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# The Qur'an and the Doctrine of Private Revelation: A Theological Proposal

Theological Studies  
2015, Vol. 76(3) 531–549  
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DOI: 10.1177/0040563915593484  
tsj.sagepub.com  


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## Abstract

The article argues that the Catholic category of “private revelation” in concert with the Church’s ecclesial documents, theological reflections, and spiritual practices allows the Qur’an in principle to be considered revelatory. After reviewing recent dogmatic developments on revelation and religious pluralism, the article discusses the theology that undergirds the Catholic understanding of private revelation and finally applies the language of private revelation to Muhammad’s experience in Mecca and Medina.

## Keywords

*Lumen gentium*, Muhammad, *Nostra aetate*, private revelation, prophecy, Qur’an, religious pluralism, Vatican II

Muslims believe that in the seventh century in the Arabian city of Mecca, the angel Gabriel began to deliver divine messages to the Muslim prophet, Muhammad.<sup>1</sup> These revelations continued until Muhammad’s death and comprise the 114 chapters of the Qur’an. Muhammad’s followers viewed him as the

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1. I am grateful to Nicholas Lash, Peter Ochs, Frank Clooney, S.J., Kevin Hughes, Joseph Curran, Grant Kaplan, Jeremy Wilkins, and Dominic Doyle, who commented on earlier drafts of this article.

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last of a line of prophets, a line that includes Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus. What should a Catholic make of these revelations? Catholics view Jews as the chosen people who were given the Covenant of Abraham, receiving the irrevocable calling of God (Rom 11:29). Jews are the tree upon which Christianity was grafted (Rom 11:17–24). But how should Catholics relate to Muslims who also claim our biblical lineage?

The last 50 years of the Church's engagement with other faith traditions have broken open the world of resources for Catholic theology. In this article I take a necessary step beyond interreligious encounter to reexamine categories within the Catholic tradition.<sup>2</sup> By laying the groundwork for examining the Qur'an's revelatory nature, I turn to neglected resources within the Catholic theological tradition and argue that the Church has reasons to be open in principle to postbiblical revelation, including what Muhammad received in Mecca and Medina. In sum, revelation in the Qur'an can be viewed through Catholic truth claims, not in spite of them. These proposals are for Catholics; Muslims would, of course, not be satisfied with the findings of this article. With this in mind, I contend that the Church should employ the same reasoning it uses to understand the category of "private revelation" in the new arena of religious pluralism.

My method is one of "excavation," of mining the Church's ecclesial documents, theological reflections, and spiritual practices.<sup>3</sup> My first section reviews recent dogmatic developments concerning revelation and religious pluralism. In particular, I appeal to Vatican II's Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra aetate* [*NA*]), Dialogue and Proclamation (DP) by the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, and *Dominus Iesus* (*DI*) issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). While *DI* tried to close some avenues opened by *NA* and built upon by DP, it failed to offer the necessary conceptual clarity that keeps these new boundaries in place.<sup>4</sup> My argument offers a way to clarify

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2. My own approach to this question in large part grows out of my participation in the practice of scriptural reasoning, in which Jews, Christians, and Muslims read passages from sacred scriptures together that are bundled under a selected theme. For more information on the practice of scriptural reasoning and a list of resources, visit <http://www.scripturalreasoning.org>. (All URLs cited herein were accessed March 29, 2015.) See also *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning*, ed. David F. Ford and C. C. Pecknold (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006).
  3. Rahner notes that much theological reflection needs to be done on the prophetic element in the church and what this means regarding private revelation (*Visions and Prophecies*, trans. Charles Henkey and Richard Strachan [New York: Herder & Herder, 1963] 21). Most of this work on prophecy has been done in France, Germany, and Italy; it has received little attention in English-speaking countries. For a recent outstanding study and helpful bibliography in English, see Niels Christian Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-Biblical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2007).
  4. While documents issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) do not have authority to close avenues opened up by decrees of ecumenical councils, I accept relevant documents from both sources as authoritative. With respect to *Dominus Iesus* (*DI*), this article is, in the words of Francis Sullivan, a "response that respects the authority

the confusion embedded in *DI*. This clarification marries the concerns of *DI* with the openness of *NA* and *DP*, thus setting the stage for my constructive argument.

My second section analyzes the theology that undergirds the category “private revelation” in the Church. It proposes that the possibility of private revelation has to be affirmed to delineate the scope of such revelation.<sup>5</sup> My third section applies the language of private revelation to the question that opens this article: whether Catholics may consider the Qur'an to be revelatory. Adopting the principles of discernment already at work in instances of private revelation to their non-Christian counterparts, my argument simultaneously upholds not only the recognition of holiness and truth found in other religions that *NA* invites us to consider but also the universal salvific validity of Christ on which *DI* so insists. In short, the Christian tradition provides not only the grounds for recognizing private revelation outside Christianity but also the tools for critically analyzing it.

## Recent Dogmatic Developments

Three crucial moments in dogmatic reflections from the past 50 years are worth considering. The first two, occurring in *NA* and further developed in *DP*, move toward an openness to Qur'anic revelation.<sup>6</sup> The third moment, found in *DI*, rejects certain ways of interpreting that openness, but leaves unresolved how to interpret adequately the revelation found in the Qur'an. I trace the development of these three moments below.

*NA*, expressing the spirit of Vatican II, recognizes that religions outside Christianity address the “restlessness of the human heart” by offering “‘ways,’ comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites.”<sup>7</sup> These rules of life and sacred rites “often reflect

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that the Pope has given it by delegation and by confirmation” (Francis A. Sullivan, S.J., “Introduction and Ecclesiological Issues,” in *Sic et Non: Encountering Dominus Iesus*, ed. Stephen Pope and Charles Hefling [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002] 47–56, at 47).

