

# Using Luther's Concept of *Deus absconditus* for Christian Mission to Muslims

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## Thesis:

Luther's concept of *deus absconditus*, humankind's common experience of "God-hidden" – in contrast to *deus revelatus*, "God-revealed-in-Christ" – is a fundamental resource for Lutheran mission theology and practice. Although generally unused (yes, unknown) in today's mission discussions it is a unique resource for Christian mission in today's "world of faiths" – especially to Muslims.

## Prolog:

I know of no Luther texts that speak very directly about Christian mission to the Turks. In scattered places [e.g., his Ascension Day sermons on the Mark 16 pericope for that day, Mark's version of the Great Commission] he encourages Christians who come under Turkish rule, or are prisoners-of-war, to be evangelists among the Turks. However, he knows that it won't be easy, and may even be impossible. But he does not speak of a program of "foreign missions" anywhere that I have found. My proposal in this paper is to take Luther's notion of *deus*

*absconditus* and work from it to build a theology of mission for today, not only to Muslims, but to all people in the “sea of faiths” (some even claiming to be Christian) in today’s pluralist world.

## **I. Introduction: Are Missions Missing in Luther’s Theology? The Accepted Wisdom in Missiology Today Says Yes.**

Lutheran churches did not move actively into “foreign” mission work in the wake of the Reformation era nor in the next two centuries that followed. This delay has nourished the widespread opinion that in Luther – and other 16th century Lutheran reformers – “We miss not only missionary action, but even the idea of missions, in the sense in which we understand them today. And this . . . because fundamental theological views hindered them from giving their activity, and even their thoughts, a missionary direction.” So says Gustav Warneck in his *History of Protestant Missions*, 1882ff. [Citation from the 1901 English translation, p. 9]

Warneck’s work was itself a critical response to other Lutheran mission scholars of his day (Ostertag, Plitt, Kalkar) who claimed the opposite for Luther. But, as far as I know, Warneck’s work was the only one that got translated into English. And English is the language of missiology. So his judgment has become the accepted wisdom among today’s mission scholars, including some who are Lutherans.

## **II. An Additional Barrier in**

# Missiology Today that Sidelines Luther

The reigning blueprint in today's missiology is "*Missio Dei*," a *terminus technicus* proposed for Christian mission just 50 years ago (1952) at the International Mission Conference in Willingen, Germany. The current use of the concept (which may not be what Willingen intended) across the missiological spectrum – from Mennonites and Evangelicals to Mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics – sees God's mission to be all the good things God is doing in and for the world, with Jesus the Christ as God's grand finale in that mission. Christians thus are called to "join in God's mission" with its accents on peace, justice, wholeness of human life and care for the environment – along with salvation for sinners. Important for Lutheran perceptions is to note that there is no fundamental distinction between God's salvation agenda in Christ and all the other good things – care and preservation – that God is doing throughout creation.

It is therefore no surprise that such a unitary vision of *Missio Dei* – a big package of all the good things God is doing – pushes Luther to the sidelines. For Luther's basic claim is that God has TWO missions in the world and that all God's work, even all of God's "good" work, cannot be brought under a single rubric. Luther reads the Scriptures proclaiming that God operates ambidextrously – left hand and right hand – and that these two operations are quite different. One classic text for this is 2 Cor. 3 where the apostle distinguishes the serious differences between God's two ministries (*diakoniai*), God's two covenants or dispensations (*diakhkai*). Those two Greek terms are the closest NT words we have for mission—and in using two Greek terms, the apostle says God pursues two missions, not just one, in the world. Mission theology drawing on such a left-hand/right-hand distinction in God's work is an almost unknown voice in today's

missiology. I will seek to show below that Luther does have a mission theology, and that it builds on his Biblical exegesis about an ambidextrous God.

Today's regnant missiological paradigm built on such unitary *Missio Dei* theology envisions mission practice as follows: to seek out the good and godly elements, God's "grace," already revealed among a given people before the Christian gospel ever gets there. When that data is in hand the mission-task then is to link God's Grace-revelation-in-Christ to the Grace-of-God people have already encountered in their lives. Mission does bring something new, but not qualitatively new. "When the missionaries arrived with the Gospel, they found that God was already there working among the people." That is one way such mission theology gets expressed nowadays.

