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## **Reason, Experience, and the Existence of God**

Daniel C. Peterson

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# REASON, EXPERIENCE, AND THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Daniel C. Peterson

*Abstract: Both reason and experience are essential to religious life, which should be neither completely irrational nor entirely cerebral. But surely, of the two, the experience of direct and convincing revelation would and should trump academic debate, and most obviously so for its recipient. The Interpreter Foundation was established in the conviction that reasoned discussion and analysis necessarily has a place in faithful discipleship, but also in the confidence that divine revelation has genuinely occurred. The role of reason, accordingly, is a helpful one. It serves an important ancillary function. However, it does not supplant experience with God and the divine and must never imagine that it can. Academic scholarship can refine and clarify ideas, correct assumptions, defend truth claims, generate insights, and deepen understanding, but, while human inquiry sometimes creates openings for revelation, it will never replace direct divine communication. Interpreter knows its place.*

In my experience and judgment, some of the most fruitful academic research and writing occurs when two normally distinct fields of inquiry are brought together — just as some of the most dynamic geological activity occurs along the intersection of two tectonic plates. Literary studies and statistical analysis, for example. Biomedical engineering. Textual studies and archaeology. Geophysics. Or the entire and still comparatively new discipline of biochemistry.

Certainly, on a much less grand scale, this has been true in my own life. My research on “Nephi and His Asherah,” for instance, grew out of the fact that, at one point, I was simultaneously working through 1 Nephi and the first edition of

Mark Smith's *The Early History of God*.<sup>1</sup> Had I not been reading these two texts at the same time, I doubt that the central idea of my work in that area would ever have occurred to me.

Recently, I was reading Robert Reilly's provocative book, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, but also happened to pick up Michael Lemonick's article in the July 2014 issue of *National Geographic* on "The Hunt for Life Beyond Earth."<sup>2</sup> These are pieces of writing about such disparate topics that one might well expect that "never the twain shall meet."<sup>3</sup>

The thesis of *The Closing of the Muslim Mind* is that the collapse of the early Muslim rationalist movement known as the Mu'tazila and the triumph, instead, of the Ash'arites were not only catastrophic for philosophy and science in the Islamic world but led, in linear fashion, to today's political dysfunctions throughout the Middle East and beyond.<sup>4</sup> Robert Reilly's

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1 Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990). Out of this emerged Daniel C. Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah: A Note on 1 Nephi 11:8–23," in Davis Bitton, ed., *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 191–243, and a much condensed version of that article, Daniel C. Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000) 16–25.

2 Robert R. Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind: How Intellectual Suicide Created the Modern Islamist Crisis* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2010); Michael D. Lemonick, "The Hunt for Life Beyond Earth," *National Geographic* 226/1 (July 2014): 26–45.

3 The quoted phrase comes from Rudyard Kipling's 1892 *Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses* (London: Methuen & Co., 1892), 75: "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet." He was lamenting the gulf of misunderstanding that, in his day, divided the British from their subjects on the Indian subcontinent. It would be nice to say that East/West cultural differences have been overcome in the nearly 125 years since Kipling penned those words, but, in many ways, they seem worse today than ever.

4 Reilly's book is, as I say, very thought provoking. I think it has merit, but I also think that it goes much too far in its implicit assumption that Thomistic rationalism is the Platonic ideal of Christianity and of religious faith in general. I also believe that it needs to be corrected by opposing views, such as that expressed by Frank Griffel in *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 28/4 (2011): 124–127, and in my friend John Walbridge's *God and Logic in Islam: The Caliphate of Reason* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Graham E. Fuller's brilliant book *A World Without Islam* (New York: Little, Brown, & Co., 2011) argues, in direct contradiction to Reilly though probably unaware

particular *bête noire* is the enormously influential Muslim theologian al-Ghazali (d. 1111).

Very soon, while reading *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, I was struck by Reilly's strong emphasis on the primacy of reason in religious matters. A senior fellow of the American Foreign Policy Institute and a former director of the Voice of America, he is also a committed Catholic, and, it seems, a Thomist, an admirer of St. Thomas Aquinas.<sup>5</sup> Toward the end of the book, he expressly cites the extraordinarily rational philosophical theology of St. Thomas as a model for a fundamental theological reform within Islam.