5. While the Qur'an gives rise to the question of this article, the body of the argument establishes an openness in principle to non-Christian revelation in general.
6. *NA* was among the most contested Vatican II documents; it received 88 negative votes, 2,221 positive, and three invalid. On the struggles of passage, see John W. O'Malley, S.J., *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard University, 2008) esp. 218–26, 277, 308. While *NA* represents the climax of the council's openness to non-Catholic religions, this orientation is found throughout the conciliar documents. Jacques Dupuis, S.J., highlights the pertinent texts in his “Interreligious Dialogue in the Church's Evangelizing Mission: Twenty Years of Evolution of a Theological Concept,” in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives; Twenty-Five Years After (1962–1987)*, 3 vols., ed. René Latourelle (New York: Paulist, 1989) 3:237–63, esp. 241–43. See also Jacques Dupuis, S.J., *Jesus Christ and His Spirit: Theological Approaches* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1977) chap. 9, esp. 153–55; chap. 11, esp. 196–202.
7. *NA* no. 2, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html). For brief background on the development of *NA*, see Thomas Stransky, C.S.P., “The Genesis of *Nostra Aetate*,” *America* 193.12 (October 24, 2005) 8–12.

a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men,”<sup>8</sup> and *NA* famously asserts that “the Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions.”<sup>9</sup> The document does not outline how Catholics are to recognize non-Christian truth claims or encounters with holiness in other faith traditions, but it does leave open the possibility of this recognition or potential encounter. As a result, this document generated several avenues of theological inquiry.

On a practical level, *NA* asks Catholics to enter into dialogue and collaborate with followers of other religions in order to “preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the sociocultural values found among these men.”<sup>10</sup> With respect to Muslims in particular, the document affirms:

They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.<sup>11</sup>

If, as *NA* explicitly affirms, Muslims honor the same God Christians do, and if, as the document readily acknowledges, Muslims and Christians share an overlapping web of beliefs, then we should not be surprised to find the Qur’an to be a vehicle of grace in Muslim communities.<sup>12</sup> More importantly, if Muslims are being sanctified through an encounter with the Qur’an, Christians should consider the possibility that this sort of interaction could bring Christians to a deeper appropriation of their own faith. Much like Marian apparitions that “bring the Gospel to life in a prophetic manner in new historic or geographic situations,”<sup>13</sup> Qur’anic revelations, while not adding to the deposit of the faith, might enliven Catholics at a particular historical moment, helping them to more fully understand and live out the gospel. If Catholics were to understand Muhammad as hearing divine messages as the children at Lourdes or Fatima allegedly did, they might be encouraged to learn from Muslim beliefs and practices.

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8. *NA* no. 2.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.* no. 3.

12. Curiously, *NA* mentions neither the Qur’an nor Muhammad nor Islam, but rather restricts itself to “Muslims.” The Muslim beliefs that *NA* highlights and applauds are, however, delivered by the Prophet Muhammad and documented in the Qur’an. See Daniel Madigan, S.J., “Jesus and Muhammad: The Sufficiency of Prophecy,” in *Bearing the Word: Prophecy in Biblical Qur’anic Perspective*, ed. Michael Ipgrave (London: Church House, 2005) 90–99; and Anna Bonta Moreland, “An Analogical Reading of Christian Prophecy: The Case of Muhammad,” *Modern Theology* 29.4 (October 2013) 62–75.

13. René Laurentin, *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mother Today*, trans. Luke Griffin (Dublin: Veritas, 1990) 19.

*NA* expresses a fresh consideration of other faith traditions. In ensuing decades, much theological reflection, taking cues from the conciliar documents, began working out answers to questions the council left undeveloped. *NA*, while certainly a groundbreaking document, explicitly referred to only three of the five pillars of Islam (presumably because the first pillar, witness [*shahâda*], and the last, pilgrimage [*hajj*], were too closely tied to Muhammad).<sup>14</sup> The council was also silent on a wide range of issues concerning other religions. Mariasusai Dhavamony provides an illuminating list:

The Council did not wish to enter into discussion on the mode and the grade of belonging of religions to the history of salvation. It did not wish to pronounce on the content and nature of revelation contained in them, nor on the eventuality of their permanence until the end of the world. Besides, the Council says nothing on the historical origin of religion or religions, on the character of respective founders of religions, nor on the presence in them of elements of primitive revelation.<sup>15</sup>

Even with a renewed openness to interreligious dialogue, the conciliar documents left unresolved the relationship between evangelization and dialogue. Summarizing the theological developments that emerged during the 20 years following the council, Jacques Dupuis concluded that the Church still needed to overcome explicitly “a long-standing habit of reducing evangelization to explicit proclamation and sacramentalization in the Church community, a task to which the promotion of justice and work for human liberation remains somehow peripheral and interreligious dialogue apparently foreign.”<sup>16</sup>

The need for further clarification of the relationship between evangelization and dialogue led to the publication in 1991 of DP by the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, with the approval of the CDF.<sup>17</sup> It is offered as a reflection upon and further specification of

14. See Michael Louis Fitzgerald, M.Afr., “‘Dialogue and Proclamation’: A Reading in the Perspective of Christian–Muslim Relations,” in *In Many and Diverse Ways: In Honor of Jacques Dupuis*, ed. Daniel Kendall and Gerald O’Collins (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003) 181–93, at 183; and Atallah Siddiqui, *Christian–Muslim Dialogue in the Twentieth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1997) 35.

15. Mariasusai Dhavamony, S.J. “Evangelization and Dialogue in Vatican II and in the 1974 Synod,” in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives* 3:264–81, at 273–74. For Gerald O’Collins, the conciliar documents affirm that “God’s self-communication includes a *revelatory* dimension . . . and a *salvific* dimension” (*The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions* [Oxford: Oxford University, 2013] 81).

16. Jacques Dupuis, S.J., “Interreligious Dialogue in the Church’s Evangelizing Mission: Twenty Years of Evolution of a Theological Concept,” in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives* 3:256.

