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## The Thematic Domain of Human Succession from God: A Comparative Study of the Views of the Qur'an and the Bible

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### Abstract

The succession of humans from God is generally accepted in the Abrahamic religions. The present study aims to examine the thematic domain of human succession from God from the perspectives of the Qur'an and the Bible through a comparative approach; it also aims to understand and define the mission of humans as successors of God in the world based on the teachings of the Abrahamic religions, which can assist in reconciling the views of the followers of these religions in fulfilling human responsibilities in the contemporary world. To this aim was used a library-based approach for data collection and uses a descriptive-interpretive method with a comparative focus to address the issues. The findings indicate that the Qur'an explicitly affirms the principle of human succession from God, considering humans as successors of God in both existential and legislative matters, supported by evidence such as the generality of verse 30 of Surah Al-Baqarah in appointing humans as successors and the compatibility of the successor with the one succeeded upon in attributes. However, in the Bible, the succession of humans from God is implicitly mentioned. In the

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**Hamid Aryan, Mojtaba Mostashreq**

*Old Testament*, humans are introduced as representatives of God on earth, with the responsibility of cultivating the earth and governing its inhabitants. This indicates a form of succession in legislative matters. From the *New Testament*, a concept similar to the Qur'anic view (succession in all matters) can be inferred, which is certainly built around the centrality of the personality and succession of Jesus Christ (peace be upon him).

**Keywords:** Human succession from God, *Khalīfatullāh*, *Mustakhlafun fīh*, the Qur'an and the Bible, Christianity, Judaism.

**Introduction**

Humans, like other creatures in the universe, occupy a specific position within the creation system. Understanding this position significantly impacts their stature and status in relation to God and other beings, as well as the responsibilities arising from that during human existence. For this reason, defining the place of humans in the creation system is considered a fundamental issue in religious anthropology. In the Qur'an, this position is referred to as succession. During the creation of Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) as the ancestor of the current human generation, God explicitly introduced humans as "Successors": "And when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority." (Q 2:30) In this verse and the two subsequent verses, not only is the principle of human succession mentioned, but also the criteria and rationale for this succession and various other aspects associated with it are addressed. Therefore, numerous questions regarding the issue of human succession have been raised in Quranic studies for a long time, with a focus on the following key inquiries:

### **The Thematic Domain of Human Succession from God: A Comparative Study of the Views of the Qur'an and the Bible**

- Who is the successor of whom?
- What are the examples of this successor?
- What criteria were used to choose humans as successors?
- In what matters and topics does humanity exercise succession from their predecessor?
- What is the scope of human succession in the matters of succession?
- And so on...

Many commentators of the Qur'an have addressed these inquiries within the framework of diverse interpretive opinions regarding verses 30-34 of Surah Al-Baqarah.

This paper is based on the established premise that "According to the Qur'an, humans are the successors of God," (cf. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2009 AD/1430 AH: 1, 115; Javadi Amoli, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 3, 57-62; Misbah Yazdi, 1989 AD/1368 SH: 364-365; Mousavi Kani and Aryan, 2024 AD/1403 SH: 49-61) and focuses specifically on the examination of the fourth question, that is, the issue of the matters and topics of human succession from God. The scope of this research extends beyond the Qur'anic viewpoint, incorporating the Two Testaments. Thus, the topic is explored from the perspective of the sacred texts of Abrahamic religions (the Qur'an and the Two Testaments) and is analyzed and examined comparatively.

The question of 'In what matters does humanity have succession and representation from God?' has received less attention from commentators of the sacred texts of divine religions. Sometimes, this issue is referred to in Qur'anic interpretative literature by the term "What is succeeded in," (cf. Andalusī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 1, 227; Misbah Yazdi, 1989 AD/1368 SH: 362), meaning in what matters and issues is humanity chosen for succession

**Hamid Aryan, Mojtaba Mostashreq**

by God and what responsibilities and missions do they hold. 'Does being a successor of God imply merely a moral mission in the realm of individual human existence, or do they also have a representation and mission from God in organizing social life?' 'Is this succession limited to legislative matters, or does it also persist in existential affairs?' Answering these questions clarifies the nature and dimensions of this succession and the responsibilities derived from it. In other words, it delineates the thematic domain of succession from God and consequently determines the various spheres of responsibility and mission for humanity in this succession.

If the domain of human succession from God encompasses all existential and legislative aspects of human life, then the notion of restricting religion and its teachings to individual matters and performing rituals in corners of temples, mosques, and personal retreats would be contrary and incompatible with this mission and the arising responsibilities. Instead, emphasizing the social role of religion and its teachings in guiding and managing various aspects of human life will become very pronounced. This point, especially in today's materially burdened world, which faces a widespread crisis of meaning in life and a decline in spirituality, can be very insightful, hope-inducing, and effective. It enhances the responsibility of scholars, religious thinkers, and theologians of divine religions in understanding and analyzing these crises, encouraging official authorities of religious institutions to promote collaboration and cooperation. It encourages them to take joint action in facing and solving the spiritual, ethical, and social crises of contemporary societies.

