

# Rethinking the Prophethood of Muhammad in Christian Theology

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MUHAMMAD RECONSIDERED: A CHRISTIAN  
PERSPECTIVE ON ISLAMIC PROPHECY

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ANNA BONTA MORELAND

MEHRAJ DIN

## Abstract

In the modern world, there is an incessant amount of research on religions and interfaith interaction. Yet, too much of our theological activities remain shockingly intramural. Instead of allowing an inherent energy to launch us into the larger reality of global religiosity, we insist on protecting our theology from the threat of contamination. Among many points of agreement, the centrality of Muhammad's prophethood remains key among the contentious issues between Islam and Christianity. Anna Bonta Moreland's *Reconsidering Muhammad* takes us on a journey into the reception of Muhammad in Christian Theology. Engaging

Islam from deep within the Christian tradition by addressing the question of the prophethood of Muhammad, Anna Bonta Moreland calls for a retrieval of Thomistic thought on prophecy. Moreland sets the stage for this inquiry through an intertextual reading of the key Vatican II documents on Islam and on Christian revelation. This review will retrace the historical reception of Muhammad in early European tradition and also how Moreland's work is a pathbreaking introduction to one of the least talked about theological puzzles between Islam and the Christian tradition.

**Keywords:** Christian Theology, Thomas Aquinas, Vatican II, Muhammad

## Introduction

The diverse and distinctive landscape of religious discourse between Semitic religions is often fraught with the question of authenticity and acceptability. Navigating the theological puzzles and truth-claims between Abrahamic religions and especially between Christianity and Islam has preoccupied the scholarship of various intellectual giants and movements in both the respective traditions. The theological position of prophets and the inevitable question of prophecy remains the focal point of contestation in the Abrahamic traditions. Part of the puzzle also is how the trans-historical Otherization of Islam has remained a permanent feature in the writings of Christian scholarship. This epistemic categorial demonization in Orientalist literature is what Sophia Rose Arjana identifies as “the Muslim problem” with the particularistic attitude toward the Prophethood of Muhammad often described as an aversion to, or “anxiety of Islam.”<sup>1</sup> Considering this recurrent and historical legacy of intimidation and polemic, finding a middle ground remains a challenging task. In the words of Robert Neville, “One of the most important tasks of theology today is to develop strategies for determining how to enter into the meaning system of another tradition, not merely as a temporary member of that tradition, but in such a way as to see how they bear upon

one another.”<sup>2</sup> Anna Moreland’s recent book *Muhammad Reconsidered: A Christian Perspective on Islamic Prophecy* is a welcome step in this direction and joins an ever-growing body of literature devoted to the assessments of Muhammad’s function and identity in Christian theology.

The past fifty years of Christian theologians’ engagement with other faith traditions have provided a world of theological resources. In this bold project, Moreland takes a necessary step beyond interreligious encounter to re-examine categories within the Christian tradition. By laying the groundwork for examining the Prophecy of Muhammad, this investigation turns to neglected resources within the Catholic theological tradition and argues that the Church has reasons to be open to the possibility of postbiblical revelations—including those that Muhammad received in Mecca and Medina. Traditionally, postbiblical revelatory events have been captured in the marginal category of “private revelation,” most typically expressed in Marian apparitions.<sup>3</sup> Private revelation is a small part of a wider prophetic dimension in the Church. In this pretext, she proposes that, given the Church’s understanding of prophecy, Christians can view Muhammad as ‘a religious prophet’,<sup>4</sup> a recognition that opens a way for the Qur’an to be taken seriously by Christians as a source of knowledge about God. This book is the fruit of the author’s decades of work on the history of how European Christians have understood Islam and how they have made sense of its rival claims to the heritage of Abraham. Moreland develops her argument through a carefully plotted structure, moving from the general state of Christian views of Islam in the context of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) to sources for reconsidering his prophethood. In this book she places Muhammad’s prophecy within that wider dimension. In sum, the prophetic insights that are documented in the Qur’an, Moreland claims can be viewed through Christian claims to truth, not in spite of them.<sup>5</sup>