Already on page 21, though, he approvingly cites the *Book of the Five Fundamentals*, by the Egyptian Mu'tazilite theologian Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar (d. 1025):

If it is asked: What is the first duty that God imposes upon you? Say to him: Speculative reasoning which leads to knowledge of God, because He is not known intuitively or by the senses. Thus, He must be known by reflection and speculation.<sup>6</sup>

Now, Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar's answer to his own question is, frankly, a surprising one to me. Overwhelmingly, I would guess, those who have read the Qur'an, the scriptural text at the foundation of Islam, would never choose "speculative reasoning" as the "first duty" imposed by it upon the faithful.

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of him, that theology, Islamic or otherwise, is essentially irrelevant to today's conflicts between the Islamic world and the West.

5 I too am a fan of Thomas Aquinas, but, as will become clear, not entirely in the same way as Robert Reilly. For that and for another very specific reason, one of my sons derives his middle name from St. Thomas.

6 Cited at Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, 21. I myself have done a bit of work, though not much, on Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar: See my translation of selections from his *Al-Mughni fi abwâb al-tawhîd wa'l-'adl* in Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Aminrazavi, eds., *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia, Vol. 3: Philosophical Theology in the Middle Ages and Beyond* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 40–51.

Nor, I think, would they identify it as the fifth or the sixth ... or the fifteenth.

Neither would most ordinary, non-Thomistic Christians have answered that question in the same way. There is, after all, an authoritative answer already contained in Christian scripture on the very topic:

But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.

Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, it was quite surprising to see Reilly's strong endorsement of Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar's position. But endorse it he does:

Therefore, reason logically precedes revelation. Reason first needs to establish the existence of God before undertaking the question as to whether God has spoken to man. Natural theology must be antecedent to theology.<sup>8</sup>

Really? If God were to appear to you and reveal a message, would you, before acting upon what he had said, first need to work your way through St. Thomas's "Five Ways" of demonstrating his existence?

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7 Matthew 22:34–40.

8 Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, 21.

Apparently so, because Reilly then quotes Qadi ‘Abd al-Jabbar again, as saying that “the stipulates of revelation concerning what [we should] say and do are no good until after there is knowledge of God,” which knowledge, both the Qadi and Reilly agree, comes from reason.<sup>9</sup>

But how does reason establish a knowledge of God? It does so, Reilly says, via thoughtful observation of natural phenomena and by inferring his existence and at least something of his nature from them. And, in support of this, Reilly adduces a number of Qur’anic exhortations to learn from the world around us.<sup>10</sup>

“It is, therefore,” Reilly writes, “the exercise of reason that creates the opening to the possibility of revelation.” Thereupon, “After determining that God exists, one can then reasonably ask whether God has spoken to man. Has revelation occurred? How would one know if it is genuine?”<sup>11</sup>

Surely, in this rather restricted sense, Reilly is on solid ground in saying that reason must be employed in order to authenticate revelation. But it seems to me that he goes too far when he cites Qadi ‘Abd al-Jabbar in support of that claim:

Knowledge of God can only be gained by speculation with rational argument, because if we do not [first] know that He is truthful we will not know the authenticity of the Book, the Sunna and the communal consensus.<sup>12</sup>

For the Muslim Qadi ‘Abd al-Jabbar, “the Book,” of course, is the Qur’an. And, by “Sunna,” he is referring to the so-called *hadith*, the authoritative traditions from and regarding the Prophet Muhammad and the earliest Muslim believers, his “Companions.” The “communal consensus” of the Muslim

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9 See Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, 21–22.

10 See Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, 22–23. There are many such passages in the Qur’an. I am, at this very time, completing a manuscript of which the concluding third section will focus on such Qur’anic texts.

11 Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, 23.

12 Cited at Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, 24.

*umma* or community after that time is, in the view of mainstream Sunni Islam, divinely protected from major error.

