

Reaching Out to the Non-Baptized Believers: Missiological Implications from a Lutheran Perspective

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Abstract: It is estimated that there are millions of non-baptized believers in India. This essay, drawing insights from Luther's understanding of sacraments, argues that sacraments as means of grace cannot be relegated to a secondary place. However, this zeal should also be matched by our efforts to take seriously the sociological and cultural struggles that these believers face because of their new faith. While challenging readers to explore theologically sound and missionally sensitive ways to reach out to the spiritual needs of these believers, this essay points out that the mission of the church should always be to go and serve people where they are.

The presence of millions of non-baptized believers in India raises several missional and pastoral concerns for us. Why are they known as “non-baptized believers”? Does their non-baptized status throw doubts on the genuineness of their faith and their commitment towards Christ? What keeps them away from waters of Baptism? What challenges do they bring to our traditional approaches to mission? What should guide our theological and missional approach in meeting and ministering to their needs? My interaction with the unbaptized believers comes from working as a pastor among first-generation Christians converted from Hinduism in India and also among Hindu/Buddhist Nepali immigrants in the St. Louis area. My concern in this paper is threefold: First, to point to the existence of non-baptized believers in our midst. Second, to throw some light upon some of the sociological and cultural struggles which lead a person to remain unbaptized. Finally, to trigger our theological and missiological thinking to minister sensitively towards the spiritual needs of these believers.

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The Non-Baptized Believers: Who Are They Anyway?

When I use the term “non-baptized believer,” I wish to exclude the following two categories of people. First are those people who are attracted towards Christ and have genuine respect for Him but do not accept Him as God. These are people who are intellectually drawn towards certain ideals, teachings, or principles that they find attractive in Christ. They, without any hesitation, would acknowledge Jesus to be among the greatest teachers or reformers that the world has ever seen. One notable example could be Mahatma Gandhi, who found Jesus to be a great moral teacher. The second category of people is those who accept Jesus as one among a pantheon of gods. They worship Him as their “favorite god” but do not feel the need to receive Baptism or to convert to Christianity from their religion, because to them all religions are valid paths towards the ultimate reality and all gods are manifestations of the same reality.

However the “non-baptized believers” we are concerned with in this discussion are those who are genuine in their faith affirmation and do not necessarily reject or despise Baptism. They are convinced that Jesus is the only God, the Way and the Truth, and that His life and work on the cross is sufficient for the forgiveness of their sin and for their salvation.¹ However, due to various socio-cultural and political reasons and/or because of the failure of the church to effectively minister to them, they still remain as unbaptized believers.² These believers could be the fruits of missionary efforts of some institutionalized churches or para-church organizations. However, they distance themselves from any institutionalized church or from Baptism, and so they are not considered as Christians by any official understanding.

Herbert E. Hoefler, a long-time LCMS missionary in India, who has done some extensive empirical study among the non-baptized believers in South India, in his book, *Churchless Christianity*, notes several characteristics of the spirituality of the unbaptized whom he encountered. His observations are helpful for us to understand the genuineness of the faith of the unbaptized believers in our midst. First, he notes that they have “a *reflectiveness and spirituality* which are at a considerable level above the ordinary, whether in church or in general society.”³ Secondly, they display a profound sense of *gratitude and faithfulness* towards Jesus Christ for what He means to them spiritually and existentially. Thirdly, these are the people who testify to having experienced the *love and power of Christ* in their lives and during crises in their lives.⁴ Hoefler thus concludes, “They had their own ‘Red Sea’ experience of deliverance and revelation, so they were ready to stand humbly and trustingly beneath Mt. Sinai to make their covenant of obedience with their Lord.”⁵