## Muhammad in Early and later Christian Writings

Before turning to some examples of modern writings on the reception of Muhammad, including the book under review, which will be the main focus of this essay, we will briefly consider some examples from

the pre-modern period. Sophia Rose Arjana in her work *Muslims in the Western Imagination* argues that the earlier studies of the Prophet Muhammad were largely polemical, neglecting to include any Muslim sources and offering little biographical detail.<sup>6</sup> John Tolan in *Faces of Muhammad* also asserts that Muhammad has always been at the center of European discourses on Islam. To medieval Christian communities, Muhammad—the leader of a religious and political community that grew quickly and with relative success—was an enigma. Did God really send him as a prophet with a revelation? Was the political success of the community he founded a divine validation? Or were he and his followers inspired by something evil? Among Christians, it was widely believed that Muslims were idolaters and that they worshipped Muhammad; Muhammad’s claims to prophecy were sometimes explained away in terms of epilepsy; much emphasis was placed on his perceived sensuality and violence; there were even stories that Muhammad was “a Roman cardinal or cleric, frustrated in his ambition, who perverted his own converts to spite the Roman Church.”<sup>7</sup> Also, in some European biographical literature, the Prophet Muhammad supposedly took on various roles—initially almost exclusively malignant but gradually incorporating a positive assessment as well. Not all European writers on Muhammad show him the admiration and respect that we find in Bonaparte and Goethe, of course. The works of predecessors were integral to these writings, which meant that tropes developed over centuries had a durable quality. Tolan argues that Christian theologians were mostly writing to defend Christianity so the masses would not be theologically misled, to protect their people from Oriental vices, and to fend off fears of the nearby expanding Muslim empires.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, reformist and revisionist thinkers reconstructed these tropes into polemical critiques of their own. In this way, exploring the reception of Muhammad since the twelfth century helps us understand modern discourses on religion.

Also writing in early modern period, Henry Stubbe, whose *Originall & Progress of Mahometanism* (1671) describes the Muslim prophet as a great reformer who fought the superstition and illegitimate power of Christian clergy and sought to return to a pure, unsullied monotheism. Stubbe’s Mahomet is a religious reformer, beloved and admired ruler, and sage

legislator. Humphrey Prideaux, a fellow student with Stubbe at Oxford, in 1697 published his *The True Nature of Imposture Fully Display'd in the Life of Mahomet*, in order to show that Mahomet was an impostor and to defend Christianity. Yet increasingly, anticlerical writers such as Irish Deist John Toland portrayed Mahomet as a visionary anticlerical religious reformer, the better to smash the pretensions of the Church of England's priestly aristocracy. Some painted him as an impostor in order to associate his imposture or fanaticism with that of Christians, notably in the *Treatise of the Three Impostors* (1719) and in Voltaire's play *Le Fanatisme, ou Mahomet le Prophète* (1741). Yet others follow the lead of Stubbe and Toland to make Mahomet into a reformer who eradicates superstition and combats the power of the clergy. This is how Henri de Boulain Villiers paints the prophet in his *Vie de Mahomed* (1730), and how George Sale presents him in the "preliminary discourse" to his English translation of the Qur'ān (1734). Voltaire, thanks in part to his reading of Sale, depicts Mahomet as a reformer and great statesman in his *Essai sur les Mœurs*. Indeed, by the end of the century, writers such as English Whig Edward Gibbon see him as a "great man," charismatic leader, and legislator to the Arab nation.<sup>9</sup>

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in terms of the Enlightenment onslaught against religion across traditions, scholars like Kant took Protestant Christianity as already rational in order to criticize other religions. While he did not regard Judaism as "a religion at all," he viewed Islam as an antithesis of everything supposedly rational. In "An Essay on the Illness of the Head," Kant described Muhammad as a "zealot": "Zeal leads the zealot to the external, led Mahomet [sic] onto his princely throne."<sup>10</sup> In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the figure of Muhammad returns as a sign of unreason, nonsense and madness of imagination.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, in *Le Fanatisme, ou Mahomet le Prophète*, Voltaire described Muhammad as an "imposter." Indeed, he turned him into an archetype of fanaticism pitted against reason. Not only Voltaire but French philosophes and encyclopaedists at large attacked Islam. To Denis Diderot, editor-in-chief of *Encyclopédie*, Muhammad was "the greatest enemy that human reason has ever known" and the Qur'ān an "absurd, obscure, and dishonest book."<sup>12</sup> Much of what is still written about him is hostile. It would have been easy for anyone to compile a chronicle of that hostility, a catalogue