Thus, transposed into analogous Christian terms, Reilly is using Qadi ‘Abd al-Jabbar to say that, lacking “speculation with rational argument” — a particular kind of philosophical, even metaphysical, reasoning — one would be unable to know whether the Bible, Christian tradition, and the teachings of the Church are true. Not just in doctrinal detail, mind you, but at *all*.

Surely, though, whether or not we’ve received such a revelation ourselves, and perhaps even if we doubt that such a revelation has ever actually been received by anybody anywhere, we can easily conceive (at least in principle) of a divine self-disclosure so powerful that it would eliminate all doubt and essentially, at least for the recipient herself, render further intellectual investigation of the question of God’s existence rather frivolous. In C. S. Lewis’s *The Great Divorce*, there are still theological discussion groups in the afterlife. But, by the end of that brilliant little book, readers understand that their debates occur in Hell.

Consider the case of Abraham, whose direct personal experience with God would, I suspect, have left him feeling no particular need to use speculative reasoning in an attempt to deduce from the phenomena of nature whether or not God exists:

Now, after the Lord had withdrawn from speaking to me, and withdrawn his face from me, I said in my heart: Thy servant has sought thee earnestly; now I have found thee.<sup>13</sup>

Consider, too, the case of the great mathematician, philosopher, and mystic Blaise Pascal. Shortly after his death in 1662 at the age of 39, a servant, sorting through his clothes, noticed something sewn into a coat that Pascal had often worn.

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13 Abraham 2:12.



Curious, the servant cut the cloth open and found a parchment inside, containing, among others, these words:

The year of grace 1654  
Monday, 23 November, feast of St. Clement ...  
From about half-past ten in the evening  
Until about half-past midnight.  
Fire.  
The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the  
God of Jacob.  
Not of the philosophers and intellectuals.  
Certitude, certitude, feeling, joy, peace.<sup>14</sup>

“The heart has its reasons,” Pascal famously wrote, “which reason does not know.”<sup>15</sup>

And we must not forget the case of the apostle Peter, as well as the approving response of the Savior himself to Peter’s affirmation:

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?

And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath

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14 For the English translation, see Marvin O’Connell, *Blaise Pascal: Reasons of the Heart*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 95–96.

15 “*Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point.*” Stanley Appelbaum, ed., *Selected “Pensées” and Provincial Letters/Pensées et Provinciales choisies: A Dual-Language Book* (Mineola NY: Dover Publications, 2004), 166, 167.

not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.<sup>16</sup>

Peter didn't arrive at his conclusion via demonstrative syllogisms, any more than he and his brother Andrew had prefaced their initial commitment to Jesus with attendance at a course of catechetical theology, Aristotelian logic, and speculative reasoning:

And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.<sup>17</sup>

The fact is that speculative reasoning in the style of medieval Catholic scholasticism is simply not within reach of most ordinary believers. They lack the training for it, and, in not a few cases, the capacity. Requiring facility with it and a mastery of it would mean that proper faith would be available only to a small, highly educated elite. And surely this is not, and cannot be, the divine plan.

Moreover, there is no agreement, even among believing philosophers, that any of the multitude of attempts to prove the existence of God by means of human reason alone have been successful. The history of philosophy in general, and of philosophical theology in particular, is littered with "demonstrative" arguments that no longer move or convince us. Keenly aware of this, the great Harvard psychologist and philosopher William James (d. 1910) commented that

as a matter of history [philosophy] fails to prove its pretension to be "objectively" convincing. ... It

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16 Matthew 16:13–17.