If empirical data constrain us not to cast doubts on the genuineness of the unbaptized person’s faith, then what keeps them away from Baptism? Is it theological illiteracy or more of a practical impediment? A closer investigation into the lives of a majority of these believers supports a case for the latter. Although

many of these people are genuine in their faith, they distance themselves from Baptism for a shorter or longer period of time due to several socio-cultural and political constraints. T. M. Philip, a well-known Indian theologian, rightly notes that the practice of Baptism carries several socio-cultural underpinnings in India.⁶ M. M. Thomas, another prominent Indian Christian theologian, clarifies this phenomenon as follows:

I have no doubt that baptism in the New Testament sense is incorporation into Christ and his congregational life. But the meaning of baptism has been distorted for long in India as a mark of transference of sociological, cultural-judicial loyalties from one community to another. The real question, therefore, is how to regain the meaning of baptism.⁷

In an Indian context, Baptism means much more than recognition and faith in the truth claims of Christ about Himself. It is a self-removal from social, family, and cultural ties to which one belongs. Herbert Hofer rightly elaborates on this: “the average convert in India must find a new family, a new community, a new social and economic life along with the new spiritual life he has adopted. His own people force him to this by completely ostracizing him.”⁸ The change of faith through Baptism means practically the change of one’s whole social identity. Here “one identifies with a new history and a new group of people. One must learn new habits and new customs. One is even expected generally to take a new name.”⁹

The transition a new convert in India must make is challenging for several reasons. From a sociological point of view, the Indian culture is interwoven by deep communitarian and familial ties. The expectation is that individuals place their commitment to family and community first, over their individual preferences. This expectation makes it difficult for the individuals to leave the faith of their fathers to transition towards a new faith.¹⁰ A convert who joins the institutionalized church through Baptism is seen as betraying his own family, renouncing his loyalty to them, and/or bringing shame to them. In this process, he may lose all or most of the emotional, social, and material support on which he is dependent from his family and community.

The second challenge a non-baptized believer faces regarding Baptism relates to the political implication attached to Baptism in the Indian context. With an increasing Hinduization of the Indian society, Baptism and conversion are portrayed as anti-national and anti-cultural political activity by the Hindutva¹¹ proponents. To Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar (1906–1973), one of the chief architects of Hindutva ideology, “Conversion of Hindus into other religions is nothing but making them succumb to divided loyalty in place of having undivided and absolute loyalty to the nation. It is dangerous to the security of the nation and the country.”¹² He goes on to call non-Hindus foreign races in India and notes:

The foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no ideas but those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture ... or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment—not even citizen's right.¹³

J. R. Chandran, a prominent Indian Christian theologian, after rightly assessing the implication of Baptism in a Hinduised Indian context notes, “Baptism is the symbol of membership in a church and as the numerical strength of any community has social and political implications, it cannot be regarded as a religious rite. It is a religious rite with sociological consequence in so far as it can alter the communal structure of the society. Those who regard this as harmful vigorously oppose conversion to Christianity through baptism.”¹⁴ The political implication attached to joining an institutionalized church through Baptism makes a new believer an easy target of various Hindutva forces. These believers will soon meet with persecution and/or forceful re-conversion, loss of governmental incentives, privileges, jobs, and the like.¹⁵

The third challenge to the non-baptized believers is from the institutionalized church itself. Many times non-baptized believers find the church to be indifferent to, insensitive to, and/or inept in understanding the psycho-socio and material problems that they are going through.¹⁶ This insensitivity slows down the process of incorporating new believers in church fellowship and nurture. Moreover, a judgmental and impatient attitude of the church towards new believers who delay their decision to join the institutionalized church through Baptism creates further mistrust between both parties.