of disdain, fear, and insult from the earliest Christian polemical texts against Islam to the shrill declarations of politicians like Geert Wilders, parliamentarian of the Partij voor de Vrijheid (the Dutch extreme right) who, to discredit Islam, attacks its prophet, whom he calls a terrorist, a paedophile, and a psychopath.<sup>13</sup> The 2005 controversy over the cartoons of Muhammad published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* illustrate the potentially explosive nature of Western views of the Muslim prophet, as do the killing of cartoonists of Charlie Hebdo in January 2015. Tinged by the history of European colonialism and orientalism and by terrorism that claims Islam as its justification, the controversy has provoked a flood of polemics and violence.

Against and in contrast to the polemical tradition and this reductionist portrayal of Muhammad, over the last 200 years many Christian scholars of different traditions have studied Muhammad's life and teaching and have come to have at least a partial respect for him. They have felt that they cannot put Muhammad in a totally negative category and yet equally they cannot subscribe to the Islamic account of Muhammad as the final prophet, with Jesus regarded as his forerunner. However, attitudes did begin to change. Muhammad was described not anymore as the ambitious, profligate impostor of old but as a "silent great soul," a hero who spoke "from Nature's own heart," as Thomas Carlyle called him. On the other hand, a number of European authors of the twentieth century, in the context of decolonization and increasing calls for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, argued that Christians should recognize Muhammad as a prophet. Clinton Bennett, in his book *In Search of Muhammad*, has argued that knowing the sources of Islam is insufficient for "knowing" Muhammad for Muslims. Rather, argues Bennett, we have "insider" and "outsider" perspectives.<sup>14</sup> To put it another way, having faith in a particular set of scriptures or documents or narratives makes all the difference in the world.

## Traversing the Terrain of this Work

In this engaging and pleasantly thought out book *Muhammad Reconsidered: A Christian Perspective on Islamic Prophecy*, Moreland

intends to offer a fresh appraisal of Muhammad that considers the widest possible history of the ways in which Christians have assessed his prophethood. Moreland considers addressing the question of the prophecy of Muhammad not only a necessary 'political question' but also a 'theological question' that has not been sufficiently addressed in contemporary Catholicism. In fact, she argues, the documents from Vatican II, while offering the first boldly affirmative portrayals of Muslim belief and practice in magisterial texts ever, consciously left unresolved the question of the status of Muhammad as a prophet. This book is one step towards the direction of addressing the unresolved issues in the conciliar documents from Vatican II about the Church's stance toward Islam by applying a neglected aspect of Thomas's thought, his treatment of prophecy. She underscores and analyses what they have to say about Muslims and their place in our de facto religiously plural world. Moreland then turns to Thomas Aquinas concerning postbiblical prophecy, and endeavours to construct a Catholic theology of revelation that could embrace Muhammad as a prophet, at least in an analogical sense (here she employs Aquinas's 'third way' of understanding language, between univocity and equivocity).

In chapter 1, 'Setting the Stage' Moreland offers a background into the trajectories of debates on the role and place of religion vis-à-vis Enlightenment rationality and how societies continue to remain separated by the power construct of Christianity vs./ over Islam, West vs./ over East, and secular reason vs./over religious fanaticism. Not underestimating the urgency in the call of dialogue amid the hyperbole of Huntington's theory of the Clash of Civilizations and publication of intimidating titles like Norman Podhertz's *World War IV: The Fight against Islamofascism*. Also, recent political events (the march on Capitol Hill and rising Islamophobia) both in the U.S. and abroad (attacks like Christchurch and Paris) have shown that there is a pressing need for Christians to understand Islam in a serious theological way. The Catholic Church occupies a unique role as mediator in the complex dialogue between the world of Islam and the secular West since it shares many fundamental beliefs with both sides. Moreland is right to challenge both this construct and the larger secularization thesis that birthed it, and then

argues the converse, as it were: that encounters between communities of Muslims and non-Muslims in ‘the West’ are increasing rapidly, that the Catholic Church remains the (sole) Western religious institution that ‘is particularly equipped to engage with Muslims in theological terms and that this will lead to salutary political consequences. While many secularists expected an inevitable decline of religious belief as Enlightenment modernity took hold around the globe, it seems that the exact opposite has occurred. As the authors of *God’s Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* wrote in 2009, “Over the past four decades, religion’s influence on politics has reversed its decline and become more powerful on every continent and across every major world religion.”<sup>15</sup> These authors argue that despite the prediction of the “secularization theory,” the twenty first century can ironically be coined “God’s Century.” A genuine understanding of religious traditions has become a theo-political necessity in the West.