17 Matthew 4:18–20.

does not banish differences; it founds schools and sects just as feeling does. The logical reason of man operates, in short, in this field of divinity exactly as it has always operated in love, or in patriotism, or in politics, or in any other of the wider affairs of life, in which our passions or our mystical intuitions fix our beliefs beforehand. It finds arguments for our conviction, for indeed it *has* to find them. It amplifies and defines our faith, and dignifies it and lends it words and plausibility. It hardly ever engenders it; it cannot now secure it.<sup>18</sup>

It's certainly wise, in this context, to remember and to reflect upon David Hume's notorious comment, in his 1738 *Treatise of Human Nature*, that "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them."<sup>19</sup>

Latter-day Saints might be especially struck by one instance of giving supposedly pure and disinterested reason priority over revelation that Robert Reilly singles out for particular mention in *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*: Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar, Reilly says, offers an illustration of the utility of reason in adjudicating what does and what doesn't constitute revelation: "By this means," he says with implicit approval,

the Mu'tazilites overcame such obstacles as the anthropomorphisms in the Qur'an, which speaks of God's "hands" (38:75), "eyes" (54:14), and "face" (55:27). The traditionalists [major adversaries of the Mu'tazilites] were forced into a conundrum by their literal reading of these passages, which confounded the doctrine that God was an incorporeal spirit. In particular, they bitterly contested the Mu'tazilite

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18 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 344-345,

19 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2.3.3, eds. David F. Norton and Mary J. Norton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 266.

spiritual interpretation of the text in verse 75:23 that those in paradise will actually “see” God.<sup>20</sup>

The famed Christian apologist C. S. Lewis, who taught at both Oxford and Cambridge and who frequently participated in debates on the subject with the leading thinkers at the two elite British universities, will serve as an example of the doubts that even a famed and vocal believer had about such arguments:

I do not think there is a *demonstrative* proof (like Euclid) of Christianity, nor of the existence of matter, nor of the good will and honesty of my best and oldest friends. I think all three are (except perhaps the second) far more probable than the alternatives. The case for Christianity in general is well given by Chesterton; and I tried to do something in my *Broadcast Talks*. As to *why* God doesn't make it demonstratively clear: are we sure that He is even interested in the kind of Theism which would be a compelled logical assent to a conclusive argument? Are *we* interested in it in personal matters? I demand from my friend a trust in my good faith which is *certain* without demonstrative proof. It wouldn't be confidence at all if he waited for rigorous proof. Hang it all, the very fairy-tales embody the truth. Othello believed in Desdemona's innocence when it was proved: but that was too late. Lear believed in Cordelia's love when it was proved: but that was too late. “His praise is lost who stays till all commend.” The magnanimity, the generosity which will trust on a reasonable probability, is required of us. But supposing one believed and was wrong after all? Why, then you would have paid the universe a compliment it doesn't deserve. Your error would even so be more interesting and important than the reality. And yet how could that be? How could

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20 Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*, 25.

an idiotic universe have produced creatures whose mere dreams are so much stronger, better, subtler than itself?<sup>21</sup>

Please recall, at this point, my statement earlier in the essay that al-Ghazali is Robert Reilly's candidate for the leading villain in Islamic intellectual history. In his famous intellectual autobiography, *Al-munqidh min al-ḍalāl* ("The Deliverer from Error"), al-Ghazālī recounts his futile search for spiritual certainty among theologians, philosophers, and what he calls "the people of authoritative instruction" (essentially the Ismā'īlī sect of Shī'ism, with its purportedly infallible imams). He then tells his readers that he finally found in personal religious encounter with the divine the certainty for which he had sought, which he compares to the ineffable experience of *dhawq* or "taste."<sup>22</sup>

As I've said elsewhere, al-Ghazali's method of achieving religious confidence is notably similar to that outlined in Moroni 10:4–5 — a method that, while nontransferable, is proportioned to the needs and capacities of all and is not restricted to a specially trained intellectual elite.

This method should not be misunderstood as anti-intellectual. I'm not arguing for the priority of irrationality over disciplined reason. My discomfort with Robert Reilly's argument isn't so much that he privileges reason over revelation, although I definitely think that, if one has to err, it would be best to err in the opposite direction. My fundamental objection is that he wants to separate them at all, and to privilege one — whichever one it be — over the other. No sentient, properly functioning, mature human being is without reason, and reason should constantly organize and evaluate experience, just as experience should inform and guide reason. Revelation, in my judgment, should never be detached from rationality, but

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21 C. S. Lewis, letter to Sheldon Vanauken (23 December 1950), *A Severe Mercy* (Great Britain: Spire, 1989), 91–92 (with contractions spelled out).

