baptism of adult believers in mind. These converts made response to the apostolic preaching by being "buried with Christ through baptism into his death, so that they might walk in newness of life". (Romans 6:4). This suggests that baptism by immersion was commonly practiced. From very early times, however, children of Christian households were baptized and the baptism of infants was by pouring or sprinkling with water and this became the customary mode (MCSA Minutes 1971:63).

Anabaptists on the other hand believe that immersion is the truest way of re-enacting in symbolic form the death and resurrection of Jesus in the life of the one who has been redeemed. They believe that immersion is the New Testament norm, but which would be impossible to use in the administration of the baptism of infants.

The fifth issue concerns the place of the Holy Spirit in the process of the rite of initiation. While not much has been debated about the Holy Spirit's role in baptism and redemption, the MCSA believes that the baptism of the Holy Spirit works towards redemption, as well as after redemption for Christian growth. The MCSA believes that there is no reason why the Holy Spirit cannot be at work upon the new-born for eventual redemption and growth. Anabaptists cannot see how an infant can be born of the Holy Spirit before that infant reaches a stage of understanding and of it being able to make a decision. Baptism therefore is only for adults.

These differences of understanding over key issues in Methodist doctrine have no doubt contributed in no small part to the practice of rebaptism and its prohibition. Both sides hold on to their views with tenacity. The MCSA continues to promote its understanding without making any changes towards positive compromise in its theology and practise. The church's way of coping with these differences continues to be that of placing an embargo on requests for re-baptism, and sometimes even appears to ignore the issues. Yet the MCSA is justified in protecting what it esteems very highly and even perhaps entertains a hope that the issue will go away on its own. Anabaptists on the other hand continue to see no wrong in the practise of rebaptism.

Defensive Reasons

Covenant baptism in the MCSA has come under criticism from a believer-baptist/Anabaptist lobby in the church, which claims that the MCSA's view and practise of baptism poses a threat to the witness of the gospel of Christ. Infant baptism is often placed in a poor light and its veracity is undermined and questioned. The church has found it necessary therefore, to counteract what it believes is a circumstance which if left as it is, will continue to be counter-productive. These practices which it forbids are part of an inter-linking process, all stemming from the rejection of infant baptism in favour of an Anabaptist form of believers' baptism. This then impacts negatively on the spiritual life of the

church and the church loses its credibility as a 'Bible-believing church'. The MCSA's counter to the forbidden practises especially that of rebaptism also comes from what it believes is one of the causes of indiscriminate baptism in that it leads to a process of baptismal repetition, and once allowed will be difficult to stop for when will rebaptism be enough? Rebaptism is rejected by the MCSA more particularly because it is believed to be an attempt to negate the practice of infant baptism which goes contrary to all that the MCSA believes about the indispensable meaning of covenant baptism.

With regard to the use of modes of baptism, it has been noted that the traditional usage in MCSA is that of sprinkling or pouring, not because it does not subscribe to baptism by immersion but also because the other two modes are more suited to the baptism of infants. The infrequent use of immersion in the MCSA is also because requests for rebaptism are often made as a dogmatic demand for this mode alone. By underplaying immersion the MCSA attempts to make a statement about the need to accept that all three methods of application are equal in value. In fact it baptizes adults who have come to faith by sprinkling, effusion, or immersion after candidates have been presented with a choice. Detailed teaching is given about the meaning of covenant baptism beforehand. If the MCSA were to accede to the practise of rebaptism this would undermine the foundation of its doctrine on baptism namely that as the essence of the bible message is covenant, and as covenant equals covenant community, that baptism is therefore to be practised as covenant. Those who personally enter into covenant with God through Gods prevenient grace also need to enter into a relationship with God's covenant family, the church. If the MCSA allowed private baptism, it believes that this would encourage individualism and this would be a contradiction of its view of the significance of baptism in relation to the purpose of Christianity whose gospel is inclusive in its mission.

Positive Reasons

Positively, the MCSA endeavours to promote Christianity as covenant in a two-way relationship: a saving relationship with God and the need to be in a right relationship with people, which is in fact the essence of biblical Christianity. Its view can be encapsulated thus; All people who belong to God should belong to all who belong to God and this can only truly materialise on the basis of the primacy of Christ's prevenient grace. Any form of baptism that is practiced should not be a contradiction of this core purpose of Christianity which forms an essential part of Jesus' commission in Matthew 28:19ff. The MCSA's dual approach in baptism is believed to be a policy which ideally should be in a position to meet all needs including those felt by the re-baptizers. This it believes would make rebaptism unnecessary and redundant.

Chapter 3 will contain reasons as to why these forbidden practices are sought after by members despite what the MCSA believes to be valid and acceptable theology in its policy.

CHAPTER 3

QUESTIONS AROUND FORBIDDEN PRACTICES AND THE ANABAPTIST BAPTISMAL BELIEF SYSTEM.

In this chapter the study will examine questions around forbidden practices and why members do not altogether agree with the MCSA's stance on baptism and why they believe the MCSA stance does not constitute true biblical baptism. These disagreements come from objections to infant baptism, modes of pouring and sprinkling, the view that personal conversion is a non-negotiable, the assurance of faith before baptism as an absolute necessity, dedication as being more biblical than infant baptism, and the high spiritual quality of the church as opposed to nominalism. Members who strive for some form of rebaptism to be included in MCSA official practice have sometimes been referred to as Anabaptist because of their so-called dogmatic biblicist stance against infant baptism. These so-called MCSA Anabaptists see nothing wrong with these forbidden practices (Dimension, June 1984:15). And yet they appear to be inconsistent, in that while requiring text and verse evidence in support of infant baptism, they seemingly overlook this need for the practice of rebaptism. It is likely that they do not see their position in this way as they reject their first baptism on biblical grounds. They regard their quest for a believer's baptism as a first baptism. The MCSA refutes this claim and believes that anyone baptized either as an infant or as an adult in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, has received a legitimate baptism. It is believed by some members however that the term rebaptism is incorrect. Dr. Bandey is one such theologian who claims that the term is theologically wrong, and contends that few Christians actually believe that they are entitled to receive more than one baptism (Bandey DW, 1976:80). Anabaptists differ with Bandey's view by arguing that the real focus of the issue should rather be placed on the indispensable need for the reception of a believer's baptism and not on rebaptism which serves as a red herring. The problem therefore stems from a difference between proponents in what is believed about what constitutes a true baptism. As to how Anabaptist members view these embargoed practices, is necessary to consider.

Who are the People Opposing the MCSA policy on baptism and what are their interests and reasons?

These people are members of the MCSA who ask their church to grant them a rite which it does not believe is legitimate but which they believe is biblically required. Biblical baptism in their view involves hearing the gospel, being discipled, repenting and believing all things they were not able to do at the time of their infant baptism. They accordingly seek a believers' baptism by immersion alone. They also request a rite of dedication for their infants as in their opinion dedication is a more biblically accurate way of initiation into the church.

Since their infant baptism they have gone through a life-changing experience of conversion and in seeking to do the will of God, and through studying the Bible they have come to believe that believers' baptism is the only true way of initiation into a life of Christian discipleship. They argue that

the first Christians who were initiated into the church gave testimony to their newfound faith according to this way. Not all of these members disagree with their previous baptism but simply want to experience a believer's baptism. Some do not even claim that a second baptism would be more legitimate than the first one and don't also have strong feelings about the way they should be baptized. It is also not known how members in these groupings would feel about an offer of viable alternative rites if they were to be available officially. Yet another group is more radical in its opposition to infant baptism and are relentless in their bid to receive a believer's baptism by immersion alone. (Questionnaire Letters: 2009.Appendix Page 164ff).

i. Objections to Infant Baptism and Why

These objections are typical of arguments that Anabaptists generally advance. The MCSA would certainly agree with the claim advanced by Prof. Richardson who stated that "because we do not teach our people the Methodist way, they are vulnerable to all kinds of other teaching – the most common of which is a combination of biblical literalism of the kind often found in Baptist circles, and a need to 'experience my own baptism', as found in Pentecostal circles" (Richardson N, 2009) and (Questionnaire Letters: 2009 Appendix, 164ff).

Be that as it may, Anabaptist objections would amount to the following:

a. Infant baptism is not biblical even though the MCSA practices baptism as covenant. Infants are not mentioned in relation to the practice of baptism in the New Testament. These objectors ignore the biblical basis which the MCSA uses to justify the inclusion of infants in its baptismal doctrine and rather look for text-and-verse evidence. They would not accept that the interpretation of 'baptizing the nations' for discipleship should include infants. Their negative response to infant baptism would be expressed in the words of B. Russell, quoting Mark 7:13, "the church has made void the word of God by following the traditions of men so infant baptism has not been handed down to the church for the church to practice" (Russell B, 1968:7). Anabaptists argue that paedobaptists place too much emphasis on theologising around texts in which infant baptism is supposedly implied, instead of needing to accept face value biblical evidence which is solely for believers' baptism.

b. Allied to the first objection would be the argument that no specific command is given in scripture that prescribes infant baptism. "If the apostles were accustomed to baptize infants (an assumption made from an argument of silence) why did they prevent Jewish mothers from bringing their babies to Jesus for blessing?" Mark 10:13-16, Matthew 19:13-15 and Luke 18:15-17 (Russell B, 1968:7).

c. I have found that in respect of the recorded instances in the Bible of household baptism, of which there are five examples in the New Testament, I Corinthians 1:16, Acts 11:14, Acts 16:15, 16:33,

18:8, this group would agree with Barth who argued that to use household baptism as a basis for infant baptism "is a very thin thread onto which to hang infant baptism" (Barth K, 1948:45).

d. They also would support the claim that infant baptism is likely to have originated round about the 2nd century and not from the beginning of the Christian era. Tertullian, a theological father of the church of that time, is on record as having questioned the wisdom of including children in the rite of baptism and urged that they should be baptized only after they have come into a stage of understanding (Dixon N, 1979:34). Infant baptism therefore developed as a new tradition in the church sometime in the third century and it became a strong practice down the centuries to the present time. It was mainly popularised by the Emperor Constantine through his policy of compulsory baptism, and later on in the fifth century through St. Augustine's theory that baptism cleanses away original sin (1979:34-37). Opponents of infant baptism generally believe therefore that their opposition to infant baptism has historical support and argue that infant baptism has led to ecclesiastical abuse of biblical truth of which there are many examples in the church up to the Reformation (Questionnaire Letters :2009 Appendix ,164ff).

e. Perhaps the strongest objection to infant baptism is in respect of the need for personal faith which infants are not able to possess (Engelsman E, 1983:9). The Bible gives examples of the practice of baptism associated only with believing adults and its teaching is for adult believers who have become Christian through the preaching of the gospel. Having heard the gospel they have repented, given their lives to Christ, have been cleansed of their sin, and have been born of the Holy Spirit. These early Christians were baptized as believers according to standard biblical requirements. A study of baptism in the New Testament must logically lead to the conclusion that infants are to be precluded and if infant baptism is practiced this would invariably lead to a mechanical, magical view of baptismal regeneration. Engelsman argues, "The concern with regard to this objection is that if people have not exercised their faith and are not born again and (yet) they are told that they are Christian, which is what is believed actually happens, then infant baptism becomes an obstruction to faith and to inroads that the gospel should make" (Engelsman E, February 1984:12). Personal decision is therefore indispensable for baptism which in itself precludes the baptism of infants.

ii. A Preference for Baptism by Immersion

The use of modes has not been a major issue in the debate, probably because it is generally felt to be a lesser issue. And yet there are signs that baptism by immersion is to be preferred to that of pouring and sprinkling (Questionnaire Letters: 2009 Appendix, 164ff). As a long-standing minister in the MCSA it is my experience that most requests for a believer's baptism are usually accompanied by a demand for the baptism to be administered by immersion alone. A demand like this usually indicates that these members do not accept a baptism by sprinkling or pouring. Those requesting immersion usually claim that there is no evidence in the New Testament for sprinkling and pouring. (I have no documented reference to hand for this claim). These Anabaptists argue that neither John,

nor Jesus, nor the apostles practiced baptism in these ways. They also appeal to the linguistic factor, the two Greek prepositions *en* and *eis* contained in some of the baptismal references in the Bible, in support of their argument. These prepositions reputedly carry a connotation of immersion, exclusive of sprinkling or pouring. Baptism by immersion is repeatedly exemplified by John the Baptist's ministry in the River Jordan, while the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River was also performed by immersion. The record of baptisms in the Acts of the Apostles all of which imply immersion, and the fact that the two Greek prepositions found in some of the baptismal texts connoting immersion, makes it overwhelmingly certain that baptism by immersion is the exclusively correct method to use. Biblical references to baptism in the Epistles also clearly speak of death, burial and resurrection and therefore of immersion i.e. Romans 6:1-7 and Colossians 2:11f. As the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus together form the essence of salvation; immersion would be its truest representation and should therefore be the required method of baptism used in the MCSA. Understood in this way biblical baptism cannot possibly be given to infants.

iii. The Forbidden Practice of Dedication in place of Infant Baptism

Why is infant dedication preferred to infant baptism? The claim by Anabaptists has already been stated, that there are references in the bible to infant dedication, but not to infant baptism. Examples of this practice are, the handing over of Isaac by Abraham as a living sacrifice (Genesis 22:1-19), and the dedication of Samuel by his mother (I Samuel 1:22-24). The presentation of the infant Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:22-24) was a dedication and Jesus urged children to come to him, took them in his arms and blessed them (Mark 10:13), are also references to the practice of dedication. All these are bible passages which more clearly support infant dedication rather than infant baptism. (Questionnaire Letters: 2009 Appendix 164ff).

While the MCSA makes much of baptism as an initiatory rite signifying sacrament and prevenient grace, believer-baptists appear to prefer using dedication even though this rite is not sacramental according to the MCSA view. (MCSA Minutes: 1987:46) The concern by supporters of infant dedication is not so much a seeking of the sign of God's prevenient grace – this they take for granted is present anyway – but something which comes from a determination to do the will of God according to bible precepts and examples. This is more important to them as a priority than any interpretation of bible passages. The use of the term ordinance refers to a command needing to be obeyed. The claim is that the need to justify infant baptism from the bible is a strained one, which on the other hand is not the case with rites around believers' baptism. A belief in and justification of sacramentalism should therefore not be given priority of importance over text-and-verse evidence (Questionnaire Letters: 2009 Appendix, 164ff). Believer-baptists do not accept that there is no text-and-verse evidence for infant dedication in the Bible, as the texts which they quote are clear and valid. (Pedersen D, July 1983, and Gibson B, December 1983). They may have a point in this

connection, and yet the texts for infant dedication as for infant baptism are also not stated in prescriptive form.

iv. The Place of Church in the 'Re-baptizers' Theological Structure

The Believer-Baptist position is criticised on the basis that it places too much emphasis on the spiritual condition of the individual. This is a deflection from the primacy of grace and could promote individualism which goes against scripture in connection with the meaning of church (MCSA Minutes 1989:66). Believer-Baptists, however, hold the opposite view. They believe that believers' baptism is more likely to provide spiritual enhancement and heighten the moral quality of the church which infant baptism is not able to ensure. They do not believe that church is to be defined in the way that Luther and some of the Reformers defined it - an *ecclesiola* in *ecclesia* - a faithful church within the wider church (literally a little church within the church) (Bridge D, 1977:111). The church as portrayed in the Bible was made up only of people who belong to God and who had become members of the body of Christ through personal conversion. Anabaptists would therefore strive for a genuinely regenerate church membership as opposed to an artificial Christianising of the whole population. A genuinely regenerate church membership is possible only through believers-baptism while artificial Christianity is a logical outcome of the practice of infant baptism (1977:98).

This group's central interest is to be located in a sincere desire to follow the Lord the Bible way. For them "the way forward, is surely to revert back to the scriptures" as stated by Rev Mbete (Mbete A, October 1983:13). The Bible way in connection with baptism is a process which always involves repentance, faith, conversion, baptism and the in-filling of the Holy Spirit - the sequence need not always be in that order - and living a simple Christian life-style based on an acceptance of the bible as being the highest authority for all matters of faith and practice. This bible way of believing will then bring about a biblical Christian lifestyle. Acts 2:37-47 is a good example of how baptism is to be practiced and of what the quality of life in the church should be.

A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE MCSA VIEW OF WHY THESE BAPTISMAL PROHIBITIONS ARE NEEDED AND OPPOSING VIEWS ABOUT THE PROHIBITED PRACTICES.

This comparative exercise may bring the differences into sharper relief and make clear that proponents of both views strive for the same goal despite taking different interpretative routes.

Indiscriminate Baptism.

The MCSA does not countenance the practice of indiscriminate baptism, while proponents of believers' baptism accuse the MCSA of promoting it. The baptism of infants is claimed to be a demonstration of indiscriminate baptism in that infants cannot respond to the gospel. The church's response to this accusation is by an insinuation that in requesting rebaptism this group is itself guilty of indiscriminate baptism. Striving for a second baptism is a sign of a devaluation of a previous

legitimate baptism. If rebaptism were to be permitted would this not be the 'thin end of the wedge' leading to further rebaptism?

How then is this impasse to be addressed in a constructive way?

Baptism's Biblical Basis

The MCSA is totally convinced of the biblical authenticity of its covenant view of baptism. Infants have always been a vital part of the practice of Biblical Christian discipleship and community. On the other hand it has already been shown that rebaptizers do not accept the biblical basis of infant baptism (Minutes, 1989:61, para.5). How this aspect of the impasse is to be resolved for which there has not been any resolution is a huge theological and practical challenge to face. And yet is there not a way of unifying the various views as a sign of unity amongst Christians which seems to be more important than quests for and claims about baptismal correctness?

Dedication

The two sides hold opposing views on the practice of infant dedication and yet it seems that the whole purpose of dedication within the context of believers' baptism carries the same intent as that of infant baptism. A difference between them is that in infant baptism water is used, while in infant dedication water is not used.

The Methodist Church agrees with the view that refusing a child growing up in a Christian home the rite of baptism could have a negative effect upon the child's general spiritual development. "To refuse baptism is to deny the presence of Christian faith" (Bridge D, 1977:173), and yet proponents of dedication carry a similar conviction that to practice infant baptism is to deny infants the opportunity of exposure to what the Christian faith truly means. The believer-baptist tries hard to say and do something that matters very much to the infant in terms of the Christian faith. The intriguing thing is that paedo-baptists are trying to do and say the same thing. Neither position possesses a specific biblical command that can be quoted in support of their respective practices around infant initiation. Both admit that the increased employment of their respective practices can and do arise from popular demand and from the need to say something about the solidarity of the Christian family, and yet in both instances the practices of infant baptism and of infant dedication could "degenerate into an indiscriminate acceptance of having the baby done" (1977:178).

The issue though goes much deeper than a simple question of putting a child through an infant baptism or a dedication. Believer-baptists believe that infant baptism followed by confirmation compromises the paedo-baptists covenant position, while paedo-baptists believe that dedication is also a compromise of the believer-baptist position. Both have a similar problem (1977:179). As the paedo-baptist does not tell the whole story of Jesus and his love, and the need to be saved by his grace, which consequently needs to be supplemented by Confirmation, so the believer-baptist finds

himself (sic) in a similar situation. If infant baptism is not literally biblical, infant-baptizers believe the same applies to infant dedication (1977:179).

The MCSA rejects the practice of infant dedication because it is not a sacrament as it is believed to place too much emphasis upon the rite as a human act. Re-baptizers on the other hand, believe that what is more important than sacramental baptism is that any Christian rite should have a text-and-verse biblical foundation.

Baptismal Regeneration.

The MCSA does not agree that infant baptism leads to a belief in baptismal regeneration of the mechanical kind (MCSA Minutes 1989:61 and 66). Methodist believer-baptists however believe that it does lead to a magical kind of redemption. They point to their experience of baptism as evidence of this. The church appears to teach that at its baptism the infant becomes a Christian, yet in the believer-baptists' experience this has not been found to be the case. A post infant baptism experience of conversion is therefore evidence that 'new life' was not granted at baptism, but only after a response of repentance and faith was given (Questionnaire Letters:2009 Appendix,164ff).

Modes of Baptism

The MCSA adopts an inclusive approach in regard to the modes of baptism and believes that while the issue of the quantity of water is important, it is not paramount. Rebaptizers believe that death and resurrection, which is of essence of Christ's salvific work can more truly be represented by immersion and this is why baptism must always be administered by immersion¹².

The Value of Church

Both proponents place a high value on the church in relation to the practice of baptism and yet they believe the opposite about each other in this connection. Why is this necessary? Perhaps both sides need to consider whether the practice of water baptism and of dedication should be viewed as being more important than the discipling of people? Why can no agreement be reached along the lines of agreeing to disagree without being disagreeable and without undermining other positions that are likely to be equally as legitimate?

¹² Robert Countess writes of James W. Dale's research around the Greek term *baptizo*: "According to Dale the literal and metaphorical senses of *baptizo* refer to general, not specific actions. Thus it is as incorrect for Presbyterians to assert that *baptizo* means 'sprinkle or pour', as it is for Baptists to assert that it means 'immerse or dip'. Dale's basic argument was, what is capable of thoroughly changing the character, state, condition of any object, is capable of baptizing that object; and by such change of character, state or condition, does in fact baptize it. Dale demonstrates that water as mode must come from a scripture context but not from *baptizo* itself, since over 40 different English verbs are required to translate *baptizo* just in the classical Greek contexts" (Dale JW, Reprint 1889. Forward by Robert H Countess-viii)

In respect of requests for rebaptism is not the use of the double approach in the MCSA a reason for these requests? Members baptized as infants have been evangelised by the church and in their newfound search to live the Christian life which they want to do according to the will of God as taught in the bible and having read in the scriptures that baptism was given after conversion, feel the need therefore to be obedient to God. Refusing their request would come as a rebuff which seems to be unnecessary, and may entrench their strong feelings against the church making them more determined than ever to pursue what they believe is right. Is the quest for rebaptism then not also a problem of the MCSA's own making? Perhaps a more inclusive and uniting way of dealing with this issue could be pursued.

If baptism is to be unifying, the question of how the MCSA can comfortably consider the possible legitimacy of requests for rebaptism by immersion on the one hand, and on the other, provide viable grounds for alternative rites in order to meet the needs of members who feel the need for a believers' baptism, while ensuring that MCSA's baptismal policy remains intact, needs to be dealt with as a priority.

There are three options that are open to the MCSA in this regard and the next chapter will consider them.

CHAPTER 4

THE POSSIBLE ELIMINATION OF REBAPTISM

Before exploring the different ways of eliminating the practice of rebaptism within the MCSA covenant context it is necessary to mention the broader context of baptism as it existed in the pre-Christian era. This exercise may provide some helpful ideas of how to cope in a positive way with the issue of rebaptism. In this regard some of the cultic washing practices of Judaism which presumably were also derived from covenant and which signify purification, will be dealt with. Mention will therefore be made of the Essenes, a Jewish cultic ascetic group; Jewish proselyte baptism, and the baptism of John. Did Christian baptism borrow from these practices and what bearing do they have on rebaptism as it is practiced today?

Covenant baptism relies heavily but not exclusively on the Old Testament as a biblical basis for its existence. These aforementioned Jewish groups possess in some way or other similarities with Christian baptism in their ritualistic practices. For example the issues of purification, incorporation, and the possibility of a better life, all of which are a part of what Christian baptism signifies, also feature in these three Jewish practices.

The Essenes and their cultic washing practice

This ascetic group existed from about the 2ndC. B.C. to the 2ndC. A.D. and conformed to rigid rules of purification (Hastings J.1989:238). It existed within the Jewish faith, whose members lived at the Dead Sea and possessed the constitution of a true monastic order. "Its inmost nature and deepest motive was thoroughly Jewish"(Hastings J, 1989:239). The Essenes were concerned to promote Levitical law and the purity of the Torah as a way of reforming Jewish temple worship which included the nurturing of a holy lifestyle.

The decline of religion, of morality, of non-Jewish influence and the bid to Hellenise Judaism were contributing factors in the formation of this group of Jewish believers. They put great emphasis on Levitical precision and kept the Torah in its smallest detail. This emphasis formed the essence of the movement's morality (1989:238). They used the Dead Sea, together with baths in their settlements, for these purification rituals which presumably were carried out by pouring and immersion.

Ritual washings took place in order to recover lost purity – lost, for example, by touching a dead body (Numbers 19:11ff). Anyone who was thus impure was obliged to engage in ritual washing before the person could again take part in worship. It would be inexact to refer to this as merely outward purification, as in Jewish thought body and soul are indissolubly linked. There are passages in the Old Testament where acts of washing are interpreted as being of moral significance. Isaiah 1:16ff says "there is blood on your hands, wash yourselves and be clean. Put away the evil of your deeds, away out of my sight. Cease to do evil and learn to do right" (See also Psalm 51:7 and Ezekiel 36:25). (Dixon N, 1979:14)

They subjected members and anyone joining them to ritualistic washings as described in the book of Leviticus. As they were Jewish groups their endeavour was directed at Temple reform because "the Temple was a place made unclean by the heathenism of the priests" (Hastings J, 1989:239). It is possible, given that John the Baptist was similar in his ascetic outlook, that he was affected by Essenian practise. Even Jesus and the apostolic church could have been influenced by this grouping, and yet "early Christianity was too strong in its own kind to be deeply touched by a spirit so unlike its own" (1989:239). The difference between this Jewish form of religion and that of Christianity is that while the former was concerned to promote Levitical law, the purity of the Torah and temple worship, Christianity is focussed more on the spreading of the gospel of the Kingdom of Christ and the offer of the grace of salvation derived not from outward religious observances but as a free gift.

Jewish Proselyte Baptism

By proselyte baptism is meant the baptism of someone seeking to become a member of the Jewish faith and who, according to requirement, needed to go through some kind of conversion formula. Anyone admitted to the Jewish faith was said to be a proselyte and the change-over was transacted by undergoing a ceremonial washing, which was a kind of baptism. In certain circumstances children were baptized along with the parents. The assumption, therefore, is that the practice of Christian baptism was influenced by and developed from Jewish proselyte baptism. I Corinthians 7:14 is quoted in support of this claim. Paul states, "For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy" (N.I.V.). "Was Paul not referring to this Jewish practice and the idea that children born to proselytes before conversion to Judaism were unclean and were therefore baptized with their parents, while those born afterwards were 'born in holiness?'" (Bridge D, 1977:36).