Luther would ask: "Which God was already working there? God-hidden or God-revealed?" Better expressed, since Luther is a Biblical monotheist: "The one and only God was already there, but in which format? Hidden or revealed?" And if the people did not already have "the merits and benefits of Christ" in the faith they lived, that would answer the question.

### **III. Some Critical Reflection on this—**

1) The *Missio Dei* notion just described builds implicitly (even if unconsciously) on the medieval scholastic axiom: *Gratia non tollit naturam, sed perfecit*. [God's] grace does not abolish nature, but perfects it.

2) The Lutheran Reformation rejected that axiom for Christian theology and replaced it with a law/promise hermeneutic for reading the scriptures, and a corollary left-hand/right-hand

hermeneutic for reading the world. That two-phase hermeneutic grounds Lutheran missiology in relating the Word to the world.

3) Thus God's manifold works in creation, the first creation – good and godly though they surely are – are distinctly different from what God is doing in Christ, God's new creation. They are God's good gifts (e.g., Luther's listing of them in the Small Catechism on the Creed's first article), but not (yet) God's grace, the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."

4) One of Luther's favored terms for God at work in the world apart from Christ is *deus absconditus*. He uses this term with several different nuances. In all of them, however, God's hiddenness does not mean that there is no evidence of God at all. *Deus absconditus* is a revealer. Theistic evidence abounds. But in that abundant evidence a fundamental aspect of God remains un-revealed – specifically the God-data needed "for us and for our salvation."

## Three nuances

a) God's work in creation proceeds via "God's masks," the *larva dei*. God's creatures are the masks, with God hiding behind the masks. That is already a "mercy" on God's part, for if we were to confront *deus nudus* [God naked], we would die on the spot.

b) Yet even though it is a "mercy" on God's part to stay behind creation's masks, that much mercy does not yet redeem anything in creation, least of all humans. Even more "hidden" in God's left-hand working in creation is God's mercy that does redeem, God's mercy toward sinners. That mercy, the *favor dei* [God's favor], comes as *deus revelatus* [God revealed]. That term for Luther is not just any "pulling back the veil" on God's part, but God exposing a merciful heart to sinners – both in its promissory format in the OT and its fulfilled format in the

crucified and risen Messiah.

c) Yet even here in the mercy actions of *deus revelatus*, another sort of hiddenness surfaces. God's mercy in Christ comes *sub cruce tecta* [covered under a cross], not so much "hidden" so that it is not visible at all, but "covered" under what looks like the opposite [*sub contrario objectu* = under its contrary opposite]. The most bizarre contrary opposite, of course, is the cross itself, both Christ's own and our own. Yet Christ's cross is manifold mercy. By his stripes we are healed. And taking up our own cross to follow him conforms us to God's same mercy-management "for us and for our salvation."

5) I propose Luther's first two meanings of "hidden God" above – God hiding behind creation's masks, which leaves God's saving mercy still hidden – as a planet-wide common denominator for building a Lutheran mission theology. Both the person witnessing to Christ and the conversation partner not (yet) enjoying "the merits and benefits of Christ" have this broad base of common experience of *deus absconditus*. Granted, that's not yet Gospel, not yet redemptive, but it is a common starting point, where there are common places for conversation—and finally for the question: "How do you cope in your encounters with hidden God? You tell me how you cope, and I'll tell you how I do." That is a much more "Lutheran" question to focus on than "What do you believe about God? You tell me and I'll tell you."