Chapter 2, ‘The State of the Question’, sets the stage for this inquiry through an intertextual reading of the key Vatican II documents and analytically offers a fascinating rereading of five magisterial documents of the Catholic Church: *Dei Verbum* (Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, DV), *Lumen Gentium* (Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, LG), *Nostra Aetate* (Vatican II document on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, NA), *Dialogue and Proclamation* (published 25 years after NA by the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, DP), and *Dominus Iesus* (Declaration on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2000). Important work from the past fifty years provides an understanding of the issues that gave rise to the Council, the heated debates that took place both inside and outside of the conciliar sessions, and the remaining issues that have developed in the post-conciliar period. The contested question about whether Vatican II was an “event” that ruptured the Church’s ties to the past or whether it was a “renewal within tradition” has planted ideological fault lines within the theological academy.<sup>16</sup> Moreland argues in this chapter and recurrently throughout the book that one can interpret Vatican II with Benedict XVI’s “hermeneutic of reform,” whereby the



Church's new attitude toward Islam first appeared discontinuous with the past. But further probing reveals that a medieval account of prophecy—freshly understood—already contains hidden seeds of Vatican II's claims about Islam. We can say, with Benedict XVI, "It is precisely in this combination of continuity and discontinuity at different levels that the very nature of true reform consists."<sup>17</sup> The creative question of the prophecy of Muhammad did not emerge at the magisterial level before the opening of the Council. But a constructive answer to this question must be borne of a deep encounter with the Church's theological tradition. In this chapter Moreland take cues from a collection of essays compiled in honour of John O'Malley's *What Happened at Vatican II* (2010), in which O'Malley suggests that we are ready to move to a further stage of interpreting the Council:

Instead of examining the documents in isolation from one another, we are now ready to examine them as interdependent and ready to see how that interdependence is essential for interpreting them correctly. We move to a consideration of each document as in some measure an expression of larger orientations and as an integral part of a cohesive corpus, which is a result in large part of the documents' intertextual character. . . . They implicitly but deliberately cross-reference and play off one another—in the vocabulary they employ, in the great themes to which they recur, in the core values they inculcate, and in certain basic issues that cut across them.<sup>18</sup>

Chapter 3 'Thomas Aquinas on Prophecy' chalks out Aquinas's 'taxonomy of prophecy' for where he treats revelation and explicitly writes about prophecy.<sup>19</sup> Both these chapters serve both a symbolic and a substantive function. Turning to a medieval figure, especially one so central to Christian thinking and practice as Thomas Aquinas, highlights the fact that the main argument is drawn from deep within the tradition of Christian theology. Moreland primarily focuses on Thomas's preliminary analysis of prophecy, first by attending to his systematic treatments of this issue in the *De veritate* (DVer), *Summa contra gentiles* (hereafter, ScG),

and *Summa theologiae* (hereafter, ST), and then by turning to his scriptural commentaries and systematic works that take up prophetic biblical figures (central among these are his commentaries on Isaiah, John, Hebrews, and Corinthians).<sup>20</sup> He does not build a theory of knowledge in these questions. Rather, he observes the varying instances of prophecy at work in Scripture and sketches a complex portrait of this phenomenon. Substantively speaking, Thomas's account of prophecy offers a surprisingly subtle understanding of this complex phenomenon, one that opens itself up organically to the animating question of this book. In the next chapter Moreland turns to particular prophetic figures from Scripture about whom Aquinas comments, in order to put his taxonomy to work. She then takes up the question of how Muhammad might figure in this taxonomy and how he might relate to this cast of characters.