This practice of baptism made a proselyte eligible to become a member of the Jewish nation. There was however a further step that was needed and that was for the initiate to become a member of the Jewish faith. This happened through circumcision and gaining entry through circumcision into the people of God was based on covenant (Genesis 17:1ff.).

Dr. Bandey declares, "no-one seems to be certain how proselyte baptism came to be required as a transfer from another faith into the Jewish community. Some rabbis argued against it because there was no Old Testament precedent for or instruction given about it. Circumcision was the usual way of becoming members of the covenant of faith. By the First Century AD, a male convert to Judaism was first circumcised and a few days later was required to baptize himself(sic) in the presence of three rabbis who were his(sic) sponsors. Females were only baptized (Bandey D, 1976:15). Such baptisms originated from washings for purification from the pollution of paganism and some rabbis believed that these washings carried a deeper meaning and were therefore a reference to the 'new birth' of the convert (Bandey D, (1976:15).

As to the influence of proselyte baptism on Christian baptism there is divided opinion. Some scholars, especially Jeremias claim that there may be a connection, notably in regard to the form and theology of Christian baptism which seems to derive from Jewish proselyte baptism. Examples of this are:

- (a) Baptismal terminology of the New Testament is similar to that of proselyte baptism.
- (b) The baptismal catechetical instruction in the New Testament could be a reproduction of proselyte baptism.
- (c) The baptismal rites in the early church follow the pattern of those used in proselyte baptism.
- (d) The baptismal theology originates in the Jewish understanding (Beasley- Murray G, (1962:25-26).

Beasley-Murray however, does not agree with Jeremias' argument on the matter and contends that there is no genetic connection between the two. His conclusion is based on two broad assumptions, that

- (a) Proselyte baptism may have been commensurate with Christian baptism in the first century A.D. and
- (b) That the similarities existing between them were because Jewish practice and thought was itself undergoing modification and consolidation in a period when the Christian church took its rise. (Beasley-Murray G,1962:25-26)

Beasley-Murray therefore doubts that there is any influence of Jewish proselyte baptism on Christian baptism, and makes a telling conclusion "If proselyte baptism was a universally accepted institution in Judaism before the Christian era, how are we to explain the fact that there is not one clear testimony to it in pre-Christian writings and its complete absence of mention from the writings of Philo, Josephus and the Bible, particularly the New Testament. These authors were quiet about this relationship so it is strange that given their interest in the relations between Jews and Gentiles that this should be so" (1962:19). Murray argues that while Jewish proselyte baptism may have been practiced when the Christian church began, the question is, whether the Jewish rite exercised a dominant influence on the Christian rite, or was it the other way round? (1962:25). Bandey agrees with Murray's argument by contending that there is no evidence to prove that Christian baptism was influenced by it. He doubts that proselyte baptism even existed as early as the first century (Bandey D, 1976:58).

The Baptism of John

Was John the Baptist influenced by the practices of Essenian ceremonial washings preceding his time, and by Jewish proselyte baptism, for his baptism? John's baptism was both eschatological in

orientation and integrated with repentance. The eschatological element could have had its origin in Isaiah 40:3-4 which is recorded in Mark 1:7-8. In respect of repentance, both judgement and redemption are featured in his ministry in which he sought to bring about a transition from being under the judgment of God on sin, to redemption which would come through the Messiah. "Baptism sealed those repenting as members of the covenant people fitted for the appearing of the Messiah and therefore with the hope of inheriting the kingdom of the Messiah" (Beasley-Murray G, 1962:33). John the Baptist's ministry had two focal points; "it inaugurated the new life of the converted assuring the baptized of forgiveness and cleansing from sin; and it anticipated the messianic baptism with the Spirit and fire, so giving assurance of a place in the Messiah's kingdom. Matthew 3:1 and Luke 3:3" (1962:39).

There is no evidence to support the claim that John's baptism derived from proselyte baptism. The ideas behind the two institutions had very little, or nothing in common. In proselyte baptism there is a cleansing factor present, and conversion to the Jewish nation to become a member of the Jewish religion was by baptism. John's baptism on the other hand served to create an awareness of the Messiah as well as served to convey the message that the Messiah would save through repentance. John's baptism was therefore unique in that it was bound up with "the uniqueness of the Messiah's vocation. In the age-long ritual lustrations combined with the prophetic anticipation of judgment and redemption formed a medium in the ablutions of men that looked for redemption in Israel. John's baptism was a preparation for repentance and purification as well as for the coming of the Messiah, who would judge and redeem"(1962:44).

The question is, can John's baptism assist towards finding answers for the practice of rebaptism? It is generally agreed that there may be a link between John's baptism and Christian baptism. Beasley-Murray summarises the argument for a link in the following assertion:

Jesus came to the baptism of John among the penitents of Israel, responsive to John's proclamation to begin the messianic task in its fullness as he interpreted it from the writings of the Old Testament Jesus' submission to the baptism of John was an assent to John's authority, in respect both to his message and to his ministry (1962:55). He went to John not as a private person but he knew that he was to be the Messiah, and as such was a representative person (1962:56).

It may therefore be concluded that Jesus did not underplay baptism, neither did he overplay it, and yet he authorised it as an essential part of his ministry (1962:72).

The Origin and Authority of Christian baptism

Murray's summary of the origin of Christian baptism is well articulated: "It rests on the command of the risen Lord after his achieving redemption and receiving authority over the entire cosmos. It is integrated with the commission to preach the good news to the world and it is enforced by his own example at the beginning of his messianic ministry" (Beasley-Murray G, 1962:92)

A brief examination of John's baptism and its purpose reveals that it was one of preparation. Jewish proselyte baptism, which either influenced John's baptism or was influenced by it, does not assist with the task of this dissertation, neither do the cultic washings of Judaism such as those practised by the Essenes offer any help for what this thesis is attempting to achieve in terms of rebaptism and alternative rites. All these movements, which in some way practiced baptism or washings, appear to have been rituals made up of how the individual is to respond in line with Old Testament instruction, whereas Christian baptism derives uniquely from what Cullmann calls, Jesus' general baptism through his life, death and resurrection, and his command to bring people through preaching and discipleship, into the redeeming benefits as provided by him alone. These Jewish rites of purification do not in any way point to the uniqueness of Jesus and his redemptive mission. Neither do they signify inclusiveness nor speak of God's prior moving in a new covenant way. They do not therefore assist with the need to promote peaceful baptismal diversity.

The one central thing that these pre-Christian movements do however have in common with Christian baptism is that all used water in their ritual washings with connotations of cleansing. Cleansing with water is a common thread running through from Old Testament Jewish religion into the Christian faith. If Christianity developed out of Judaism "a religion in which ceremonies involving water were commonplace then it is difficult to conclude that there was no link of influence between Jewish antecedents and Christianity" (Dixon N, 1979:14). Isaiah 1:16 has already been quoted as an example of this. Whether or not these washings can be proved to carry a direct influence on Christian baptism is inconclusive. As John's baptism was one of repentance and cleansing and as John was a forerunner to the coming of Christ it is in that sense that his baptism prepared the way for Christian baptism. Mark 1:4ff says "John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness proclaiming a baptism in token of repentance, for the forgiveness of sins; and they flocked to him from the whole Judean countryside and the city of Jerusalem, and were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins". John, like his predecessors such as Amos, Hosea and Isaiah of Jerusalem denounced evil behaviour and demanded moral righteousness. As baptism signified repentance and cleansing it called for a change in behaviour. The message of John the Baptist therefore was "expressive of a thoroughgoing moral reformation" (1979:16). Anyone sorry for former behaviour came for washing, for cleansing, for the removal of past wrongs and then passed through the waters and returned to start all over again. They

... needed to be conscious of failure and guilt. They needed to be sufficiently concerned about it to abandon certain kinds of behaviour. They had to show a practical desire for a better way of life (Dixon N, 1979:15). There is no suggestion that cleansing in John's baptism was "*ex opere operato*" in nature neither can it be "considered to be a mere ritual devoid of any efficacy" (Dixon N, 1979:15).

John's teaching that baptism is a repenting from and a washing away of sin is without a doubt a carry over into Christian baptism. Evidence of this is to be found in many New Testament texts. Acts

2:37ff, Acts 22:16, I Corinthians 6:9ff, Ephesians 5:25ff, I Peter 3:18-21: In these writings Peter and Paul appear to set great store on baptism as one of the ways of being purified through the washing away of sin, while in Hebrews 10:22 the writer makes "an allusion to Old Testament ritual, in which priests were required to purify themselves with water before offering sacrifices (Numbers 8:7) and to purify the holy things by sprinkling them with the blood of sacrificial victims" (Leviticus 16:14,18ff). The message of the letter to the Hebrews is that Christ cleanses the Church by his own blood and this is a "once-for-all cleansing which is applied to us in the once-for-all cleansing in baptism". (Dixon N, 1979:15-17) Baptism in the New Testament, as in the Old Testament rituals, includes purification in its meaning, yet an essential difference which Christian baptism provides is the need for and possibility of inner cleansing while purification in Old Testament religion was conveyed ritualistically. In John's ministry, baptism was a preparation ritual for the cleansing away of sin, while in Christianity Christ alone would bring the cleansing by his shed blood, the only thing that would make lifestyle and inner change possible.

The question begs as to how a rite of cleansing can be of assistance as a possible alternative to the practice of rebaptism? It seems that the two issues, that of cleansing and a need for rebaptism are different issues, and the cleansing factor does not appear to be something that Anabaptists quibble about anyway. In the Anabaptist view cleansing takes place during conversion, which is prior to baptism and it is featured symbolically. It is on this basis that there is therefore no need for further debate on the matter.

The rest of this chapter will deal with what the MCSA could do to eliminate the problem of rebaptism. Firstly, if the MCSA adheres to its claim that infant baptism is more in line with its tradition rather than that of believers' baptism and thereby insinuates that believers' baptism is of secondary importance and is therefore problematic, could it not consider discarding the practice of believers' baptism? Conversely, if infant baptism is not meeting the biblical and spiritual needs of its members then may it not consider doing away with this part of its policy? The third option is that of retaining the status quo. As to why the MCSA would most likely not deviate from the third option, will be discussed in an in-depth way.

THE POSSIBILITY OF DISPENSING WITH BELIEVERS' BAPTISM

This suggestion has emerged in debates at different forums in the MCSA, but has not been taken seriously. It is however necessary to discuss this option in that the MCSA sometimes leaves the impression in its pronouncements that believers' baptism is dispensable. The MCSA baptizes infants and caters for the baptism of believers not previously baptized, and yet "Infant baptism is the traditional practice of the MCSA and ministers are expected to adhere to this position. Adult baptism should not be encouraged to the detriment of infant baptism"(MCSA Minutes, 1989:59). This means that as the church baptizes the infants of believers, these infants are then brought into the life of the church in the usual way. They are thereby subjected to the influence through being disciplined and

eventually are regenerated by grace through personal response. They become believing adults who in turn produce infants who follow the same process of Christian initiation and discipleship. In this way the cycle is repeated ad infinitum. The possibility of dropping believers' baptism may therefore be a simple solution to the problem in that members who seek a believer's baptism could be dissuaded as they would know that the church does not practice rebaptism (usually by means of a believers baptism). Before any change along this line can however be recommended it would be necessary to look at what the possible biblical, theological and practical implications of a move like this would be.

The Biblical Significance of such an Action

As has been indicated the MCSA believes that the Bible is a higher Christian authority than the church. Wesley's point is "that the final authority in matters of religion is the Bible, and all the other writings must be judged in the light of this once for all revelation" (Williams C, 1960:25). In his Journal, called 'Works', Wesley writes that Protestants in general embrace only

those truths as necessary to salvation which are clearly revealed in the oracles of Godthe written word is the whole and sole rule of their faith as well as practice. They believe God has declared and professed to do whatsoever he has commanded. This is the proper faith of Protestants: by this they will abide and by no other (1960:26; footnote).

As with Wesley, the MCSA upholds a high view of the Bible to which all other theological authorities are to be subject. To eliminate believers' baptism from its doctrinal structure would be a radical move to make. A possible action like this may be a sincere attempt to solve a problem but runs into all sorts of theological problems. Believers' baptism is a well-attested practice in the Bible. The examples of baptism in the Acts of the Apostles are all accounts of adult believers' baptism. The excising of a component from MCSA belief system which it also accepts as being thoroughly biblical, would lead to a minefield of faith contradictions and would destroy the foundation upon which its covenantal view of baptism is based.

Matthew 28:19 is a commission to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them etc. This text is generally accepted as referring primarily to believers' baptism and is directed towards people who need to be evangelised in a missionary circumstance. The baptism of adult believers mentioned in the New Testament is generally carried out upon those who have responded to the preaching of the gospel and have become believing adults. Examples are: Acts 2:37ff, 8:12-16, 8:35-39, 9:17-18 10:45-48, 16:13-15 and 29-34, and 18:8. References in the Epistles also provide information about the meaning of baptism that fits the baptism of believing adult converts. The examples are, Romans 6:3-5, I Corinthians 10:1, Galatians 3:27, Ephesians 4:5ff, Colossians 2:11ff, Titus 3:3ff, Hebrews 6:1-3, I Peter 3:18-22, and I John 5:5-8. It is difficult to conceive how the MCSA can legitimately take believers' baptism out of the body of biblical revelation and remove it from Jesus' commission to make disciples, when it carries such a high view of the Bible and submits to the Lordship of Jesus.

Its Theological Significance

To eliminate believers' baptism from covenant baptism as practiced in the MCSA would also impinge negatively on the sacramental value of baptism. The sacramental value of baptism, which has reference to prevenient grace, ranks very highly in MCSA belief and as baptism is given to those who have been regenerated, this serves as a sign of grace in action and of the need for personal response. Another difficulty in the possible excision of believers' baptism is that it would contradict the MCSA theology of inclusiveness which it believes forms a vital part of biblical covenant.

It is also hard to see how a move like this could serve to cancel out requests for rebaptism. If as some members of the MCSA claim, the Holy Spirit has led them, through a reading of the New Testament, into a quest for a believers' baptism, it is unlikely that a move like this could change their minds since in their thinking what the scripture says is more important than following church tradition. The dropping of believers' baptism could mean that more of these members would either resort to clandestine baptism, and this would mean that the MCSA does nothing about meeting the spiritual needs of its members, or leave the church.

Believers' baptism is necessary because baptism and the Eucharist are "generally necessary for salvation" (Bandey DW, 1976:81). This may be a contentious statement to make because adults can be saved without being baptized; a biblical example of salvation without baptism is that of the thief on the cross. And yet Dr. Bandey argues that baptism "is necessary not because salvation is unavailable without it but because men (sic) in general need it in the life of faith, which is life in the body of Christ" (1976:83).

Another consideration around this issue is that baptism in Christian mission is

the primary vocation and responsibility, in accordance with the value set upon the apostolic ministry in the New Testament and in the early church of declaring the universality of the grace of God by preaching the gospel of a free, full, present salvation for everyone who repents and believes upon our Lord Jesus Christ. In the providence of God Methodism was raised up to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land by the proclamation of the evangelical faith (MCSA L & D, 2000:2).

Adults need to be baptized based on a believing faith and the idea that any adult becoming a Christian without a subsequent baptism is not in keeping with New Testament teaching. It is only by the Holy Spirit that those born of the Spirit may be incorporated into the body of Christ and baptism amongst other things is a sign of discipleship. The MCSA policy states it as such: "As an acceptance of the vocation to personal discipleship as well as incorporation into Christ's body and both of these aspects of baptism are realities because of the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Bandey DW, 1976:85).

As to whether the person's need for a believers' baptism after having received baptism in infancy is a valid need, which hasd been questioned by MCSA, is a difficult judgment to make. The church has

however begun to recognise that rebaptism is a reality needing to be taken seriously. It states that "Some requests for rebaptism arise from the need of the person concerned to bear public witness to a new or renewed faith or to perform an act of obedience to mark a new commitment, provision should (therefore) be made to meet this need" (MCSA Minutes, 1989:66).

In the light of the aforementioned debate, excluding believers' baptism from MCSA doctrine would be a futile move limiting the MCSA's ability to fulfil its calling in terms of the need to be true to the Bible. If it were to do this the MCSA would then have to find a rite that is scripturally viable to replace believers' baptism as a way of enabling new converts to be initiated into the Church. Finding an alternative rite for believers' baptism is impossible as no other clear biblical way of doing this, is to hand.

2. THE POSSIBILITY OF DISPENSING WITH INFANT BAPTISM

From a believers' baptism point of view there are a number of factors that point to what is believed could be a legitimate dispensing with infant baptism. Arguments that are presented against the practice of infant baptism have not changed down the years and appear to be repeated ad infinitum. The most common one is that there is no biblical basis for this practice. It is true that there is no specific command for infant baptism anywhere in the Bible, no recorded example of infant baptism being practiced in New Testament times, and references to baptism in the New Testament appear to refer only to Jesus' baptism and the baptism of believers. Moreover it has been difficult to apply the meaning of believers' baptism to that of infants in a theologically cogent way. The theology of baptism derived from the Bible does not generally fit in easily with infant baptism and members of the MCSA have a constant struggle to know how to relate the two practises in a coherently viable way. The wording in the MCSA policy statement seems to say one thing, namely the need for the infant-baptized person to arrive at the point of conversion and then a profession of faith, and yet this is not clearly stated in the Order of Service which appears to promote baptismal regeneration of the mechanical kind instead. This was the criticism of MCSA baptismal policy by some ministers before 1989, and was expressed in the words of Rev. Eldred Engelsman.

The Order of Service produced by the Church Unity Commission on behalf of several churches and accepted by the MCSA, states quite explicitly that baptism is the sign and seal of the new birth in Christ, of the gift of the Holy Spirit, of our entry into covenant grace, and of our membership of the church and again says , we thank you that in you offer us new birth through water and the Holy Spirit and then goes on to say, 'in this baptism may this child be made one with Christ in his death and resurrection, to be cleansed and delivered from all sin' (Engelsman E, February 1984:12).

These words are read as meaning that the baptized infant has been saved in an *ex opere operato* way – mechanically. Engelsman and others argue that this way of expressing what the church believes about infant baptism is not biblical, and is therefore not theologically sound. If prevenient grace (for salvation) is believed to be somehow associated with baptism Engelsman believes that this

is incorrect for, "in the Bible prevenient grace is linked to salvation and not to infant baptism" (Engelsman E, February 1984:12).

While Rev. Engelsman has possibly not fully understood the intention of the theology behind these statements, yet his claim, that the MCSA Order of Service carries a suggestion of 'mechanical regeneration,' is correct. On the other hand the MCSA believes that it should not be understood that the sign and seal mentioned in the Order of Service is a reference to the material substance of a subjective possession of the one baptized. It should rather be understood objectively with prevenient grace being highlighted and needing to be appropriated in the maturing years of the infant's life. This may be how the MCSA understands it, and yet the way the policy and the words in the Order of Service are stated appear to be saying two things: the infant must have faith when it comes to a stage of understanding, but then seemingly insinuates that the infant already possesses that faith by reason of having been baptized (Methodist Service Book 1975:A7 and A8). The wording does not clearly state that the infant must still come to a personal acceptance of saving faith.

Infant baptism is also blamed for being the catalyst for the promotion of nominalism in the church. The MCSA is crippled because of an excessively large nominal membership and opportunists use the church as a political platform for their own ends. By this statement is meant that there are baptismal opportunists who request baptism for their infants because they see in it something mysterious and magically redemptive. "If this is so, then the MCSA can well do without infant baptism"(Pedersen D, February 1984:12).

Should the MCSA not drop infant baptism because of the perpetuation of these contradictory meanings in the wording of its Order of Service? Why can't the MCSA do something to rectify this ambiguity? The argument for excising infant baptism is also based on the fact that a number of Christian movements which do not practice infant baptism, notably the Baptists and the Churches in Christ group, seem to be more effective in the discipling and evangelisation of children and adults, baptized or not baptized. Sometimes sweeping claims are made in debates and private conversations by their members about this issue. They claim that their movements do not experience the same level of dispute and division over baptism as paedobaptizing churches do. They blame the practise of infant baptism for this. The question still remains as to whether removing infant baptism from MCSA doctrine would in reality stop requests for rebaptism. Is it true that believer-baptist churches do not experience difficulty with believers' baptism while paedobaptists have difficulties because of the practise of infant baptism? The insinuation therefore is that as paedobaptism is biblically wrong, the difficulties with which the Church constantly grapples may be traced to this rite. This could be true and yet is this assumption accurate and how can it be verified?

Its Biblical Significance

Taking infant baptism out of the covenant baptism equation would destroy an essential part of MCSA understanding of biblical covenant. Biblical covenant, since its inception in the Old Testament and continued through fulfilment in the New Testament has always included adults and their children. It also includes the need for infants and children to be disciplined. The discipling of men, women and children is what the MCSA believes is contained in the command in Matthew 28:19-20. Covenant has always emphasised the importance of the family unit and is believed by the MCSA to have been given by God as a way of being inclusive in the discipling and evangelising of people.

Theological Significance

The elimination of infant baptism would also distort the theological significance of covenant baptism in the MCSA view. This view importantly signifies God's initiative in respect of discipling men, women and children for Christian relationship. Infant baptism is thus a sign of God's continuous movement through the Holy Spirit seeking the redemption of the people he has created. To take infant baptism out of Methodist doctrine is not only to exclude an emphasis on prevenient grace, but is to leave out infants and children for whom Christ has a special love and who are thus very much candidates for his salvific work. Doing this would also contradict the meaning of covenant baptism in the wider Christian church.

Practical Implications

The excising of infant baptism from MCSA policy would also pose a serious practical difficulty. The church would have to find an alternative rite, given its view of baptism, with sacramental connotations for the initiation of infants. Dedication is unacceptable to the church because it believes that dedication does not meet the sacramental and biblical criteria that form a vital part of MCSA policy. A rite of thanksgiving for the birth of infants which the MCSA permits as an alternative to infant baptism may be the answer, and yet it is difficult to see how the rite of thanksgiving can be any more acceptable than dedication as its sacramental value is doubtful. Based on biblical, theological and practical considerations it is unlikely that the MCSA would be willing to excise infant baptism from its current policy.

3. THE OPTION OF RETAINING CURRENT POLICY

There is no indication anywhere in MCSA records that the church has altered the core elements of its baptismal doctrine and policy since becoming an independent body in the 1900s. All indications are that the church will remain with the status quo and possibly become more entrenched in its stance. Why is this so?

Baptism is covenant in essence.

As the MCSA is unwavering in its belief that covenant is the correct basis of baptism it believes that covenant baptism is the most effective way of fulfilling Gods saving mission. As Judaeo-Christian religion in Reformed theology is believed to be essentially covenant, it is recognised that covenant forms an indispensable component in all aspects of Christian doctrine which includes baptism. Covenant is the essential basis of God's way of advancing Gods kingdom through the church and baptism is an indispensable sign and part of that mission.

In Wesley's high view of covenant he urged "Methodists to renew their covenant with God every year" (Methodist Service Book, 1975:D1). The MCSA takes this instruction seriously and every congregation is required to have a covenant renewal service at the commencement of each year (MCSA Laws, 2000:1-8). The MCSA may not always refer directly to the covenant factor in its doctrinal and theological formulations and pronouncements, yet this does not mean that covenant is not the underlying basis for its thinking on matters of faith and practise. It particularly believes that covenant teaching is the intention behind the commission in Matthew 28:19ff – to disciple, to baptize and to teach. Its policy view of baptism and Holy Communion is that both are sacramental and evangelistic. As covenant is inclusive, God demonstrates this through Christs' saving dealings with people by the action of the Holy Spirit. Wesley made a statement which expresses what for Methodists is the heart of covenant, "All men need to be saved. All men can be saved. All men can know that they are saved. All men can be saved to the uttermost and all men can witness to their salvation" (Wesley J, Sermons 1994 edition: 173).

Prior to the coming of Christ, Judaism used baptism for the proselytisation of gentiles who wanted to become Jewish citizens (Bridge D, 1977:36). The requirement was that these gentile men were to be baptized first before going through a rite of circumcision. They entered membership of the Jewish nation by baptism and then were circumcised in order to enter covenant with God. John's baptism was a stepping-stone through repentance for an acceptance of Jesus as saviour. Families were accommodated in this system. The MCSA upholds the covenant notion of baptism because it similarly and importantly includes children, and all other members of the household. For a justification of this tradition it relies on Jeremias' theology. Circumcision in the Old Testament was superseded and replaced by baptism in the New Testament. The prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31ff which speaks about the making of a new covenant was fulfilled in the New Testament as described in Hebrews 8 and following chapters. There is a view however which argues for a disjunction between the two covenants. If this claim is right the MCSA may then not possess a biblical basis for its practice of infant baptism. The argument for discontinuity is based on an interpretation of Jeremiah 31:31ff which speaks of God making a new covenant which is believed to be radically different from the old one. According to this interpretation the term new signifies a total abrogation of the old. Infants therefore were not meant to be included in New Testament baptism in the new covenant regime.

Yet the new factor of the new covenant seems to be more clearly and accurately understood as Jesus' coming to earth and by doing so fulfilled the Law and the Prophets i.e. the old covenant (Matthew 5:17). The outward administration of the old covenant was thereby abrogated only because it had become redundant and this happened in favour of the new inner transaction of salvation to be carried out in human hearts by Jesus Christ. It was the new covenant born out of the Old Covenant. The MCSA would not therefore agree with the claim that the new covenant discontinues the old one because to believe this, not only would be scripturally incorrect but would also take away the essential basis of Christian salvation history, which is covenant. The old covenant contained the promise of grace and the new covenant was a demonstration of the fulfilment of grace. Under the old covenant dispensation, all the members of a covenanting family, starting with the head of the family, a male figure, were possible recipients of this kind of relationship with God. As covenant includes children, infant baptism is an essential part of God's scheme of salvation. Jesus demonstrated this by his love for people which included children even though he did not baptize them. The new covenant therefore is not less in its significance than the old dispensation of covenant except that Jesus is the factor which gives the new covenant its essential and unique meaning.