## IV. Finally to Luther

1. At the end of his explanation of the Apostles Creed in the Large Catechism Luther says: "These 3 articles of the Creed, therefore, separate and distinguish us Christians from all other people on earth. All who are outside this Christian people, whether heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites – even though they believe in and worship only the one, true God

– nevertheless do not know what his attitude is toward them. They cannot be confident of his love and blessing, and therefore they remain in eternal wrath and damnation. For they do not have the LORD Christ, and, besides, they are not illuminated and blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.” [Book of Concord. Kolb-Wengert, edd., p. 440 (66)]

[German text: “Daruemb scheiden und sondern diese Artikel des Glaubens uns Christen von allen andern Leuten auf Erden. Denn was ausser der Christenheit ist, es seien Heiden, Tuerken, Jueden oder falsche Christen und Heuchler, ob sie gleich nur einen wahrhaftigen Gott glaeuben und anbeten, so wissen sie doch nicht, was [wie] er gegen ihn gesinnet ist, koennen sich auch keiner Liebe noch Guts zu ihm versehen, daruemb sie in ewigen Zorn und Verdammnis bleiben. Denn sie den Herrn Christum nicht haben, dazu mit keinen Gaben durch den heiligen Geist erleuchtet und begnadet sind.”]

2. People who “believe in and worship only the one, true God [but] nevertheless do not know what his attitude is toward them” are people who have indeed encountered God, God as *deus absconditus*, to use Luther’s vocabulary. They have not encountered *deus revelatus*, God revealed in Christ.

3. With no “Christ-encounter,” they “do not know what God’s attitude is toward them,” viz., God’s merciful attitude toward sinners. They do not know the Gospel. Not knowing the Gospel (never having heard it), they cannot trust it, and the last two sentences in the citation above are the inevitable chain reaction.

4. Luther does not confine this analysis to the Turks, but to all “*was ausser der Christenheit ist.*” So initially I propose to proceed with the same general perspective for all mission theology reflection, and later come to specific focus on the

Turks, i.e., Islam.

5. At first Luther's evaluation of heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites is surprising: "They believe in and worship only the one, true God . . ." "Only the one, true God"? What does that mean? Since Christ is absent in such believing and worshipping – "they do not have the LORD Christ" – the object of their faith and worship must be *deus absconditus*, the one, true God, but God with his mercy-for-sinners undisclosed.

6. Remember that the hiddenness of God does not mean that there are no signals of God at all in people's lived experience. On the contrary. God's creation abounds with such signals, as Paul says in Romans 1:19ff: they have been evident "ever since the creation of the world." But not so the Gospel, God's "mercy to make sinners righteous." Out there in our general experience of God in creation such Good News is *abscondita*, hidden – often contradicted – in the God-encounters all people have in God's creation. That Gospel is what *deus revelatus* is all about (Rom. 1:16f): "For in it [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith."

7. *Deus revelatus* is God in the Gospel. *Deus absconditus* is God in the law. It is the same "one and only true God" but as different as left-hand and right-hand. Put into the format of the creed: encountering *deus absconditus* [Romans 1] is a first-article relationship with God – in whatever form it may take – but not (yet) a second-article or third-article encounter with God that leads to "new creation."

8. Because *deus absconditus* encounters with God are common among all human creatures – those who trust Christ as well as those who do not – there is common ground here, common "God-experience" as *Anknuepfungspunkt* for Christians to engage in



God-talk with “heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites.”

9. This proposal is in conscious contrast to the widespread axiom in missiology today that “common experience of God’s **grace**” is a point of contact for Christian conversation with people of other faiths. The Good News of God’s mercy in Christ is not “common experience” in the God-encounters of daily life, even those that do indeed bring blessings. Those are *deus absconditus* encounters, if for no other reason than that God’s mercy in Christ is not accessible there. It is *abscondita*.

10. Our common human experience of *deus absconditus* is not all gloom and doom. It includes all the gifts of creation that make human life possible and even enjoyable. See Luther’s gift-list in his explanation to the creed’s first article in the Small Catechism. “*Alles ist Gabe.*” But there always comes a “but.” “But” none of those good gifts suffice to get sinners forgiven, to remedy the “*des alles ich ihm [Gott] schueldig bin*” [for all of which I am already in debt to God] with which Luther concludes that first-article explanation in his catechism. God’s gifts of creation are gifts that obligate us receivers to “thank and to praise, to serve and obey him. This is most certainly true.” And where is there one human who is “paid up” in fulfilling these obligations? For just one day, let alone for a lifetime?