22 *Al-munqidh min al-ḍalāl* is translated in W. Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazālī* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1982).

rationality shouldn't be divorced from empirical experience, either, not even if it's experience with God and the divine.

Now, at this stage you may be wondering whether I've altogether forgotten about Michael Lemonick's *National Geographic* article on "The Hunt for Life Beyond Earth."

I haven't.

The scientific attempt to locate life beyond our planet — or, as it's often known, the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence, or SETI — can plausibly be said to have begun with a meeting in November 1961. That meeting was convened and organized by a young radio astronomer named Frank Drake, who was intrigued by the possibility of receiving and identifying alien radio transmissions. A small number of biologists, engineers, chemists, and astronomers (including a newly minted planetary scientist named Carl Sagan) came together to discuss whether it was worthwhile to devote valuable time with a radio telescope to a search for radio broadcasts from potential other planets, and, if so, how best to do it.<sup>23</sup>

In preparing for the meeting, Drake wondered how many civilizations might be out there among the stars. So he scribbled an equation — now famous as "Drake's equation" — on the blackboard:

$$N = R^* \times f_p \times n_e \times f_l \times f_i \times f_c \times L$$

Reading from left to right, Michael Lemonick explains the equation as follows:

You start out with the formation rate of sunlike stars in the Milky Way, then multiply that by the fraction of such stars that have planetary systems. Take the resulting number and multiply that by the number of life-friendly planets on average in each such system — planets, that is, that are about the size of Earth and orbit at the right distance from their star to be hospitable to life. Multiply that by the

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23 A very brief account, covering essentially what I've provided here, is given by Lemonick, "The Hunt for Life Beyond Earth," 30–32.

fraction of those planets where life arises, then by the fraction of those where life evolves intelligence, and then by the fraction of those that might develop the technology to emit radio signals we could detect.

The final step: Multiply the number of radio-savvy civilizations by the average time they're likely to keep broadcasting or even to survive. If such advanced societies typically blow themselves up in a nuclear holocaust just a few decades after developing radio technology, for example, there would probably be very few to listen for at any given time.<sup>24</sup>

Only a few months before, on 25 May 1961, President John F. Kennedy had stood before the United States Congress to announce that "this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to earth."<sup>25</sup> It was a heady time, and Drake and his friends were optimistic.

"The equation made perfect sense," writes Lemonick,

but there was one problem. Nobody had a clue what any of those fractions or numbers were, except for the very first variable in the equation: the formation rate of sunlike stars. The rest was pure guesswork. If SETI scientists managed to snag an extraterrestrial radio signal, of course, these uncertainties wouldn't matter. But until that happened, experts on every item in the Drake equation would have to try to fill it in by nailing down the numbers — by finding the occurrence rate for planets around sunlike stars or by trying to solve the mystery of how life took root on Earth.<sup>26</sup>

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24 Lemonick, "The Hunt for Life Beyond Earth," 32.

25 John M. Logsdon, "John F. Kennedy's Space Legacy and Its Lesson for Today," *Issues In Science & Technology* 27/3 (2011): 29.

26 Lemonick, "The Hunt for Life Beyond Earth," 32.

Some progress has been made over the intervening decades. Scientists now have much clearer ideas about some of the values for the variables in the Drake equation.

But it's been nearly sixty years since that hopeful meeting was convened, and no radio transmissions have yet been detected from beyond our planet, except those from astronauts and space probes that we ourselves have sent out. The search for extraterrestrial life is now focused less on signals from ET and on hopes of making contact with superintelligent alien scientists than on exobiology, on places where relatively primitive extremophiles might have eked out a survival niche — or, at least, where they might once have existed. And, to complicate things, there's talk about viruses or bacteria being carried from earth to Mars, or from Io to Europa, by material ejected from volcanos or blasted out into space by meteor impacts.<sup>27</sup>

This, I think, is closely analogous to the use of inferences from nature, speculative reason and induction, in an attempt to build a case for the existence and nature of God — in a sense, the ultimate extraterrestrial.