The ordinances in the old covenant functioned as pointing towards the person and work of the Messiah, as a preparation. Jesus had come as the High Priest, though not as in the Old Testament sense. He did not need to offer sacrifices day after day because he was the one perfect sacrifice for sin and redemption, through death and resurrection and in so doing became the essential component, the new factor of the old covenant. (Hebrews 8 vs. 1-2). Reference to Jesus was always present in germ in the Old Testament. The new covenant therefore is not new in nature and membership – God always included all members of the family of a responding adult head in the relationship. The new covenant may carry changes in the way it is administered in the new dispensation, but the theology of grace, its inner content and the focus on the family, has always been the same throughout redemptive history before and after the coming of Christ. (Luke 1, Ephesians 6).

Those who believe that Hebrews 8:11 teaches the exclusion of children of believers from membership in the new covenant need to observe that the word 'least' (the Greek is *micros*) in Hebrews 8:11 is used elsewhere in the New Testament to refer to children (Matthew 18:6, 10, 14, Luke 9:48). This is also true of the Hebrew word for 'least' *Qaton* Jeremiah 6:11-13. (ed. Strawbridge G, 2003:155 Footnote).

Covenant as understood in this way therefore is in fact the biblical basis for all understandings of baptism. Jesus personifies the new covenant and baptism therefore is first and foremost a sign of Jesus and his prevenient saving work. It is an ordinance designed to facilitate the appropriation of saving grace and also serves as a witness to the possession of that salvation by the believer. As such it is for men, women and children.

Covenant Baptism is Biblical.

The MCSA is convinced therefore that covenant baptism is just as biblical as any other understanding of baptism and would be so if it were to be found in the bible in text-and-verse statements. Its theory of covenant baptism as being thoroughly biblical stands or falls on whether there is continuity between the Old and the New Covenants. The MCSA categorically believes that continuity between the testaments exists because the biblical evidence for this is glaringly clear.

Why Infants?

It has already been stated that the MCSA places a high value on covenant which is of the essence of biblical revelation and this comes from the high value that the Bible gives to children and infants. The church would be in full agreement with arguments put forward by both Jeremias and Marcel for the indispensable inclusion of infants in baptism. Infants appear always to have been present in covenant households from earliest times in the Old Testament and this form of household devotion has persisted through to the apostolic era and beyond it.

Both Jeremias and Marcel understand Jeremiah 31:31ff as signifying continuity between the two covenants and the place of infants is featured as an important ingredient in terms of its purpose. This prophetic scripture does not state that when the new comes the old will be scrapped. It is rather a way of declaring that the Lord will apply the old covenant in a new way, a fulfilling of the old by the new through the coming of Christ. Some of the fringe features hardly central to covenant would change, such as the old rituals involving circumcision and various sacrificial ceremonies. Christ as Saviour would replace these. While circumcision was a sign of God's prevenient grace in the old covenant, circumcision would give way to baptism with water as a sign of Christ and his saving work spoken of as the circumcision of the heart (Col 2:11) in the new covenant era. The inclusion of children in the new covenant has therefore not changed from the old one.

Jeremias adds strength to the argument for infant baptism through an examination of the *oikos* formula in both the Old and New Testaments. The Greek term *oikos* refers to households made up of men, women and children who entered into a covenant relationship with God. (Jeremias J, 1962:12-32). There are many references to 'household' in the Bible. In this understanding, the faith of the head of the family was required to be extended to all the members of the household. By being in a covenant context members of the family were in a position to appropriate and personalise covenant faith and in that way became the people of God. Jeremias agrees with Stauffer's conclusion that it is likely that the *oikos* formula existed from earliest times and it also included children, even small children who might have been present in the house. Biblical references confirming this argument are I Samuel 22:10, 19, Genesis 45:18, Genesis 46:7, I Samuel 1:21 and 22, Genesis 17: 23 and 62 (Jeremias J, 1960:20-24). Jeremias also notes that in the "New Testament the *oikos* formula occurs very early in the records, as early as AD 54. I Corinthians 1:16 is an example of *oikos*, which comes

from a time in which the majority of the members of the churches were from the synagogue and from the circle of God-fearers" (1960:20-21). Stauffer's conclusion is "that the New Testament *oikos* formula was adapted from Old Testament cultic language and in particular from circumcision language and was introduced into the formal language employed in the primitive Christian rite of baptism; it has the same form and the same meaning as the old biblical ritual formula in that it includes small children as well as others" (1960:20-21).

Jeremias then quotes Preiss' view on the matter:

This does not mean to say that in every particular case in which the baptism of a whole household is mentioned small children were actually present. But it does mean that Paul and Luke under no circumstance could have applied the *oikos formula* if they had wished to say that only adults had been baptized (1960:21-22).

In support of this argument Jeremias states that

Theologically the establishment of the fact that children were baptized as members of a family joining the church is of fundamental significance. The primitive church did not regard children as isolated individuals; the household was regarded as a unity in the sight of God. The faith of the father who represents the household, and the faith of the mother, also embraces the children in the name of Christ (1960:24).

As a high value is placed on children of a family in covenant, evangelism and discipleship are critically important. The MCSA accordingly greatly appreciates the central place that children occupy in the mission of Christ and it believes that this is the goal that baptism is designed to achieve.

Pierre Marcel also argues that as covenant includes children both in the Old and New Testaments, the baptism of infants of believers is biblically legitimate and theologically sound. Biblical covenant is therefore the sole basis for infant baptism (Marcel PCH, 1953:198-203). As in the Old Testament, children and infants were brought into the circle of God's covenant salvific influence by circumcision, the same applies to the rite of baptism in the New Testament era. Baptism is a sign that God is at work preventively, as well as serving as a reminder that children baptized thus need to be fed and surrounded by God's saving presence within the Christian family. The response of faith at this stage of the infant's life comes from the church family which encourages the infant to come to new birth faith as soon as it is able to do so. It is in this sense that baptism is a promise to the infant both as a sign of God's commitment to save and also is an indication to the community that the child needs salvation. While baptism is evangelistic it is also a commission to disciple the new Christian (Wesley's Sermons, 192-193).

Although babies cannot participate in the covenant of grace by a change of heart, yet the blessing of the covenant of grace is ascribed to them by grace while they are still unable to think; while they

cannot yet accept moral responsibility or be compelled by God's Spirit to choose (Konig A. et al, 1983:81).

Witherington's argument in support of covenant baptism as having its roots in Old Testament covenant and of fulfilment in the New, inclusive of infants, states

that while circumcision was certainly more of a sign of promise, baptism is more a sign of fulfilled promise based on Jesus and his gift of the Spirit. Trying to exalt baptism at the expense of circumcision is wrong, as is implying that faith, moral renewal or God's fulfilment of his (sic) promises was totally absent in Old Testament times. A proper appreciation of the New Testament ritual should not involve an improper depreciation of an Old Testament ritual. Therefore on a priori basis elements of continuity between circumcision in the Old Testament and baptism in the New Testament, these two rites cannot be ruled out because they belong to two different stages in God's dealing with mankind(sic) (Witherington B, 2007:15).

This line of reasoning accords with Christianity's evangelistically inclusive intention. Inclusivity is the message of Isaiah 9:6 as well as of Christ; Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:15, John 3:16, and of the Apostles in Acts 3:24-26 and I Timothy 2:1-7.

Covenant baptism as read out of the wording in Matthew 28:19 and Acts 2:37ff, and based on the important place of households which has reference to the inclusion of infants in Jewish covenant culture, is difficult to refute. When it comes to the baptism of infants, incorporation is not so much into Christ but firstly into the body of Christ. The body of Christ with its moral, spiritual and social influences are brought to bear on the soul of the infant. "The child is not given the Spirit but placed where the Spirit moves" (Forsythe PT, 1917:225). Jesus said "when two or more are gathered in my name" Matt 18:20 constitutes the most basic ingredient of what the human side of church signifies. It accords with Jesus' words stated in the baptismal text of Matthew 28; 20 "Lo, I am with you until the end of the world". It is thus logical for children to be included by baptism into the presence of Christ in the church to begin to enjoy the benefits of his grace. If baptism is the sign of evangelism, and it needs to begin in the life of the infant as soon as is possible, in what way can this be achieved? Forsyth answers that,

the person is affected much more by the acting church which practices faith through its influence upon him(sic) as a social milieu and in the body of Christ. To the person being baptized, Christ affects a seeking adult, or a passive infant. As the Church opens to his (sic) soul, by its discipline, atmosphere and means of grace, the Church in this sense is the sphere of Christ's influence. He (sic) is associated inseparably with the Church and is its domain of grace (Forsythe PT, 1917:225).

Forsyth argues that baptism in this sense carries impact upon the psyche to begin with, and is not at first regenerative. To argue that infant baptism is primarily regenerative does not take into account the ability of Christ by the Holy Spirit to put divine influence upon the child before conversion. Baptism in 'the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit', Matthew 28:19, with its

parallels in other New Testament texts, ICorinthians1:12-14 and 10:2 all signify personal relationship. Baptism then, is into the church, and is an entry into Jesus' covenant family where Christ is present and on a deeper level is into the presence of Christ. "When an adult is baptized, he (sic) declares that he (sic) belongs to God" on the basis of personal salvation. "When a child is baptized, his(sic) parents and the church declare that the child belongs to God in order to be in a position to receive Christ as personal saviour" (ed. Strawbridge G, 2003:40).

What precedes the gospel being taken out to all nations for people to be discipled is the action of the Holy Spirit (Acts1:7). Without the Holy Spirits work, the implementation of covenant is not possible. The New Testament speaks of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This has always been God's chosen pattern of working. God blesses Abraham and his family and all in his household by the Holy Spirit on covenant terms. These people in turn become a light to the nations that Gods salvation may extend to the ends of the earth. As Jesus' ministry was initially to the Jews (John 1:11-12) and then to gentiles (John 3:16), disciples were likewise to take the gospel to the gentiles (Matthew 10:5, 18; 15:21-27). This sounds like covenant terminology, carrying covenant intentions. To obey everything that Jesus commanded seems to apply to converts and seekers who possess the ability to understand and obey. Converts are made up of those who are able to understand, and yet

there is nothing in Matthew which excludes children and infants from discipleship and therefore baptism. Baptism is a valuable means of discipling children in the name of the Lord Jesus, and God by his (sic) grace is able to regenerate a child from a very early stage even in conjunction with the act of baptism itself (Strawbridge G, 2003:42).

There is no indication in this statement which assumes that baptism is automatic regeneration. In this connection Strawbridge quotes a most helpful homily told at an infant baptism service, which effectively explains the practical meaning of covenant baptism.

We baptized you when you were little too. We promised to raise you to trust Jesus. The pastor put water on your head. We use water for washing, and when we baptized you we asked God to wash away your sins (original). The pastor said, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and this is for you too. That means that we asked God to be your God. Now you belong to him (sic). We want you to believe in God yourself, but baptism means that you are never all by yourself. See how the family always comes to baptisms and how the whole church is there. Our family came too, and we pray for you. The people of the church care for you too. We teach you and pray for you so that you will belong to God all your life (ed. Strawbridge G, 2003:42).

The language used here undoubtedly is an expression of covenant. A statement is made which insinuates that baptism is the fulfilling of the covenant promises made at the baptismal service and contains the idea that the infant needs to obey God personally. They can only do this by coming to God through Christ's saving work based on observing "all that has been commanded" (Matthew 28:19).

In regard to believer's baptism MCSA practice is not the same in every way as Anabaptist belief. The difference relates mainly to the meaning of being disciplined, which in MCSA understanding does not signify only conversion, but includes all that leads to conversion. It baptizes born-again believers as well as those deemed not to be in possession of salvation but who clearly show that they seek it. It is willing to administer a believers' baptism by any of the three modes. It takes a more flexible line in its appreciation of Matthew 28:19ff because it believes that the background of baptism is covenant and covenant is inclusive because it is based on God's will for people. Central to its covenant view is the action of prevenient grace which has been provided by God supremely through Christ, to reach and to embrace men, women, children as well as non-family members, who through the covenant family and because of covenant principles, come within reach of Jesus' saving work.(MCSA Minutes 1989:61-62, 63-64).

Christ reaches out to all people through this covenant plan which baptism portrays as being at the heart of the gospel of Christ. A specific prayer by Christ about this is contained in John 17 which speaks of Christians needing to be one, as well as those who still need to be Christianized, i.e. the infants and children of believers and anyone not yet in the church. Ephesians Chapter 2 is a commentary on Jesus' work bringing the different estranged parties together through the working of the Holy Spirit, to be one. The working of the Holy Spirit is at the heart of the meaning and purpose of baptism. The church's obligation is therefore to care for all its members, including those who disagree with it (MCSA Minutes 1989:67-68). God's work through Christ always proceeds from a background of the availability of God's saving work based on God's covenant plan and in the belief that the Holy Spirit will always be active in that regard.

As the MCSA uses covenant baptism in a sacramental and evangelistic way, it is not likely ever to give up on these two emphases. This is summed up neatly in a theological statement adopted by the church: "The difference between infant and believers' baptism becomes less sharp when it is recognised that both forms of baptism embody God's own initiative in Christ and express a response of faith made within the believing community" (MCSA Minutes, 1982:73).

The covenant emphasis in the church's ministry, particularly in relation to baptism, may not always produce the good results intended as some infants of believers who grow up and go on to live a life which is anything but Christian, never seem to come to faith. This is no fault of covenant baptism theology but it may well be caused by neglect on the part of the church to teach and preach about these things, or perhaps comes from the infant-baptized person slipping into sin, or from never coming to Christ through repentance and faith. Be that as it may, covenant baptism signifies that God is always present however bad the person may be and prevenient grace will never cease to be active. The intention in baptism is not to insinuate that the person to be baptized is saved because of the administration of the rite *per se*. It is rather a commanded demonstration by which salvation is signified and made possible, and from which obedience to God is to follow (I Peter 3:21). It has been

said that baptism is no impersonal influence injected through material substances, but is the gracious action of God alone; it has more to do with the living God, than with the application of water or with any other feature. This is the emphasis that the MCSA regards as being of central importance and which it seeks to convey in its theology and practise of covenant baptism.

While the MCSA is critical of a theology in believers' baptism which emphasises the response of the initiate to the detriment of the need to recognise the prior action of God's grace, it nevertheless accepts that there is also a sacramental feature at work in believers' baptism. Schreiner's statement about this is pertinent:

Believers' baptism accords with the gospel because it teaches that the objective work of God in salvation necessarily leads to the subjective response of faith. The objective work of Christ secures a believing response in his people so that the sign of the New Covenant, that is baptism, is applied to those who give evidence of belief and of membership in that covenant (Schreiner TS, 2006:2).

The MCSA would differ though with the view that the sign of new covenant can only apply to those who give evidence of personal belief and of membership of that covenant. Its view is rather that the covenantal, sacramental, evangelical sign which baptism signifies needs to include those who have faith, those who are receiving faith, and those who seek to receive faith. The scope of covenant baptism in the MCSA is all embracing and is a witness to the inclusiveness of the gospel, which carries a much wider application than that which is portrayed by a believers' baptism alone.

Covenant, Sacrament and Evangelism.

Apart from sacrament being a sign of inclusiveness in the sense that God loves all people, sacrament in the MCSA signifies prevenient grace which is a practical expression of what is important to it, namely the need to be inclusive in its presentation of the gospel and in church life. It is God's action in covenant endeavour to bring all people into a saving relationship with Christ. Not only is covenant a sacrament indicating the presence of God's love before that love can be experienced, but also carries an evangelistic component which requires a subsequent decision and a personal response.

The Importance of Matt.28:19 is seen in that it is a Commission of the Covenant

That God's covenant plan and purpose for humankind seeks to be inclusive is clearly seen in both the Old and New Testaments, and as Jesus came to fulfil the prophecy by making a new covenant with his people, Christian baptism must surely therefore also be inclusive of believing adults and their children. This is the way that the MCSA understands and interprets Matthew 28:19-20. What this passage does not imply is exclusiveness in regard to the commission contained in it; indeed it cannot be understood that way. As covenant is provided for all people, subject to compliance with certain requirements that God has laid down, the same applies to water baptism. In Matthew 28:18f the statement is made that as "all authority" was conferred on Jesus and he in turn conferred it on his

followers to "make disciples of all nations – their mission also...(was possibly to all people), though it could mean to all the gentiles" (Witherington B, 2007:52). That God's covenant of salvation was to be to all nations is stated in various parts of the Bible. Isaiah 49:6 states "I will make you a light for the gentiles that you may bring my salvation to all the ends of the earth". In Mark 16:15 the instruction is "Go into the entire world and preach the good news to all creation" (N.I.V.). Luke 24:47 brings in a variation when saying that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, while John 20:21 states "as the Father has sent me, I also send you" and verse 23 says "If you forgive any they shall be forgiven". All these statements place no limit on the scope of Christ's covenantal saving work. In John 1:1-3 God has created all things but he has also come to redeem all that he has created through the forgiving work of Christ. The Father sent the Son to make it available and to make it possible by the Holy Spirit to bring the new covenant of salvation to every human being (John 3:16). Christians are sent "to ensure that the availability of the gospel is understood by everyone" (Hayford J, Spirit Filled Life Bible, 1991: 1614). These texts which refer to the making of disciples by baptism are therefore more accurately interpreted as being inclusive. This inclusiveness still importantly requires a personal response of believing faith.

Being baptized requires evangelism which is the gospel call and the need for those who have come into that context, men, women and children, to be influenced and taught about all that Christ has commanded.

We can deduce from this statement (Matthew 28:19) that Jesus saw water baptism as an important part of making disciples. Baptism is part of a command to missions; it is an essential part of missionary work (Witherington B, 2007:53).

A study of the text "Baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" which is a baptism into Christ and therefore into his body reveals that nothing is said about whether these disciples were to be converted or seekers or passive infants before their baptism or at any other time, and neither is there an explanation of what baptism means. Is baptism only for the converted, for those who have received a conversion faith, or is it also for those who need faith or who are seeking faith? Is baptism to be understood as being a symbol, or is it also a means of grace? Must it be used as a sign of prevenient grace? Jesus does not give any instruction which elaborates on all these questions over which the Church has struggled to find answers and unity down the centuries. Jesus merely made what appears to be a passing statement when he mentioned being baptized in the name of the Trinity and baptism appears to be ancillary to making disciples of all nations (Witherington B, 2007:53).

Acts 2:37ff seems to be a direct outcome of the commission in Matthew 28:19ff to make disciples of all nations. The message is that people must "repent and be baptizedFor the promise is for you and your children and to all who are afar off". This is Old Testament covenant terminology and portrays in limited detail the intention of God's divine scheme for humankind. In the old covenant,

entry was by circumcision followed by teaching and these stand together. Matthew 28:19ff is similar in that the apostles are to make disciples of those being evangelised/ proselytised as well as teach all that he commanded. Strawbridge says:

Technically speaking, to make disciples is the only command in this verse. To go is a participle, which possesses imperatival force. To make disciples is more than preaching the gospel and making converts. It is to become Jesus' pupil and disciples are therefore his learners (Strawbridge G, 2003:35).

The phrase used in Matthew 28:19 *panda ethne* appears in the Old Testament covenant passages (Genesis 18:18, 22:8, 12:3). The debate therefore is not whether adults are included in covenant baptism as believers, but is rather about whether Matthew 28:19ff, based on Old Testament covenant rituals, could include infants. (2003:35 see footnote).

Baptismal Regeneration and the Methodist Church's non-committal stance

Criticism is levelled at the MCSA for adopting a non-committal stance towards baptism in relation to regeneration (Bridge D, 1977:142). While the church will not make any claim as to what actually happens in the baptism and even refutes baptismal regeneration of a mechanical kind, some members feel that statements in the Minutes of Conference as well as wording in the rite of the baptism of Infants imply a mechanical understanding of baptismal regeneration.

The most commonly and ardently held reason for infant baptism is on the grounds of covenantal theology. Personally I cannot accept this as adequate rationale for the following reasons: It was quite unknown before the Reformation and cannot be found in any form in the writings of the early fathers. It admits (knowingly) unbelievers into Church membership. It regards baptized children as Christians until they deny it. It requires that the word of God be preached differently to those baptized in infancy and those not so baptized. It requires that baptism should only be administered in the context of discipline, i.e. to certain children because they have certain parents, (i.e. it requires 'judging' after all), not because God loves all or because grace precedes faith. ... As regards the view that ministers should continue to baptize infants in order to try to convert the parents – is this not somewhat devious? Not everything that is pastorally expedient is biblically justifiable. Surely one's honest convictions are a better base from which to try to convert anyone? (Pedersen D, July 1983:4).

I suspect the doctrine of baptismal regeneration is one which is fast finding acceptance in the Methodist Church. Witness the change from the book of offices where the emphasis was on dedication, to the Order of Service where the emphasis is on regeneration. (Engelsman E, February 1984:12).

There is probably good reason why the MCSA adopts a non-committal stance in regard to regeneration and baptism. Nothing specific in scripture is given as to what specifically should be believed about the matter. The main reason for this stance seems to come from a lack of ever being able to tell assuredly as to whether salvation is effectual during the act of baptism, and if so, to what extent.

Various theologians believe that while the sacramental factor is involved in the act of baptism, this has reference only to the presence of prevenient grace. It is this grace alone that makes salvation possible. The best that can be made of the matter is that by Gods prevenient grace God works on the infant before salvation, for salvation, and baptism is given as a sign of promise generating the hope that grace will bring the infant to an experience of personal salvation as soon as is possible. The Church of England in S.A. on p.1 of its Service Book makes a statement as to what infant baptism in this sense should signify:

We read in the gospel the love of Jesus towards the children of God's people and of his readiness to bless them...in the power of his resurrection he stands ready to give them the blessing of eternal life as we bring them to him(sic) in faith. Children must indeed make their own response of faith and obedience towards God when they are able to do so (Church of England in South Africa, undated Service Book: 1).

This homily is both a statement of prevenient grace (the resurrected Jesus stands ready to give them the blessing of eternal life) as well as points to the need for the person to respond as soon as is possible. The important place of personal faith is featured in this rite. There is no hint in the wording of a mechanical *ex opere operato* message of salvation. Even though magical salvation can be read into or out of MCSA covenant baptism, the church is nevertheless satisfied that its position is sound biblically and theologically, and therefore is effective in practice.

Dr. Attwell states, in defence of the MCSA current policy that if it is assumed that the orders

Imply that baptism conveys regeneration of salvation, this is not the intention. In infant baptism prevenient grace is recognised and the process of regeneration is initiated, not completed, in the sacrament. It is the sign and seal of what Christ has already done for 'you and your children and all that are afar off'. The tenor of the prayers for the child, the parents, the home and the church are all centred in the hope that the process which is initiated is the child's entry into the family of God and will be fulfilled in that child's life, through the further operation of the Holy Spirit (Attwell A, June 1984:15).

Dr. Attwell further states that the Doctrines Commission cannot spell out more clearly than this explanation, based on the 1976 Short Statement on Baptism and on the Lima Text, as to what the policy of the MCSA on covenant baptism is. He further goes on to say "our Methodist position on baptism, which we share with all the main-line churches, with the exception of the Baptist Church, is quite clear" (1984:15).

That the MCSA expresses a predisposition towards a belief in biblical Christian inclusiveness is also expressed in its practice of baptism.

The primary vocation and responsibility of the Church in accordance with the value set upon the apostolic ministry in the New Testament and in the early church is that of declaring the universality of

the grace of God by preaching the gospel of a free, full, present salvation for everyone who repents and believes upon our Lord Jesus Christ (MCSA Laws, 2000:2).

Baptism as covenant conveys the message of all this. The need is for adults baptized as infants to repent and believe and for these adults to encourage the same response in their children as and when repentance is possible.

In summary, the MCSA prefers to maintain its present policy of using the double practice.

When the church celebrates the sacrament of baptism it proclaims at a particular time, in a particular place and for a particular person what God has accomplished in Christ for all people – forgiveness of sin, the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit and adoption as the sons and daughters of God into his (sic) family, his (sic) covenant family, the church. This pertains to the objective side of baptism. Baptism involves both God's gift and the responses to that gift on the part of the baptized and the church (subjective side). It looks forward to a growth into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13) and is therefore related not simply to a momentary experience but to life-long growth in Christ, and in the fellowship of the church. Thus the response of faith is essential for the personal appropriation of the salvation embodied and set forth in baptism, and the response, like the gift, involves not only an initial act but a life-long process (MCSA Minutes, 1989:60-61).

As regards the one baptized as a believer after profession of faith, that person will need to grow in faith and live within the fellowship of the church, by whose faith he/she will be supported and enriched. The person baptized in infancy also needs to make a personal profession of faith after conversion, and Christian nurture is directed to the eliciting of growth in that profession.

In both cases the act of baptism signifies God's redeeming act in Jesus Christ which does not depend on human merit or achievement but witnesses to the truth that God first gives his(sic) grace to his(sic) people before they can respond to it. In the case of infants the sign precedes the personal profession; in the case of a believer the initial profession precedes the sign. The sequence is different, the profession is the same. Therefore because baptism, whenever ministered, signifies the once-for-all act of Christ, it makes the baptized a member of the covenant community. It is unrepeatable. So the church baptizes the children of Christian parents and children who are in the care of Christian guardians or sponsors accepted by the church. It believes that this practice is in harmony with the teaching of scripture; bearing witness to the fact that such children have a place within the covenant community and emphasises the primacy of God's grace over any activity of ourselves. It further acknowledges that the practice of infant baptism lays upon it the solemn obligation to provide special nurture and care for such children and parents (MCSA Minutes, 1989:61).

In upholding covenant baptism, the MCSA is not able to find any basis in its doctrine for the support of and the need for the practice of rebaptism. Rebaptism is diametrically opposed to MCSA theology on baptism. In the eyes of the MCSA it is negative, promotes exclusivism and division, while covenant baptism is biblical and has a sound theological basis and is for all who are under Gospel influence.

In summary, covenant baptism is used unapologetically in the MCSA as it is believed to be thoroughly biblical. This means that the infants of believers, together with their believing parents ought to be baptized. The disjunction that is claimed by some Anabaptists to exist between the Old and New Testament covenants does not stand the test of biblical study. It makes sense that circumcision, which is a sign of an individual's response in order to be included in God's covenant should be replaced by baptism which signifies God's unaided provision for salvation.

Covenant baptism is a sign which expresses sacrament, the need for evangelism, as well as points to the need for a response of repentance and faith, for conversion. Sacrament as a mandate includes a reference to God as saviour, together with God's initiative in making provision for the salvation of people before people can do anything towards saving themselves. It also is a sign of prevenient grace and prevenient grace directs attention to God as saviour. Baptism is a message signifying all that and as such is a sign of complete and never ending salvation.