11. Hidden here is God’s grace and mercy for sinners who aren’t paying up – who can’t pay up – their “debts.” Forgiveness is also a gift, but a grace-gift with a qualitatively different character from God’s gifts in creation. This grace-gift covers failed obligations. It does not impose new ones. But what about the common “God-experience” of unfulfilled obligations, the common experience of the consequences of “*lex semper accusat*”?

12. *Deus absconditus* encounters have their downsides, also their dreadful downsides. And that too is common God-experience throughout the human race. What might we learn from beginning interreligious conversation with the daily lived experience of “God hidden”? How do encounters with the hidden God appear in the experience and perception of people of other faiths? That leads to the opening question for mission conversation proposed above: “How do YOU cope?” Where in their own “grace” experiences do they find resources for coping with the obligatory aspect of creaturely gifts received, and with the consequences of failed accountability in meeting such divine debts?

13. Not exactly parallel, but close, are these words from Kosuke Koyama, once a Christian missionary in Buddhist Thailand. He discovered common denominators in linking his own “non-grace” – yes, non-faith – experience with that of his Buddhist neighbors. “We are just alike. We want money. We want position. We want honor. We are both concerned about ourselves. We are failing to practice what the Buddha or Christ commanded. We are quick in judging others and very slow in judging ourselves.” Koyama, himself a Luther-devotee, does not link this to *deus absconditus*. Yet his words do signal what both he and his Buddhist neighbors “don’t have, don’t receive” from their common daily life encounters with *deus absconditus*.

14. And “having” is one of the key terms in the Luther citation above. “To have Christ”– *Christum habere* – is a regular synonym for “faith” in Luther’s vocabulary. “Glaubstu, Hastu; Glaubstu nicht, hastu nicht.” [When you believe, you have (something). When you don’t believe, you don’t have (it).] Faith is a having, a possessing of a resource not had before. And with new resources, you can cope as you were not able to cope before. Yes, even cope with dark side of encounters with *deus absconditus*.

15. So a missionary coming from this *deus absconditus* perspective would first of all listen as people tell of the God they believe and worship, listen for what they do have, anticipating that since/if they do not claim the Lord Christ, they do indeed not have him. Signals of such “not having” are consistent with *deus absconditus* encounters: “not knowing God’s [merciful] attitude toward them, [consequently] having no confidence of God’s love and blessing, remaining in eternal wrath and damnation, not being illuminated and blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.”

16. Note that all of these benefits are centered in one’s relationship to God, *coram deo* data, and all of them a “having,” a possessing that people did not have before. E.g., the freedom that comes with “having Christ” is first of all a freedom at the point where it is often least expected: *coram deo*, in our relationship with God. The unitary *Missio Dei* perspective widespread today, while not ignoring faith (=having Christ), in no way makes faith’s *coram deo* agenda so central to the mission task as Luther does here. Primary items in such *missio dei* agenda are in Luther’s language God’s left-hand work in the world and/or the fruits of faith, once the *coram deo* agenda is healed. But the focus on “having Christ” for *coram deo* healing is a very minor melody. To modify Hamlet a bit: “To have, or not to have (the merits and benefits of Christ) – that is the question.”

17. It ought to be obvious. In order for someone to “have Christ,” someone else must offer Christ. Christian mission is precisely such an offering. In Apology 4 Melanchthon makes the point that the fundamental verb accompanying God’s promise is “offer” (in contrast to the law’s fundamental verb “require”). Both Luther and Melanchthon complained that the medieval church so often “made Christ unnecessary,” and with that it was joining the ranks of the Turks and Jews. The upshot of “sharing” *deus*

*absconditus* experience in mission conversation and dialogue is to listen for and to hear those signals of people's need for Christ – the same need(s) the Christian also has living in the same *deus absconditus* world we all do. It is a *coram deo* need which “necessitates Christ.” That Christ-offer is what the missionary is called to do.