17. It should be noted that Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was then prefect of the CDF. As such, he made observations during the drafting process of DP and approved its publication. See Jacques Dupuis, S.J., “A Theological Commentary: Dialogue and Proclamation,” in

John Paul II's encyclical, *Redemptoris missio* (nos. 55–57), issued six months earlier. In bringing together the thread of the conciliar documents on dialogue, the document highlights the fact that

*Nostra Aetate* speaks of the presence in these traditions of “a ray of that Truth which enlightens all” (*NA* 2). *Ad Gentes* recognizes the presence of “seeds of the word,” and points to “the riches which a generous God has distributed among the nations” (*AG* 11). Again, *Lumen Gentium* refers to the good which is “found sown” not only “in minds and hearts,” but also “in the rites and customs of peoples” (*LG* 17).<sup>18</sup>

DP, reflecting on the conciliar texts, states, “The Council has openly acknowledged the presence of positive values not only in the religious life of individual believers of other religious traditions, but also in the religious traditions to which they belong” (no. 17). DP's main contribution lies in the clarification of the relationship between interreligious dialogue and proclamation, which, “though not on the same level, are both authentic elements of the Church's evangelizing mission.” In other words, “both are legitimate and necessary . . . intimately related, but not interchangeable” (no. 17).<sup>19</sup> Anchoring interreligious dialogue in the heart of evangelization means that “Christians too must allow themselves to be questioned. Notwithstanding the fullness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, the way Christians sometimes understand their religion and practice may be in need of purification” (no. 32). In the process of evangelizing, Christians must always recognize that they do not fully grasp the truth: “In the last analysis truth is not a thing we possess, but a person by whom we must allow ourselves to be possessed” (no. 49). Evangelization, then, is a dynamic and unending process in which the evangelizer becomes evangelized herself in her encounter with the religious other.

Some 35 years of absorbing the spirit of *NA* into theological reflections led to the publication of *DI* in 2000. With unyielding clarity, this declaration sharply poses the question of how the Church can acknowledge what is true and holy in other religions in a way that preserves the absolute truth and salvific universality of Christ.<sup>20</sup> *DI* claims to be a boundary-setting document for all those theologians who work *ex corde*

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*Redemption and Dialogue: Reading Redemptoris Missio and Dialogue and Proclamation*, ed. William R. Burrows (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994) 119–160, at 122.

18. Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church from the Second Vatican Council to John Paul II (1963–2005)*, ed. Francesco Gioia (Boston: Pauline, 2006) no. 16, 613–14.
19. Dupuis notes a tension in this document between (1) the recognition of interreligious dialogue as true forms of the Church's mission and (2) the centrality and necessity of proclamation, always required in evangelization: “The question must be asked how interreligious dialogue can *by itself*, prior to, and eventually in the absence of proclamation, be a genuine form of evangelization, if proclamation needs to be present *always*, as its *simultaneous foundation* without which ‘there is no true evangelization’” (Dupuis, “A Theological Commentary” 146, emphasis original).
20. On the one hand, *DI* no. 2, referring to *NA* no. 2, states that “The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is *true* and *holy* in these religions” (emphases added). On the other hand, “on the basis of such presuppositions, which may evince different nuances, certain theological

*ecclesiae*, outlining the “indispensable elements” of Christian faith that must be preserved in any theology of religious pluralism (no. 3). *DI* enumerates the foundational cornerstones of the faith:

The definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus Christ, the nature of Christian faith as compared with that of belief in other religions, the inspired nature of the books of Sacred Scripture, the personal unity between the Eternal Word and Jesus of Nazareth, the unity of the economy of the Incarnate Word and the Holy Spirit, the unicity and salvific universality of the mystery of Jesus Christ, the universal salvific mediation of the Church, the inseparability—while recognizing the distinction—of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ, and the Church, and the subsistence of the one Church of Christ in the Catholic Church. (no. 4)

At the same time, however, *DI* recognizes the need for much theological reflection in this area; it urges, though, that these reflections be undertaken with due care for the central mysteries of Christian faith and experience. *DI*'s contribution to the contemporary conversation on religious pluralism lies not in any constructive proposal, but rather in its reiteration of central Christian convictions. It insists that any theological proposal that puts the sacred documents of other religions on a par with Christian revelation denies the definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus Christ. Much scriptural testimony is marshaled to support the claim that the “Christian dispensation . . . as the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away, and we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (no. 5). The revelation of Jesus Christ is full, true, complete, and perfect, and the act of revelation calls forth an assent of faith on the part of the believer (no. 7).

*DI* no. 7 then offers a provocative (but underdeveloped) distinction between theological faith on the one hand and belief in other religions on the other. Theological faith is the acceptance of the truth revealed by God. Belief, by contrast, is “that sum of experience and thought that constitutes the human treasury of wisdom and religious aspiration, which man in his search for truth has conceived and acted upon in his relationship to God and the Absolute.” But it is “religious experience still in search of the absolute truth and still lacking assent to God who reveals himself.”

*DI* here seems to close the door to the possibility, originally opened by *NA*, that truth can be found in other religions, but in the very next paragraph that door is reopened, albeit in a confused way. On the one hand, *DI* insists that the sacred writings of other religions cannot be called “inspired texts,” as “the Church’s tradition . . . reserves the designation of *inspired texts* to the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, since these are inspired by the Holy Spirit” (*DI* no. 8). On the other hand, God “does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals, but also to

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proposals are developed—at times presented as assertions, and at times as hypotheses—in which Christian revelation and the mystery of Jesus Christ and the Church lose their character of absolute truth and salvific universality, or at least shadows of doubt and uncertainty are cast upon them” (*DI* no. 4, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000806\\_dominus-iesus\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html)).

entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential expression” (ibid., quoting *Redemptoris missio* no. 55). Note that God works not only inwardly on individual non-Christians but also outwardly reveals Godself through their religious traditions. But how can God make God’s self present to other religions without calling forth assent on the part of religious people? In the words of Francis Clooney:

Given the declaration’s explanation of faith as a “personal adherence of man to God,” . . . the denial of “faith” to the people of other religious traditions must be interpreted as also indicating that in other religious traditions there can be no relationship with God of the sort that counts as that personal adherence which is also faith. . . . If God is present to people in their own religions, God is surely present in such a way that those people can respond to God and adhere to God even before assenting fully to revelation as understood in the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>21</sup>

In short, the unclear openness to truth and holiness in non-Christian religions remains both unclear and open. On the one hand, *DI* no. 8 states that the sacred books of these traditions ultimately receive from the mystery of Christ their elements of grace and goodness (*DI* no. 8). But James Fredericks complicates this position by asking:

If the grace contained in the Sutras and the Upanishads, the Qur’an, and the Dao-de-jing is from Christ and not merely the product of human wisdom untouched by grace, how then can Christians maintain a stark, un-nuanced distinction between “theological faith,” on the one hand, and “belief, in the other religions” which is merely “that sum of experience and thought that constitutes the human treasury of wisdom and religious aspiration”?<sup>22</sup>

True, *DI* sets clear boundary markers around dogmatic claims that call forth theological faith, but it also invites exploration around this category of “belief” that arises in other religions. *DI* reflects rather than resolves the tension found in *NA* 35 years earlier. Both documents seek to affirm the definitive revelation in Christ without denying God’s presence beyond the walls of the Church. Neither document offers the necessary theological terms to appropriate these dual concerns.