The least benefit of such interreligious comparative studies is that, in general, it can assist thinkers of the heavenly religions in gaining a deeper

### **The Thematic Domain of Human Succession from God: A Comparative Study of the Views of the Qur'an and the Bible**

understanding of the human position in the system of existence and their responsibilities towards God and creation. Specifically, it can at least expand and enhance awareness among the followers of the Abrahamic religions, who constitute half of the world's population, regarding the fundamental teachings of the Qur'an and the Bible concerning the succession and representation of humanity from God and the common human responsibilities arising from it. This article aims to take a step towards achieving these stated objectives by re-examining the teachings outlined in the Qur'an and the Bible that relate to divine succession and the associated responsibilities.

It is noteworthy to mention in the introduction regarding the texts of the Abrahamic religions that, based on rational and textual evidence, the Holy Qur'an is the only heavenly book that is preserved from verbal distortion (cf. Misbah Yazdi, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 271-274; idem: 1999 AD/1378 SH: 310-396). However, this claim cannot be maintained regarding the Two Testaments, as the existing text does not necessarily correspond to its original text, and there is historical and religious evidence indicating its non-conformity with the original text (Spinoza, 1951: chap. 8; Wayment, 2019: The full article). Nevertheless, since the current the Bible are considered valid by their believers and followers, in interreligious dialogues with an approximate approach, the credibility of each of the religious texts according to the perspectives of their adherents is emphasized. Considering the importance of highlighting the commonalities of the Abrahamic religions in such studies, objections to the authenticity of religious texts may be overlooked, and their credibility from the perspective of their adherents will be taken into account.

### 1. Review and Evaluation of Background

Regarding the background of the research, based on the conducted search, no specific work has been found that comparatively examines the views of the Qur'an and the Bible on the matters and aspects concerning the succession of humans from God. The only reference is in the book "Recognition of the Qur'an and the Two Testaments," where the author briefly discusses the Qur'anic views on human succession and its aspects before mentioning the issue of human succession in the Bible (Baghbani Arani, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 275 and 278). However, these general references pertain solely to the principle of humans being successors, not the matters and aspects of that succession from God. Moreover, no work specifically addressing the views of the Bible on the matters of human succession from God was found by the authors of this article.

Although the Quran commentators have generally shown attention to the topic of human succession from God under verses 30 to 34 of Surah *al-Baqarah* and occasionally in the interpretation of verse 26 of Surah *Şād*, the findings reveal that only a few of them have addressed the matters and aspects below or in detail regarding human succession from God, while most interpretations either did not acknowledge this issue at all or merely provided brief references to it. Among the works that more clearly address the issue discussed in this article are "*Anwār al-Tanzīl*" (Bayḍāwī, 1997 AD/1418 AH: 1, 68), "*Rūḥ Al-Ma'ānī*" (Ālūsī, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 1, 222), and "*al-Mīzān*" (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2009 AD/1430 AH: 1, 115), while "Tasnim" has elaborated on aspects of this issue in greater detail (Jawadi Amoli, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 3, 62–127).

### **The Thematic Domain of Human Succession from God: A Comparative Study of the Views of the Qur'an and the Bible**

A review of the content of the mentioned interpretations concerning the issue discussed shows that, apart from the two interpretations "al-Mīzān" and "Tasnim," other interpretations have limited themselves to a few wordings or, at most, one-line mentions on this topic, merely listing the titles of the matters concerning succession without providing any analysis or explanation. However, "al-Mīzān" addresses the relationship of these matters with the status of the successor and the one succeeded, while "Tasnim" offers a broader discussion on this connection. Another issue seems to be that many past commentators did not seriously consider what responsibilities the successor bears and in which matters they hold succession, passing over this subject without any discussion or opinion.

In addition to the interpretative books, some other writings occasionally contain weak entries on the discussed topic (matters of human succession from God). In two articles, "A Study of the Semantics and Interpretation of the Verse of God's Succession" (Bagheri et al., 2012 AD/1391 SH) and "Examining the Concept of *Khalīfatullāh* in the Verse of Succession," (Kavand, 2009 AD/1388 SH), there are hints regarding the aspects of human succession from God in the analysis of Adam's succession story in the Qur'an; however, these references are brief and lack the necessary reasoning and analysis. An article titled "Divine Succession; Emphasizing the View of Ayatollah Jawadi Amoli" (Sayyidinia, 2007 AD/1386 SH) briefly compiles the author of "Tasnim's" viewpoints under three titles: "The Limits of Divine Successorship," "The Scope of Divine Successorship," and "Degrees and Ranks of Successorship," which contains no new points or analyses, merely summarizing "Tasnim's" content.