As the MCSA is not only sacramental but also evangelical, evangelicalism in baptism emphasises the need for a personal response of repentance for salvation by grace, though faith alone. The MCSA believes that on the basis of its baptismal belief system that evangelism can and does begin in infancy as a sacrament. The emphasis on the family in the covenant notion speaks of the need for family solidarity and is a sign of God's love for each individual within the family and of his desire is to save all. Covenant baptism also speaks about a special effort that needs to be made towards the discipling of men, women and infants (all nations) in line with the commission in Matthew 28:19. It also points to the need for every person included in the covenant to have an on-going relationship with God as started through the saving work of Jesus. The MCSA believes therefore, that its understanding of baptism along covenant lines is an expression of inclusivity, which is what Jesus had in mind and proclaimed in his ministry (John 3:16).

The MCSA's non-committal stance in respect of baptismal regeneration carries the following message: on the one hand it believes in the supreme importance of baptism as a sacrament, for unless the divine initiative is recognised as being present as God's prior saving provision, baptism could be interpreted as signifying magical salvation. On the other hand if it emphasises a need to respond personally for salvation, this can also convey a message of self-salvation. It believes therefore that as the Holy Spirit is present and at work there is no need for a claim that the work of salvation is transacted during the baptism; that is the Holy Spirit's sole jurisdiction.

A Remedy for Rebaptism?

What may be concluded from this study is that MCSA baptism is thoroughly biblical. Its baptismal theological structure is therefore legitimate and is a sufficient practice to broadly cover the needs of both believers and the infants of believers according to biblical requirements. This also applies to the felt spiritual needs of members who want a rebaptism. Rebaptism is unacceptable in the MCSA as it

signifies the rejection of a previous baptism which the MCSA believes is legitimate. Given the strength of its adherence to covenant and what covenant implies with reference to baptism, how has the MCSA attempted to break the impasse towards meeting the needs of those seeking rebaptism and in this way endeavouring to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?

The next chapter will attempt to answer this question.

CHAPTER 5

STEPS TAKEN BY THE MCSA TO REMEDY THE PROBLEM

If the MCSA will not exclude the baptism of either infants or believers' from its practice of covenant baptism, how has the MCSA endeavoured to address the problem of rebaptism in a constructive manner? While it has not changed its view on covenant baptism it has adopted various measures to arrive at a way forward finally based on an acceptance that members who seek a rebaptism do have a genuine need.

While its tradition is that if infant baptism, the Methodist Church ought to assist those of its members who in conscience lean towards the tradition of believers' baptism; there is no good reason why the church should not make provision for both traditions in its present practice (MCSA Minutes 1989:59).

The MCSA has made a number of attempts to address the problem of rebaptism in order to make it redundant. In doing so the idea of the possible nullification of a previous baptism was suggested. It also placed an embargo on rebaptism with a corresponding attempt to clarify its stance. Debates between ministers and members have continued and the possibility of the introduction of viable alternative rites with terms and conditions applying has been proposed. All these moves by the MCSA will be mentioned and discussed in some detail in this chapter.

a. The Possibility of a Rite of Nullification of a previous Baptism

A suggestion of the possibility of the nullification of a previous baptism came from a Methodist theologian named Dr. David Bandey. In this he referred to the Roman Catholic Church practice of the nullification of marriage as an example. Dr. Bandey's view was that annulment of a previous baptism could be acceptable "if the conditions necessary for the event to be correct are not fulfilled at the time, then the event may be declared null and void" i.e. if it were found that a previous baptism was altogether illegitimate. Examples of baptism claimed to be illegitimate are the indiscriminate baptisms performed on a wide scale during the reign of the Emperor Constantine in the third century A.D. No regard was given to questions of discipleship, nurture, repentance and faith, all of which are essential biblical prerequisites for baptism. Other examples could be those of baptisms carried out by non-Christian movements, or from reasons that do not derive from Christianity. A critical question is who would be in a position to decide on the matter and how is it to be decided as to "whether a particular request for baptism by a person who has already been baptized as an infant, is justified" (Bandey DW, 1976:90), before a nullification can be deemed to be valid. Nullification of a previous baptism is a complex matter. If any baptism were to be carried out without any Christian input or influence or was not related to the gospel of Jesus Christ, it could qualify for an official annulment. Yet the question is about how these factors are to be accurately determined. If a previous baptism was carried out in the name of the Lord, this would be a different matter. What may need to be considered here is baptism carried out by ministers who have had a bad spiritual and moral record, or who are proven to be false. An example of this derives from a belief by some Christians of pre-Reformation times that the Roman

Catholic Church was apostate. The Donatist controversy was also all about this difficulty, and was a major issue early in the 4th century A.D. Behind the controversy lay the view "that the validity of any sacrament depended upon the personal worth of the priest administering it". The practice of rebaptizing so called faulty priests became abhorrent to the orthodox church of that time. The issue seemed to have been settled however when the church decided to follow Augustinian teaching which strongly opposed Donatism.

(Donatism:definition<ahret=<http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Donatis>).

And yet if a church has priests who are morally faulty would this be a valid reason for the nullification of a baptism even though baptisms were administered in the name of the Trinity? Nullification may be attractive for members who reject their infant baptism because it is claimed to be unscriptural. Some members even believe that their previous baptism was a non-event. And yet how can all these claims disqualify a previous baptism and when can a previous baptism be validly regarded as a non-event? If the previous baptism is regarded as a non-event then logically there is nothing to nullify. Why then would a rite of nullification be necessary? And moreover how would it be possible to annul an event that took place at some specific time in the past?

It is difficult to see how this rite would be acceptable given the MCSA view of baptism as covenant. Any baptism carried out in the name of the Trinity is a legitimate baptism in the eyes of the MCSA. If nullification were to be sanctioned this would contradict the church's baptismal stance and will insinuate that either the grace of God was not present at the first baptism or that the Holy Spirit was also not at work at that time. The church would then be using an instrument which contradicts its own view by doing the very thing that it has set out to avoid. The possibility of nullifying a so-called previous faulty baptism seems therefore to be both futile and impossible from a covenant baptism perspective. Karl Barth claimed that while infant baptism could be viewed as being flawed by reason of the lack of biblical evidence, it could not possibly be a non-event (Bandey DW, 1976:94).

b. The Prohibition of Rebaptism

In order to curtail requests for rebaptism the MCSA has adopted the stance of prohibition. "Methodism agrees with most major denominations that so-called rebaptism is inappropriate and may not be practiced"(MCSA Minutes, 1989:65). MCSA archival records reveal that rebaptism has been with the church for a very long time. In the Minutes of Conference of 1954 and repeated in the Minutes of 1970 as well as of 1971, a statement is made:

Since the sacrament of infant baptism is truly baptism, there is no need for it to be repeated in later years. The Methodist Church does not therefore approve the suggestion that those who were baptized in infancy need to be immersed in later years (MCSA Minutes, 1954:70-71).

In the 1969 Minutes of Conference a more strongly worded statement on the matter was issued, and this was repeated in 1970 as well as in its revision of baptism in 1976:

Conference knows no doctrine of rebaptism and instructs all her ministers, deaconesses, local preachers and members to refrain from preaching, teaching or encouraging the practice of rebaptism (MCSA Minutes, 1969:56).

These records go on to mention a need "to consider the matter of baptism by a formal commission and to consult with similar commissions which may be at work in other parts of world Methodism" (1969:56). This statement indicates that the MCSA was not merely treating the problem of rebaptism negatively but at the same time was seeking to be constructive. Records of statements, debates and letters written around issues relative to rebaptism carried by the official newspaper of the MCSA called *Dimension* reveals that during the 1980's the leadership of the MCSA was under pressure to find some way of granting permission for the use of rebaptism ('*Dimension*' 1983-1985). These records show that the MCSA moved from a blanket ban on rebaptism without providing much that was positive in place of the ban, to engaging in theological debate around it, and this reflects a more pro-active approach. A consultation on baptism was held at Cyara in the N.W. Province, attended by approximately 100 Methodist clergy, with invited guests from other denominations who were asked to present other viewpoints. Although this consultation did not appear to have enjoyed the full support of the Methodist Conference, yet the viewpoints and suggestions decided upon at the Consultation were submitted to the Conference for consideration and action. In a communiqué to the MCSA the request was made that the church should "consider whether it should move from the position of baptizing infants to one, which allows a minister to administer either infant or believers' baptism, or both" (October 1983:vol.10). The reaction was "that should such a step be taken by the Church to move away from infant baptism, to which a large sector of it is committed, it would indeed be a radical move" (1983:vol.10).

A memorandum accompanying the request, asked the MCSA Conference to formulate a clear doctrine on baptism especially with regard to church membership. It was also asked to spell out:

- "The relationship of society to the discipline and nurture of those brought for baptism as well as their sponsors.
- Study the practice of rebaptism, especially in the widespread desire for this and to give guidance to the church.
- Prepare an appropriate liturgy to enable those who have experienced a renewed relationship with God to give public expression of this.
- Prepare an appropriate liturgy for children of Methodists when those parents do not present their children for infant baptism". (1983:vol.10).

The church received these requests positively, and subsequently adopted what it believed to be the essential tenets of baptism. These were similar to those issued by the World Council of Churches in 1982 which the MCSA regarded as a helpful clarification and affirmation of its position (MCSA Minutes, 1989:58-62).

There were two key outcomes from the Cyara consultation and from the adoption by the MCSA of the WCC's Lima text. The first was a confirmation of the rejection of rebaptism, and the second was the importance placed on the need for unity to be promoted around water baptism. The reasons for the rejection of rebaptism were spelled out and a declaration was made that the MCSA was in harmony on the matter with most other denominations. Eventually the MCSA gave a detailed response to the requests made at the Cyara Consultation. In its response reasons for the rejection of rebaptism were listed:

- i. That baptism is an unrepeatable act and there is only one baptism (Eph.4:5) for the forgiveness of sins.
- ii. It implies the original baptism is invalid.
- iii. It denigrates MCSA practice and calls into question its tradition of infant baptism.
- iv. It presupposes that the prevenient grace of God was not in action in the original baptism.
- v. It presupposes that man (sic) is the only agent in baptism and that baptism is primarily an expression of faith or an act of obedience and not of prevenient grace (MCSA Minutes: 1989:65-66).

The church's emphatic conclusion was that however defective a baptism is deemed to be in terms of claims that are made about a lack of faith on the part of the parents/sponsors, and/or a lack of true pastoral care from the church, and/or any other defects, any baptism carried out in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, it is nonetheless a true baptism and dare not be denied (1989:66). This argument applied not only to those baptized in their infancy but also to so-called defective adult baptisms.

A critical question around baptism has always been, was God at work during the first baptism or did he only begin to work after the gospel was heard and a call for repentance and faith was made, for a believing acceptance? The MCSA believes that on the basis of prevenient grace and because of God's Spirit moves on all flesh, the first view is the correct one. In response to so-called defective baptism, the MCSA had this to say,

that the act of baptism signifies God's action which is not related to a momentary event at the time of baptism but to a life-long growth into Christ; and that the response of faith is likewise a life-long process and is not limited to the faith exercised at the moment of baptism. Thus the profession of faith by a person baptized in infancy should be welcomed as a response to that baptism and not be regarded as a reason for the ceremony to be repeated. It also needs to be recognised that the faith of the person baptized as a believer, may also be immature and therefore needs to grow. If it is argued that many persons baptized in infancy do not come to a profession of personal faith it should also be noted that many persons baptized as believers do not persevere in the faith. The reality of baptism does not depend upon the quality of the faith exercised at the moment of baptism but upon the faithfulness of God whose saving work is signified by the act (1989:66).

In view of the MCSA's belief that any first baptism carried out in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is legitimate, that it will continue to be defensive about its view as well as persist with a theology of prohibition.

The use of prohibition however, seems not to have stemmed the tide of requests for rebaptism. "Although I have said that there is not a widespread debate" (around the question of rebaptism) "at the moment I am aware that the issue of baptism is not fully settled" (Richardson N, 2009) (Appendix 1, 2009:165ff). Nevertheless, the MCSA has been more accommodating toward these requests and has accordingly sanctioned the formulation of alternative rites.

c. Clarification of its Stance on Baptism

Before the directive for the formation of viable alternative rites was issued, the MCSA came out with a simple statement on baptism for the purpose of clarification. It has repeatedly reaffirmed this statement and recommended its use as an important educational resource document to be used by ministers, leaders and members. Its contents are:

i. What the Bible teaches:

- Christ commanded to preach, make disciples, baptize and to teach (Matthew 28:19ff).
- The Early Church practiced baptism immediately after its spiritual birth (Acts 2:37).
- Adults were baptized (Acts 2:41), as one would expect in a missionary situation like that, but the promise was also "to you and your children" (Acts 2:39), households were baptized after the conversion of the father or head (Acts 16:15-34).
- Baptism is into Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4).
- For the Christian, baptism replaces circumcision as a sign of entry into the family of God (Colossians 2:11-12).
- Baptism with water is the sign of spirit baptism and rebirth from above (John 3:5).

ii. What baptism is:

- Entry into the family of God's people – the church, sometimes called the new Israel' or the 'body of Christ' in the Bible.
- Acceptance by God. It declares that God's love and Christ's saving work is for this particular person.
- An outward sign and seal of a spiritual grace or blessing through the giving of the Holy Spirit.
- Identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- A proclamation by dramatic symbolism, of the good news of God's love made clear in Christ's dying and rising.
- A pledge of loyalty to Jesus and faith in him.
- An acceptance of God's grace, and a declaration that we will live as those included in his (sic) love and his (sic) covenant family. (MCSA *Open Letter to parents seeking baptism for their child*. Is undated but is referred to in MCSA Minutes 1976:69).

In the clarification of the MCSA's understanding it was stated that although baptism is a human act it "has eternal and heavenly significance and if it is to fulfil what Christ intended, must lead the child to make a response to the love of God as he or she grows" (MCSA *Open Letter to parents*. MCSA Minutes 1976:69).

One stage in this pilgrimage of life is observed when the child confirms his/her commitment to Christ when he/she is received into the full membership of the church. "Baptism is thus not a finished transaction in the life of the child but is the beginning of a spiritual journey in which the child is disciplined within the context of the church through the preaching of the gospel, through teaching, through prayer and through the presence of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit" (MCSA *Open Letter to parents*. MCSA Minutes 1976:69 and 1986:76).

It presumably was hoped that through this teaching members would be led into a peaceful tolerance of baptismal diversity in the MCSA.

iii. MCSA usage

- The MCSA acknowledges both infant and adult baptism.
- Adult baptism is administered after candidates have confessed their faith, committed their lives to Christ and received instruction in the Christian faith and practice. This can coincide with preparation for Confirmation.
- Infant baptism is administered to the children of Christian parents who have given evidence of their faith in Jesus and personal commitment to him by their participation in the life of the church.
- Baptism is in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- Baptism is administered in the congregation at a normal service of worship designated for that purpose.
- Baptism is preceded by instruction.
- Baptism is usually by sprinkling with water, but in principle there is no difficulty with immersion if this is requested.
- Baptism is once and for all. There is no need for repeated acts of initiation in order to gain entry into, and to belong to the church. Once baptized, the individual lives within the context of faith by reason of being a member of God's covenant family. (MCSA *Open Letter to Parents* MCSA Minutes 1976:69 and 1986:76)

iv. Covenantal Responsibilities of Parents

- Parents must have accepted and confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and saviour.
- They must be prepared to exercise Christian discipline over themselves and their family.

- They must undertake to give their children access to the worship and teaching of the church, which means taking them to Sunday school and to church, rather than merely sending them.
- Promise as members of the congregation that they will share in the life of the church, join its worship and participate in its teaching and general ministry. Ideally both parents are required to be members of the congregation, or where only one is a member, that the other gives an undertaking that the child will not be hindered from receiving instruction and joining in fellowship with the church (MCSA *Open Letter to Parents* and MCSA Minutes 1986:76).

The aim of this regulation is for parents to practice their faith and participate in the Christian disciplines of the community of faith in which the child can be nurtured in the Christian faith and the presence of Christ.

v. Responsibilities of the Church

The MCSA's conviction is that the whole family of God should exercise a caring faith for the congregation and this signifies:

- Meeting for worship and service as members of the visible body of Christ.
- Teaching and proclaiming the faith to those baptized which takes place through Sunday school, youth activities, fellowships, study groups and during services of worship.
- Affording an opportunity for those baptized in infancy later to confess their faith in Christ and witness to their acceptance of him as Lord. This opportunity takes place at a Confirmation service in particular where the candidate gives testimony that he/she has found Jesus as saviour and has accepted him as Lord, or at any other opportunity which may be created for this purpose.
- Exercise pastoral oversight of those received into the Christian community's care through visiting, Cradle Roll follow up and through various activities designed to encourage both parents and children in the life of the church (MCSA *Open Letter to Parents* and MCSA Minutes 1986:76).

This statement is clear in its explanation about the practical meaning of covenant baptism which it believes accords with God's covenant in both Testaments of the Bible. Christ and his saving work are the goal of baptism. The emphasis on the family as a covenant unit, the presence of prevenient grace signifying God at work, and God's willingness to save those who are in covenant with God, are all factors that are of central importance in this view of baptism. Adults and their families outside the covenant circle are brought into covenant as an act of mission and therefore are also expected to benefit from this work of saving grace. In this the MCSA uses Wesley's statement of faith about God's salvific intention as stated in the oft quoted words of John Wesley: everyone needs to be saved; everyone can be saved; everyone can know that they are saved: and everyone can be saved to the uttermost as well as is able to witness to their salvation. All these statements show that the MCSA firmly believes that as covenant is the essential fabric of the Biblical message, and therefore believes that this is the intention of the command given by Jesus in Matthew 28:19ff.

d. Debate between the MCSA and its Ministers and Members

Despite these clarifications given by the MCSA in which the church claimed that its belief on baptism is thoroughly biblical, it nevertheless did understand the problems that some of its members were experiencing with its position. And although it believed that it has a credible theology concerning salvation and baptism, and explained this by stating that baptism is not a name-giving ritual, neither is it a guarantee of entry into heaven, - entry into heaven depends on a personal response of faith to Christ, which in the case of infants are led by the parents and the church into it, - and that baptism is not a work done by the individual or by the church, which earns God's salvation, -salvation is the work of God alone, - and that it is a gift to all who yield all of life to Christ, yet its rationale in support of its understanding was either not accepted or correctly understood by members of the re-baptizing group. The dispute around these two issues continued and has never been fully settled officially. This reality came out in a letter written by Rev. D. Pedersen. After quoting from Laws and Discipline paragraphs 16 and 11, he went on to show that the statement on baptism in the 1976 Minutes of Conference which claims that there is no direct reference to (infant baptism) in the New Testament, is thereafter contradicted by Laws and Discipline para. 1.14 which states that the Methodist Church acknowledges this revelation (the Holy Scriptures) as the supreme rule of faith and practice. "An un-churched person reading the scriptures for the first time is hardly likely to conclude that infant baptism is the right way in his (sic) response to the church's exposition to the meaning of baptism. It is dangerous to think that an emphasis on infant baptism which undermines a need to emphasise believers' baptism exists in Methodist theology." As regards salvation he has this to say, "Isn't salvation, to which baptism refers, surely both grounded in God's grace initiative and dependent on man's (sic) faith response. The two do no stand on their own." (Pedersen D, February 1984:12).

A response was also made by Rev. E. Engelsman who stated:

For 20 years I have asked the question of men in the Methodist ministry "What is the meaning of infant baptism? I have, broadly speaking, received three replies: (i) it is just a dedication service; (ii) it is incorporation into the church as the family of God; (iii) The child becomes regenerated through the working of the Holy Spirit. I suspect that baptismal regeneration is fast finding acceptance in the Methodist Church. Witness the change from the old Book of Offices where the emphasis was on dedication, to the new Order of Service wherein the emphasis is on regeneration. I quote from the new Order: 'thus the children of Christian parents are brought to be baptized with water as a sign of the new life in Christ'. The new Order of Service, produced by the Church Unity Commission on behalf of the Methodist Church and others, is even more explicit: 'Baptism is the sign and seal of this new birth in Christ, of the gift of the Holy Spirit, of our entry into the covenant of grace and of our membership in the church etc.' and again 'We thank you that you offer us new birth through the water and the Holy Spirit', and again 'In this baptism may this child be made one with Christ in his death and resurrection to be cleansed and delivered from all sin'. Now if that is the position of the Methodist Church then I and many others believe it is not in keeping with the scriptures on the meaning of baptism and of salvation. I agree fully with the doctrine of prevenient grace and there is ample proof for it, both in scripture and

in life, but in the Bible the doctrine of prevenient grace is linked to salvation and not to infant baptism. Let us not confuse salvation with baptism (Engelsman E, February 1984:12).

Responses from two members of the MCSA hierarchy, who were also at that time the church's theologians followed. Dr. D. Cragg clarified that "The Doctrines Commission recommended to the Conference of 1983 that the 1976 Short Statement on Baptism be re-affirmed as representing the essentials of the Methodist position" (Cragg D, May, 1984:8). The Conference of the MCSA accepted what was then the newly adopted Lima text as an acceptable definition of its doctrine on baptism.

Mr. Pedersen asked if both infant baptism and believers' baptism were officially being practiced by members and ministers, if so, why then did the MCSA legislate to exclude from the Methodist ministry those with believer-baptist convictions. (Pedersen D, February 1984)

In his reply to this question by the Rev. Pedersen, Dr. Cragg wrote:

The Methodist Church recognises believers' baptism as appropriate for those who come to faith but have not been baptized in infancy, and does not require members to have their children baptized. The problem is that the advocates of believers' baptism generally deny the legitimacy of infant baptism and sometimes practice rebaptism, which is ruled out by the church at large, including that great critic of infant baptism, Karl Barth. The tolerance for which Mr. Pedersen asks is possible only if they clearly affirm the legitimacy of infant baptism and if they are prepared to administer the sacrament when parents request it and pastoral requirements are met. Ministers have had to leave our church because they could not do this and because they practiced or refused to disavow rebaptism. This is not legislation against those with believer-baptist convictions. Mr Pedersen implies that the adoption of believers' baptism would solve the problem of excessively large nominal membership. I once thought that, but Baptist ministers I have spoken to disagree. Believers' baptism is no more a guarantee of perseverance than Confirmation. This problem has to be approached along other lines (Cragg D, May 1984:8).

"Do we believe in the authority of God's word?" asked Mr. Pedersen. Dr. Cragg:

Yes we do – and infant baptism is in harmony with the theological principles of the New Testament. Salvation is indeed grounded upon the grace of God and is appropriated by personal faith. The sacraments symbolise God's grace. They demand the response of faith but are not a sign or badge of that faith as some imply. It needs to be recognised that the exclusiveness does not lie on the side of the Methodist church but on the side of those who deny the valid position of infant baptism which is held by fellow Christians in that and other churches (Dimension, June 1984:8).

A statement was also issued by Dr. Attwell on behalf of the President of the MCSA and it reads:

In all the passages that Rev. E. Engelsmann has quoted from the new Order of Service and the Order produced by the Church Unity Commission, he seems to assume that the Orders imply that baptism conveys *regeneration or salvation*. This, I submit, is not the intention. In infant baptism, prevenient grace is recognised and the process of regeneration is initiated, not completed, in the sacrament. It is

the sign and seal of what Christ has already done for 'you and your children and all that are afar off', quoting from Acts 2:37ff. The tenor of the prayers for the children, the parents, the home and the church are all centred in our hope that the process which is initiated in the child's entry into the family of God will be fulfilled in that child's life through the further operation of the Holy Spirit (Attwell A, June 1984:15).

Mr. Engelsmann concluded his letter with a request, appealing to the Doctrine Commission to spell out in clear terms what baptism is. Rev. Attwell's reply was to say that the Doctrine Committee had done this.

After a period of approximately two years, during which it carefully examined our Methodist sacramental theology and considered sympathetically all the views submitted to it, including the report of the seminar (Cyara) on baptism, the Doctrines Committee made its unanimous recommendation to the Conference last year (Attwell A, June 1984:15).

Acting on this advice, Conference of 1983 resolved:

- That the 1976 short statement on baptism is re-affirmed and is to be included in the doctrinal supplement to the Minutes of Conference.
- That the Lima text be accepted as an acceptable statement of the MCSA understanding of baptism. We cannot spell it out more clearly than what is contained in these two documents. (June 1984:15).

Dr. Attwell went on to express some personal observations on the issue.

We are a Methodist church with a Wesleyan theology, and Wesley believed emphatically in infant baptism. Presumably the ministers (always the same little coterie) who so vociferously oppose infant baptism now, knew this when they accepted ordination. What became of their vow to believe and preach our doctrines?

Why is it that the protagonists of Anabaptism (we believe in adult/believers' baptism, provided it is not rebaptism) so presumptuously claim that they alone have scriptural warranting for their views? None of them to my knowledge has produced scriptural warrant as Dr. Simon Gqubule's *apologia* for infant baptism, or as thorough as Marcel's 'The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism'. Our Methodist position on baptism, which we share with all the mainline churches with the exception of the Baptist Church, is quite clear. If some of our men in good faith cannot accept it then they should at least be honest with themselves and the church and join a denomination with an Anabaptist stance (June1984:15).

In their responses Drs. Attwell and Cragg did not deal with the deeper theological issues around the problem of mechanical regeneration, but rather seemed to defend the status quo. Responses from protagonists of both sides of the debate thereafter began to be that of criticism and dogmatic utterances. The re-baptizers unbendingly claimed that their need was for a biblical and spiritual answer and felt that it was therefore valid. The MCSA on the other hand tended to view the re-baptizers as being disobedient and rebellious. The debates around the central issues of baptism did

not provide satisfactory conclusions, and only tentative steps towards possible compromises were taken.

The question of whether the re-baptizers had a genuine need was not resolved fully. It was felt by some however, that a biblical example of a way of coping with the Anabaptist need, could be found in Jesus' parable in Mark 2:23-28: the disciples of Jesus had seemingly broken the Sabbath law by picking grains of corn because they were hungry – they had a need. Jesus' response to his enquirers (v.28) was that the Sabbath (and its laws) was made for people and not people for Sabbath Laws. Christianity therefore exists to meet the needs of people rather than requiring an inflexible adherence to doctrine and religious ritual (Kretzmann O, June 1984:15).