Taking *NA*, *DP*, and *DI* as the springboard from which to pursue this inquiry, we must ask ourselves whether Muhammad’s revelatory experiences in Mecca and Medina have any place within a Christian understanding of revelation. While Christians affirm that the Christ event is the perfect fulfillment of revelation, is postbiblical understanding of revelation open to the angel Gabriel’s revelations to Muhammad? A marginal category in the Church—“private revelation”—can help address this vexing question.

21. Francis X. Clooney, S.J., “Implications for the Practice of Inter-Religious Learning,” *Sic et Non* 157–68, at 158–59.

22. James Fredericks, “The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths: Rejecting Nothing That Is True and Holy,” *Theological Studies* 64 (2003) 225–54, at 232.



## The Tradition of Private Revelation in the Catholic Church

Private revelation is a neglected and idiosyncratic category in the Catholic theological tradition, due perhaps to its usual connection to extraordinary events of Marian apparitions. It might possibly be considered the area in which the experience of the faithful has had the most marked effect on church teaching. Popular devotion to Mary throughout the Church's history has led to liturgical celebrations, theological deliberations, and even dogmatic pronouncements. The category of private revelation has been developed in the Church, at least in part, to capture at one and the same time the validity of Marian apparitions and their distinctness from the deposit of faith. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

Throughout the ages, there have been so-called "private" revelations, some of which have been recognized by the authority of the Church. They do not belong, however, to the deposit of faith. It is not their role to improve or complete Christ's definitive Revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history. Guided by the Magisterium of the Church, the *sensus fidelium* knows how to discern and welcome in these revelations whatever constitutes an authentic call of Christ or his saints to the Church.<sup>23</sup>

The *Catechism* makes clear the ancillary role of private revelation in the life of the Church. An analysis of the theological underpinnings of the term "private revelation" will help us recover a category that acknowledges God's continual revelatory activity within the world while respecting the fulfillment of public revelation with the Christ event.

This revelatory activity is held distinct from the traditional deposit of faith. No Catholic is obliged to believe in a particular private revelation. Deciding whether an alleged revelation is authentic, however, is a delicate and complicated matter. The Church has a long tradition of principles of discernment on which to draw in order to distinguish true revelations from their false counterparts. These principles exercised in discerning private revelations help the magisterium broaden awareness of the workings of the Holy Spirit. As John Paul II affirmed, "It is the same Spirit who assists the Magisterium and awakens the *sensus fidei*."<sup>24</sup> To set the preliminary groundwork for a discussion of private revelation outside Christianity, we must first outline the role of such revelation within the life of the Church.

Private revelation arises out of the prophetic element of the church; it is one of the ways that prophecy takes shape. The theology behind private revelation moves from its theoretical possibility to the concrete documentation of its occurrence. Karl Rahner argues that at the very least private revelation in the Church has to be allowed in principle, for its denial would throw the whole of Christian belief into doubt:

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23. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1994) no. 67.

24. *Ut unum sint*, On Commitment to Ecumenism, no. 80, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25051995\\_ut-unum-sint.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html).

The history of Christianity would be unthinkable without prophetic and visionary elements (in the broadest sense). To try to explain all these things by natural or even abnormal human causes, would be logically to deny that any historical activity of the personal God revealing himself in the Word was possible at all. But this would be to repudiate the character of Christianity as an historical, supernatural, revealed religion.<sup>25</sup>

Belief that God became incarnate in a Palestinian Jew at a concrete moment in history means that human ears must be open to encountering God in history, even in unexpected ways. That Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled the messianic expectations of the Hebrew Scriptures certainly attests to the surprising way that God chose to express God's self in history. In Jesus Christ, we have "God's final and definitive revelation and self-disclosure."<sup>26</sup> Supernatural revelation, then, is essential to Christianity; it is "basic" revelation. But the logic of supernatural revelation leads directly to the possibility of private revelation.

This theoretical openness becomes concrete when we support it with the testimony of Scripture. The New Testament affirms that before the birth of Christ, God spoke to God's people in history.<sup>27</sup> This history of revelation, although incomplete in itself, was preparatory in nature and is completed by the fullness of revelation in Christ. The Gospels themselves portray John the Baptist as the last of the prophets to foretell Christ's coming and the first to point directly to Christ;<sup>28</sup> and Paul's letters richly describe the movement of the Holy Spirit in the early Christian community.<sup>29</sup> While revelation receives its climax and fulfillment in the coming of Christ, the New Testament documents an expansion of new charisms and prophecies after his death. The role of Christian prophets after the death of Christ, Niels Hvidt argues,

is to lead the church to the truth and fullness of God in Christ, just as it was the role of the Old Testament prophets to lead God's people to remain faithful to the revelation God has conferred on Moses. Just as the Old Testament prophets fought to keep God's people faithful to the covenant, so now the prophets in the New Testament, and in Christ's church, are called to keep believers faithful to the covenant of the New Testament, sealed with the blood of the Lamb.<sup>30</sup>

The New Testament suggests that prophecy will be a permanent feature of the life of the church. Ongoing miracles, interventions, and revelations have typically been used as evidence for such prophecy in the church, reflecting an assumption that they are a permanent part of it. Hans Küng, commenting on *Lumen gentium*, argues for an ongoing charismatic structure to the church that is not limited to a particular group of persons, but rather is widely shared in the church:

25. Rahner, *Visions and Prophecies* 15.

26. *Ibid.* 16.