**Hamid Aryan, Mojtaba Mostashreq**

In summary, the discussions regarding the background indicate that, despite addressing the fundamental topic of human succession in the Qur'an, first, all aspects of it, including the issue of "Matters and contexts of human succession from God," have been given less attention in these works. Secondly, most who have indeed paid some attention have not seriously and thoroughly elucidated its facets or their connection to the status and rank of the successor and the one succeeded. Thirdly, to our knowledge, no specific research has yet been conducted analyzing the views of the texts of the other Abrahamic religions (the Bible) on this topic. Fourthly, no comparative study has been carried out between the views of the Qur'an and the Bible in this regard. Therefore, we believe that addressing the aforementioned research gaps and considering the goals previously outlined for such studies, researching the discussed issue with a comparative approach based on the views of the Abrahamic religions is both appropriate and necessary.

This article employs a library research method, gathering foundational data from primary sources, namely the texts of the Qur'an and the Bible. In the next step, the necessary information was collected through references to recognized interpretations of the Qur'an and the Bible. Then, with an analytical-interpretive method, this data was processed. In the information processing stage, the authors' fundamental reliance in deriving the meaning and intent of the texts of the Qur'an and the Bible is based on general principles and logic of understanding texts and specific criteria for comprehending and interpreting sacred texts.

Thus, following references to some general concepts of the research, we will organize and pursue the main body of the discussion in three areas:

## **The Thematic Domain of Human Succession from God: A Comparative Study of the Views of the Qur'an and the Bible**

stating the Qur'anic view on the issue, stating the views of the Bible on the issue, and finally, comparing and assessing the two.

### **2. Conceptualization**

#### **2.1. Succession and Successor**

The root "*Kh L F*" originally means the coming of something after another (Ibn Fāris, 1983 AD/1404 AH: Root "*Kh L F*"; Ibn Athīr, 1947 AD/1367 AH: Root "*Kh L F*"). "*Khilāfah*" is the verbal noun (Ibn Durayd, 1988: Root "*Kh L F*") derived from "*Kh L F*" meaning representation (Farāhīdī, 1988 AD/1409 AH: Root "*Kh L F*"), agency (Rāghib, 1991 AD/1412 AH: Root "*Kh L F*"), and substitution (Moein, 2007 AD/1386 SH: Entry "Agency") for another, and the person who represents or succeeds is called "*Khalīfah*" (Farāhīdī, 1988 AD/1409 AH: Root "*Kh L F*"; Azharī, 2000 AD/1421 AH: Root "*Kh L F*"), where the "*Hā*" indicates emphasis (Fayyūmī, 1993 AD/1414 AH: Root "*Kh L F*").

In Islamic theology, the political apparatus replacing the government of the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) is termed succession, and its rulers are referred to as successors (Kasnizani, 2005 AD/1426 AH: 7, 266). In mysticism, the term successorship is applied to the rank of the perfect human (Sajadi, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 226), which is a position where a person, purified from base desires, connects to the holy realm to the extent that the light of truth flows into them without intermediaries, thereby becoming a manifestation of divine names, a channel of God's governance in matters beyond Him, and an intermediary of grace (Doghaym, 2004: 1, 408-409).

Considering that the term "*Khalīfah*" and other derivatives from the root "*Kh L F*" have all been used in connection to human succession in religious texts in their literal and non-technical meanings, this research will also refer

**Hamid Aryan, Mojtaba Mostashreq**

to the literal meanings of these terms, and none of the technical meanings of succession and successor are intended.

**2.2. *Mustakhlafun fih* and *Mustakhlafun 'anh***

If a person other than the successor himself appoints him to the position of succession, this act is termed "*Istikhlaḥ*." (Jawharī, 1983 AD/1404 AH: Root "*Kh L F*") In this case, the person who has chosen the successor is called "*Mustakhlaf*," and the individual for whom the successor has become a representative is termed "*Mustakhlafun 'anh*." (cf. Saḥāb, 1993 AD/1414 AH: Root "*Kh L F*") In anthropological discussions, the place or tasks and matters that are subject to succession are referred to as "*Mustakhlafun fih*," (Misbah Yazdi, 1989 AD/1368 SH: 362) meaning matters in which the successor has become the representative of the one succeeded to perform on their behalf or in alignment with their will.

