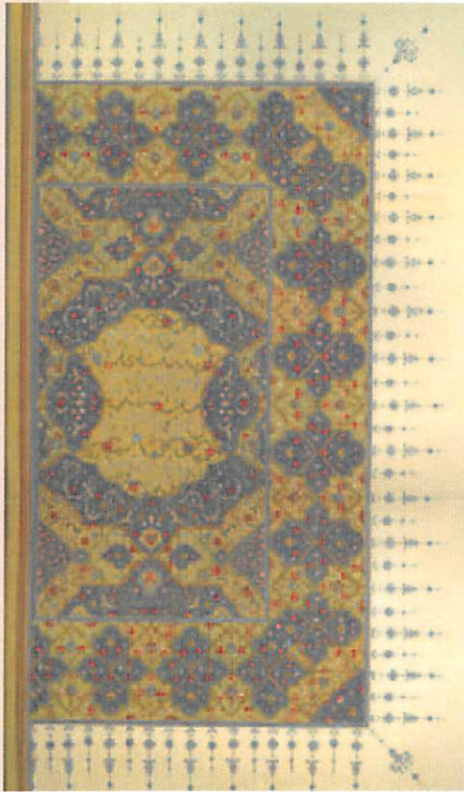


Hadith, which records the traditions of what Muhammad said and did as an example for all Muslims.

The implication of the Muslim declaration of faith is that all true Muslims will strive to obey God according to the example of Muhammad and the teachings of the Qur'an. This means that Muslims are committed to a radical reorganization of human society based on the principle of radical religious and moral reform. The ultimate goal of Muslims is the creation of the rule of God on earth through the activities of God's people, the Muslim community.



**Photo 24.1** For Muslims this page from an ancient Qur'an has a quality of sacredness lacking in the Bible. While the Bible is a historical text, no one doubts that it was written by human beings. Therefore, Muslims see it as inspired in some way, but for them it is not revelation. Only the Qur'an is revelation, and therefore it is totally unique according to Islamic philosophy.

### THE MIRACLE OF THE QUR'AN

According to Islamic belief, Adam was the first Muslim. From him a long line of prophets can be traced, through Abraham, to Jesus, and on to Muhammad. Muhammad is the last and greatest prophet of all. Through Muhammad the Qur'an, which literally means "recitation," was revealed to mankind. Usually expositions of Islamic belief begin by discussing the teaching of Muhammad about God. Although this is a good place to start, it is probably better to begin by discussing how one should read the Qur'an and how Muslims view it, because Islamic teaching about God is based on God's revelation in the Qur'an.

Most Christians approach the Qur'an the way they approach reading the Bible. As a result, Christians fail to see the differences between the Qur'an and their own scriptures. According to Christian teachings, all scripture of the Old and New Testaments is inspired by God and is God's revelation to mankind. Therefore, Christians speak of the Bible as the Word of God. Superficially Muslims use the same language when speaking about the Qur'an. Therefore, Christians often assume that Muslims regard the Qur'an in essentially the same way as Christians regard the Bible. They also often think that because the Qur'an mentions the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, it does so in more or less the same way as Christians think about these books. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The identification of the Islamic doctrine of *wahy*, or revelation, with Christian views about the inspiration of the Bible is a major source of misunderstanding of Islam in the West. To understand why, one must

consider two terms usually used to express the idea of revelation as found in Christian thinking: *wahy* and *ilham*. *Ilham* means approximately what “inspiration” of the Bible has meant in the Christian tradition as taught by traditional Roman Catholics and Protestants like the Princeton theologian B. B. Warfield. Literally, *ilham* means “to cause to swallow or gulp down” and is found only once in The Qur’an, in Sura 91:8, which reads: “And inspired it (with conscience of) what is wrong for it and (what is) right for it.”

Here, in verse 8, the term for “inspired” is *ilham*, which clearly means that God is working inside the person. As Muslim theology developed historically, this usage was maintained and developed. *Ilham* is said to occur when God reveals himself to an individual by putting his knowledge into their mind. Thus saints are believed to be special recipients of *ilham* or inspiration, and the knowledge a person gains by *ilham* is inspired knowledge, quite distinct from human reason, and is the free gift of God.