Inculturational and Liberational Approaches to Baptism and Conversion

Several Indian Christian theologians have tried to address the socio-cultural challenges faced by the non-baptized believers. The theologians from high caste background tend to follow an inculturation approach. The concern of inculturation theologians has always been to relate Christian faith to the Hindu culture. In the course of their efforts, most of them either downplayed or thought sacraments as unnecessary. Pandippedi Chenchiah (1886–1959) was a Hindu Brahmin convert who became a Christian theologian. He thought that “a Christian movement within Hinduism without its umbilical cord being cut is a decided advantage to the Hindu and the Christian.”¹⁷ He was critical about the institutional church because he saw it as a human institution tainted with an alien Western pattern and colonial legacy. So Chenchiah was attracted to the ancient Hindu idea of the *ashram*, where a small community of people lived with greatest simplicity as disciples of a *guru*. He also

thought that *ashram* system would effectively cater to spiritual needs of Christian community instead of institutionalized church.¹⁸

Chenchiah found Baptism, which has largely assumed the function of a social rite of joining a community, to be problematic. He argued that “the thought of having to undergo baptism has kept many a Hindu from open confession of his sincere faith in Christ.”¹⁹ And so he propagated a view of “religionless Christianity” where “there will be no baptisms, no confession of faith, no creedal profession... [The Hindu] will slowly and in different degrees come under the influence of the Spirit of Christ, without the change of labels or nomenclature. The change will be in the realm of spirit – not in the *nama* (name) and *rupna* (form).”²⁰

If inculturation theologians, in general, seem to downplay the role of Baptism in conversion, the liberation theologians, in particular the Dalit theologians,²¹ affirmed it as a means of social protest. As Jeyakiran Sebastian quotes Joseph Mattam:

When we welcome people to baptism, in the context of the poor and dalits in India, it is a call to a counter culture (not a separate Christian culture) which will empower the poor and will help them change their self-image and transform their world view into a new cooperative pattern. It is in view of this mission that baptism becomes meaningful, not in terms of the salvation of few individuals.²²

Although Dalit theologians, in general, affirm Baptism and conversion as a means of social liberation; in reality, Baptism does not always save a Dalit convert from the socio-cultural and economic hardship. In fact, a Dalit convert becomes twice discriminated with his formal embrace of Baptism. For example, a Dalit, who is already socio-economically backward, with the acceptance of Baptism will forfeit all the constitutional safeguards and privileges guaranteed to him/her for socio-economic up-lift. This is because a Dalit once converted to Christianity is no longer considered an “outcaste” who is eligible for government benefits. But, at the same time, a Dalit who is converted to other religions like Buddhism or Sikhism will continue to enjoy the constitutional rights.²³

The limitation present in the inculturation and liberation approach is obvious. One major criticism leveled against inculturation approach is that it creates an identity crisis for the converts. Converts from Hinduism who continue to follow the Hindu culture and its norms will find themselves belonging fully to neither the Christian nor the Hindu community. This will make the convert a rootless individual, losing support from both the Hindu and the Christian community during his time of need. Moreover, the inculturation approach tends to see Baptism as secondary to Christian faith and practice. The liberation approach also fails to capture the full significance and meaning of Baptism as it is interpreted within socio-political limits.²⁴

Engaging Non-Baptized Believers from a Lutheran Perspective

Approaching non-baptized believers from a Lutheran perspective calls our attention to address several questions: Why do we think Baptism should not be relegated to secondary place? Why not regard conversion by the means of the preached Word be sufficient and not to seek Baptism? How can we better serve, pastorally and sensitively, the spiritual needs of the non-baptized believers? In my attempt to answer these questions, I will interact briefly with Luther's understanding of Baptism and the Lord's Supper and their significance in our present discussion.

To Luther, the Word and Sacraments (namely Lord's Supper and Baptism) play a significant role in creating, sustaining, and preserving one's faith. According to him, although salvation comes through faith alone and it is not depended on human works, still sacraments are necessary because they are visible and tangible signs of the gracious divine favor and they form the means by which faith is created. Although it is true that a person can be justified through the preached Word, it should be briefly noted here that the preached Word normally leads a person to God's visible Word, the Sacraments. So any missiological approach which seeks to take Luther's thoughts on sacraments cannot assign the same to a secondary place. The following are some of Luther's emphases on sacraments which might provide some insights to our present discussion.