But note Michael Lemonick's significant phrase, quoted just above: "If SETI scientists," he said, "managed to snag an extraterrestrial radio signal, of course, these uncertainties wouldn't matter."

Frank Drake's dream from the first, as a radio astronomer, wasn't to detect obscure traces of the past activity of extinct microbes on a Jovian moon. It was to receive, identify, and understand deliberate transmissions from intelligent extraterrestrials. And today, in his mid-eighties, he's still at it: "Although he's technically retired, Frank Drake is still looking for extraterrestrial signals — a discovery that would trump everything else."<sup>28</sup>

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27 In addition to Lemonick, "The Hunt for Life Beyond Earth," see Christopher P. McKay and Victor Parro García. "How to Search for Life on Mars," *Scientific American* 310/6 (June 2014): 44–49.

28 Lemonick, "The Hunt for Life Beyond Earth," 44.



And, truly, it would. Just as an unmistakable revelation directly from God would render every debate about his existence moot, at least from the standpoint of the recipient of that revelation.

Must the revelation be spectacular? Not necessarily. At least, Pascal didn't think so. "Those to whom God has given religion through the feelings of the heart," he wrote, "are fortunate and of a truly legitimate persuasion; but to those who do not possess this, we can give it only through reasoning, while waiting for God to give it to them through the feelings of their heart."<sup>29</sup>

But certainly an indubitable and spectacular revelation would obviate the need for secular, rational proofs. "Could you gaze into heaven five minutes," Joseph Smith famously said, "you would know more than you would by reading all that was ever written on the subject."<sup>30</sup>

There is a memorable story about St. Thomas Aquinas, who is plainly Robert Reilly's intellectual hero in *The Closing of the Muslim Mind* and who is, very arguably, the greatest of all systematic theologians: One day, on 6 December 1273, while he was celebrating Mass in the chapel of Saint Nicholas at the Dominican monastery in Naples, he paused a for a very long time, such that the congregation became nervous. Finally, he resumed his liturgical functions and completed the service.

But a great change had come over Thomas. From that moment, although he had been a legendarily prolific author, he never again wrote or dictated anything. When his companion or *socius*, Reginald of Piperno, complained that there remained much work to be done, Thomas replied, "I can do no more." Still, the other man insisted. "Reginald," Thomas finally answered, "I can do no more; such things have been revealed to me that

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29 "Ceux à qui Dieu a donné la Religion par sentiment du coeur sont bienheureux et bien légitimement persuadés; mais à ceux qui ne l'ont pas, nous ne pouvons la donner que par raisonnement, en attendant que Dieu la leur donne par sentiment de coeur." Appelbaum, *Selected "Pensées" and Provincial Letters/Pensées et Provinciales choisies*, 114, 115.

30 Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 324.

all that I have written seems to me so much straw [*mihi videtur ut palea*].” And he died about four months later.<sup>31</sup>

It seems clear that Thomas, a good, sincere, and devout man, had experienced some kind of profound revelation while ministering at that Neapolitan altar. And what he had just seen, in his own judgment, trumped everything that he had ever written.

The Interpreter Foundation was established on the premise that both reason and revelation have their place in determining religious truth. We believe reasoned investigation to be essential, but we will not discount revelation.

*Daniel C. Peterson (Ph.D., University of California at Los Angeles) is a professor of Islamic studies and Arabic at Brigham Young University and is the founder of the University's Middle Eastern Texts Initiative, for which he served as editor-in-chief until mid-August 2013. He has published and spoken extensively on both Islamic and Mormon subjects. Formerly chairman of the board of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) and an officer, editor, and author for its successor organization, the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, his professional work as an Arabist focuses on the Qur'an and on Islamic philosophical theology. He is the author, among other things, of a biography entitled Muhammad: Prophet of God (Eerdmans, 2007).*

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31 The story has been retold at a number of places. See, for instance, Jacques Maritain, *St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Joseph W. Evans and Peter O'Reilly (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1958), 54, 56.