In chapter 4 'Scriptural Prophets and Muhammad', Moreland turns explicitly to Thomas's scriptural commentaries and his reflection on some unlikely prophets—even some figures who reject Jesus and yet speak and act prophetically. It then turns back to the taxonomy from chapter 3 in order to draw some conclusions about these figures. Finally, it recalls our reading in chapter 2 of Vatican II documents on non-Christians generally and Muslims in particular, where Christians and Muslims share an overlapping web of beliefs, and draws some preliminary conclusions about the role of Muhammad in this taxonomy of prophecy. Together chapters 3 and 4 reveal Thomas's effort at one and the same time to be true to the varied scriptural testimonies while also weaving together a cohesive understanding of the prophetic experience. These chapters highlight contextual differences, developments in thought, and persistent themes throughout the Thomistic corpus. The textual analysis of these chapters maps out Thomas's treatment of prophecy in preparation for our test case, Muhammad. These chapters open up creative possibilities for considering prophets beyond the walls of the Church. Interpreting these ecclesial documents in light of Thomas on prophecy leads us to open up a new direction in Muslim-Christian dialogue by considering whether Muhammad, a seventh-century nomad, was a religious prophet. Karl Rahner noted that the prophetic element demanded theological reflection.<sup>21</sup> Most of this work on prophecy has been done in France,

Germany, and Italy, but it has received little attention in English-speaking countries.<sup>22</sup> In chapters 3 and 4 of this book, while not offering a comprehensive study of prophecy in the Christian tradition, She draws from the writings of Thomas, bringing to light this neglected aspect of his work. She asserts, “Thomas offers a surprisingly supple and complex account of prophecy, one that has not received sufficient attention in the scholarly Thomist literature, especially in works written in English.” In addition, she draws on biblical commentaries that have been largely neglected in contemporary scholarship. In its method and approach, this book, she argues, contributes to a growing movement in Thomistic scholarship, sometimes called “biblical Thomism” or “Ressourcement Thomism.”<sup>23</sup>

After opening up the theoretical question of Muhammad’s prophecy in the first four chapters by marrying the claims made at Vatican II about Muslim belief and practice to Thomas’s understanding of the role of prophecy in the church. Moreland, in Chapter 5, ‘Is Muhammad a Prophet for Christians?’ situates her proposal within the context of the past and ongoing conversation about this very question. The first section of the chapter takes up the work of those thinkers who have found an affirmative answer to this question: Montgomery Watt, Hans Küng, Kenneth Cragg, and David Kerr. Each of these thinkers has spent decades engaging Muslim sources and scholarship. Each of the first four thinkers offers a particular model through which to consider Muhammad’s prophecy, although there are some significant areas of overlap among their proposals. Watt focuses on Muhammad’s moral exemplarity as a sign of his prophetic status, Küng on his invocations against idolatry, Cragg on the praiseworthy messages of the Qur’ān, and Kerr on Muhammad’s political reforms and liberating praxis. Moreland differentiates her position from these four in a brilliant and thought-provoking way: ‘Muhammad as liturgical prophet’.<sup>24</sup> Moreland critically analyzes these theologians’ approaches to this question and suggests an alternative model to these initial four. In the spirit of the medieval *quaestio*, the rest of the chapter addresses objections to the argument of this book that arise from two representative thinkers: Jacques Jomier, O.P., and Christian Troll, S.J., each of whom has dedicated his professional life to Christian theological work in Muslim contexts.

Both these thinkers offer objections along two main lines. The first states that a Christian assent to Muhammad as a prophet inevitably sounds to Muslim ears as if the Christian has declared submission to Islam. A belief in the prophecy of Muhammad is a belief in all that Islam teaches, including its anti-Christian elements.<sup>25</sup> Islam teaches that Muhammad's recitations are final and universal. A Christian could never accept that claim without ceasing to be a Christian. Particularly problematic is the fact that assenting to Muhammad's claim replaces Jesus's universality with the universality of Muhammad. Jesus becomes the forerunner, speaking to particular people at a particular time. A Muslim understanding of Muhammad, then, cannot be agreed to by Christians and cannot serve as a meeting-place for people of both faiths. So the first objector understands "prophecy" in the full Muslim sense of the word. The second line of objection argues that Muslims would and have reacted negatively to such a redefinition of prophecy, which resembles none of the thick theological claims they assume in the term "prophet." It does no good to redefine prophecy in such a way that it is unrecognizable to Muslims and then ascribe that "prophecy" to Muhammad. The second line of objection understands the term "prophet" to be emptied of its Muslim contents such that it becomes a third term that is unrecognizable to the religious other we are trying to engage. The next chapter tries to recapture the argument of this book and show how it is a fruitful alternative to the approaches of the thinkers examined in this chapter.