This type of idea compares well with traditional Christian views about the inspiration of the Bible. Second Timothy 3:16 reads, “All Scripture is God-breathed . . .,” and 2 Peter 1:21 reads, “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

For this reason, B. B. Warfield summed up his understanding of biblical inspiration by saying, “The Biblical books are called inspired as the Divinely determined products of inspired men; the Biblical writers are called inspired as breathed into by the Holy Spirit, so that the product of their activity transcends human powers and becomes Divinely authoritative. Inspiration is, therefore, usually defined as a supernatural influence exerted on the sacred writers by the Spirit of God.”<sup>1</sup>

Clearly this interpretation of inspiration is very close to the Muslim concept of *ilham*. The problem is that Muslims do not claim that the Qur’an is inspired in the sense of being the product of *ilham*. For Muslims the Qur’an is the product of *wahy*, not *ilham*. That is,



**Photo 24.2** This miniature from a twelfth-century illustrated manuscript by Master Hugo shows Moses preaching to the Jews. Islam has no difficulty accepting Moses, Isaiah, and Jesus, as well as a host of other prophets as men inspired by God. Yet it distinguishes sharply between the inspiration of a prophet who speaks for God and the revelation of the Qur’an, recited by Muhammad. The prophets speak inspired words, yet they are their words. But when Muhammad recited the Qur’an, he spoke the literal word of God. The works of the prophets are inspired; the words of the Qur’an are divine.

1. B. B. Warfield, *Inspiration and Revelation of the Bible* (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1951), 131.

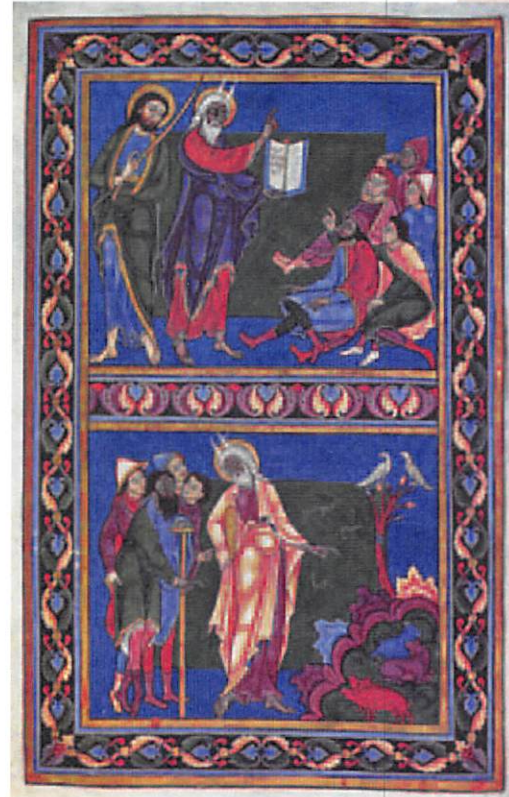
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it is a revealed, not an inspired, book. *Wahy* literally means “to hasten” and is used as a religious term to denote revelations given to prophets. The Old Testament prophets are said to receive *wahy*, not to speak by *ilham*. This can be seen in Sura 23:27, presented here in its context:

23 And We verily sent Noah unto his folk, and he said: O my people! Serve Allah. Ye have no other God save Him. Will ye not ward off (evil)?

24 But the chieftains of his folk, who disbelieved, said: This is only a mortal like you who would make himself superior to you. Had Allah willed, He surely could have sent down angels. We heard not of this in the case of our fathers of old.

25 He is only a man in whom is a madness, so watch him for a while.

26 He said: My Lord! Help me because they deny me.

27 Then We inspired in him, saying: Make the ship under Our eyes and Our inspiration. Then, when Our command cometh and the oven gusheth water, introduce therein of every (kind) two spouses, and thy household save him thereof against whom the Word hath already gone forth. And plead not with Me on behalf of those who have done wrong. Lo! they will be drowned.

Later, as was already observed, when Muhammad himself received revelation, he was commanded: “1 Read: In the name of thy Lord Who createth” (sura 96).

In this passage *wahy* is clearly described as a reading of a preexistent message, not as the inspiring of a person to compose the message. Muslims do believe that Muhammad spoke under the influence of *ilham*, but his inspired sayings form the basis of the Hadith rather

than appearing in the Qur’an. For this reason Hadith may be understood as “revelation” but not “Revelation.” That is, it contains words inspired by God, but it is not God’s word. Therefore, Muslims argue that, like the Bible, the Hadith may be corrupted, necessitating its critical study to distinguish genuine from spurious traditions.

In the truest sense, only the Qur’an is *wahy* to a Muslim’s certain knowledge. Other scriptures may contain *wahy*, but they are not *wahy*, because their transmission has been corrupted. The Qur’an, on the



**Photo 24.3** The above tenth-century miniature of John the Evangelist dictating his gospel sums up the difference between Christian and Muslim views of scripture. John dictated God’s message in his own words; therefore, although they are inspired words, they are not revelation in the sense that Muslims use *wahy*. The Qur’an, on the other hand, is the word of God. It is revelation, and the only reliable revelation available to humans.