It was only later that the MCSA Conference took a decision in which it became more accommodating and inclusive on the matter. It began to deal specifically with the issue of rebaptism. It expressed its intention "to expound the theological meaning and pastoral implications of baptism in the MCSA and to deal with the issue of so-called rebaptism" (MCSA Minutes, 1988:53).

The MCSA again reaffirmed its acceptance of the Lima text. This text contains positions which "recognises and accepts the validity of the theology and practice of churches which baptize infants and those which baptize only believers" (MCSA Minutes, 1989:68).

The MCSA then issued a directive: "While the tradition of the MCSA is that of infant baptism, the Methodist Church ought to assist those of its members who, in conscience, lean towards the tradition of believers' baptism" (MCSA Minutes, 1988:53). It however made a strong proviso, which required that any openness to believers' baptism should necessitate a clear acceptance of infant baptism as a legitimate sacrament and which would specifically exclude the practice of rebaptism. This compromise should not be regarded as a sign on the church's part of a reduced commitment to the church's acceptance and practice of infant baptism. The MCSA urged that a balanced acceptance of believers' and infant baptism should be maintained and that adult baptism should "not be encouraged to the detriment of infant baptism" (1988:54). This decision led the MCSA to be more encouraging towards the provision of possible viable alternative rites to meet all needs as a valid compromise.

The Conference then issued another directive specifically for the benefit of those who opt for believers' baptism:

When, for reasons of conscience, parents choose to defer the baptism of their children until they are able to make a personal confession of faith, provision should be made for such parents to dedicate themselves to Christian parenthood and to promise to nurture their children in the Christian faith (MCSA Minutes, 1988:54).

Conference reiterated that the dedication of infants "is not an appropriate alternative to infant baptism and may not be practiced with that intention in the MCSA" (1988:54).

This move seemed to be an expression of a hope by the MCSA of being able to meet requests for rebaptism which arise from the need to bear public witness to a new or renewed faith or to perform an act of obedience to mark a new commitment (MCSA Minutes, 1988:60-61). It laid out broad criteria as guidelines needing to ensure that the core meaning of baptism is upheld, namely that "the sacrament of baptism was given to the church by Jesus Christ. It is an outward sign of the new life that God offers to all people through the work of Christ and marks the entry of the person baptized into God's family, the church" (1988:60).

As regards the formulation of alternative rites the MCSA instructed that the following possibilities be considered:

1. An appropriate form of words in the context of a Communion Service, possibly accompanied by the laying on of hands.
2. An adapted form of the Covenant Service.
3. An opportunity for public witness in a service of worship.
4. A special liturgy designed for this purpose (1988:60-61).

The intention behind these four possibilities was clearly that of a conciliatory compromise towards a resolution of the problem of rebaptism. And yet the MCSA seems to have contradicted its inclusive spirit by requiring that "if members insist on going through a baptism or a rebaptism in spite of attempts to show that the previous baptism is valid and the new rite is inappropriate, then the member is to be advised to leave the MCSA and join a church of his views" (1988:61).

In summary, the suggestion of nullification seems to have been ignored. The question of prohibition was retained but is contrary to the MCSA inclusive ethos. The clarification of the MCSA baptismal position, though helpful, still did not go fully towards meeting the need for a believers' baptism by the Anabaptist group. On the positive side, the debate between the hierarchy of the church and its ministers did lead to greater openness for compromise as demonstrated by the suggested formation of viable alternative rites. Approval around the formation of possible viable alternatives is a development that will be dealt with in the next chapter, and the question of how these rites may also meet the needs of the re-baptizers, will be addressed as well.

CHAPTER 6

ALTERNATIVE RITES AND PRACTICES.

This chapter will investigate alternative rites for their viability within the context of MCSA covenant baptismal theology as a possible way of circumventing the practice of rebaptism without these rites becoming disguises of rebaptism. The MCSA has set out clear criteria for what it believes would be unacceptable in respect of alternative rites on the one hand, and of what is acceptable on the other. Keeping in mind the criticism of Methodist baptismal policy by members, alternative rites would also need to be shown to be thoroughly biblical as well as needing to avoid the impression of teaching baptismal regeneration as a mechanical transaction.

For a balanced view of rites, existing rites will be mentioned and assessed and the same process will be used for alternative rites. Existing rites are: infant baptism, confirmation, thanksgiving for infants and dedication for parents. Alternative rites include; a blessing in covenant for infants; the renewal of baptismal vows; a remembering of a previous baptism; the reaffirmation of baptismal vows; the appropriation of a previous baptism, together with the possibility of baptism being administered in two stages. All these require the need to determine what constitutes baptismal legitimacy as well as to find out whether there could be a difference between the repetition of a previous baptism and that of rebaptism. A biblical basis for the repetition of baptism and its appropriation of the promises of a previous baptism could be based on Acts 19:1-7. And yet this text may not provide a sound theological basis. Attention will also be given to the implications for the use or non-use of water in respect of the alternative rites.

The MCSA insists that views about alternative rites, the methods used and the timing of the application of rites that are in use and anything to do with initiation into the church and discipleship, as well as the formulation of possible new rites, should not insinuate or simulate a message of rebaptism. Any possible new rite that implies that a previous baptism carried out in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit by the church and which signifies a rejection of that baptism must be avoided according to its rules. New rites should be Bible based, and should avoid contradicting any other biblical view of baptism. They need also to contain material for the promotion of the gospel of Jesus Christ and baptismal unity. These provisos which taken together form the viability criteria, will therefore pose a number of questions:

- Will the ceremony avoid all the pitfalls of it being a rebaptism and exclude the possibility of baptism being a repeatable exercise, as well as calling into question the validity of the original baptism?

- Will it fudge the need for baptism to be practiced as an expression of God's action of prevenient grace?
- Will it also be a sign of grace indicating that grace is primary and more important than the response of obedience or faith, but at the same time indicate that obedience and faith are indispensable requirements of the rite in question?
- Will the rite avoid giving the impression of being a mechanical *ex opere operato* view?
- Will the rite be thoroughly grounded in biblical revelation especially within a covenant context and be a sign of obedience to the command to disciple, baptize and teach? (Matthew 28:19).
- If permitted by the MCSA, will the use of water be an option through any of the three modes?
- Will the use of water enhance all views and forms of baptism without necessarily contradicting the MCSA view and practice, and at the same time encourage inclusivity?

Any teaching or preamble in a service of an alternative rite should also not contradict the requirements as stipulated by the MCSA in respect of its baptismal policy and doctrine. These include:

- a. A clear statement that the rite affirms the truth that God seeks us before we seek him (sic).
- b. That the rite is a sign pointing to new life in Christ and entry into the kingdom of God, which also signifies entry into the church.
- c. That it signifies that believers' baptism is prominently featured in the New Testament because the apostolic church was formed in a missionary situation.
- d. That there is a justification for infant baptism from the Bible on the basis of a broad biblical witness which speaks of children as having a place within the covenant community and that baptism in connection with infants who are helpless emphasises the primacy of God's grace over any act or response from the person.
- e. The need for the baptized to respond in adulthood by faith if the salvation proclaimed in baptism is to be appropriated personally.
- f. The role of the church as an indispensable factor in the nurture and pastoral care of all who are baptized.
- g. The obligation of parents and sponsors to nurture their children to come to personal faith and for each one who has come to personal faith to lead a Christian life. That those baptized as adult believers are subjected to the Christian community's care, enabling the person to grow their baptism so to speak (MCSA Minutes, 1988:57-61).

In order to acquire a total perspective of rites in the MCSA it is necessary for those rites currently in use, to be scrutinised first.

A. Rites that are currently in use in the MCSA

1. The Rite of Infant Baptism

Infant baptism is a sacrament, which also signifies entry into the church. In regard to general policy, the following statement is made:

A solemn obligation rests upon parents to present their children to Christ in baptism, which claims for them the benefits of his redeeming work and signifies their admission into the visible community of the church. Parents thereby dedicate them to God, and are pledged to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; and the sacrament of baptism is administered on the promise so to do (Methodist Service Book (revised) 1975:A2).

The church family committee is responsible for all "possible oversight of baptized children and needs to ensure that suitable instruction is given, as they are able to receive it, to prepare them for Christian discipleship" (1975:A5).

The wording of these statements "to present their children to Christ in baptism" (1975:A2) is a usage taken from Jesus' presentation in the Temple (Luke 3), and, "claims for them the benefits of Jesus' redeeming work" signifies a sacramental feature. While "Their admission into the visible community of the church", and, "parents thereby dedicate them to God", and, "suitable instruction to prepare them for Christian discipleship," all speak of an element of dedication as a part of the response, and point to the need for infants to be christianized. Matthew 28:19ff which speaks of "making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name...." is viewed by the MCSA as an inclusive text embracing both adults who are responding to Jesus' saving work as well as infants who require discipling and salvation.

An introductory exhortation in the service book is worded:

Thus the children of Christian parents are brought to be baptized with water as a sign of new life in Christ and to be made members of God's family, the Church. We bring this child, whom God has entrusted to us, and claim for him (sic) all that Christ has won for us. Christ loves him (sic) and is ready to receive him (sic), to embrace him (sic) with the arms of his mercy and to give him (sic) the blessing of eternal life (1975:A7).

In line with the meaning of covenant baptism and references to prevenient grace, parents who bring their children and who are Christian, are helped to understand that baptism is the sign of new life in Christ and their inclusion into membership of God's family in the Church is indispensable for Christian nurture. Once again nothing is said about the need for the child's personal conversion and of the importance of making a decision that needs to precede it. The minister prays on behalf of the child:

Father, be present with us in the power of the Holy Spirit. We pray that this child now to be baptized in this water may die to sin and be raised to new life in Christ. We pray that this child may learn to trust Jesus Christ as his (sic) Lord and Saviour. We pray that by the power of the Holy Spirit this child may have victory over evil. From darkness lead to light, from death lead to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ (Methodist Service Book, 1975:A8).

The prayer is an earnest request to God for Jesus to become the child's Lord and Saviour through the work of Holy Spirit. The rest of the Order of Service is an exhortation about the need for the child to be trained in the doctrines, privileges and duties of the Christian religion and be assisted by the parents and the church to renounce all evil; to be in the membership of the church and to serve Christ in the world. The phrase that is used in this connection is, helping the child to put his/her trust in the Lord. This statement is a covenant prayer of hope emanating from what is believed infant baptism signifies. The question is however, as to how anyone baptised but who is not 'born again' in line with Jesus' statement in John 3:5, is able to put their trust in Christ, to live life in the power of Holy Spirit, produce the fruit of the Spirit, follow him and do so without a personal decision for commitment to Christ? It is over this critical issue that there is dissension in the church. It has been shown elsewhere in this study that dissenting ministers and members believe that the wording in this rite implies automatic redemption and no exhortation of an t emphasises on the need for personal repentance, faith and conversion, is present. This impasse in the MCSA probably arises out of the MCSA's non-committal posture in connection with what the terms sacrament and baptismal regeneration actually mean.

Clarity on this issue may go some of the way towards satisfying the concerns of those who believe that while the MCSA correctly upholds baptism as a sacrament, it still needs to provide clear instruction for the necessity of an evangelical call to repentance and conversion. This provision would also more clearly demonstrate that the MCSA is both 'sacramental and evangelical'.

2. The Rite of Confirmation

The Confirmation Service provided by the MCSA for those baptized in their infancy and who seek full membership of the church, is in its view a logical outcome of infant baptism. Confirmation is only for those who have come through the ranks of having been baptized in the church, nurtured in the structures of the church, the Cradle Roll, the Sunday School, Youth Meetings and various Bible Studies and acts of Christian Service, as well as having attended a kind of Catechism Class which gives instruction on the basic tenets of the Christian faith. These candidates are required to have had a christian experience of new birth, be of an age of maturity both in terms of their physical age as well as spiritually as well as be willing to take up the responsibilities and duties of the Christian faith within the context of the church. By responding in this way they would give witness to the fulfilment of the promises of baptism taken for them. The MCSA believes that the confirmation that follows is a logical outcome of the working of prevenient grace, of which baptism is a sign. Prevenient grace has worked both directly through the operation of the Holy Spirit and indirectly through the faithful and

loving responses of those who are Christian members of the church family. A Confirmation Service does then broadly signify two things; that the person has come to faith, and also has taken a decision to be committed as a follower of Christ.

Nowhere however does the Bible specifically talk about a rite of confirmation as a requirement for Christian commitment. It only speaks about taking up the cross and following Christ. And yet Confirmation as a rite may be deduced, especially as stated in I Corinthians 12:13: "By one spirit are we baptized into the body of Christ and are all made to drink of the one Spirit" and Acts 2:41-47, which speaks of three thousand people repenting, being baptized and devoting themselves to the Lord. The text "and many others were added to the Lord" also provides space for a rite of confirmation to be constructed as a way of being added to the church, and as a sign of Christian commitment (v.47).

The Methodist Service book states that, those who by baptism have been admitted into the visible community of the church are to be taught and to look forward to their reception into the full membership of the church, when by professing their faith in Christ, they will claim for themselves the promises of God who by Gods Holy Spirit will strengthen them for his service. Paragraph 7 instructs that

if any have not received Christian baptism, that sacrament should be administered either before or in connection with a Service of Public Reception into Full Membership, or Confirmation. In this Service those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and accept the obligation to serve in the life of the church and the world, and who desire to have fellowship with the Methodist people, having been baptized and having been admitted into full membership by the church council, are publicly received into full membership, with all the duties and privileges of the Methodist Church, which is within the Holy Catholic Church. As they commit themselves to Jesus Christ their Lord and Saviour, prayer is made that the Holy Spirit, who alone makes them new creatures in him, may strengthen them by confirming the gifts which he has given (Methodist Service Book, 1975:A14 and A15).

While the rite of Confirmation is not formally prescribed or taught in the Bible, and one would have to agree with believer-Baptists that it is has no text-and-verse reference, yet an act of confirmation is an effective way of giving witness to a personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as Saviour by those baptized as infants. It also serves as a public act of commitment designed to encourage discipleship. This rite does not contradict Bible teaching on baptism in any way or take the place of any other rite which may seek to achieve the same result, but is regarded by the MCSA as a valid and adequate alternative to rebaptism, and for witness to personal salvation (Romans 10:9).

The texts that are used at the Confirmation Service are Jeremiah 31:33ff which focuses on covenant:

This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. After that day says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be my people. No longer shall each man(sic) teach his(sic) neighbour and each his(sic) brother saying, know the Lord for

they shall all know me from the least to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sins no more.

And Romans 8:13ff

For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you will put to death the deeds of the body you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship, (sic) when we cry 'Abba! Father!' It is the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

While nothing is said about a rite of confirmation in these texts, yet they show that Christianity is essentially something that God initiates through a covenant plan by Gods saving grace whereby God engages the heart with transforming consequences. By God's Spirit the person knows that he/she belongs to God as a son/daughter and carries an inner confirmation of this. As with infant baptism, the intention behind the rite of confirmation is to encourage conversion and commitment. The confirmation service therefore includes an element of the need for the confirmation of a personal conversion. Mark1:14ff says:

After John was arrested Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God saying 'The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel.... And Jesus saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon.... He saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother.... And immediately he called them.... And they followed" (Methodist Service Book, 1975: A 18).

A special prayer offered at this point fits the message stated in Mark 1:14:

Heavenly Father, we thank you that by the preaching of the gospel you have led these servants to the knowledge of your truth; and we pray that the good work you have begun in them may be confirmed by the continued working of your Holy Spirit (1975:A 17).

A homily to be read before the confirmation rite expressing the message based on the scriptures quoted in the earlier part of the service is:

Beloved in Christ, at your baptism you were received into God's family, the church. You have grown in the knowledge and love of our Lord. You have heard Christ saying to you, as he said to his first disciples, 'Follow me'. You have already responded to his call and you come now, by your own choice, publicly to renounce evil and to profess your faith in him. You are now to be confirmed as members of a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, sent forth as Christ's servants and witnesses into the world. For this God will strengthen you by the Holy Spirit (1975:A20).

Those to be confirmed are asked the following questions:

Do you repent of your sins and renounce all evil? Do you trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour? Will you obey Christ and serve him in the world? (Methodist Service Book,1975:A2).

The candidate for confirmation should then answer in the affirmative. It is at this point that candidates give public testimony of their conversion, after which they are prayed over and a special prayer is offered for the Holy Spirit to come upon them. This prayer is for an inner confirmation of their regeneration and to remain in the Christian faith forever. They are then welcomed into full membership with an exhortation encouraging them to honour the terms of the covenant as well as to go into the world to be God's witnesses:

Lord God, Holy Father, we are not our own but yours. As you sent your son into the world to save the world, so send us to serve our neighbours and to bring them to believe in Christ. Amen (1975: A 24).

All this reveals that a rite of confirmation following infant baptism or a believers' baptism, is intended to promote Christian discipleship and growth.

The public reception of new members, also called Confirmation, is a solemn service of recognition, commitment, prayer and blessing and is in accordance with long established Christian practice. It emphasises both the responsibility being accepted by the candidate, the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit and the shared life of the church (MCSA Laws, 2000:16-17). The rationale for this is: the baptismal vows (of covenant) taken by the parents for the child and the church are not fully discharged until the child is converted and is in active church membership (MCSA Minutes, 1970:64).

In its scheme of covenant baptism the MCSA holds the view that a rite that stops at infant baptism requires a completion of it by way of a Service of Confirmation. The church declares that since the sacrament of infant baptism is truly baptism there is no need for it to be repeated in later years.

The need for a further public act of witness of faith by believers seeking full membership is recognised, and provision is made for this in the Service of Reception of Membership. In this structure of initiation the confirmation service coincides with reception into full membership, but precedes it (1970:64).

Because of the purpose of the rite of confirmation the MCSA does not believe that a rebaptism is necessary. All the benefits for which rebaptizers seek, both in terms of seeking to live according to the Bible and to do God's will as well as the need to experience the saving grace of Jesus to the fullest, are available through this line of Christian initiation. A rebaptism therefore would not add any more benefit for the person. Experience also shows that some Christians enjoy a personal relationship with Christ, have not been baptised as believers, but convincingly live out their Christianity. The thought therefore is that despite being commissioned by the Lord, baptism should not be given undue importance and if that is the case auxiliary and companion rites such as Confirmation on the other hand should not be written off.

The Sacramental Impact of the Infant Baptism/Confirmation Combination.

The MCSA views the procedure of baptism first, and confirmation after conversion as taking place in two parts, confirmation as an outcome of infant baptism. This policy is in line with the view of baptism being both sacramental and evangelical; baptism is the sacramental feature which carries the sign of prevenient grace and confirmation signifies evangelism realised (Methodist Service Book, 1975:A15). There is no contradiction apparent between these two rites. At baptism reception was into the physical body of Christ, the church, whereas confirmation signifies the individual's in-grafting into both the visible and invisible body of Christ. Confirmation is also a testimony to the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, which is heard and affirmed by members at a worship service. Since the time of Martin Luther, whose emphasis also was on salvation through grace alone, reformers saw no biblical or theological difficulty with the use of confirmation as a valid rite in the life of the church. The significance of a personal confession of faith at confirmation is that the

Baptized member becomes a different kind of member. In this way baptism can retain its full significance, for the Holy Spirit may be given to an infant in accordance with its capacity and its needs, and again to an older person at the time of his (sic) confession of faith in accordance with his (sic) greatly changed needs and capacities (Bandy DW, 1976:75).

Because covenant paedobaptism does not tell the whole story of salvation it needs to be supplemented by confirmation in which room is found for the teaching of I Corinthians 7:14: "That even where there is only one believing partner in a marriage, the children born are in a state of privilege. It is also in recognition of the gracious love of God which extends to children and their children's children forever" Ezekiel 37:2 (Bridge D, 1977:179).

The role and value of the baptism/confirmation combination for initiation is explained in this way:

In general the Western Church has looked upon confirmation as a strengthening ordinance, which confers further graces of the Spirit, especially for growth and stability in the Christian life ... but nothing other in kind or in essential principle from what baptism has already given. The major work in confirmation is that of the Holy Spirit. But the word confirmation has a secondary meaning, that of ratification or endorsement, which also has some bearing on the theology of confirmation. There is a sense in which the person being confirmed is also confirming something. He (sic) is declaring that he (sic) is happy to belong to the Church into whose family he (sic) was received many years previously. The individual concerned has the opportunity, by his(sic) personal commitment and profession of faith in Christ, of sharing the confirmation of that which was done for him(sic) at the baptism. This opportunity to confirm one's baptism is extremely valuable, particularly when it follows a conversion experience or a realization by a baptized person that he (sic) genuinely cherishes his (sic) place in Christ's Church. Confirmation is both backward-looking and forward-looking; the candidate thankfully recalls his (sic) baptism and the providence of God which has brought him (sic) to his (sic) present experience and, at the same time, re-dedicates himself (sic) for future discipleship (Dixon N, 1979:77-78).

Even though confirmation may be an invented rite, it is a logical out-flowing of the gospel of salvation preached and accepted, of which baptism is a sign. Confirmation exists for the implementation of Christian discipleship which commences at the baptism. It is therefore regarded by the MCSA as an outworking of the commission requirement in Matthew 28:19ff (MCSA Minutes 1989:63). As infant baptism signifies the beginning of salvation through prevenient grace, confirmation is the fulfilment of prevenient grace. Despite saying nothing about the need for a personal decision being required for personal conversion, the church demonstrates through this process of initiation that it does not intentionally practice a mechanical form of baptismal regeneration.

3. A Rite of Thanksgiving

A Rite of Thanksgiving and Dedication after the birth or adoption of a child.

This rite is being offered to parents who "for reasons of conscience choose to defer the baptism of their children until they are able to make a personal profession of faith" (Methodist Service Book, 1999:399-403). The MCSA Conference emphasised that "provision should be made for such parents to dedicate themselves to Christian parenthood and promise to nurture their children in the Christian faith" (MCSA Minutes, 1989:63). This provision is believed by the MCSA to be a compromise for the benefit of those who want a believers' baptism and who prefer the dedication of their infants rather than infant baptism.

The biblical basis given for this rite is:

- a. Deuteronomy 4:6-7.... "For parents.... To keep these words.... Recite them to your children and talk to them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise".
- b. Mark 9:36-37: "Jesus took a little child and put it among them. Taking it in his arms he said to them, whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me".

That this rite is preferred to the rite of infant dedication is explained in the preface;

In the MCSA tradition the children of Christian parents are normally brought for baptism, but there are occasions when an act of thanksgiving maybe helpful, either suggested by the minister or requested by the parents. Prior to the child's baptism the parents may already have been baptized and an act of thanksgiving serves to welcome the child into the local congregation. Some parents may have reservations about the baptism of young children while still desiring to give thanks for their child's arrival and to dedicate themselves for the new task (Methodist Service Book, 1999:399-403).

An important emphasis in this rite is the need for parental responsibility in the Christian nurture of their offspring. Given that the MCSA rejects dedication as an alternative for infant baptism by arguing

that dedication on its own has no sacramental value and merely involves a human act, would the use of the rite for the dedication of parents not however be a contradiction of the church's argument in regard to the dedication of infants? Jesus was presented at the temple when he was an infant in line with Luke 2:23, which speaks of "every first born male is to be consecrated to the Lord". This text may not speak of the inclusion of female infants and yet believer-baptists use it in support of the dedication of infants of both genders. This reference speaks only of first-born males needing to be consecrated to the Lord. On the other hand, despite the discrepancy cited, there is no theological reason why this text may not be used in a rite of presentation and thanksgiving even though it possesses an element of dedication. And yet, texts that are used for this rite appear to present the same problem as for those that are quoted in support of infant dedication. There is also no teaching or command in the Bible prescribing that infants born to families that are in covenant need to go through a rite of thanksgiving. Be that as it may there is no reason why this rite cannot be an option. The two rites of thanksgiving and of dedication appear to be equal in value – the one is a presentation of an infant to God for blessing according to Old Testament covenant laws, and the other is a receiving of the infant from God as a sign of thanksgiving. (Mark 9:36-37). The commitment to fulfil the terms of covenant from Deuteronomy 4:6-7 may be seen to be contained in Matthew 28:19: "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" and is the intention behind both these rites.

The question still remains, in what way does thanksgiving as an alternative rite to infant dedication and infant baptism, meet the concerns of those who oppose these rites in the MCSA? While thanksgiving may include an element of a sign of God's grace, i.e. the acknowledgement that God is giving the child to the parent, it does not portray a sign of sacrament which indicates the presence of prevenient grace, which is what is signified in baptism. Does thanksgiving as a replacement for the dedication of infants better express divine covenant as an act of prevenient grace than the rite of dedication? Thanksgiving may come closer than dedication to having a sacramental feature, and this distinction may be indicated in a prayer offered by the parents and the minister in which the emphasis is on God: "God our Father, bless *N* and *X* with your Holy Spirit that the infant may come to believe in Christ and glorify you forever" (Methodist Service Book, 1999:399-403).

There are drawbacks to this service as with the rite of blessing in covenant which will be discussed later on, namely, that both

are likely to be confused with baptism. It is not easy for the average congregation member to grasp the difference between baptism and dedication especially if the latter borrows from the baptismal rite. John Searl's service, for example, includes the passage about Jesus blessing the children (Mark 10:13-16), the naming of the child and the Aaronic blessing closely resembles the baptismal service in its structure If the aim of the dedication service is to provide a rite which is not baptism, the greatest care is to avoid similarities which could lead to confusion of the different services in people's minds (Dixon N 1979:1-2).

While the biblical basis in terms of a text and verse requirement for this rite is lacking, yet there is nothing in this rite that contradicts the Methodist view of covenant baptism, neither does it contradict the covenantal requirement of the commission in Matthew 28:19ff, nor is there anything in it that could give the impression of it being a rebaptism or of hindering discipleship.