27. Heb 1:1.

28. Jn 1:29.

29. 1 Cor 12:28. Among NT references on the role of prophets: Acts 2:18; 11:28; 19:6; 21:11; 1 Pt 1:11; 2 Pt 1:21.

30. Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy* 60.

All this implies also that [the charismata] are not a thing of the past (possible and real only in the early Church), but eminently contemporary and actual; they do not hover on the periphery of the Church but are eminently central and essential to it. In this sense one should speak of a *charismatic structure of the Church* which embraces and goes beyond the structure of government.<sup>31</sup>

Recognizing private revelation is one way that the Church affirms ongoing divine manifestations in history, even after the definitive and normative Christ event. These revelations have a different character and status in the Church, to be sure, but the logic of the incarnation—that God reveals God's self in history—leads directly to the possibility of postbiblical revelation. This possibility falls within the prophetic element of the Church and includes instances of private revelation. Below I argue that, much like prior Israelite and subsequent Christian revelations attested to in Scripture, non-Christian private revelations (1) do not modify Christian revelation; but (2) derive their validity from Christ in some way; and (3) provide a creative avenue for deepening our understanding of the basic revelation.

The question of the character and status of private revelation, then, arises. Thomas Aquinas understood prophecy as a kind of knowledge that divine revelation impresses on the prophet's intellect under the form of teaching.<sup>32</sup> Instances of private revelation fall within this prophetic or charismatic element in the Church, for they reflect an encounter with God or a messenger of God that, while sometimes ineffable, often presents a message to the faithful.<sup>33</sup> The recipients of these revelations, much like the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures, often express surprise and hesitation at being chosen. While theologians regularly cite Aquinas in affirming that the goal of prophecy is to direct human activity,<sup>34</sup> Hvidt argues that prophecy is also directed toward understanding Christian revelation more adequately:

Christian prophecy is not revelation on par with the Bible, but this does not mean that it cannot serve as verification of and support for revelation. Postcanonical Christian prophecy can indeed serve to elucidate points of Scripture that are not clear or that Scripture contains in an implicit way only, and as such it can and has indeed played a very important role in the correction and actualization of our understanding of revelation.<sup>35</sup>

In church history, prophecy was linked with predicting future events. Bernard McGinn, however, finds that in early medieval Christianity the "broadest and most significant

31. Hans Küng, "The Charismatic Structure of the Church," *Concilium* 4.1 (1965) 23–33, at 30–31.

32. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (hereafter *ST*) 2–2, q. 171, a. 6.

33. Rahner maintained that a theology of private revelation would always occur within the framework of the charismatic element of the church. See his "Revelation," in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (New York: Seabury, 1975) 1453–72, at 1471–73.

34. *ST* 2–2, q. 174, a. 6, ad 3.

35. Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy* 78.

function of prophecy . . . was its identification with the spiritual interpretation of the Bible and preaching.”<sup>36</sup>

A word should be said about what is both private and revelatory about private revelations. The term “private” is misleading. Revelations, while usually received by individual persons, often involve a message to the Church as a whole. The term “private” stresses the fact that Catholics are not obliged to believe in these revelations. In fact, Benedict XIV’s 18th-century volume on liturgical reform, *De servorum Dei beatificatione et de beatorum canonizatione*, suggests that no Catholic is obliged to believe occurrences of this sort: “The approval that the Church gives to a private revelation is simply a permission, based on a careful examination, to allow the revelation to be promulgated for the instruction and profit of the faithful.”<sup>37</sup> Rahner prefers the terminology of “prophetic visions.” Laurent Volken, Avery Dulles, Pierre Adnès, and Augustinus Suh prefer the term “particular” or “special” revelation.<sup>38</sup> Hvidt opts for “prophetic revelations,” as it underscores the fact that the function of postapostolic revelations is similar to that of biblical prophecy:

This term marks the difference between the postapostolic revelations and the *revelatio publica*. It indicates not only that such revelations are the direct result of divine intervention, but that they actually fulfill the function in the church of communicating an intelligible message to the congregation and that it has prophetic purpose.<sup>39</sup>

Each of the theologians cited above argues for a change in terminology because each seeks to raise the status of private revelations and to acknowledge their legitimate function in the lives of the faithful and the Church at large. Their arguments are largely persuasive. But I suggest that preserving the terminology of “private revelation” also has advantages. As Dulles observes, the term has gained “wider currency,”<sup>40</sup> but it also

36. Bernard McGinn, “Prophetic Power in Early medieval Christianity,” *Cristianesimo nella storia* 17 (1996) 251–69, at 269.

37. Benedict XIV, *Benedicti papae XIV doctrina de servorum Dei beatificatione et beatorum canonizatione in synopsis redacta ab emm. de Azevedo* (Brussels: Typis Societatis belgicae de propagandis bonis libris, 1840) 1. 2, ch. 32, n. 11, as cited in Carlos María Staehlin, S.I., *Apariciones: Ensayo crítico* (Madrid: “Razon y fe,” 1954) 40–41, translation mine. Benedict XIV wrote this magisterial study after his 20 years of experience as Promoter of the Faith for the Causes of Beatification and Canonization (Staehlin, *Apariciones* 40 n. 34).

38. Karl Rahner, *Visions and Prophecies* 18; Laurent Volken, *Visions, Revelations, and the Church*, trans. Edward Gallagher (New York: P. J. Kennedy, 1963) 11–13; Avery Dulles, S.J., *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford University, 1994) 198; Augustinus Suh, *Le rivelazioni private nella vita della chiesa* (Bologna: Dehoniane, 2000) 32; Pierre Adnès, “Révélations Privées,” in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité: Ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire*, 17 vols., ed. Marcel Viller, S.J., assisted by F. Cavallera and J. de Guibert, S.J. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1932–1955) 13:482–92. These theologians draw on the language adopted by the Council of Trent [DS 1540; 1566].

39. Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy* 12.