## **IV. Now to Islam: Deus Absconditus and Deus Revelatus in the Life Experience of Muslims.**

Selections from texts in the Appendix below:

1. Luther Engelbrecht, missionary to Muslims in India: “What’s Good, What’s New in the Gospel for Muslims?”
2. Lamin Sanneh. Born and raised in Muslim West Africa [Gambia], now Prof. of Missions and World Christianity at Yale University. “Muhammed, Prophet of Islam, and Jesus Christ, Image of God: A Personal Testimony,” *Int’l Bulletin of Missionary Research* (October 1984), p. 169- 174.
3. “Muslims Tell . . . ‘Why I Chose Jesus,’” an article in *Mission Frontiers* (March 2001)

## **V. Some Conclusions**

- 1) No one’s day-in/day-out religious experience – whatever their religion – is grace alone.
- 2) To center inter-religious conversation on grace-experiences leaves vast areas of God- experience untouched, and almost guarantees that Christian grace-talk, centered in the crucified and risen Messiah, will be blurred.

3. The grace of God in Christ is not simply an unexpected and undeserved experience of goodness, as one missiologist defines it. It is rather a surprising fresh word of mercy from a Creator whom we chronically distrust, and to whom we are unendingly in debt.

4) Might not this fact – Christians' own chronic distrust of their creator, with all its consequences, and their willingness to confess it – serve as a leaven in the dialogue? Even a leveler? Christians come with paradoxical God-experiences and paradoxical faith-admissions. "Lord I believe; help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24). And Christians admit to being "simultaneously saint and sinner."

5. Thus, Christians are no "better" in their moral life or the strength of their faith than their dialogue partners. They might even be worse. Their claim is not about themselves, but about a Word they have heard that encourages them to live in hope before the face of God despite all evidence to the contrary.

6. Inter-religious conversation that sidelines the negative God-experiences is not speaking the whole truth. To talk about Christian grace-experience without specifying the antithetical God-experience it must cope with does not give the dialogue partner a fair shake. Nor does it clarify the Good and New in the Good News of the one Christians call Lord.

7. When Christians do not hear from the dialogue partners how they articulate their own negative daily life experiences of the divine, and what resources they "have" to bring them through their own valleys of the shadow, then Christians are left impoverished, and the conversation is skewed.

8. It may sound negative to push religious dialogue in the direction of humankind's common experience of *deus absconditus*, but it does bear promise. First, it ecumenizes the project to

include the whole human race. Everyone has personal data useful for the conversation. Everybody can do it. It is not the preserve of the elite. Second, it's existential, not cerebral, – about life, not beliefs. Though beliefs may eventually enter, the conversation begins on common ground. Remember the Koyama citation above. Third, the standard barricades in Christian-Muslim conversations – Trinity, Christ's deity, jihad, morality – are moved away from center focus. Fourth, it's "easier" to get to Gospel. What the Christian conversation partner has to offer is the Jesus story as Good News – something Good and something New – both for Christians coping with their own experience of *deus absconditus*, and for the parallel experience of their Muslim conversation partners.

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## Appendices

### APENDIX A.

Luther Engelbrecht gives his reflections on 25 years in mission to Muslims in India.

"Why Muslims choose Jesus? What for them is Good News? The quranic material about Jesus is quite attractive. The extensive Islamic traditional material [Hadith] in my opinion, is even more so. What more do we have to offer? The Incarnation and the Cross, against both of which most Muslims are well inoculated. Following what I understood was our Lord's own self presentation ("Messianic secret" and all), I shared Jesus with my Muslim "audience" in India particularly as Luke portrayed Him, serving both genders and all segments of society with love and compassion, portraying the "signs" that Jesus did (of which the

Qur'an and Hadith have an impressive array) rather as expressions of love and compassion instead of signs of power. Of course, the only "sign" that Jesus made much of (except perhaps in the "semeion" Gospel of John!) could come only at the end, again as in the self presentation of Jesus.