B. Possible new Rites

1. A Rite of Blessing in Covenant for Infants

A rite of 'a blessing in covenant for infants' appears to be allowed by the MCSA and has had the backing of at least one MCSA Bishop, and yet the church has not formerly adopted it as an alternative to infant baptism. The biblical basis for this service rite is Mark 10:13-16, repeated in Matthew 19:13-15 and Luke 18:15-17. Mark and Matthew use the term little children while Luke refers to them as babies. In all three accounts of the same incident, little children or babies were brought to Jesus who laid his hands on them and blessed them, declaring that the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. There is no indication in these texts or the others that in Jesus' dealings with children water was used. There are however signs of sacrament in this rite in respect of the following:

- i. The minister as the ordained representative of God and who serves as the priest, functions in the name of Christ. There is some possibility that the phrase used in the rite, in the name of Christ has sacramental reference despite the absence of water which is the symbol of sacrament in baptism. This claim may however be regarded as being thin theologically.
- ii. A human response is present in as much as the child is handed over to the ordained minister in the name of Christ. The minister's reception of the child and the subsequent laying on of hands, which is a replication of what Jesus did, could be viewed as being a sign of sacrament.
- iii. Covenant is also indicated in the prayer offered with the laying on of hands, and the placing of the sign of the cross on the forehead of the child. That this rite fits in with Matthew 28:19ff which urges the making of disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of Father, teaching them to observe his commandments, appears to be a possible of sacrament, as Jesus' commission is all about discipleship. His lifting of the children into his arms indicates this. He also made an appeal for their regeneration when he spoke about children being an example of child-like humility which constitute the required quality of life in the kingdom of God. This is a reference to the need for child evangelism, which is the major objective of biblical covenant. Jesus' prominent place in this ministry may be regarded as a reference to prevenient grace. These factors in the meaning of this rite are little different as from those of infant baptism. The only differences between infant baptism and this rite lie in the absence of water and in respect of their intention. Infant baptism declares recognition of God at work based on Gods command, while blessing in covenant seeks to bless the child without it needing to be baptized. The absence of water is replaced with the laying on of hands for the

conveying of blessing, and making the sign of the cross is an indication of Jesus' love and presence. An acknowledgement of Jesus' presence is also a sign of God's prevenient redemptive covenantal grace on the one hand, and on the other, is an exhortation to evangelise and disciple children. And yet dangers exist in this service as in the thanksgiving service examined earlier. "As the service of blessing in covenant is not baptism, it does not therefore signify all that is entailed in Methodist covenant doctrine even although it would meet a real need. It would mean that ministers were no longer obligated to baptize against their better judgment or to turn people away" (Dixon N, 1979:155). On the other hand Dixon claims that this rite is capable of being defended theologically and believes that there is much to be said for the service of thanksgiving studied earlier, which was originally crafted and provided by the Anglican Church (Dixon N, 1979:155).

The warning of a danger existing in the three services, baptism, thanksgiving and blessing in covenant, examined thus far, is that while each rite may carry a particular meaning for the theologian, this may not be the same for church members, and this is an issue worth considering.

2. A Rite of Renewal of Baptismal Vows for Adults

The MCSA does not formally practice this rite and yet it is used in Roman Catholic and Anglican denominations, as also in the United Methodist Church in the U.S.A. The MCSA has given its tacit approval to this rite by stating that "another possibility is a general renewal of baptismal vows in a covenant service or at some other appropriate time in the Christian year" (MCSA Minutes, 1989:67).

The Roman Catholic Church practices the renewal of baptism vows once a year fitting in with its Easter ceremonies and it has become entrenched in its annual devotional calendar. This rite is administered by the sprinkling of water on all who are at the church service. In this way it avoids the impression of the service being a rebaptism. "For all the baptized, children or adults, faith must grow after baptism. For this reason the Church celebrates each year at the Easter vigil, the renewal of baptismal promises by sprinkling all with water"(R.C.Catechism, 1994:323). It however points out that "the essential rite of baptism consists of immersing the candidate in water or of pouring water on the head" (R.C. Catechism, 1994:323).

The United Methodist Church of America has a similar practice in its annual calendar of devotion and uses the words "Remember your baptism, and be thankful" (United Methodist Church, 1976:22). This rite of renewal differs somewhat from the Roman Catholic approach in that not only can it be used for a general renewing of baptismal rites but also in a confirmation service

whenever Confirmation or other baptismal renewal is desired, whether on the part of an individual or involving the entire congregation the use of water is not mandatory, and when water is used the quantity should be small, as this act is intended only as a reminder of baptism and ought not to create the impression of being a rebaptism. Water should be sprinkled towards those making the renewal and not directly upon their heads as would be the case of first time baptism by sprinkling (1976:22).

The MCSA could well introduce a formal rite like this especially as its counterpart in the USA does so. It need not compromise the church's view that infant baptism is biblically legitimate, or that this action constitutes a rebaptism. It would be a way of confirming all that is positive as signified in infant baptism, be in keeping with the general message of discipleship in the Bible and could be a theologically effective way of affirming the grace and faith that are conveniently present. As to whether those who request a believers' baptism would find this suggested way of meeting their need to experience their conversion by means of a believers' baptism by immersion acceptable, is debateable.

3. A Rite of Remembering by Re-enacting a Previous Baptism

There is also no specific injunction in the Bible for the need to remember a previous baptism, but seen from the angle of circumventing the problem of rebaptism this alternative rite may be helpful. Michael Green, an Anglican Minister, believes in the viability of such a rite and he bases his view on a text in the Bible that carries an indirect reference to it:

One of the great words in the Bible is that of remembering, i.e. *anamnesis*. At all their festivals the Israelites 'remembered' being slaves before they were redeemed from slavery by God. The Passover meal, celebrated annually is a remembering in the form of an enactment. Many centuries later in the Christian era, in obedience to Christ's command recorded in the gospels, Christians practiced a re-enactment of the Christian Passover – the death of Christ as a saving provision – as a memorial. At the Lord's Supper it is said "Do this in remembrance of me", and "As often as you eat the bread and drink the cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he come" (I Corinthians 11:24). The Eucharist is an opportunity to recall the original event, to recover, and to renew the vow of allegiance as a response, during the Passover liturgy (Green M, 1987:91).

Although this rite may also not be specifically sanctioned in the Bible, it may however have some merit not only in that it fits in with the general intent of scripture, but also as it could be a valid alternative for rebaptism. It would not contradict the benefits accruing from a previous baptism, but would build and nurture discipleship. Michael Green quotes the example of a Baptist missionary who believes in the viability of this rite. The gist of this argument is that

in this form of baptism the Christian enters (a little more each time) into what God has done for humankind in the sacrament. The remembering is a kind of calling into the present (for the individual) the power of what historically happened in the past. It is an opportunity to deepen the understanding of what could never fully be understood at the time of baptism as infants or adults, and is that occasion for appropriating more and more the grace made available to mankind (sic) (1987:91).

Based on an understanding of the significance of remembrance, a rite like this may meet the need for rebaptism if a conscious recalling of the original event could be made possible:

Those who feel that they missed the opportunity for a public witness to their faith because they were baptized as infants could ask to remember their vows publicly and prepare for the occasion as seriously as though it was the initial act and should be able to come away from such an act, clothed in baptismal freshness (Green M, 1987:92).

This rite also does not enjoy direct prescriptive status in the Bible and yet there is no reason why it should contradict the meaning of any baptismal text in the bible if utilized. Neither need it leave an impression of being a repeat baptism, or contradict the MCSA belief that the first baptism was sacramentally significant, or insinuate that the person has not been a member of the covenant community under the discipling influence of Christ's presence. This rite can also serve as a sign of God's faithfulness in granting grace and also of the response given to God's saving grace having been appropriated and experienced. All that is positive about the meaning of the previous baptism is recalled and provision for a renewed commitment to God is made. Martin Luther always remembered his baptism when he was subject to enormous doubts about his salvation. He is said to have remembered his baptismal vows every day of his life by saying "*baptizatus sum* - I have been baptized", and D.H. Lawrence is also quoted by Michael Green as having repeatedly said "I have been dipped again in God and am newly created" (1987:92). Nothing is present in this rite which would not meet the requirements of Methodist policy on baptism. Whether this rite will be viewed as being biblically adequate or not as an alternative, is debateable.

4. A Rite of Re-Affirmation of Baptismal Vows

The rite of re-affirmation also signifies going through a process of the re-enactment of a previous baptism which is very different from the intention of rebaptism. As with previous rites examined thus far it is a way of personalising a process that was carried out on the person's behalf during their infancy or at some other time. The United Methodist Church of America has noted that infant-baptized members who seek a subsequent believers' baptism do so when doubts arise in connection with the individuals' relationship with God, or because God's love is experienced with great warmth and dramatic transformation. The need is then sometimes felt, to give a public testimony in dramatised form, as an expression of God's prevenient grace. Members usually feel that a believers' baptism would be the most appropriate way of achieving what is desired. "At such a time it is possible to renew the baptismal covenant" and reasons are given in the order of service,

For although God does not forget his (sic) promises to members, members tend to forget them; and that the truth of those promises may be doubted or even forgotten, while the commitments made in baptismal covenant may be neglected. It is therefore appropriate for every Christian to renew/reaffirm the baptismal covenant (United Methodist Church of the USA, 1976:12).

In this scenario, a rite used as the first renewal of baptismal faith could be called a baptismal confirmation. A rite for the renewal of faith that has been personally appropriated, would thereafter serve as a reaffirmation of the vows made at the original baptism. As with the other rites no specific

prescriptive text is in the bible as a mandate for it. A rite of this nature would nevertheless be in line with the requirements placed around an emphasis on prevenient grace and the commission to make disciples of all nations. Its use may well meet the spiritual needs of some members who want to experience their conversion through a believers' baptism.

5, The Rite of Appropriation of a Previous Baptism

The Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, which also practices baptism in the covenant tradition, uses this rite as standard practice. The content of the service contains the following terminology: "Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ, in former days, before you knew it, God called you and laid his (sic) hand upon you to be his (sic)". This statement is a reference to the covenant sacramental factor, which expresses belief in the work of prevenient grace. "By your baptism you were integrated into the true vine, who is Christ", and the wording "integrated into the true vine" (Green M, 1987:93) does not infer baptismal regeneration of the mechanical kind. The emphasis is however on the objective side of regeneration which refers to what Christ has done before any response can be given. Being "Incorporated into the body of Christ" signifies it as a way of admitting people, infants and adults, into the life of the church and therefore into the life of Christ. Infants are also seen to be "members of the household of faith". This and preceding phrases may be understood as references to household baptism and signify that membership initially is of the human side of the body of Christ, the church. They are "Lambs of the Good Shepherd's fold, to be nurtured by his grace" (1987:93).

The wording continues "Now by God's good hand he has brought you here personally to accept his(sic) grace and declare yourselves by the power of the Holy Spirit to be his(sic) own in repentance, faith and service" (1987:93). This statement alludes to the need for a personal response of faith to grace, for regeneration. From first to last the wording emphasises the action of prevenient regenerating grace. The same emphasis is contained in the concluding statement: "He has reconciled us to self through Christ and he has enlisted us in the service of reconciliation" (1987:93). After the candidate has remembered and reaffirmed the previous baptism and has confessed personal faith, he/she comes forward for the re-enactment of the previous baptism, which is carried out by immersion. In this way the candidate appropriates for himself/herself personally what has been promised at their infant baptism and, based on personal testimony, which has come to fruition through the working of the Holy Spirit. The minister then says: "As you were baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, I now confirm to you the cleansing, forgiveness, new life and the gift of the Holy Spirit which are in his(sic) covenant" (1987:93).

Alternative wording is permitted in the following explanation: "As in Jesus Christ you were baptized, so I pray that God, who began a good work in you, will bring it to completion" (1987:93). The appropriation is supplementary to the original rite (of infant baptism) and is not regarded as a rebaptism. In arguing for the validity of this rite Rev. McKay claims that this would not be a new baptism, but as underlying factors in terms of pastoral needs are not always understood, together

with the apprehension that people feel, this supplementary rite would give visibility to the baptism of the past now forgotten, to reawaken its significance by the signs given in this supplementary rite. It is not possible to undergo another baptism or to re-enact confirmation, but every act/rite of worship and witness provides the congregation with an occasion for a personal and corporate renewal of vows of baptism and of discipleship (Konig A et al, 1983:126 & 127).

As with previous alternative rites no specific text-and-verse reference is present in the Bible as a mandate for it. And yet this rite would not be contrary to the meaning of baptism as contained in the bible and should therefore be legitimate, especially as it not only derives from the Bible but promotes Christian witness and discipleship. It does not in any way contradict the possibility of prevenient grace being operative at the first baptism. Neither does it put an undue emphasis on the personal response of faith as opposed to the grace of Christ as a priority. An emphasis of the primacy of grace and the recognition for personal response and conversion would be upheld. Mechanical baptismal regeneration is not signified at all. All these points taken together go towards making this rite legitimate and therefore acceptable. The first baptism (infant baptism) is dominated by initiation and a message of prevenient grace in action; the second (a believers baptism), that of appropriation, predominately signifying grace received and effectual. This rite contains aspects of the same objectives as renewal, re-affirmation and remembering, and there is no reason why they may not also be used interchangeably. Seen in logical order a rite of re-enactment is the practical part of the renewing, remembering, reaffirmation and appropriation of the grace signified in the first baptism. Theologically they all refer to the same thing: recognition of the existence and validity of a previous baptism as well as providing an acknowledgement that the benefits of a previous baptism have been appropriated. McKay argues that an approach of appropriation is the better way of describing a remembering, a renewing, a reaffirming or a re-enactment of a previous baptism and that it is usual for this rite to be carried out by immersion, which is the mode generally requested (1983:132).

Will members in the MCSA who seek a rebaptism as a (first) believers' baptism view the appropriation of their infant baptism and its benefits as being biblically acceptable? If they do not accept the validity of their infant baptism and regard it either as being flawed or as a non-event, how would they become convinced about the need to appropriate something that in their view was a non-baptism in the first place?

6. The "one baptism" (Eph.4:5) Administered in two Stages – Infant Baptism First, Followed by a Believers' Baptism of Appropriation

The theological implications of this possibility would still need to be worked out thoroughly and tested. It seems however that a warrant for a move like this is already present in respect of attempts being made towards the provision of viable alternative rites for the addressing of the problematic issue of rebaptism in the MCSA.

What then are the theological consequences of the one baptism being administered in two expressions, one in infancy and the other after conversion in adulthood, seen not as two separate baptisms but as two features of the one baptism? The second application with water could be understood as an appropriation and continuation of the first application, much in line with the example of the rite of appropriation as dealt with in point number five above. How would this process need to be understood and accepted as a legitimate single event with two aspects? This idea logically leads to the question of baptismal legitimacy.

THE LEGITIMACY OF BAPTISM

What constitutes a truly legitimate baptism in the eyes of the MCSA is any baptism administered in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19ff). This seems to be a bare minimum requirement. When there is doubt about a previous baptism the MCSA requires that the minister shall use the words "If you are not already baptized, I now baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (MCSA Laws 2000:5). The MCSA believes that only one application of baptism is enough to signify the once-and-for-all redemption of Christ. The fact that Christ died and rose again once for all time, and is inflexibly adhered to by the MCSA, is a sound reason for baptism being unrepeatable. This contention is however open to debate and needs some clarification. It is this area of MCSA baptism theology where a breakthrough of a legitimate compromise could be made in the use of viable alternative rites.

There is nothing in Wesley's doctrine on baptism that suggests that the act of baptism is once and for all. It appears that he had no qualms about the need in certain circumstances to repeat the application of baptism on an individual. He never rebaptized people already Christened in their infancy by the Church of England, but rejected baptism as practiced by nonconformists and those baptized as infants in dissenting chapels. In Wesley's view being a schismatic and receiving baptism after that, was enough reason for the disqualification of the previous baptism (Bridge D, 1977:141). In connecting being born again with baptism, Wesley advised the baptized person – whether wicked or moral – who is not born of the Spirit, to deny their prior baptism in order by implication, that that person might be re-baptized (Mohn DH, 2006:3-4).

Wesley's apparent use of re-baptism which possibly was practised as a matter of expediency in certain situations of his time is not talked about in the MCSA. If Wesley regularly rebaptized Christians, this practise is very different from the position held by world Methodism, and South African Methodism in particular on the matter. Both emphasise the once-and-for-all non-repeatable nature of baptism as well as the unrepeatable saving act of Christ. The MCSA Conference states that whenever baptism is administered it signifies the once and for all action of Christ and makes the baptized a member of the covenant community and it is therefore unrepeatable (MCSA Minutes, 1989:65).

REPETITION OF BAPTISM

Given the MCSA viewpoint on the unrepeatable nature of baptism, it still needs to be asked how it would be possible for a repeat of a previous baptism not to be viewed as a rebaptism. A double expression of the "one baptism" (Eph.4:5), the first one at infancy focussing on prevenient grace, and the second one during adulthood focussing on conversion signifying the appropriation of prevenient grace. An example of this process could be present in the account of Acts 19:1-7. If this possibility exists certain requirements as stipulated by the MCSA will need to be met. The MCSA states that the formulation of any new rite:

- i. Must not be a repeat baptism based on the rejection of a previous baptism, more particularly of an infant baptism, carried out 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit'.
- ii. Must not contradict any of the features of covenant baptism and is not opposed to the content and intent of the commission to disciple, baptize and teach all that Christ has commanded. Matthew 28:19 ff.
- iii. Must not reject infant baptism because of the claim that infant baptism is not in the Bible in text-and-verse form.
- iv. Must not convey a message of mechanical baptismal regeneration but witness to a non-committal formula in respect of whether salvation coincides with the baptismal act or not.
- v. Must be scripturally inclusive and promote unity in the "one baptism" (Eph.4:5).
- vi. Must offer a choice of any of the three modes with the proviso that immersion is not highlighted, leaving an impression that baptism by immersion is the only true and therefore valid mode.
- vii. Must ensure that as baptism is a witness to the once-and-for-all saving work of Christ, it cannot be repeated even although a repeat application of the baptism may serve as a witness to an affirmation and an appropriation of the once-and-for-all redeeming work of Christ (MCSA Minutes, 1989:59-67).

In MCSA thinking rebaptism is a total anathema because it believes that the motivation behind rebaptism is an intention to correct a previous baptism that is believed to be faulty and therefore illegitimate (MCSA Minutes 1989:65). Viewing a second baptism as a repeat baptism however does not necessarily need to signify a redoing of something already done legitimately. Alternative viable initiation rites can be designed to avoid presenting that kind of message. It is in this sense that the

possibility of the one baptism possessing a two-pronged approach with the use of water may be able to find a theological basis within the context of Ephesians 4:5. Baptism administered with two applications at different stages would need to signify that the first application during infancy is a process begun, and the second during adulthood, a process fulfilled and continued.

Dr. Bandey reasoned that "There may be no way of reconciling the convictions of those who believe in believers' baptism and those who approve infant baptism in the MCSA" (Bandey DW, 1976:94). But having said that, he appealed for a realistic solution for rebaptism in arguing that baptism needs to be looked at as a whole, and there is a need to

recognise both the importance of individual decision and the influence of the community of which the individual is a member. Therefore in regard to the gospel call and requirement in baptism is the free and primary initiative of God's operation in creation and redemption on the one hand, and man's (sic) response to the divine operation when personal commitment is made to Christ in faith. (1976:95).

The two aspects of the one baptism would involve firstly, the baptism of infants of believers symbolising God's initializing work as a direct action, as well as of it being a sign of God's indirect influence through members of the church, and the second would be a believers' baptism finalizing the transaction of the first baptism by signifying decision, commitment to Christ, testimony to prevenient grace, and of new birth having been received. Could these two rites legitimately be practiced at different stages in MCSA baptism without this scenario being viewed as a rebaptism? What biblical and theological basis is there for a structure like this?

An example for a two-stage baptismal theology in the bible is in connection with God's covenant relationship with people. The Old Testament is a record of the initiation of God's covenant and its terms. The New Testament is all about the fulfilment of Old Testament covenant by Christ (Matthew 5:17). These dispensations of covenant have come from the same divine background and carry a common intention – God's seeking the salvation of men and women and children. The new covenant is not believed by all to be a total abrogation of the old covenant and certainly not by the MCSA. Fringe features of the old covenant have been omitted from the new, with Jesus featuring in the Old Testament as pre-figurement, and in New Testament as fulfilment. The implementation of what is called the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31ff does not signify a rejection by God of God's original plan operative in the Old Testament, and neither is it a destruction of the essential value surrounding the need for salvation in the old covenant, but rather is an enhancement and advancement of that original plan. The same theology which the MCSA no doubt accepts, that argues that there is no discontinuity between the old and the new covenant which is used as a basis for covenant baptism could be used for the viewing of a two-stage process as being legitimate baptismal practise.

Is Acts 19:1-7 a sound basis and example of baptism in two stages?

A Theological Study of Acts 19:1-7 as a possible example of Baptism possessing two expressions

This passage at face value appears to be the only example in the New Testament of a rebaptism. Paul did not hesitate to baptize the Ephesians in the name of Christ, after they had been baptized with the baptism of John the Baptist. Having been baptized in the name of Jesus they then went on "to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, prophesied and spoke in tongues". The Ephesian circumstance required remedying by Paul. Paul did so by 'rebaptizing' them in water and thereafter they were led into an experience of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:6). Could this event be regarded as a true example of Christian rebaptism in the bible?

In the Discipleship Study Bible (NIV version), it is argued that

some interpreters have tried to make these 12 disciples at Ephesus who simply had not received the Holy Spirit, Christian. This could not happen, as they did not even know that there was a Holy Spirit; they had only received John's baptism (although this shows no awareness on their part of their need for a second baptism). This had made them disciples of John and they had continued to exist in this belief system since John's time. Paul told them to believe in the one coming after John, and that is Jesus – when they believed in Jesus they were baptized in his Name. They became Christian when they believed in Jesus, not when they believed in John (Godwin J, 1988:1397).

The authors of this version of the bible therefore do not believe that this passage is an example of a rebaptism as Paul was more interested in the Saviour and of the need for the in-filling of the Holy Spirit. The argument however that John's baptism did not play a role in respect of the baptism that Paul administered in the name of Jesus does not seem to be true to what is stated in Acts 19:1-7. This passage carries a connection between John's baptism and baptism in the Name of Jesus. The Bible records that John was the voice crying in the wilderness coming to prepare the way of the Lord (Luke 3:1-21). Was this incident in Acts 19:1-7 not a recorded example of many such incidents during the period between Jesus' departure and the ministry of John the Baptist to the Jews who later had become Christian believers?

What is the possible link between John's baptism and Jesus' baptism, even though John's baptism is something quite different to the practice of Christian baptism which uniquely derives from Jesus? That there were two baptisms of the Ephesians, there can be no doubt. Yet the connecting link between these two separate incidents is more of John's baptism being a pre-figuring of Jesus' baptism and was therefore in that sense a preparation for it.(John 1:30-34). This passage describes the submission of Jesus to John's baptism, even though Jesus did not need to repent, and Jesus having received divine approval for his response (Luke 3:21-22). This means that the second baptism spoken of in Acts 19:1-7 cannot be viewed as a re-doing of the first baptism by means of a rebaptism. Jesus' baptism was unique in that it was the commencement of something that was altogether new. Although the emphasis of repentance and preparation in John's baptism represents a

vital component in the unique redemptive work of Jesus, yet it would be difficult to justify the need for a second baptism on this basis. The question remains as to whether this instance recorded in Acts 19:1-7 is a valid case for Christian rebaptism?

That the application of water was no doubt administered on two different occasions does give the impression of it being an example of a rebaptism – a second baptism as a replacement for the first one. The critical theological issue here is, whether in Acts 17 1-7 there was a repeat baptism of a previous valid baptism, and whether Paul viewed these two baptisms as being totally different, one being a correction of the other.

How can this issue be resolved? Baptism in Jesus' name could be understood as Paul writing-off John's baptism as being an incorrect baptism, and hence the baptism that he gave was in Jesus' name. Paul's action may have insinuated that John's baptism was not enough as a sign for the coming gospel of redemption and the need for discipleship. Matthew Henry gives the view that Paul explains the true intent and meaning of John's baptism as principally referring to Jesus Christ. Paul appears not to be writing off John's baptism in vs. 4. He says John's baptism was a baptism of repentance and he (John) spoke of the one to come after him, which is Jesus Christ. He owns that John's baptism is a very good thing, as far as it goes. Paul clearly believed that there is a link between Jesus' baptism but that John's baptism had a further reference, that of repentance, and it was designed only to prepare the way of the Lord, to whom he directed the listeners when he said, behold the Lamb of God. "John's baptism was a porch to be passed through, not the house to be rested in" (Bethany Parallel Commentary, 1983:821). Matthew Henry concludes that Paul rebaptized the 12 Ephesian men, because there was no agreement between John's baptism and those baptized in the name of Jesus. Those baptized in the name of Jesus had never been baptized as Christians before. There may have been a preparatory connection but it was surely not a rebaptism as the second baptism was administered only once in the name of the Lord.

Jameson, Fausett & Brown argue, "The point of contrast is not between John and Christ personally, but between the water baptism of John unto repentance and the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit for new life from the hands of Jesus" (1983:820-821). Whether there is an implied link here between the two baptisms as a basis for rebaptism, is questionable.

Adam Clarke argues that there is a simple solution, and points out firstly that the New Testament bears no evidence of anyone being rebaptized except for Acts 19 which may be an instance of it. Many have tried to argue that this is not a case of rebaptism but he sees no point in arguing along this line. He reasons that,

To be a Christian a person must be baptized in the Christian faith. These persons had not been baptized into that faith; and therefore were not Christian; they felt this and were immediately baptized into the name of Jesus (Bethany Parallel Bible, 1983:821).

Clarke therefore does not believe that this was a genuine biblical example of a Christian rebaptism. Concerning a possible link between John's baptism and baptism as instituted by Jesus, it would be safer theologically to conclude that the two baptisms are complementary. John's baptism was a preparation pointing to the coming of Jesus. Even though the question of repentance is a vital component in the meaning of Christian baptism, this text cannot be used as a justification for a Christian rebaptism. They were two entirely different rites, the one before and the other after the coming of Christ. Neither is there a biblical basis in this passage as a justification for a possible formulation of a two expression process in the one baptism. This means that a search will have to be made elsewhere in the bible for texts as a basis for practising baptism as a two stages process. Does this possibility exist? Whether this possibility exists or not, a two-stage way of administering baptism as an answer for rebaptism appears to be gaining ground in the wider Christian church. Could a practise like this be justified theologically and used flexibly, be adopted by the MCSA?