40. Dulles, *Assurance of Things Hoped For* 198.

preserves an important continuity with other common terms, such as “private mass” and “private prayer.” These terms affect the whole Church and as such are in some important ways not private. But the terms make sense only in relationship to the inverse terms, “communal mass,” “communal prayer.” It is not that private prayer or private masses do not affect the whole Church in a real way; it is, rather, that they need to be distinguished from their communal counterparts with respect to their role in the life of the Church. The communal experience of mass and prayer is at the center; private mass and private prayer are rooted in that center. Private revelation is also rooted in the wider revelation of the Church. The Israelite prophetic tradition is preparatory to the revelation of Christ; postbiblical private revelations ultimately derive their meaning from the Christ event. Both private and public revelation, however, retain their own intrinsic value for ordering individual Christians and their communities. Maintaining the terminology of “private revelation” has an important advantage for the argument of this article. Since “private revelation” calls attention to its distinction from the deposit of the faith, it is easier to stretch this term to capture the encounter between non-Christians and God.

What then is properly revelatory in private revelations? Much work has been done since the 1950s and 1960s in the theology of revelation. Two significant markers of this development include: (1) the movement away from revelation as propositional disclosure of truths and toward revelation as a dynamic encounter between persons;<sup>41</sup> and (2) the recognition of the relationship between the history of revelation and salvation. Hvidt documents the first marker in the shift that occurred

from a rather propositional to a more dynamic understanding of revelation that sees revelation as the communication of God’s life-reality to his church, a reality that encompasses cognitive aspects while remaining continuously in need of vivification in order to become a powerful expression of God’s image in every new historical context.<sup>42</sup>

Rahner, in asserting that revelation closed with the cross, marks the shift from revelation conceived of as a set of propositions to revelation conceived of as a dynamic reality into which the faithful are invited. He also recognizes the second marker of revelation as occurring against the backdrop of eschatological expectations. The cross represents God’s irrevocable promise to us, and it is God’s final word to which nothing more can be added. But

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41. I do not mean to imply here that revelation is no longer about truth claims. Gerald O’Collins puts this shift nicely: “Even if the personal question (*Who* is revealed?) remains the primary one, the propositional content of revelation (the answer to the question ‘*What* is revealed?’) has its proper place. The personal model emphasizes the *knowledge of* God (a knowledge by acquaintance) which the event of revelation embodies. But this implies that the believer enjoys a *knowledge about* God. The communication of truth *about* God belongs essentially to revelation, even if always at the service of the personal experience *of* God or encounter *with* God” (*Rethinking Fundamental Theology: Toward a New Fundamental Theology* [New York: Oxford University, 2011] 67).

42. Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy* 31.

within this final word history also continues as God's revelation—the history that we usually describe as history of the Church and history of faith, which is the history of this final word of God and thus, rightly understood, can also continue to be described as history of revelation.<sup>43</sup>

Dulles places his discussion of revelation within the plan of salvation history, for he acknowledges that revelation still awaits the full manifestation of Jesus Christ at the end of time: "Revelation, therefore, either coincides with the end of history or anticipates that end. Within time, revelation is given only under the form of promise or anticipation of a fuller revelation yet to be given."<sup>44</sup> Instances of private revelation fall within this pattern of already-but-not-yet, helping Christians to more adequately understand and live out what has already been given, in fuller anticipation of the encounter with Christ that is yet to come at the end of time.

Regardless of the terminological issue—whether we call these revelations "private," "special," or "prophetic"—we are naming a postbiblical revelatory experience. While that experience is rooted in the Christ event, it is secondary, subsequent to biblical revelation, and but one possible expression of the prophetic or charismatic element of church life. Below I extend this postbiblical revelatory experience to the theology of religious pluralism. Stretching theological terms to fit the context of radical religious pluralism is urgent today. We stretch and adapt traditional terms both confidently to affirm our own tradition and to recognize the truth and holiness of other traditions.

## Applying "Private Revelation" to the Qur'an—Creative Possibilities

The previous two sections of this article, in outlining recent dogmatic developments in the relationship of theology of revelation to religious pluralism, and in developing a working definition of "private revelation" in Christian theology, have anticipated the question that opens this section: Can this category be applied in a non-Christian context as a way to acknowledge revelatory activity that both draws its source from the cross and anticipates the final coming of Christ? The history of revelation in which Christians are invited to participate also presents an invitation beyond the boundaries of the visible Church. In principle, there is no reason why the category of private revelation cannot be expanded to non-Christian encounters with God. In 1937 Yves Congar wrote a landmark article on private revelations in which he included non-Christians: "Private revelations are commonly understood as those revelations in which a soul, *be it Christian or not*, is the subject of God on a personal or private level, and not as an initiator or a doctor of the universal religion in which God works the

43. Karl Rahner, "Death of Jesus and the Closure of Revelation," in *God and Revelation*, Theological Investigations 18, trans. Edward Quinn (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961) 132–42, at 141.

44. Avery Dulles, S.J., *Models of Revelation* (New York: Orbis, 1992) 229.

salvation of humanity.”<sup>45</sup> This understanding of private revelation might be too individualistic, but it affirms that the one who receives the divine message need not be Christian. The authenticity of the divine–human encounter is acknowledged even in non-Christian contexts and need not but may be affirmed by Catholics.

What should the Christian community’s response be to the claim of private revelation? What level of faith commitment does the claim expect of the individual believer and the wider community? Here again practices of discernment within the Church that have been applied to Christian private revelation can be adapted to our contemporary context of religious pluralism. A medieval distinction emerged in Scholastic theology between *fides humana*, *fides divina*, and *fides catholica* that influenced the formulations of the ecclesial magisterium.<sup>46</sup> Arguments for the faith based on human reason are to be believed by *fides humana*. Objects immediately revealed are to be believed with *fides divina*, as the belief due them is based on the authority of God revealing. Of these, those proclaimed by the Church to form the deposit of faith are to be believed by *fides catholica*. These are fundamental truths of Scripture and tradition. Rooted in the Church’s experience before the death of the last apostle, there is general theological consensus on what comprises *fides catholica*.