Baptism: There are at least four emphases in Luther's understanding of Baptism which are worth mentioning. First, he understands *Baptism as a means of grace*. Baptism is a means of grace through which God gives to the baptized person forgiveness of sin, rescue from death and devil, and eternal salvation. As Luther explains, "It (*Baptism*) is not simply common water, but water comprehended in God's Word and commandment and sanctified by them. It is nothing else than a divine water, not that the water in itself is nobler than other water but that God's Word and commandment are added to it."²⁵ Secondly, he understands Baptism as a divine *promise and a gift*. Luther notes, "Now, the *first* thing to be considered about baptism is the divine promise, which says: 'He who believes and is baptized will be saved'" (Mark 16:16).²⁶ Since Luther understands Baptism as a promise and gift, there is nothing one is "required to do to" to earn a Baptism or to bring efficacy to the Baptism. Thus one can only receive Baptism and its blessings through faith and not earn it. Thirdly, Luther understands Baptism to *be a sign which carries active significance and implication for one's entire life*. To him, Baptism (*die Taufe*), according to its Greek (*baptismos*) and Latin (*mersio*) terms, means to plunge something completely into the water, so that the water covers it. So the "sign must thus have its parts, the putting in and the drawing out."²⁷ The imagery of death and resurrection and re-birth is central to Luther's baptismal thoughts. The significance of Baptism lies in "a blessed dying unto sin and a resurrection in the grace of God, so

that the old man, conceived and born in sin, is there drowned, and a new man, born in grace, comes forth and rises” (Cf. Eph. 4:22–24; Col. 3:9–10, Titus 3:5).²⁸ Although the baptismal act is a one-time event, still its significance, the dying to sin and rising to life, lasts throughout one’s life. Thus the Baptism has a past and present, as well as a future, meaning and significance attached to it. Through Baptism,

he has the sign of God; that is to say, he has the baptism by which it is shown that his sins are all to be dead, and that he too is to die in grace and at the Last Day is to rise again to everlasting life, pure, sinless, and guiltless. . . . Finally through Baptism God allies and becomes one with the baptized person in a gracious covenant of comfort. God pours upon us his grace and Holy Spirit, who begins to slay nature and sin and to prepare us for death and the resurrection at the Last Day.²⁹

Lord’s Supper: Martin Luther explains the Lord’s Supper as the true body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ in and under the bread and wine which we Christians are commanded by Christ’s word to eat and drink. To him the incarnation and the Eucharist are parallels. Just as the flesh of Jesus Christ is the *figura* or form under which the body and the blood are hidden, so too are the bread and the wine *figurae* or forms under which the body and the blood are hidden. Thus, the bread and wine are not signs of the body and blood of Christ, but the form under and through which the body is offered to the communicant.³⁰ As with Baptism, the theme of the *Sacraments as a means of grace and as a promise and gift* dominate Luther’s understanding of Lord’s Supper. According to him, the Lord’s Supper is *a means of grace* through which one receives continual forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation, as well as victory over sin and hell and power for the new life. The Lord’s Supper is instituted by Christ as a daily food for sustenance so that faith may be refreshed, strengthened, and grow continually. Baptism leads us into a new life on earth; the bread guides us through death into eternal life.³¹ Luther’s understanding of the Lord’s Supper has important pastoral implications too. He understands that the Lord’s Supper is a sure sign of fellowship and incorporation with Christ and all saints (1 Cor 10:17). Through the Lord’s Supper, the believer shares in all the spiritual possessions of Christ and His saints (both blessings and sufferings). The believer is comforted and strengthened through this mutual sharing and is motivated to take seriously sharing in the sufferings and misfortunes of fellow believers in the community (Gal 6:2). Luther uses the imagery of the bread, made out of many grains ground and mixed together, and the wine, as the drops lose their own form, becoming the body of one common wine and drink to further explain his point. For Luther, through the interchange of blessings and misfortunes, we become one loaf, one bread, one body, one drink, and have all things in common. These actions foster a true fellowship and help us to celebrate the true significance of the Sacrament.³²