As the meaning of "agape" emerges in the ministry of Jesus and the involvement of the Father therein, its and His ultimate expression in the Cross takes on new meaning. The cross denied in the Qur'an represents the defeat of God and His special prophet/apostle/word/spirit 'Isa ibn Maryam. The true Cross of Christian faith and proclamation is something else, coming at the end and followed by the resurrection and the ascension in different order and with completely different significance from the quranic story. Islam's "Theology of Glory"-approach, of course, is more attractive to "the flesh". Those who "choose" to follow the crucified One rather than the Victor at Badr and Khaybar (as today's Muslim Palestinians remember!) are usually people who resonate with the Prince of Peace (would that all those who profess to be His followers were the same!).

## **APPENDIX B.**

From Lamin Sanneh Born and raised in Muslim West Africa [Gambia], now Prof. of Missions and World Christianity at Yale University, member of the Roman Catholic Church

Herewith a summary of his article [not easy to understand] in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Oct. 1984, "Muhammed, Prophet of Islam, and Jesus Christ, Image of God: A Personal Testimony."

1."Divinity is compromised by personification in Islam." [For God to get close to being a human person would contradict God being God.] "Nevertheless the Prophet came very close to

personifying God in handing to us God's revelation. He was more than a prophet. We were taught to imitate his example. He became for us an intercessor. At that level 'he bore our infirmities.'"

2. Citing specific passages of the Q: "Within its own terms Islam was affirming the inescapability of personal religion." "Muhammad as the devotional magnetic pole of Islam brought personal religion within range of the ordinary worshiper. But he also released us from a cramped transcendentalism" [Allah being so far away].

3. "This was an abatement, not of God's sovereignty, but of that view of it which rejects that it could have human proportions." [Sanneh is constantly arguing with the "orthodox" interpreters of Islam who claim that Allah is untouched by anything human.] "For the fact is that God did establish decisive and meaningful contact with the historical man Muhammad." M. was our ally and help. "M. the intercessor had . . . brought God within range [of us]." "This makes short work of rigid transcendence."

4. "If human striving [jihad] is worth anything at all, it has to be worth the Creator having a stake in it, of his being at risk in our risks and vindicated in our moral life." This leads Sanneh to speak of "God's unfathomable compassion, what in my language we call his 'numbing' capacity to take on our suffering." Thus there is "intimacy [which] rests on a genuine reciprocity. If we can go on from there . . . the gap narrows considerably between that and the biblical account of Jesus Christ as the divine breakthrough in human form."

5. This possibility "scandalized Muslim thinkers, and a defense was quickly mounted to guard against adopting a human role for God. Yet even al-Ghazali (d.1111), foremost critic of making Allah human, still leans in that direction. "We were shackled to dogma . . . [B]ut our hearts knew better, and here [in the texts



he cites] we have both the Q and the Hadith as our ally.” “I was in my search increasingly afflicted with the sharp dissonance between this Inner Reason and the fixed center of Exterior Authority. Of course, by looking both at the religious sources before the cold hand of systematization fell on them and at the rich devotional literature available since that time, the dissonance is less pronounced.”

6. Mohammed as both deliverer of revelation & “intercessor par excellence” opened the door to “the demands of human need [that] required that the door to personal experience of God be unbarred. M.was the gate through which people, stirred by life’s hurricane, would rise and affirm that God went on his knees & came within human focus. Our trials and misfortunes, as well as our triumphs & blessings, are also his. . . . The prophet, any prophet, is in this regard not just God’s missionary, sent to represent Someone, who would not deign to come himself. The prophet is God’s mission, the prince who can feel in his veins the heartthrob of God’s solicitude. We are a spiritual nobility, conceived in the womb of divine compassion, and the prophets are our kin. Through their earthly exposure we catch a reflection of the stature God also conferred on us at creation.”