John Renard in his chapter 'Islam and Christian theologians' proposes an approach to this vast subject by describing the "Four M's" of Muslim-Christian theological engagement: The Apologetical Model: Defining Islam in Relation to Christianity; The Scholastic model: Come, Let Me Reason for Us; The Christian-Inclusivist Model: Can't We All Get Along? and The Dialogical Model: Inter-theology and Theological Cross-Reference.<sup>26</sup> David Marshall also and along the same lines argues for at least two specific and distinct contexts in which Christians can address the question of their response to Muhammad. The first is in the context of internal Christian theological discussion. In this framework, Christians ask themselves how they should interpret Muhammad within a Christian frame of reference. Where does he fit within a Christian universe of

meaning, a Christian view of God's purposes? In what sense, if any, can Christians regard him as a prophet? A feature of such internal Christian reflection is that it can allow considerable flexibility and diversity in thinking about prophecy. For Christianity, prophecy is clearly important, but it is not as important as certain other concepts, notably incarnation. It is perhaps because prophecy is not at the very centre of Christian theological thinking that such flexibility and diversity in understanding it are possible. The other context is that of Christian encounter with Muslims, whether in polemical debate or in eirenic dialogue. Christians are often asked by Muslims what they think of Muhammad and, sometimes, why they do not recognize him as a prophet, not least as Muslims recognize Jesus as a prophet. Within the wide field of Christian engagement with other faiths, there is perhaps no other figure on whom Christians are more often invited to give their opinion. In this context, Christians will (or at least should) be acutely aware of the Islamic frame of reference within which Muslims use the word "prophet." For Islam, prophecy is a more central and also a more clearly defined concept than it is for Christianity.<sup>27</sup>

In chapter 6 'Closing Argument' Moreland draws on the practice of analogical reasoning in the theology of religious pluralism and shows that a term in one religion—in this case "prophecy"—can have purchase in another religious tradition. Chapters 3 and 4, in fact, show that a Christian understanding of "prophecy" is already fluid, before even stretching beyond its ecclesial walls. The documents of Vatican II claim that Christians and Muslims share an overlapping web of beliefs. In other words, they use religious terms in overlapping ways. Moreland equally argues, if we turn back to Thomas, how a multi-layered understanding of Christian prophecy, such that what Muhammad heard and communicated in seventh-century Arabia in principle could fall under the term "prophecy," understood in its most expansive sense.<sup>28</sup> And for our conversation to develop, Moreland argues for a dire need to move from apologia to analogia. As in, how through apologia we speak words "from" or "out of" our narrative, but in analogia we are taking words "up" from our narrative and seeing how those words cohere in other religious traditions and understand the importance of a theology of religious pluralism. She

further argues how David Burrell, C.S.C., will act as a guide in this constructive proposal. Burrell embodies in practice the intellectual trajectory of his work. His first book, *Analogy and Philosophical Language* (1973), planted seeds that bore fruit years later in his ground-breaking work in comparative theology.<sup>29</sup> Moreland concludes the chapter by recalling that the Catholic Church already has practices of spiritual discernment that have been applied to post-canonical divine encounters. Moreland offers the unlikely category of “private revelation” here as a possible model for discerning what is true and holy in the Qur’ān. These discernment practices are offered as a possible way into a concrete examination of Muhammad’s prophethood— an examination that would involve another book-length project.

## (In) Conclusion

Anna Bonta Moreland’s *Muhammad Reconsidered* is an excellent addition to the fields of Catholic studies in Islam, and Catholic theology of post-canonical revelation. As we are aware both Christian and Islamic traditions have long histories of explicit awareness of the challenge and delicacy of interpreting communications believed to be of divine origin, whether as products of “inspiration” or as the mediation of the very words of God. This awareness begins with the sacred texts themselves, in the ways they incorporate, or allude to, previous “books” as well as in their more explicit comments on the limits of human interpretation and the inherent differences in various types of sacred communication. It is undoubtedly a fresh appraisal of Muhammad that considers the widest possible history of the ways in which Christians have assessed his prophethood. Moreland’s book is inspiring reading for anyone seeking to navigate between the Scylla of Christian exclusivism and exceptionalism and the Charybdis of onto-theological pluralism and universalism (or even religious perennialism). Communicating this idea that deep within the bosom of one tradition (Christianity) one finds a theological openness to another tradition (Islam) and this means that Christians have internal reasons from within their tradition to take seriously the revelations Muhammad received in Mecca and Medina. In fact, Christians need to

take all the resources used to interpret the Bible—historical, anthropological, philological, and theological—and apply them to a Christian reading of the Qur’ān. This work can be recognized as one of the central works—if not the central work in the modern academia to open the gates of debate and interaction to solve and untie the knots of theological puzzles between Islam and Christianity.