If sacraments carry such theological significance in the life of a believer, it is clear that Baptism and the Lord's Supper cannot assume a secondary place in our missiological deliberations. But an important question requires our serious attention: How can we enhance and sharpen our mission methods in those situations where Baptism and conversion entail serious socio-cultural and political ramifications? I think that answering this question should be an ongoing theological activity that requires complete humility, trust in God, theological sharpness, and pastoral sensitivity, as each new situation brings in fresh challenges. However, in light of our present discussion, I would like to reflect on several thoughts which might be of help.

Empathetic Understanding and Pastoral Sensitivity

We have already noted in this paper the socio-cultural, political, and economic challenges that a convert must face due to his new faith. These situations require great amounts of patience and understanding on the part of the church towards the non-baptized believers. In my pastoral ministry, I have witnessed several incidents in which a new believer delays his Baptism out of respect toward parents or other elders in the family. Often times, in a context where family and community ties are strong, I have found that to be a responsible and sensible act, because such a gesture conveys a message that the new believer is mindful of and respects the sentiments of family and community. On several occasions, this attitude has helped the new believer in his witness to get a listening ear from his non-believing family or community members toward the Gospel. Over time, long though it may be, it is no surprise to discover that the bridge that the new believer built with his family or community was indeed the work of the Holy Spirit. The results it brings might vary. Occasionally, over the course of time, the whole family is won over to the waters of Baptism. Other times, it might be a few members who are baptized, or just the new believer with the silent blessing of his family. But what needs to be noted in all those instances is that, the conversation is kept alive with the non-believing family members, and the mutual respect is not broken. Of course, there will also be other instances when the new believer needs to come out of his silent waiting period to heed to the voice of Jesus that "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—such a person cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14:26). However, in those situations, the role of the local church and the faith community becomes more significant and critical.

The communitarian responsibility and concern that undergirds Luther's understanding of the Lord's Supper should challenge the church to have empathy for and to provide both material and spiritual support for the non-baptized believer as he encounters various needs and struggles. Hoefer rightly points out that "the local church or the Christian community must not only make a place in its spiritual

fellowship to include the new believer but, if it is to see him survive, must open homes, intimate associations, channels of communication, and means of livelihood to him.”³³

Mission Sensitive Ecclesial Structures: Building Faith Communities— not Institutions

The nuanced socio-cultural and political situation of the predominantly non-Christian mission fields should guide our ecclesial structural decisions. Our commitment should be to build faith communities, not institutional empires. It is true that a faith community cannot escape an institutional dimension to its existence. However our structural ordering should be mission- context sensitive. I think a fresh appropriation of Luther’s understanding of power and ordering of the Church is very helpful in this regard. Because in Luther’s thought, one could find a great flexibility in ordering the sociological dimension of the Church.

To Luther, the Church is primarily a communion of saints—the gathering where the Gospel is preached and the Sacraments are administered. The Church is a spiritual reality in which the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the believers and keeps them with Jesus Christ. The Church is contingent upon faith. To become a member of this communion and also for the subsequent sanctification, what matters most is the faith.³⁴ What is central to Luther’s understanding of the Church is its two-dimensional nature. The Church, *coram Deo*, lives in the presence of God as an assembly of true believers. Although the Church, *coram Deo*, is invisible to human eyes, yet it is not a platonic republic. It has real existence. The church, *coram hominibus*, which is visible to human eyes is defined by human activity and action.³⁵ Here we can recognize “two important but unequal kinds of activities.”³⁶ The first is the ministry of the Word and Sacraments, which is commanded by God; without these, the Church, *coram Deo*, cannot exist. Second are those activities devised by human beings to carry out the ministry of the Word and Sacraments, which are often referred to as human traditions, human orders, and adiaphora. As Arand puts it “We can distinguish between these two activities in that the former deals with the ‘what’ we are given to do by God; whereas, the latter deals with ‘how’ we carry them out.”³⁷ The church polity, structure, and policies come under the latter category. The Confessions make it explicit that God has not mandated any particular form of church polity or ecclesiastical structure. The main concern regarding power and order in the Church is a matter of getting things done in their proper place. The congregations, according to their need, have freedom to arrange the polity deemed to be fitting according to the circumstances. However, the Confessions do offer certain cautions and guidelines to keep things in the right perspective. The Confessions emphasize that the office of the ministry alone has divine right and authority. It is the Gospel that comes through this office that creates