When it comes to private revelations that occur after the death of the last apostle, however, there is a range of theological opinion. The minimalists, who are hesitant to ask the faithful to believe any particular instance of private revelation, maintain that occurrences of private revelation only call forth belief by *fides humana*,<sup>47</sup> a view taken by modern Thomists and pointedly adopted by Congar.<sup>48</sup> It is also the view upheld in magisterial documents but not necessarily in individual papal pronouncements regarding certain apparitions.<sup>49</sup> The maximalists, who are more willing to allow the faithful

45. “On entend communément par révélations privées celles dont un âme, chrétienne ou non, est l’objet de la part de Dieu à titre personnel et privé, et non au titre d’initiateur ou de docteur en la religion universelle au sein de laquelle Dieu opère le salut de l’humanité” (Yves Congar, “La crédibilité des révélations privées,” *Vie spirituelle* 53 [1937] Supplément 29–48, at 29, emphasis added; translation mine).

46. See Benedict XIV, *De servorum Dei*, 1.2, ch. 32, n. 11.

47. Staehlin cites Benedict XIV’s *De servorum Dei* in stating that even in the case of private revelations officially approved by the Church, like that of Blessed Hildegard, Saint Bridget, or Catherine of Siena, one need not believe with *fides catholica*, but rather with *fides humana*: “*Quaeres quarto, quid dicendum sit de revelationibus privatis a Sede Apostolica approbatis, ex. Gr. Beatae Hildegardis, et Sanctarum Birgittae, et Catharinae Senensis. Porro* [1.2, ch. 32, n. 11] *diximus, praedictis revelationibus, etsi approbatis, non debere, nec posse a nobis adhiberi assensum Fidei catholicae, sed tantum fidei humanae, iuxta regulas prudentiae, iuxta quas praedictae revelationes sunt probabiles, et pie credibiles*” (1.3, ch. 53, n. 15 as cited in Staehlin, *Apariciones* 40 n. 35).

48. Congar, “La crédibilité des révélations privées” 29–43.

49. The Lourdes apparition is an instance of a private revelation that has repeatedly received papal approval. One wonders, however, whether this approval covers only the doctrinal content of the revelations or also the “objective reality of the phenomenon (vision, apparition, locution) through which the revelations take form and are communicated”

to believe particular instances of private revelation, counter that the substance of the truth experienced in private revelation is rooted in the same truth as the deposit of faith. Consequently, it may be believed by *fides divina*. On this view the fact of the revelation is only to be believed with *fides humana*, but the actual content of the revelation is to be believed with *fides divina*.<sup>50</sup> Magisterial documents side with the minimalists in affirming that Catholics may withhold belief in these revelations, provided they do so with “due modesty, not without reason, and without contempt.”<sup>51</sup> Commenting on the apparitions at Lourdes and La Salette, Pope Pius IX stated that the “Apostolic See has neither approved nor condemned such apparitions or revelations but merely permits Catholics to believe in them—where they have the support of credible witness and documents—with a merely human faith [*fide solum humana*].”<sup>52</sup> Pope Pius X reaffirmed this principle in his encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis* on the Modernist controversy, when addressing how to manage the veneration of sacred relics:

In passing judgment on pious traditions be it always borne in mind that in this matter the Church uses the greatest prudence, and that she does not allow traditions of this kind to be narrated in books except with the utmost caution and with the insertion of the declaration imposed by Urban VIII, and even then she does not guarantee the truth of the fact narrated; the Church merely does not prohibit belief, unless human arguments for belief are wanting.<sup>53</sup>

The range of theological opinions regarding whether private revelations should be believed with *fides divina* or *fides humana* could arise from the fact that private revelations are a complex reality. It is prudent for the Church to err on the side of *fides humana* in its magisterial documents. But it is also possible that a certain instance of private revelation, given its particular shape and circumstances, calls

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(Pierre Adnès, “Revelations, Private,” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. René Latourelle [New York: Crossroad, 1994] 950–54, at 953).

50. Among the minimalists are found Carlos María Staehlin, S.I. See his *Apariciones*. Among the maximalists are Adnès, Rahner, Congar, and Hvidt. For a discussion of this issue see Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy* 271–76.
51. Benedict XIV, *de Servorum Dei* 2.32.11.
52. Joseph de Guibert, *Documenta ecclesiastica christianae perfectionis: Studium spectantia* no.1005 (Rome: Gregorian University, 1931), citing *Acta Sanctae Sedis* 11 (1893) 509. Translation altered from “purely” to “merely.”
53. Pius X, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* no. 55, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_x/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-x\\_enc\\_19070908\\_pascendi-dominici-gregis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_x/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_19070908_pascendi-dominici-gregis_en.html). Translation altered. The Latin reads, “Ecclesiam tanta in hac re uti prudentia, ut traditiones eiusmodi ne scripto narrari permittat nisi cautione multa adhibita praemissaque declaratione ab Urbano VIII. sanctita; quod etsi rite fiat, non tamen facti veritatem adserit, sed, nisi humana ad credendum argumenta desint, credi modo non prohibet” ([http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-x/la/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-x\\_enc\\_19070908\\_pascendi-dominici-gregis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-x/la/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_19070908_pascendi-dominici-gregis.html)). I thank Jeremy Wilkins for pointing out this translation issue.



forth a deeper faith commitment on the part of both the recipient and the wider Christian community.

In developing norms for judging apparitions and private revelations, the Church draws on long-standing practices of spiritual discernment. The canonical norms date back to the 1978 CDF document, Norms . . . on the Manner of Proceeding in Judging Alleged Apparitions and Revelations.<sup>54</sup> Arising out of a particular historical context, the norms followed upon a noteworthy relaxation of the prohibitions and censures of publications dealing with apparitions and private revelations.<sup>55</sup> The rise of mass media enabled news of apparitions to spread quickly among the faithful, and the ease of travel enabled journeys to pilgrimage sites. The norms outline a series of criteria to help ecclesiastical authorities discern the validity of claims of private revelations and respond to them quickly and effectively.