MEHRAJ DIN  
RESEARCH FELLOW  
ISTANBUL ZAIM UNIVERSITY  
ISTANBUL, TÜRKIYE

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## Endnotes

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- 2 Robert Cummings Neville, *Behind the Masks of God: An Essay Toward Comparative Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991) 166.
- 3 See Anna, Bonta Moreland, “The Qur’an and the Doctrine of Private Revelation: A Theological Proposal.” *Theological Studies* 76, no. 3 (2015): 531-549.
- 4 Anna Bonta Moreland, *Muhammad Reconsidered: A Christian Perspective on Islamic Prophecy*. (University of Notre Dame Press, 2020) 34
- 5 Moreland, *Muhammad Reconsidered*, 3
- 6 Sophia, *Muslims in the Western Imagination*. 8
- 7 Tolan (2002) gives many examples of Western Christian views of Muhammad; e.g. Peter the Venerable (xxi), Guibert de Nogent (135–147), Pope Innocent III (194).
- 8 Daniel, Norman. *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1960) 83.
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- 11 Irfan, *Religion as critique*, 32
- 12 Irfan, *Religion as critique*, 34
- 13 Geert Wilders, Geert Wilders Weblog, March 30, 2011, <http://www.geertwilders.nl/index.php/component/content/article/80-geertwildersnl/1741-time-to-unmask-muhammad-by-geert-wilders>.
- 14 Clinton Bennett, *In Search of Muhammad* (London: Cassell, 1998), 205.
- 15 Philpott, Daniel, Monica Duffy Toft, and Tim Shah. “God’s Century: Religion and the Future of Global Politics.” (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010) 3.
- 16 In his 2005 Christmas address to the Roman Curia, Pope Benedict XVI called for a “hermeneutic of reform” in the interpretation of Vatican II instead of the “hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture,” which risks a split between the preconciliar and the postconciliar Church. This address was reprinted as the introduction to a collection of essays meant to follow the pope’s lead on this issue. See Benedict XVI, “A Proper Hermeneutic for the Second Vatican Council,” ix–x.
- 17 Moreland, *Muhammad Reconsidered*, 32
- 18 James L. Heft, and John O’Malley, eds. *After Vatican II: trajectories and hermeneutics*. (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), xiii.



- 19 I disagree with Mikka Ruokanen, who argues that “what is apparent to human reason has become an institutionalized religion in Islam” in his *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions according to the Second Vatican Council*, 78. Roukanen implies that *only* what is apparent to human reason emerges in Islam. In my reading of the conciliar texts, the overlapping web of beliefs about Mary, Jesus, eschatology, and so on, added to the fact that we “adore” the one God together, imply that Muslims do not come to know God just through natural reason.
- 20 Moreland, *Muhammad reconsidered*, 43.
- 21 Karl, Rahner. *Visions and prophecies. (Quaestiones disputatae, 1963)* 21.
- 22 For a recent outstanding and helpful bibliography of modern studies of “prophecy” in English, see Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*.
- 23 See Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis; Scripture and Metaphysics; Christ’s Fulfilment of Torah and Temple*; Dauphinais, *Aquinas the Augustinian*; Mattison, *Introducing Moral Theology*; Tapie, *Aquinas on Israel and the Church*; and Hütter and Levering, *Ressourcement Thomism*.
- 24 Moreland, *Muhammad reconsidered*, 107.
- 25 Christian W. Troll. *Dialogue and Difference: Clarity in Christian-Muslim relations*. (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2009) 117.
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- 27 David, Marshall. “*Muhammad in contemporary Christian theological reflection.*” (*Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 24, no. 2 (2013). 161-172.
- 28 Moreland, *Muhammad reconsidered*, 114.
- 29 David Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas*. (University of Notre Dame Press, 1992) and *Freedom and creation in three traditions*. (Univ. Notre Dame Press, 1993).