peace and harmony among people. The Gospel alone has the power of God that moves people to live and work together; it is not the rules and regulations. The church polity and its ordering fall below this office but their primary function is to aid not to obstruct the office of the ministry.³⁸

If the discussion above is taken seriously, then congregations do have their freedom to arrange the polity to meet the needs that arise from a mission context. The overarching concern should be to find a best way to administer Word and Sacraments to the people. I believe that the mission of the church should be to go, reach, and serve people where they are, not to insist and expect people to come to where we are, inside our Constantinian structures, to receive the ministry of Word and Sacraments. Our concern for catechizing process and providing spiritual, emotional, and social support to the non-baptized should be our prime delight.

I believe that one of the best ways to bring the ministry of Word and Sacraments to the non-baptized believers could be to take the model of house churches seriously.³⁹ House churches do not carry any institutional structures or official form in public eyes. The outsiders view it as a small prayer gathering or fellowship of a few like-minded people who meet in a particular house or in different houses each week. This safety and security could well provide a non-threatening atmosphere and space for the non-baptized believers to interact with one another, receive further catechizing, support, prayers, encouragement from the mature believers. This place could well become a place where the non-baptized journey themselves to the waters of Baptism and receive God's Word and the Lord's Supper regularly. Reaching people where they are is nothing but emulating the great mission model of our Master, who came to us to save us and who keeps coming to us through His Word and Sacraments to nourish and strengthen our lives.

Conclusion

We have seen that it is not the lack of desire or theological illiteracy on the part the non-baptized believer that keeps them away from Baptism. The non-baptized believers in our discussion neither reject nor consider Baptism as unnecessary. But the socio-cultural and political challenges make it difficult for them to come to the waters of Baptism. This then calls forth for an empathetic understanding and pastoral sensitivity in our missiological deliberations. Our call is "not to stand in judgment against the non-baptized believers,"⁴⁰ but to reach them where they are, taking the ministry of Word and Sacraments to them.

Endnotes

¹ For more discussion on this topic, see J. Paul Rajashekar, "The Question of Unbaptized Believers in the History of Mission in India," in *Debate on Mission: Issues from the Indian*

Context, ed. Herbert E. Hofer (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1979), 323–335.

² I am using the term “believers” for the unbaptized people in our discussion with a contention that they are justified through the preached Word.

³ Herbert E. Hofer, *Churchless Christianity* (California: William Carey Library, 2001), 59.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 58–63.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁶ T. M. Philip, “A Historical Survey of Baptismal Practices And Theologies,” in *Debate on Mission: Issues from the Indian Context*, ed. Herbert E. Hofer (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1979), 307–308.

⁷ M. M. Thomas “Baptism, the Church and Koinonia,” *Religion and Society* 19, no. 1 (1972), 89.

⁸ Hofer, *Churchless Christianity*, 153.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Unlike Western cultures, Indian culture is not marked with individualism. Here one is socialized to think about his/her family and community first before thinking about the self. More discussion on Indian cultural mindset, see Jai B. P. Sinha, *The Cultural Context of Leadership and Power* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995).