The notion of practicing baptism in two stages seems on a superficial level to be a constructive and inclusive idea and appears to be a possible way of constructively dealing with requests for rebaptism in the MCSA, as well as making the need for its prohibition unnecessary. If this idea is pursued the belief that baptism is a sign of the salvation of Jesus as being a once-and-for-all act needs to be somehow upheld. Michael Green's logic makes sense:

Baptism means beginning and it cannot be done again. It is by definition impossible to have more than one rite of initiation. It is as foolish to petition for ... citizenship when you already are a citizen; to seek adoption when you are already adopted. Baptism is ever to be remembered but never to be repeated (Green M, 1987:89).

Michael Green's argument implies that baptism *per se* need not be regarded as a once-and-for-all act for salvation but should rather serve the once-and-for-all-act of salvation. Baptism is the initiation of the Christian person into salvation history by being included into the church which is the body of Christ. It is the person's immersion in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus and there is no reason why the initial baptism should not be ongoing and applied again and again as a remembering or reaffirmation or even an appropriation of the vows signified at the original baptism.

The two pronged approach involving a believers' baptism followed by an infant baptism, could be seen as an appropriation or confirmation or affirmation, and need not therefore be viewed as a second baptism but as a way of appropriating and appreciating what is already to hand; a possessing of one's possession, which is what Michael Green mentions the Reformers constantly did (Green M, 1987:92). The need is to take all the above into consideration when formulating a preamble to the rite, and to emphasise that the first baptism points forward to Jesus in the same way that repentance points towards his saving work, while the second application would signify the appropriation pointing back to the saving work of Jesus, as a reception and confirmation of the first application. This makes sense when it is noted that Christian salvation involves firstly a response to the preaching of the

gospel, which requires repentance and faith, and also secondly, the personal acceptance of Jesus' saving work. In this way the two applications, one in infancy before personal faith, and the other in adulthood after a personal appropriation of saving faith, need not be viewed as two separate rites, but as two sides of the one baptism.

Positive Practical Outcomes of Baptism with two applications

The merits of this baptismal structure are the same as for the other alternative rites investigated, and could serve as a way of preserving all that is best in the present baptismal policy of the MCSA; that is the emphasis on prevenient grace, the need for and preparation for repentance, the positive affirmation of what has gone before, the unrepeatable nature of Jesus' saving work which is once and for all, and the making the person baptized a member of the covenant community. The validity of the first baptism would have to be recognised without calling into question the presence of prevenient grace. It would need to include a clear message about the all-important response of a decision for personal conversion, and for the creation of an awareness of God's grace operating from beginning to end (MCSA Minutes, 1989:65-66).

Michael Green's point is valid, that while baptism is not a once-and-for-all testimony of the gospel, it rather is testimony to the once-and-for-all gospel and should be affirmed and reaffirmed in the same way that the use of the elements of the Eucharist are used repeatedly. In this sense the two-pronged approach would not connote a negative non-acceptance of what has gone before, but would be an on-going way of recognising, experiencing and testifying to the completed and available redemptive work of Christ.

This approach may not be accepted by all who seek what they believe is a need for a genuine and original believers' baptism, yet, like all the other alternative rites, it shows the possibility of biblical validity, theological cogency and positive spiritual outcomes. The history of the church testifies to the practice of Christian initiation as involving a number of stages anyway.

Mechanical regeneration may still be an issue of difference in the new double-pronged approach. Yet the MCSA has been at great pains to teach that as infant baptism is a sign of the prevenient grace of redemption it must be appropriated personally through an act of surrender and through new birth by the Holy Spirit. The fact that some infant-baptized individual members have repented in their more mature years can also indicate effective internal evangelism by the church. This reality has not always been accepted or recognised. As baptism is both sacramental, in the sense that God's saving grace has always been preveniently available, and evangelical, signifying prevenient grace at work and accepted by the person resulting in personal conversion, can be a sign pointing to the success and legitimacy of a scheme like this. It is the cause and effect scenario, the infant baptism prong would serve as a sign of the cause – prevenient grace which brings the gift of repentance – and the effect, a believer's baptism indicating that prevenient grace has been appropriated personally. Sight should

also not be lost of the Holy Spirit's role of being the prime mover in all this and thus making it possible to come by a viable theology on the matter. The Bible in Joel 2:28 and Acts 2:17, speaks of the Spirit being poured out on all flesh, and Jesus' words in John 16:7ff should always be considered in regard to water baptism especially as Jesus came to 'baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire' (Luke 3:16) The grace of repentance (first prong) is followed by the grace of salvation (second prong). This makes sense when it is considered that Christian salvation involves a response to the preaching of the gospel which generates and requires repentance and faith, as well as the requiring of a personal acceptance of Jesus' prevenient regenerating work, which is the Holy Spirit's task. John 16:5-15. The present process involving infant baptism first, then conversion, then confirmation, then church membership is no different to what the theological implications and practical structure would be in an arrangement of baptism administered in a double pronged approach.

There is therefore no good reason why a structure like this would not satisfy both the theological aspirations of the MCSA as well as the spiritual needs of Anabaptist members. All that the church seeks to preserve and to ensure is present in its traditional policy of baptism may be upheld in this structure; the emphasis on covenant and prevenient grace through the redeeming work of Christ, and Christ's work once and for all which cannot be repeated. The original baptism in this scenario would be altogether valid; that prevenient grace was present; that the response of faith and obedience, far from being the most important features of baptism, could still be legitimately viewed as being dependent upon the primacy of God's saving grace and experienced as such. The MCSA could solve the problem of rebaptism in this way. Infant baptism, as the first phase indicating a recognition of the entry of the infant into the objective provision of God's work through the covenant of grace, and a believers' baptism expressed as a remembering, re-enactment, affirmation, renewal, continuation or a personal appropriation of what God has done in a person's life, would be a way of fulfilling and continuing the work started and hoped for through being baptised. There need be no contradiction or conflict between these two sides of baptism as the significance of baptism would remain intact and is what is far more important than the symbolic value of the water and the number of times that it may be used. The theology of this double pronged scheme could therefore be satisfactorily worked out in accordance with MCSA covenant baptismal requirements.

So long as the MCSA uses the dual practice of baptizing the infants of believers and nurturing those infants in discipleship, while calling for repentance for new birth, and members thereafter responding and having an experience of new birth, the problem is not likely to go away. The United Methodist Church of the U.S.A. like some Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, and the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand seem to recognise this, and use water mostly by immersion in their rites of renewal, remembering and appropriation. There is no reason why an acceptable compromise along this line cannot similarly be worked out by the MCSA.

There is however another question in connection with the use of alternative rites which begs an answer. Will the MCSA allow the use of water with these alternative rites?

The use of Water in these Rites - A Critical Necessity?

Is the MCSA going to allow the use of water in these alternative rites? The MCSA became more accommodating towards so-called baptismal dissident members in that it came to acknowledge that requests for rebaptism do sometimes come from a spiritual need. However, when it comes to the call for the formation of alternative rites no mention was made about the use of water. It is not known as to what the official MCSA view is, on this matter. This raises the question as to when it is possible for baptism to be regarded as a baptism without the use of water. If the MCSA has decided that these alternative rites are to be administered without water, this is in a sense understandable as the use of water could pose "the danger of being confused with a rebaptism" (Green M, 1987:93). And yet does this mean that the non-use of water is more important than meeting the needs of people?

The core question still is, whether alternative rites for those traditionally practiced in the MCSA, will meet the needs of Anabaptists and at the same time ensure that the MCSA's view of covenant baptism is upheld. The Minutes of Conference state:

The MCSA invites its ministers and members to formulate rites, which make for individual affirmation. This provision must be geared towards a general renewal of baptismal vows which may occur during a Covenant Service or at some other appropriate time in the Christian year (MCSA Minutes 1989:61).

As no mention is made of the use of water in the above statement, does this mean that the church may reject its use because of the possibility of these rites being viewed as acts of rebaptism? If the MCSA views the use of water as the central factor which constitutes a rebaptism, is this valid? On the other hand if requests for rebaptism are accompanied by demands for the alternative rite to be administered only by immersion, is this not also going to signify rebaptism and insinuate a rejection of a previous legitimate baptism? The question then becomes how a renewal of baptism vows can legitimately be administered with water without it being viewed as a rebaptism?

The place of water in these rites seems to be essential. Even though Jesus did not specifically mention the use of water in his commission to go and baptize the nations in Matthew 28:19ff. And yet it would generally be regarded that the use of water is the factor that constitutes the material essence of New Testament baptism. It is the distinguishing trait of baptism as a sacrament, in the same way that bread and wine are the components that portray Eucharist as a sacrament. As it would be impossible to provide the Eucharist as a sacrament without the elements of bread and wine, so too would it be impossible to offer a baptism as a sacrament without the use of water. As the water factor constitutes the material side of baptism it also conveys its invisible meaning.

In the MCSA view, infant baptism would surely not constitute baptism as a sacrament if the rite were to be performed without the use of water. Infant baptism without the use of water would then be no different from dedication, which the MCSA is at great pains to prohibit. In the same way members who request a believers' baptism would likely reject any of the alternative rites of affirmation if they were to be offered without the use of water as this may logically be viewed as a round-about attempt to force them to view their infant baptism as being legitimate. Members want to experience their conversion according to a believers' baptism which they have come to understand is the biblical norm. What then makes a baptism a rebaptism?

Why should the appropriation of baptismal vows or their renewal, administered with water be felt to be necessary? As baptism is the response of a person acting within God's grace, the water is essential for the renewal because it symbolises God's action as washing a person clean making him/her a new creation (Konig A et al, 1983:162). There need not therefore be a theological or biblical problem with a compromise involving the use of water in the provision of viable alternative rites. These rites make provision for a combination of belief in the biblical validity of infant baptism, as well as the validity for believers' baptism together with the acceptance of all the values that are derived from both. Rites or liturgies could therefore be constructed "where adults who have made a full commitment can come to waters and be immersed, or sprinkled, or effused, as a renewal of their baptism" (1983:162).

It may seem that by offering these rites without the use of water that the church has not provided legitimate and uniting concessions towards those whom it acknowledges have a genuine need to "Bear public witness to a new or renewed faith, or to perform an act of obedience to mark a new commitment" (MCSA Minutes 1989:66). If the use of water is not permitted in these alternative rites the MCSA would appear to be moving laterally, while the offer of alternatives would be viewed as being no different to the rite of confirmation. Requests for believers' baptism by immersion alone arise mainly because immersion is viewed as the most powerful symbol of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and is a sign of a corresponding change having taken place in the individual. Baptism by pouring or sprinkling therefore does not carry the same impact.

The MCSA's claim to be inclusive may also be compromised if the use of water is not permitted in alternative rites. A statement in Minutes of Conference records a resolution that,

Should a member of the MCSA insist on undergoing a ceremony of baptism in spite of attempts to show that a previous baptism is valid and that the new rite (of rebaptism) is inappropriate, that these members be advised that the church does not condone it and that it discourages the encouragement of others to be rebaptized, and in the event of an undertaking along this line not being given or observed, the member should be advised to leave the Methodist Church and to join a denomination which accepts his/her view (MCSA Minutes, 1989:68).

The question is, will the non-use of water in respect of the alternative rites not be a contributing factor to a perpetuation of division? And should the use of water or its non-use be the deciding factor of whether a member should continue to be a member of the church? Is the use or non-use of water to serve as the theological crux of whether an alternative rite is valid or illegitimate? This is a dilemma that Wesley faced and it has been noted that he at times resorted to the practice of rebaptism with the use of water in order to meet the needs of the people. There is no record which provides information that Wesley actually wrestled with the biblical and theological implications surrounding rebaptism. His major concern was for the discipling of the nations and not about issues pertaining to baptism and the use of water. Given the MCSA policy in which the church endeavours to safeguard what it believes is legitimate in its policy surrounding baptism and in attempting to be theologically and spiritually constructive and inclusive, the question that remains, is how could a believers' baptism with the use of water be a first baptism, without it being a rebaptism of a previous infant baptism?

It has already been stated that in Methodist usage a rite of initiation other than that of infant baptism or confirmation would qualify so long as it does not negatively infringe on all that is claimed and signified about covenant baptism and provided the rite does not signify rebaptism. Yet it is hard to understand how the use of water in any alternative rite would infringe anything in MCSA baptismal policy which promotes inclusiveness through covenant teaching in the command to go out and make disciples with the provision of an emphasis on the message of prevenient grace. The need for a rebaptism could then fall away through a legitimate meeting of water baptism needs.

God confirms his (sic) promise (of salvation) to those who were too young to understand that promise at the time of their baptism, and second, the person being renewed confirms their personal commitment in a public testimony which they were unable to make as infants or children (United Methodist Church, 1976 alternate text: 11).

It seems that it is theologically possible within a context of Methodist covenant baptism for alternative rites to be administered with the use of water and still uphold the principles of covenant baptism as articulated by the MCSA. A flexible use of water which, while it is not indispensable for salvation is nevertheless necessary for the rite to be an act of baptism. It would be helpful if the alternative rites could be viewed in this way, especially as they would point to the original act of baptism. Other Christian denominations, such as the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand see no biblical and theological problem in granting an appropriation of the first baptism, with the use of water as a second baptism. Francis McNutt also argues for the use of water with rites of renewal,

As an infant baptizing church there are real positive values in believers' baptism, as there are for infant baptism. Something positive is needed to be done about the impasse between the two practices, rather than merely a forbidding of rebaptism (Konig A et al, 1983:157).

And he continues,

The mainline churches need some solution for those who need to be rebaptized, and it should be an action that involves an alternative rite, with the use of water. The infant-baptized members of Roman Catholic and Protestant churches who did not know Jesus as personal Saviour are now being converted and seek to give verbal and tangible sign of that, which needs to be by baptism, and the churches need to provide for that need. It is evident from the Bible that there are strong biblical and practical reasons for infant baptism as well as for adult baptism. Instead of these strong reasons leading proponents into confrontation and even of setting up more division in Christendom, there must be a way of reconciling these two positions so that the advantages of both types of baptism can be preserved without theological compromise. (Konig A et al, 1983:158).

Allowing the use of water in the administration of alternative rites would also be in line with the sacramental and evangelical emphasis in MCSA mission policy.

People want to experience the initial sacrament which is baptism. People want to experience the initial reception of the life of God within them, and the washing clean of sin. They want to be immersed in water to experience the fullest symbolism of being under the water to die with Christ, and then rise up again as a new creation (II Corinthians 5:17) (1983:158).

Is it possible for this to happen without the rejection of one's infant baptism? There seems to be no theological or practical reason why the infant-baptized cannot go through some sort of re-enactment or re-affirmation with a flexible use of water. Their first baptism is reproduced symbolically in the believers' baptism experience as an affirmation and appropriation of the original baptism. This arrangement would only be both biblically and theologically feasible provided members do not reject the first baptism as being biblically invalid. Alternative rites will only be legitimate within the MCSA context of covenant baptism, if they meet the criteria set by the church which excludes any possibility of a rite being viewed as a rebaptism. Repetition of a previous baptism need not be understood as rebaptism provided it is not an attempt to repeat the once-and-for-all gospel of Christ which of course is impossible to do. Avoiding giving that impression can be made very clear in the homily that precedes any particular rite.

Chapter 7 will contain a summary of a finding and conclusion from this research. The final section contains a proposal that the MCSA should investigate the possible viability of a two-pronged approach of the one baptism and of its implementation.

CHAPTER 7

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This study has been an attempt to address several difficulties in the MCSA in relation to water baptism. The first is the notion that so-called biblical baptism prescribes a view which has it that only one understanding of baptism can be exclusively correct. If this sentiment is correct then any attempt to practise baptism according to other views, of which there are at least five, is to practice baptism deemed to be incorrect. Incorrect baptism is used as a reason to justify the practice of rebaptism and this usually is an attempt to correct what is believed to be a previously incorrect baptism. Allied to this problem is that members who have gone through a first-time conversion having experienced a spiritual renewal, desire a rebaptism according to the believer-baptist understanding, as a way of correctly experiencing and expressing their conversion or renewal.

The MCSA has been constrained to deal with these conflicting issues without compromising its own position on baptism. The challenge for the church has been how it can respond positively to these requests and maintain its policy on covenant baptism which it believes is biblical, in a way that maintains the unity of the one baptism in a bond of peace. (Ephesians 1-6)

In an attempt to discover how the Bible and Jesus define water baptism in its truest meaning, an exhaustive study of more than 75 texts and references of baptism has found that an exclusively true or correct understanding of the subject is not possible. This finding has caused the researcher to come to the conclusion that the various views of baptism need therefore to be seen as an expression of unity in diversity. That this is perhaps the best way of dealing with the divisive issues around baptism is also confirmed from the finding that biblical baptism possesses an *adiaphorous* quality - meaning that the significance of baptism is open to debate, and those rites by which it is expressed and applied, can be variously formulated. Baptism therefore is like a prism, having many facets, and yet is a single entity. This means that facets of baptism should not be understood as necessarily being in conflict, but as complimentary, expressing the rich variety of meaning and practice that is water baptism.

Furthermore, taking up a legalistic stance over what is believed to be an exclusively correct baptism is not in accord with baptism's character in the bible. An accommodating, encouraging and affirming of other views approach may rather be more accurately expressed in the re-enactment of a previous baptism in a way that gives witness to the once-and-for-all salvation obtained by Christ, in his life and work, without it needing to be viewed as a rebaptism.

It seems to me that division over baptism is based on whether one interprets the doctrine in an exclusive or inclusive way. I have come to see that the origins of the practice of water baptism are generally located in the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist which baptism was demonstrated

through his life, death, resurrection and the outpouring of his Holy Spirit. If water baptism is located in the example of Jesus, who submitted to John in this way, and by his submission demonstrated an impressive humility giving his obedience to God to the end of his life, then believers' baptism will probably be the way that Matthew 28:19ff and other texts on baptism will be interpreted. One hears members saying over and over again that they want to be like Jesus and do what he did. They therefore seek to emulate his example and this invariably seems to result in an adherence to an exclusive view of baptism expressed in the Believer Baptist way.

If on the other hand, the meaning of baptism is to be located not only from Jesus' example of humility and obedience, but also from a life of serving and suffering which Cullman describes as being a general baptism, then baptism will be interpreted inclusively, and the discipling of all nations referred to in Matthew 28:19ff which includes men, women and children in a believing family unit, will make the practice of household covenant baptism fitting.

In the light of this investigation I believe that the form of biblical baptism which is nearest to being correct baptism is that which is inclusive.

Signs of a move towards viewing and practising baptism more inclusively are evident in statements made by some modern-day scholars and through trends of practice in the wider church. The Biblical credibility of infant baptism as well as the recognition of the important place of sacrament based on God's grace seems to be gaining ground in some believer-baptist circles. Beasley-Murray for example made some reference to this, while Profs Cross and Grudem have called for a willingness to practice believers' baptism and infant baptism side by side. There is evidence of these trends already in some denominations, while the promotion of unity in diversity has always been the World Council of Churches unflagging mission focus. (See Lazareth WH: 1982)

A R Cross writes,

Evangelical scholars such as the Baptists George Beasley-Murray and the Paedobaptist David F. Wright challenge Baptists and Paedobaptists alike to reform their theologies and practices of baptism according to scripture. With the high view of scripture we profess as Evangelicals, it is a particular challenge to us to lead the way in this reformation. Baptism should be more central in our life and thought, as conversion-baptism was in the New Testament. David Wright answers those who question whether baptism merits such weight being placed on it: 'That the church's practice of baptism was mandated by Christ himself with a clarity shared by very few other things we do in church, is a good starting point in answering such a question'(Cross A R, 2008:216).

Beasley-Murray states,

All of us in all the churches need to consider afresh our ways before God, with the Bible open before us, and a prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and a preparedness to listen to what the Spirit is saying to all the churches The inadequate insights of frail individuals and of our very fallible traditions (also around baptism) would surely give place to a fuller understanding of the divine will made known, and the glory of God in Christ be furthered through the church by the Spirit (Beasley-Murray G,1962:395).

While A. R. Cross claims that

for centuries, the controversy over the subjects and mode of baptism, believers or infants, immersion or effusion/sprinkling – has been repeated almost by generation and still there seems little likelihood of agreement. Only from time to time has the controversy moved on to the theology of baptism. What I am not suggesting is that Baptists have got it right, while Paedobaptists have got it wrong. Rather I have argued that in the main neither Baptists nor Paedobaptists at present uphold New Testament baptism. (Cross AR, 2008:195-217)

J.M. Beach notes that

after nearly 500 years of debate, some theologians are pleading for a truce within the Evangelical church. Wayne Grudem, for example, while himself arguing vigorously for believers' baptism does not think baptism ought to be a point of division amongst churches. He suggests that Paedobaptists and advocates of believers' baptism jointly acknowledge that 'baptism is not a major doctrine of faith'. Grudem recognises that this would require concession on the part of Baptists and Paedobaptists alike, so that both views of baptism could be taught and practiced in their respective churches.'" (Beach JM, 2001:47-48)

These are encouraging developments in respect of what seems to be felt by more and more Christians, which is the need to restore unity around the practise of baptism. It seems to me therefore, that Biblical baptism which is located in biblical covenant, especially the new covenant, makes it possible to accommodate all expressions of baptism, in which it is possible to make provision for men, women and children in the loving redeeming work of Christ, and would be the most effective way of promoting baptism as an expression of unity in diversity.

A CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

If the MCSA is going to keep its double-pronged approach and avoid encountering the problem of requests for rebaptism then it may have to offer a practical compromise in the form of a range of alternative rites with the use of water as official policy. This provision need not undermine its doctrine and policy on covenant baptism but could be a helpful and legitimate way of meeting all needs. A possible way of doing this would be to introduce a two-pronged approach in the application of the one baptism which could do away with the encumbering circumstance of having too many alternative rites. In this two-pronged approach infant baptism would serve as an initiation, a preparatory rite, and a believers' baptism, as a sign of the appropriation of the first baptism and its continuation. This baptismal policy involving a repeat as an affirmation or appropriation of a previous baptism, would have to uphold the once-and-for-all gospel of the saving work of Christ as demonstrated by his life, death and resurrection, and may become a significant gesture towards unity and witness.

The MCSA believes its understanding of baptism in terms of covenant is soundly biblical. Claims that the MCSA is not practicing biblical baptism are without foundation. The theology of MCSA covenant baptism carries an inclusive ethos and is in keeping with the divine salvific plan for all of humankind. It emphasises the availability of God's grace, making for the possibility of an obedient response to Christ's commission to make disciples of all nations, through preaching, discipling, baptism and teaching. Mark 16:15-16, Matthew 28:19ff.

The practice of rebaptism poses a number of contradictions to the MCSA view, causing both confusion and division. That some members baptised as infants seek a believers' baptism rather than a rite of confirmation over and above their infant baptism is understandable, in that there is a felt need to obey what is understood by them to have been standard missionary discipling practice in the apostolic church. This standard practice involves the preaching of the gospel; a response of repentance; an acceptance of the preached word; a believing in Christ; a baptism by immersion; the infilling of the Holy Spirit, followed by a lifestyle of Christian living and witness. The claim is made that the Bible does not provide similar specific evidence of a link between this procedure and the baptism of infants. Neither are infants capable of going through this formula, which seems to indicate that baptism is for believers alone. Requests by members already baptised in their infancy for a believers' baptism, contradicts what the MCSA values very highly, namely that baptism signifies the discipling of all nations involving men, women and children in obedience to the command of Christ. The MCSA therefore strongly and reasonably defends its position which it believes is both theologically feasible and biblically valid.

The MCSA has found itself in a theological and pastoral dilemma over the seeming incompatibility of the two baptisms in its double practice, and has never been able to resolve completely the differences between proponents of the two baptisms. Neither has it been able to practice baptism without

requests for rebaptism being made despite what some members claim has become a non-issue. It has endlessly been confronted with the problem of how to meet the needs of proponents of both views of what baptism signifies, which appear to be equally valid, but which occupy opposite sides of the same coin. The MCSA nevertheless has the doctrinal capacity in its view of covenant baptism, not only to accommodate but also to meet the needs of various proponents. Its mission ethos, which is both sacramental and evangelical, provides the balance that is necessary for a discipling ministry that includes men, women and children. Sacrament in respect of infant baptism is necessary because it is both a command and a sign of prevenient grace at work, based on the biblical statement that salvation is by grace through faith alone. (Ephesians 2:8). With regard to believers' baptism, an emphasis which is on the need for personal salvation by grace alone is also extremely important, and would also uphold the MCSA evangelical requirements in connection with baptism.

The MCSA should therefore endeavour to follow through with the constructive compromises of the use of viable alternative rites for which it has called, as a way of effectively bringing some sort of finality to the impasse around rebaptism. This investigation has found that the provision of alternative rites may be constructed and understood in such a way that they need not contradict all that is of value in all views, and shows that these views are complimentary by nature.

It is not clear however whether water may be used in these alternative rites because the MCSA has not said so in its policy documents. The question of water is critical in the whole process and constitutes the difference between what a confirmation rite in MCSA usage signifies and what constitutes baptism. Will those requesting believers' baptism view any alternative rite as being the equivalent of a believers' baptism without being able to receive the rite with an application of water? This does not seem likely. As to whether the use of water should be permitted in the practice of these alternative rites or not, could continue to be a contentious point in the debate, if not resolved. As baptism has always been understood as an action involving the use of water, the MCSA will have to seriously consider finding a way of using the alternative rites with water in the interest of greater inclusivity in the unity of baptism, much like what is happening increasingly in some present day Christian denominations. Examples of inclusive compromise in the use of alternative rites with water come from the Roman Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, and the United Methodist Church of the U.S.A.

The argument central to this investigation is that some adult members previously baptised as infants in the MCSA, need some way of experiencing their baptism and giving witness to it, whether it is by sprinkling, pouring or immersion, but they seem to desire "something stronger than simply repeating the baptismal promises on the eve of Easter during the baptismal vows renewal service – they feel the need to experience what they missed in their baptism as babies" (Konig A, 1983:162).