The fact that private revelations are received by humans and communicated by human means introduces the possibility of multiple errors. A given private revelation might be authentic, but it could also be entangled in errors resulting from reception and transmission.<sup>56</sup> Even a canonized saint can distort a revelation approved by the Church. Errors that might find their way into a given private revelation do not automatically invalidate the revelation as a whole. Conversely, that a given revelation proves true (in, for example, a historical prediction) does not in itself mean that the revelation was divine in nature.<sup>57</sup>

In the history of Marian apparitions a dilemma arises between the urgency of the messages received from the Blessed Mother and the prudence required by the Church in evaluating these apparitions. Discernment about Marian apparitions is contested, marked by a push and pull between the faithful who believe in the apparitions and the ecclesial authorities who urge prudence.<sup>58</sup> One should expect, then, this same tension to arise when trying to stretch the category of private revelation to non-Christian revelations.

The process of discernment, while using Christian dogma as its main guide, opens the possibility that the Qur'anic message clarifies neglected aspects of the Christian

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54. The official document remains unpublished. A French translation can be found in Joachim Boufflet and Philippe Boutry, *Un signe dans le ciel* (Paris: Grasset, 1997) 396–99; ET at <http://www.catholicrevelations.org>.

55. In 1966 the *Index* was formally abolished by Paul VI, bringing to a formal end the centuries-long prohibition by ecclesiastical authorities. See Andre Kingham, "The Norms for Judging Alleged Apparitions and Private Revelations" (PhD diss., St. Paul University, 2007) 151.

56. On errors in private revelation see Augustin Poulain, S.J., *The Graces of Interior Prayer: A Treatise on Mystical Theology*, trans. Leonora L. Yorke Smith (St. Louis, MO: Herder & Herder, 1910) 323.

57. Benedict J. Groeschel, *A Still, Small Voice: A Practical Guide on Reported Revelations* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 1993) 27.

58. Msgr. Alfredo Ottaviani, in a widely distributed address, urged extreme caution and prudence ("The Need for Prudence," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 124 [1951] 321–26).

tradition. Just as David Burrell finds that robust Jewish and Muslim doctrines of creation can highlight for Christians our own tendency to let the doctrine of atonement overshadow the doctrine of creation, so my article suggests that Christians should be open to the possibility that the Qur'an can clarify Catholic beliefs and practices.<sup>59</sup> This openness does not mean that Christians will or should adopt the Qur'an as revelatory *in toto*, but rather that passages in the Qur'an could help Christians clarify their own faith on particular issues. Such judgments can occur only in the particular. So, for example, what Daniel Madigan asserts about *Nostra aetate* and other religions would in general also hold for Christian openness to the Qur'an in particular:

Perhaps, then, the question about means and structures, on which *Nostra Aetate* did not offer an explicit opinion, needs to be rephrased. Instead of asking "Is this religion a structure or vehicle or way of salvation?" should we not rather ask "Are there elements in this religion that God appears to be using to save people?" Thus, there is no single, *a priori* answer to the question of how salvific other religions are. We can only make an *a posteriori* judgement, based on an observation of the fruits of the Spirit and the distinguishing marks of the Kingdom in the followers of that particular religion. Such an *a posteriori* judgement cannot or need not be made about the whole religion, but rather about individual elements.<sup>60</sup>

The way the Church understands the unusual category of private revelation provides a fruitful avenue for this kind of openness. Particular passages in the Qur'an could be explored without having to make any claims about the book as a whole.

## Conclusion

Difficult work lies ahead in the Christian spiritual discernment of Qur'anic revelations, both with respect to Muhammad as the receiver of such revelations and to the content of Qur'anic passages. But unique benefits reward such work. While an analysis of Muhammad and Qur'anic passages lies beyond the scope of this article, one already wonders how Qur'anic accounts of, for example, the creation story or the binding of Isaac or the birth of Jesus could enhance Christian understandings of those same events that are documented in the Christian Scriptures. This article sought to establish the possibility of extending the category of private revelation to a non-Christian context. In this I suggest that my article succeeded in principle, if not in practice—the latter would have required a much longer analysis. I believe, however, that my argument answers

59. See David B. Burrell, C.S.C., *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1993). Some of this work is well under way. Mark N. Swanson, "The Trinity in Christian–Muslim Conversation," *Dialog* 44 (2005) 256–63, argues that the Muslim doctrine of *shirk* (the sin of idolatry or polytheism) can help Christians purify their trinitarian language. Jon Hoover considers Muslim criticisms of the Trinity and outlines structural similarities between Islamic and Christian doctrines of God ("Islamic Monotheism and the Trinity," *Conrad Grebel Review* 27.1 [Winter 2009] 57–82).

60. Daniel A. Madigan, S.J., "*Nostra Aetate* and the Questions It Chose to Leave Open," *Gregorianum* 87 (2006) 781–96, at 787–88.

the call of both *Nostra aetate* and *Dominus Iesus* to recognize the truth and holiness in other religions while not losing sight of the salvific universality of Christ. My argument applies to what occurred in two towns in Saudi Arabia the theological reasoning at work regarding Marian apparitions all over the Catholic world.

My argument leads to further questions both in the theology of revelation and in the arena of religious pluralism. These include a reexamination of the Christian understanding of what comprises prophecy, an analysis of Muhammad as a possible receiver of private revelation, and a detailed exploration of actual Qur'anic texts that would elucidate the theoretical suggestions outlined in this article. The first step in this larger project has been established: Christians should be open in principle to the possibility that Muhammad received divine revelations in Mecca and Medina, much as some Catholics have received and continue to receive private revelations.

### **Author biography**

Anna Bonta Moreland received her PhD from Boston College and is currently an associate professor in the Department of Humanities. Her areas of special interest include faith and reason, medieval theology with an emphasis on Thomas Aquinas, religious pluralism, and comparative theology. Among her recent publications are: "An Analogical Reading of Christian Prophecy: The Case of Muhammad," *Modern Theology* 29.4 (2013); "Comments on Per Erik Persson's *Sacra Doctrina: Reason and Revelation in Aquinas*," *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 89.1 (2013); and "What's Reason Got to Do With It? Examining Contemporary Theologies of Religious Pluralism," in *New Voices in Catholic Theology*, ed. Anna Bonta Moreland and Joseph Curran (2012); and *Known by Nature: Thomas Aquinas on Natural Knowledge of God* (2010). In process is a monograph on prophecy in Christianity and Islam.