¹¹ Hindutva—literally translated as “Hinduness”—is an ideology that drives Hindu nationalism, which seeks to establish a Hindu state in India. The main goal of this majoritarian nationalism is to establish the political, cultural, and religious supremacy of Brahmanical Hinduism and to create a single, collective identity for Indians under Hindutva. Equating India with Hindu society, the political project of Hindutva is to create a Hindu nation. For more discussion, see Dibyesh Anand, *Hindu Nationalism in India and the Politics of Fear* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1–5.

¹² M. S. Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts* (Bangalore: Sahitya Sindhu Prakashana, 1966), 142.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁴ J. R. Chandran, “Baptism,” *Religion and Society* 19, no. 1 (1972), 51.

¹⁵ See Sebastian C. H. Kim, *In Search of Identity: Debates on Religious Conversion in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 38–42.

¹⁶ For example, see T. M. Kareem, “My Experience as Non-Baptized Believer in Christ” in *Debate on Mission: Issues from the Indian Context*, ed. Herbert E. Hofer (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1979), 366–370.

¹⁷ Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* (Madras: Christian Literature Service, 1969), 164.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 159–160.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 161.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Dalit Theology is a strand of liberation theology which had its beginning in the 1980s in India. The term *Dalit* comes from the Sanskrit *dal*. It means burst, split, broken or torn asunder, downtrodden, scattered, crushed and destroyed. In its usage, “Dalit” refers to the “untouchable” population of India, who constitute almost 20% of the total population (200 million). They were considered as impure according to Hindu understanding of “ritual pollution and purity.” Dalits are not included in the fourfold varna categories. Brahmins, who considered themselves as the most ritually pure occupied the top caste, and the Dalits, the “outcastes” who were considered as extremely polluted, were assigned occupations such as

removal of dead animals, scavenging and cleaning of the village, etc. The goal of Dalit theology is to act in solidarity and to act for liberation of Dalits from the historically oppressive religio-cultural and socio-economic structures. See George Oommen, "The Emerging Dalit Theology: A Historical Appraisal," *Indian History Review* 34, no. 1 (June 2000), 19–37.

²² J. Jayakiran Sebastian, "A Fresh Look at the Issues of Conversion and Baptism in Relation to Mission," accessed August 9, 2014, <http://www.religion-online.org>.

²³ For more discussion, see Brojendra Nath Banerjee, *Struggle for Justice to Dalit Christians* (New Delhi: New Age International (P) Ltd, 1997).

²⁴ For more discussion on issues relating to Baptism and Conversion, see Kim, *In Search of Identity*.

²⁵ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 36: Word and Sacrament II, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 58–59.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 30.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 32–33.

³⁰ David C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 75.

³¹ Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I, 67.

³² *Ibid.*, 57–62 and Martin Luther, *Luther's Small Catechism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991), 30–32.

³³ Hofer, *Churchless Christianity*, 153.

³⁴ Edward W. A. Koehler, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1952), 237–238.

³⁵ Charles P. Arand, "A Two-Dimensional Understanding of the Church for the Twenty-First Century," *Concordia Journal* 33, no. 2 (April 2007): 147–152.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ For more discussion, see Paul L. Schrieber, "Power and Order in the Church 'According to the Gospel': In Search of the Lutheran Ethos," *Concordia Journal* 26, no. 1 (2000). P. E. Kretzmann, "Apostolate, Preaching Ministry, Pastorate, Synodical Office," *Concordia Journal* 15, no. 3 (1989).

³⁹ My proposal for house churches for the mission fields is not something new. This is a model which is being practiced for more than a century and is still in practice with much success, in the mission fields of India. Two examples from my personal experience would suffice this point. My home congregation in Trivandrum, India, was started and remained as a house church in the 1960s for over a decade, before it became a "formal" church. Same is true with the first congregation I served from 2001–2006. This church for more two decades met in different houses before it transitioned itself to become a "formal" church. For a brief discussion on House Churches, see Victor Raj, "The Book of Generations," *Missio Apostolica* 22, no. 1 (May 2014), 143–144.

⁴⁰ Hofer, *Churchless Christianity*, 167.