For this to happen the commodity of water needs to form part of the rite. It is a renewal not merely of vows that they instinctively know they need, or some kind of a re-commitment or remembrance

rite, but a first time believers-baptism that they desire. The use of water does not need to be an expression of a denial of the previous baptism, or even constitute a rebaptism. The homily of instruction in the rite therefore occupies an important place, as do the responses formulated by the MCSA and repeated by the initiate before the rite is administered. The homily should convey the message of prevenient grace as an expression of covenant. Compulsory instruction on the MCSA's general understanding of baptism and of alternative rites would serve to preclude the rite from conveying a message of being a rebaptism.

All the elements required by the MCSA theological position set out in its *Laws and Discipline*, and in the 1989 Minutes of Conference need to be included in the Service rite as a way of complying with the church's call on the matter. Specific provisos in line with the church's belief about covenant baptism, with a specific need to accept that infant baptism is biblical, and that therefore rebaptism is not to be practiced for the reasons given in the church's theological position, together with a short explanation stating why any of the three modes of baptism are acceptable and from which a choice can be made, should be included. In favour of baptism being an on-going testimony Green says:

Baptism is too important to be left to once-for-all testimony. It needs to get out far more often than that. I should want to encourage someone to speak often about Christ to his (sic) unconverted friends: that is a fitting outworking of baptismal testimony. I should encourage him(sic) to take the opportunity to renew his(sic) baptismal vows to the Lord whenever present at the baptism of somebody else (Green M, 1987:92).

The crux of the matter is that the sign and significance of baptism is not focussed only on the water but on the redemption to which the water points. Should this then, not mean that if water is of lesser importance than the salvific significance that it carries (though baptism cannot be administered without it), the manner of the application and the number of applications, as well as the quantity of the water used are lesser factors? A valid compromise can therefore be looked for in this area. The use of water is an essential part of what it means to be baptised and it has nothing to do with a magical notion of salvation. The prevenient grace of Christ is linked to the salvation of the person but not to baptism, even though baptism with water is a sign of it (*Dimension*, February 1984:12). These alternative rites, with the use of water, should be constructed as official viable practices within the MCSA understanding of baptism, with the proviso that they are not acts of rebaptism, while the appropriation and renewal of a previous baptism in a two-stage process need not be theologically problematic. Dr. McNutt states: "So far as I know there is no real theological problem with this solution" (Konig A, 1983:162).

Rites that are viable options and alternatives which could compliment existing rites include:

1. The rite of Infant baptism followed by conversion and by a service of Confirmation. Infant baptism would be the occasion when inclusion into the membership of the visible body of

Christ happens. The service of Confirmation is a confirmatory sign of membership of both the visible and invisible church, as well as a service of witness to personal salvation.

2. A rite of Thanksgiving for infants born, and the dedication of the parents. This service may be used as an alternative for infant baptism or the dedication of infants.
3. The rite of a Blessing in Covenant could be used in lieu of infant baptism, infant dedication, or even the rite of thanksgiving for infants.
4. Rites of remembering, re-affirmation, renewal and appropriation, could be available in place of the practice of rebaptism and are by nature similar to a believers' baptism. These rites could be administered with or without water, based on choice.
5. The one baptism (Ephesians 4:5) administered in two stages could become a fixed policy: a rite of Infant Baptism (as a sign of prevenient grace, initiation and preparation) first, and then followed by a rite of Believers' Baptism (as a sign of appropriation of the benefits signalled by the previous baptism) when it is appropriate later on.

The options stated in numbers 4 and 5 would need to be investigated and constructed by MCSA theologians and approved by the policy-making conference of the church, before possible adoption as official practice.

In the event of the two stage process being accepted, the MCSA could then simplify the baptismal scenario involving all of these alternative rites by doing away with any unnecessary duplication. This two stage idea surely would have theological and practical problems. An example of a problem with this suggestion is whether a person is only half-baptised if that person has only been through phase 1? And then what would this process imply in terms of church membership, salvation, cleansing from original sin, or participation in the life of Christ? Consideration would also need to be given to the ecumenical implications of this two phase process since the MCSA is closely allied to the wider Christian church. These questions and others cannot be underestimated and yet there is a need for thorough research in this direction and for a bold willingness to bring in valid and viable progressive change and this would be more helpful than otherwise. The two-stage approach is a possibility that seems to be worth considering and exploiting, especially as this way of dealing with the difficulties surrounding baptism and rebaptism is the direction being taken in the wider church with seemingly positive results.

A quote from Bridge and Phypers is pertinent, namely that:

To insist that the inclusion of children in the people of God must be ratified in their baptism in infancy is to come dangerously close to sacramentalism and to making Christianity depend on external observance more than on inward faith, in this case the faith of the parents in the electing love of God towards their child. Equally to demand that baptism *must* await the personal response of faith in the child, with all the

problems of deciding when that has taken place, is to deny to parents a great comfort, a visible sign that their children are his (sic), and because they are his (sic), that he (sic) will call them by grace, that they will trust Christ for salvation, that they will enjoy the hope of glory (Bridge D, 1977:186). Christians must agree to differ at this point because scripture gives them no specific instructions concerning their children. Paedo-baptism and believers' baptism both testify to different aspects of God's dealings with men. Because they are applied to humans, both fall short of their intended purpose. Both can be dreadfully abused, yet Christians are commanded to baptise and to be baptised, and they must respect the varying ways they find God leading them to observe his (sic) commands (Bridge D, 1977:186 & 187).

A central question which the MCSA should therefore seriously consider, is that if its understanding of baptism is not regeneration (i.e. fundamental to salvation or a form of salvation by works) but simply the sign of having entered the life of Christ, then what harm is done by repeating that sign in an officially recognised two-pronged approach, with the use of water? (Questionnaire Letters, Appendix, 165ff) A two-pronged approach of initiation is currently obliquely in use in the MCSA anyway, in that infant baptism which is the first stage is followed by a rite of confirmation, which is in reality the second stage of the process. Why then should water not be used in the second rite as well? What is being proposed in this thesis is merely that the MCSA will regularise and formalise a practice which to all intents and purposes is already in use, and to provide a sound theological basis for these various alternative rites.

As the possibility of the use of alternative rites in the MCSA appears to be both viable and therefore valid, the pursuing of a thorough theological study as a basis for a two stage process of baptism in the MCSA would be the right way to go. This it seems, can be a most effective way of addressing the age-old problem of rebaptism, and which also could considerably enhance the mission of the MCSA of making disciples inclusively in the one baptism as referred to by Paul the Apostle in Ephesians 4 verse 5.

From this investigation it appears that these possibilities do exist. On the basis that the MCSA is willing to accommodate alternative rites, the church should take steps to bring the conundrum relating to rebaptism to a speedy conclusion through an official provision of these rites (MCSA Minutes, 1988:60-61). It should do this through a concerted investigation into the possibility of the formulation and adoption of a two-stage process of baptismal application as a viable simplification of the process of baptismal initiation and of its purpose in the MCSA.

APPENDIX I

THIS QUESTIONNAIRE WAS SENT OUT IN JULY 2009. THE INFORMED CONSENT FORM THAT ACCOMPANIED THIS QUESTIONNAIRE IS INCLUDED ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE AND WAS SENT OUT DATED 1 JULY 2009

A QUESTIONNAIRE ABOUT THE MCSA's DOCTRINE ON WATER BAPTISM

Dear Colleagues

Greetings! I hope that you are keeping well.

My reason for writing to you is to enlist your help with research around water baptism in the MCSA. You may recall that prior to the 1980s there was continuous debate, sharp differences and even division within our church around aspects of our church's understanding of water baptism.

Some of these issues were the following: The rejection of infant baptism; of baptism by sprinkling and pouring; the bid for a rebaptism by immersion alone; and requests for dedication in lieu of infant baptism. The struggle in our church has always been to try to legitimately honour the needs of all of our members including those who have turned away from their infant baptism and who request a believer's baptism. The problem is how to achieve this transfer without a rebaptism being involved. The church, as you know, prohibits rebaptism.

Despite a Conference resolution in 1989 in which ministers and members were 'invited to explore certain alternative liturgy options' instead of requests for rebaptism along the lines of the re-affirmation of baptismal vows (Minutes of Conference 1989, para.4 page 57), nothing has been formally achieved along this line twenty years later.

Baptism and its effects have always been a strong interest and concern of mine and now in my retirement years I have time, at last, to attempt to make a contribution. I am doing this work through the UKZN School of Religion with Prof. T. Balcomb as my supervisor.

Can you please answer the questions as set out below in brief?

1. Is baptism in the MCSA a problem issue for you? YES NO
If yes, state why.....
2. Is baptism a problem issue amongst members of your congregation? YES NO
If yes, state why.....
3. Have you had requests for rebaptism? YES NO
If yes, state why.....
4. Do members sometimes reject infant baptism? YES NO
If yes, what reasons do they give?.....
5. Do you know of any ministers who have left the MCSA because of issues surrounding baptism in the MCSA? YES NO
If so, how many?
If yes, what reasons do they give?.....

6. Do you know of any lay people who have left the MCSA because of issues surrounding baptism?

If so, how many?

If so, what reasons do they give?.....

Any comments you may wish to make would be

welcome.....

Please sign: Your identity will be kept confidential as per university ethical requirements.

Signed:..... NAME OF CHURCH:.....

Thank you most sincerely,

OSSIE KRETZMANN

Please return to 20 SHONE STREET, STUTTERHEIM, 4930 or to my email address: ossiekretz@telkomsa.net

INFORMED CONSENT FOR A RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE FROM OSSIE KRETZMANN

ossiekretz@telkomsa.net

1 July 20-09

I will be grateful to you if you could participate in the research I am doing on baptism in the MCSA as detailed in my separate letter to you. Would you kindly read the documents included before you take a decision on whether to involve yourself or not. The information, which I am giving you to scrutinize, is in fulfillment of the university ethical clearance requirements, for the submission of a research proposal. It is the following:

1. The title: "Baptism and re-Baptism in the MCSA: A critical investigation into the viability of possible alternatives".
2. My telephone numbers 043 6831432 or 033 701 1296 cell 072 779 9699
3. The purpose of the dissertation – to make progress in a search for viable alternative baptismal rites toward more inclusiveness and reconciliation amongst members in the MCSA.
4. The project supervisor. Prof Tony Balcomb School of religion and Theology, New Arts block 207c, Golf Rd, UKZN, Pietermaritzburg Campus. Tel. 033 260 5600 cell' 084 688 7125 email: balcombt@ukzn.ac.za
5. The separate letter includes an explanation of the purpose of the subject being investigated and of how it was identified.
6. As regards the "Voluntary participation factor" the University ruling for ethical clearance requires the following questions to be answered

Are you willing to assist in this research on a voluntary basis? Yes / no

(PS. You may withdraw from the research at anytime without any negative or undesirable consequences directed at yourself.)

- Your responses will be treated in a confidential manner, unless you deem otherwise. For example are there any limits you wish to place on the confidentiality issue. Yes / no
If yes, what are they?.....

.....

- Do you wish that anonymity be ensured? Yes / no

Please note the following:

- i. No financial benefit will accrue to myself and for that matter to any participant
- ii. Any cost incurred to you the participant, in the process of responding to this research is for the account of O.G.Kretzmann, 20 Shone St., Stutterheim, 4930 or send it to my email address: ossiekretz@telkomsa.net
- iii. In terms of the time that it takes you to answer the questions, what I'm looking for is brevity, which estimated roughly, should take less than an hour.

- iv. The gathered data will remain in my personal possession and will therefore be kept confidential and anonymous.

I am depending on your generosity for a voluntary participation.

Please would you sign the declaration?

I (Full names of participants) do hereby understand the contents of this documents and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participate in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at anytime, should I so desire.

Signature and address of participant

Date and telephone number:

Researcher Signature

Date

ANSWERS RECEIVED TO QUESTIONS POSED:

- 1. Is baptism in the MCSA a problem issue for you? YES NO

THERE WERE 16 ‘NO’s’ WITH ONE BEING A QUALIFIED ‘NO’, WHICH I TAKE TO BE A ‘YES’ THE 6 THAT GAVE AN AFFIRMATIVE REPLY STATED THE FOLLOWING

If yes, state why...

- i. **“We sometimes get requests for rebaptism when people have had a conversion experience. We turn them away”**
- ii. **“No such much an issue as a concern. Because the mainline churches stance on baptism/rebaptism”**
- iii. **“Sacraments reserved to be officiated by clergy only, and not addressing the alternative options to re-baptism”**
- viii. **“A practice that is a “Means of Grace” has been turned into a Law by our church. Ministers have been kicked out of the church and HUGE numbers of members have left and gone elsewhere. This returns us to the practice of the Scribes and Pharisees. If our understanding is that Baptism is not regenerative (i.e. fundamental to salvation or a form of salvation by works) but simply the sign of having entered the life of Christ, then where is the harm of repeating that sign?”**
- ix. **“This will be on the account of infant baptism. Last year I sat down with a couple who wanted their daughter baptized. They appeared in Church about (a) month before they approached me. I knew that that was the reason they started to attend the services. However I gave them the benefit of the doubt, as I have done to many before them. I sat down with them over two weeks explaining the significance of baptism and their responsibility especially in regard to the commitment to the life and ministry of the Church. They acknowledged the negative issues on the side of parents’ commitment to the vows they take and assured me they would not fall into that category. Well, the rest is history. They, like the majority that I baptized over the years, having given each one the benefit of the doubt, no longer attended the services which were the basic minimum requirement to which they agreed. My contact with the family as with many others remained intact, and each time we met they would say how they need to be involved. Frustration and disillusionment perhaps were my greatest resistance to infant baptism and will continue to remain so. The theological implications were never grasped even though clearly taught, so the sacrament became and still is in my opinion a form of ‘cheap grace’ to quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer.**
- x. **“It was, in the late 1970s but I have moved on”**

2. Is baptism a problem issue amongst members of your congregation? YES NO

13 REPLIES WERE 'NO', 8 WERE 'YES', AND ONE WAS 'NOT SURE'.

If yes, state why

- i. "Yes. But only to those who cannot be rebaptized"
- ii. "For some. I have had requests from some who want to renew their commitment of Christ and his church by a rebaptism. Two members left our church and went to a charismatic church, who were only too delighted to oblige. It was a great loss to us as they were committed leaders"
- iii. "Not many, but some parents have opted not to baptize their children"
- iv. "In the 6 months I have been here it has not been raised. Certain of the more committed members have previously been rebaptized"
- v. "For the reason that a greater majority did not remain faithful to their vows and were using 'the church for their own gain and convenience'"
- vi. Several members have questioned whether their infant baptism was valid.
- vii. "For some who do not hold to infant baptism – and support believers' baptism"
- viii. "Some six years ago some youth were rebaptized on a youth camp, but it wasn't a major issue"
- ix. "I have only been here for 6 months" (so presumably it was too early to judge as to whether infant baptism is an issue in the congregation)

3. Have you had requests for rebaptism? YES NO

THERE WERE 17 'YES' REPLIES AND 5 WERE 'NO'.

If yes, state why

- i. "People had an infant baptism, but after confirmation they left the church and/or faith. They commit and wish to be baptized as a testimony of faith and entry into God's kingdom"
- ii. "Because they feel their need to express their commitment and Christ and his church. Their argument is that the church is denying their right to respond to God's unending grace, by not allowing them to commit to Christ as a committed believer."
- iii. "Mainly from those from a charismatic/Pentecostal background"
- iv. "Frequently in previous congregations. Generally people wanting to make a public stand about their faith (as with confirmation) but feeling that baptism is the biblical example that they wish to follow (Confirmation is not found in the Bible and as much as I try to use theology to explain other 'reasons' they feel that we are not following the simplest and plainest route – a bit like the Pharisees made laws to explain the laws)
- v. "There was a sense that now they had come to an understanding of their conversion experience they believed they had the conviction of the Holy Spirit to follow through with Jesus' instruction of baptism. For some they did not feel that it was appropriate for others including parents to make promises on their behalf, promises they at times did not keep, and were poor examples of the Christian faith"
- vi. "Once, because there was no certainty of an infant baptism, and another time because there was some question about the church that performed the baptism"
- vii. "After a major trauma they felt that they needed to be rebaptized as a sign of gratefulness to God"
- viii. "People wanted to do it as an act of obedience"
- ix. "Not recently but in previous congregations. It was perceived to be more meaningful, especially after a recent conversion experience"
- x. "Because a member wanted to be rebaptized"
- xi. "A few. Usually after influence from outside – e.g. Emmaus"
- xii. "For the most part such requests are due to theological ignorance, that is additionally and often fuelled by non-Methodists (generally, 'Charismatic') influences"
- xiii. "Folk wanted to personally affirm their experience of the Holy Spirit. They could not remember being baptized as children"
- xiv. "Mostly due to misunderstanding of the idea of Christening"
- xv. "Yes, but not here in Kimberley over the two and a half years I have been here"
- xvi. "Yes, but not recently"
- xvii. "It has usually related to people getting involved with Pentecostal churches who have told them that they needed to have adult baptism in order to be saved"

4. Do members sometimes reject infant baptism? YES NO

THERE WERE 16 ‘YES’ ANSWERS AND 6 ‘NO’ REPLIES.

If yes, what reasons do they give?

- i. “They deem it as unscriptural”
- ii. “Have not had any comments made to me rejecting infant baptism. But that does not mean that there are none who hold that viewpoint”
- iii. “Want to wait for children to be able to answer for themselves”
- iv. “Yes. For reasons stated in point 3
- v. “They choose to delay baptism until the child is able to decide for themselves”
- vi. “I wouldn’t say they reject it. I think they want to add something new – an immediate gratification. Infant baptism is not considered ‘relevant’ to those influenced in charismatic settings”
- vii. “Some say it is not biblical”
- viii. “They quote from Mark 16:16 and the baptism of Jesus”
- ix. “In the 32 years I have now been in the ministry, only a handful (10, at most) has done so. The most common rationale advanced is ‘...but the Bible says...’, in other words, a fundamentalists/Biblicist methodology that isolates one text, Acts 2:38 generally being the favorite”
- x. “They want their children to personally testify to a life of faith when they are themselves ready”
- xi. “They prefer to have their children dedicated”
- xii. “Not here in Kimberley yet, but then I have teachings on the two sacraments from the pulpit”
- xiii. “Not after a theological conversation”
- xiv. “They want their baby dedicated so that later the child can makes its own decision”
- xv. “It is not biblical, and choose to let children be baptized at confirmation”
- xvi. “Personal conviction that their child must decide for /herself later on.

5. Do you know of any ministers who have left the MCSA because of issues surrounding baptism in the MCSA?

If so, how many? YES NO

THERE WERE 15 ‘YES’ ANSWERS AND 7 ‘NO’ REPLIES.

- i. “I know a few ‘charismatically-inclined’ ministers who have left the MCSA but for what reasons I do not know”One resigned
- ii. “The church does not accommodate their understanding of baptism”.....About 1
- iii. “They either were fired or felt that they could not, in good conscience, continue to ‘believe and teach’ our doctrine”About 10
- iv. “They were presented with a crisis of conscience. (They had to decide between)Their understanding of scripture or loyalty to the leadership of the church”.....About 5
- v. “The one who left in the 1980s favored believers’ baptism1
- vi. “At least one left. I can’t remember actually discussing it with ”At least one
- vii. “A number. However, often baptism is given as the reason but there are sometimes many issues clouded over by baptism”..... A number
- viii. “Long ago”.....Very few
- ix. “In most cases, some (ex) colleagues declared that they could not identify with so called“covenant theology. Invariably however this was merely symptomatic of theological fundamentalism and outright Biblicism. On reflection, I realized that in many cases, the objector was an intrinsic antinomian, and that the issue of baptism/rebaptism was little more than a pretext to “pick a fight”Approximately 10 in 32 years
- x. “Lack of theological support for infant baptism”.....2
- xi. “Incompatibility with our doctrine of infant baptism”.....10+ (but not in the last decade)
- xii. “Many years ago. Don’t know them personally”.....Maybe 2/3?
- xiii. “Could not accept infant baptism, but this was in the 1970s when it was a hot debate, but not recently”3
- xiv. “One, who left before I arrived in this Circuit,. All I know it was around baptism”.....1

- xv. "I think it was the normal thing of disagreeing with our understanding and saying faith must come before".....(no number given)

NO NUMBERS WERE GIVEN TO A FEW OF THE 'YES' REPLIES

6. Do you know of any lay people who have left the MCSA because of issues surrounding baptism?

If so, how many?

THERE WERE 12 'YES' RESPONSES, 8 WERE 'NO', AND TWO WERE LEFT BLANK.

If so, what reasons do they give?

- i. Amongst others, baptism and they joined the Baptists church.....2 left the MCSA
- ii. "Same answer as for no. 3 above.....2
- iii. "I have always encouraged folk to remain within the congregation and explore other options, so none have left.
- iv. "they wish to be obedient to what they believe Christ is calling them to do and the Methodist Church will not allow it.....100? 200? More?
- v. "Hard to say" The Methodist insistence on no rebaptism made them question their place in the church..... At least 20 over the years
- vi. "Because the church is not being true to scripture"..... A handful
- vii. "They could not understand our viewpoint and wanted a fuller experience..... 3
- viii. "They reject infant baptism because they wanted something new and relevant..... +/- 6
- ix. "Infant baptism is not biblical..... A number
- x. "For the most part, similar reasons to those advanced by the ex colleagues. Some quoted such ex ministers, clearly providing pastoral interference and as such a basic lack of integrity on the part of said ex minister(s). Few, however, when afforded an opportunity to interrogate their theological convictions, could articulate much less defend them. This often left me wondering about their true motives".....somewhere between 20-30
- xi. "A need for being obedient to the scripture regarding full immersion".....100+(very few in the last decade
- xii. "All this happened in the 70s with the charismatic debate. Not now at all.....Very few/minimal

Any comments you may wish to make would be welcome.....

THERE WERE 7 BLANKS IN THE REPLIES

- i. "I understand the CONCERNS with regards to rebaptism, but I feel that it may stifle people's relationship with God and the Church"
- ii. "I believe, as an ordained minister, that the mainline churches in prohibiting re-baptism, are denying the applicant the opportunity to experience consciously for the first time as a believer (they were too young to remember their infant baptism or understand it) the grace of God and the chance to outwardly express that grace in submission to Christ. I believe that the arguments that a re-baptism denies the first one, is a very thin one indeed... Marriage vows (a sacrament in the Catholic church) can be renewed and many couples do so as an expression of ongoing love for each other, but that certainly doesn't deny those made on their wedding day"
- iii. "Explore the role of laity in conducting the sacraments"
- iv. "Most that do not leave simply go to a church that will baptize them and then return. Others get their ministers to do a 'quiet job'"
- v. "When I performed what some may refer to as 'rebaptism', especially for those who did not want to reject their infant baptism, I used words to the effect 'Having been baptized, I now confirm to you all the promises that are yours within the context of the New Covenant as you come forward declaring your faith in Christ and desire to go through the waters of baptism and as He did'. I cannot remember the exact wording but it was along the lines I just quoted."
- vi. "Of course the issue is not as hot as it used to be. Also the question of baptism has boiled down to one's interpretation of the authority of scripture. So when Keith McLachlan left I think it was not baptism so much as a sense that his understanding of the authority of scripture differed too strongly from the official Methodist concept. For me the question has been resolved by the age-old Methodist way. If you don't shout about it no one will notice. So I don't ask too many questions when people ask for adult baptism. In six years at Queensburgh I have only been asked twice, both of whom we baptized.

- vii. "I told an applicant that I would prefer to baptize only the children of 'born again' believers as I feel that they have a great sense of the importance and impact of the promises that they make before God. Why baptize a child if the parents do not believe – rather I would suggest they then leave it for child to decide at a later stage. Have noted that some who have left, actually left the church that did their believers' baptism and are now not attending church".
- viii. "It seems to me that this is largely an issue of yesteryear. There are other questions that create division/problems in the 21st. century."
- ix. "I wish we could move beyond this debate. Ministers/members seem to do their own thing. A re-baptism will simply be reported as a matter of course. Baptism itself is not viewed as it was years ago. Many of the confirmation kids are not baptized – so we have their baptism and a minute later confirm this baptism – why? In our church we have arranged a porta pool and baptized adults in place of the confirmation which seems to make sense to me."
- x. "Both sides seem to have some good points and it is arrogant to feel superior. The devil laughs at our division."
- xi. "The more things change, the more they stay the same! Just the other day I was thinking back on that national Conference of Baptism in 1982 (or was it '83) held at Cyara where us theological ignoramuses were enlightened by a vociferous Rex Mathee. Mathee has yet to answer my simple question: When is rebaptism enough?"
- xii. "I don't experience the need for re-baptism as strongly as it was in the 80's and 90's. It seems to have become a bit of a non-issue, particularly with the rise of the new churches and the consequent demise of the mainline churches."
- xiii. "STATEMENT. I have always felt that Baptism in all its forms is a red herring, and that the only baptism that is of importance is that of the Holy Spirit. Prior to my candidating for the MCSA I was involved with a number of Pentecostal groups and participated in a rebaptism ceremony, but never felt the urge to have myself re-baptized. Having opted to minister in the MCSA, I have always maintained our discipline and over the years tried to dissuade folk who felt the need to undergo a rebaptism. I have at such times discussed the concept of Covenantal Theology and Preventive grace, showing that their baptism as an infant was valid as proven by their living faith in Jesus. When faced with someone who insisted on being re-baptized, I have contacted a Brother from another church to perform this ceremony, and asked the person concerned not to make an issue of the rebaptism. Most have been happy to meet me half-way and have not left the church. My position in this kind of situation is purely pastoral, and is the same as if someone came and said that they believed God had said they were to sit and pray for a week on the church roof, I will hold the ladder and send up food, but not join until God tells me to. Practical case examples (1) On one occasion I told a friend (whose brother was a Presby. Theolog.) that out of my high regard for I would attend his rebaptism, even though I did not support his action. He was grateful and our friendship was maintained. (2) An old friend who is at present a serving member of the present MCSA W A National General Secretariat was re-baptized, and has been active in the MCSA since the mid 1970s."
- xiv. "My issue is: with young people who do not wish to join, but worship, how do we deal with the Methodist Church rubric that a parent must be a member? Is there another way? Another ceremony (other than dedication, which is, I think contrary to our doctrine)?"
- xiv. "This is a debate that has died, and late in the 70s it was big with the charismatic movement. Now also we dedicate babies sometimes. A very few, though. About 2 babies every 7 years" Nowadays we also baptize adults that have not been baptized before so adult baptism is not excluded provided there has been no baptism before."

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