7. “The clearest expression of this inner Reason is the gospel affirmation that although the Word was God, ‘it became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.’ . . . Finally, the wraps are taken off and God deals with us outside the veils. God is in the picture now.” [He cites Jeremiah 31 new covenant, and Hebrews 1 & 2 “many ways of old in which God spoke, but now....”] “By adopting for himself the full logical consequences of the moral significance of human existence, God achieved a stupendous breakthrough in Jesus Christ, and no one who is familiar with his ministry and teaching can fail to discern in the following passage the clear-cut details of his portrait even though it existed long before his earthly life.” Then comes the Is. 53:3-5

citation.

8. “ God, who normally delegates his authority to the prophets, is committed to the logic of that delegation by being willing to express himself in one such prophet who, by virtue of that special relationship, must henceforth be described by the strong language of filiation [Son of God]. Rather than rendering him immune to the tragedy of human disobedience, such a prophet is in fact the supreme subject and victim of its consequences. ‘It pleased the Lord to bruise him.’ No proximity to the human condition is more poignant than that. It is too lifelike to be mistaken for what it is, a full-blooded encapsulation of the original divine intention. God through him would know our plight & feel our sorrow. Jesus is God in full engagement. Put to grief in the unspeakable agony of human sinfulness, Jesus is the definitive measure of God’s ‘numbing’ capacity to take on our suffering, the Suffering Servant now unenviably receiving the double *salat* (=the fivefold daily prayer. Meaning not clear.) of God & human beings. The Suffering Servant is God’s self-portrait, & our unflattering self-witness.”

9. “Our perception of this truth is indispensable to our obtaining a right and fulfilling relationship with God. Redemptive suffering is at the very core of moral truth, and the prophets were all touched by its fearsome power. But only One embodied it as a historical experience, although all, including the Prophet of Islam, walked in its shadow. Those who consult their hearts will hear for themselves the persistent ordinance proclaiming God’s ineffable grace.”

## **APPENDIX C.**

**Muslims tell . . . “Why I Chose Jesus,”** an article in *Mission Frontiers* (March 2001)

This is a Fuller Seminary report drawn from questionnaires in the past 10 years filled out by 600 believers who came from Muslim backgrounds. Here are the captions in the article which collect the responses:

A sure salvation. Hope of salvation is “a bit elusive for many, even the most devoted Muslims.” “With Jesus I have confidence about the end of my life.” Taught that the “bridge to heaven was as thin as a human hair,” an Indonesian woman came to faith in Christ “realizing that she could not save herself, but that Christ could.” A West African woman wanted to know for certain that her sins had been forgiven and washed away. A Persian emigre to the US said: “Oh yes, I feel more forgiven, more assurance of forgiveness.” An Egyptian man stated “Assurance of salvation is the main attraction of Christianity for a Muslim.” A Javanese man said simply, “After I received Jesus, I had confidence concerning the end of my life.”

Jesus. His character “overwhelmingly attractive.” He never retaliated. His love for the poor. The Sermon on the Mount. When asked what particular teaching attracted him, an Egyptian man stated simply, “the crucified Messiah.”

Dreams and Visions. One-fourth of those surveyed state that dreams and visions were key in drawing them to Christ. A Malay woman heard Jesus in a vision saying: “If you want to come to me, just come.” Feeling that she had tried her entire life to reach God without success, she now saw God initiating the effort to reach her through Jesus.

Power of Love. Nearly half of all Muslims now following Christ “affirmed that the love of God was a critical key in their decision.” God’s love for me in Jesus. Christian people who love one another. A Bengali man says he was “subdued by the revelation [sic!] of God’s great love, his own sinfulness, and

Christ's great sacrifice for him." A West African man from Gambia says simple: "God loves me just as I am." His experience in Islam was "rigorous submission to God" yet he could never "please God."

Personal relationship with God. Proximity or nearness to God, contrasted with "no possibility of walking together with God" in Islam. Another contrasted "being adopted as God's son" with its Islamic opposite: "God is universal and has no family. There was no way of knowing what God was like." [sic!] The author concludes: "Apparently, when Muslims do have an opportunity to see the love of Christ revealed [sic!] in all its fullness, they are finding a life with Christ quite compelling."

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