**3. The Qur'anic Perspective on Matters and Aspects of Succession from God**

Initially, it is important to note that since the nature of the matters and topics concerning the succession of humans "*Mustakhlafun fih*" is directly related to the identity of the one succeeded "*Mustakhlafun 'anh*" (the one whom the successor has replaced), the differing opinions of commentators regarding the identity of the one succeeded contribute to varied perspectives on the nature of the matters of succession. As mentioned in the introduction of this article, the premise of the present research is that, from the Qur'anic perspective, humans are successors and representatives of God, not other beings. Therefore, the views of interpreters who believe that, according to the Qur'an, humans are successors of the previous inhabitants of the earth

### **The Thematic Domain of Human Succession from God: A Comparative Study of the Views of the Qur'an and the Bible**

(including other humans, Neanderthals, jinn, and angels) (for example, cf. Sadeqi Tehrani, 2011 AD/1432 AH: 1, 280-285) fall outside the scope of this article and will not be addressed. Only those interpretative perspectives based on the premise of human succession from God will be discussed.

The term "*Mustakhlafun fih*" or the matters in which humans hold succession from God are addressed in two verses: 30 of Surah *al-Baqarah* and 26 of Surah *Şād*. The first verse relates to Prophet Adam, and its generality can be utilized in this regard. The second verse expresses a strong near-explicit instance of the realm of succession of Prophet David from God. We do not have many narrations to clarify and explain this matter. This lack has led to differences among commentators regarding the principle and manner in which these verses indicate the scope of human succession from God. Some ancient commentators have conveyed only two interpretative opinions (Abū Ḥayyān Andalusī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 1, 227). However, it seems that all interpretative opinions regarding the nature of the matters and topics for which humans are successors from God "*Mustakhlafun fih*" can be categorized into four main perspectives:

#### **3.1. First Perspective: The Judgment of Right and Justice among Creatures**

Some commentators believe that the succession of humans from God mentioned in verse 30 of Surah Al-Baqarah is solely related to ruling and judging among people based on truth (cf. Ṭabrisī, 1952 AD/1372 AH: 1, 176). *Shaykh Ṭūsī* has attributed this view to Ibn Mas'ud, stating: "I meant that I am making a successor in the land to judge among creatures." (Ṭūsī, n.d.: 1, 131) *Abū Ḥayyān* also referenced this as one of the two interpretations concerning the matter: "One of them is ruling justly and

**Hamid Aryan, Mojtaba Mostashreq**

fairly." (Abū Ḥayyān Andālūsī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: *ibid*) This interpretation appears to rely on the meaning of the noble verse "O! David, indeed We have made you a successor upon the earth, so judge between the people in truth," (Ṣād: 26) where the act of judging justly among the people (*Faḥkum Bayn al-Nās bil Ḥaqq*) is linked explicitly to the status of David as God's successor. According to some commentators, the ambiguity of the matters of human succession in verse 30 of Surah *al-Baqarah* is clarified and emphasized by the statement of the matters of David's succession in verse 26 of Surah *Ṣād* (judging and ruling justly among people) (for instance, cf. Nizām al-‘Araj, 1995 AD/1416 AH: 1, 216).

**3.2. Second Perspective: The Cultivation of the Earth**

Some Islamic commentators assert that humans hold succession from God to serve the purpose of cultivating the earth (cf. Ibn ‘Āshūr, 2000: 1, 385). This opinion has occasionally been expressed in different terms by various commentators. For example, some have stated that humans have been appointed by God to take command of earthly matters and discover its resources and wealth for utilization (cf. Mughnīyyah, 1952 AD/1372 AH: 1, 80). *Shaykh Ṭūsī* (without mentioning any specific person or group) reports an interpretative opinion that limits the matters of succession to the cultivation of the earth and the utilization of its resources, such as agriculture, production of goods, and the establishment of irrigation canals (cf. Ṭūsī, n.d.: *ibid*). *Abū Ḥayyān* also referred to this view as the second opinion regarding what is considered "*Mustakhlafun fih*": "The second is the development of the earth, where one plants and harvests, builds, and runs rivers." (Abū Ḥayyān Andalusī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 1, 227)

### **The Thematic Domain of Human Succession from God: A Comparative Study of the Views of the Qur'an and the Bible**

In this view, the phrase "*Fil Ard*" (in the earth) is emphasized, as the earth besides being the location of human succession, also has significance in the mission of the divine successor. This perspective may stem from earlier commentaries in the first two centuries, as discussed in the interpretation of Ṭabarī (for instance, cf. Ṭabarī, 2001 AD/1422 AH: 1, 477).

#### **3.3. Third Perspective: Establishing Justice, Cultivating the Earth, Managing People's Affairs, Perfecting Souls, Implementing Divine Commands**

A number of other commentators believe that humans are chosen as successors of God to fulfill four tasks: establishing justice, cultivating the earth, managing people's affairs, and perfecting souls. Commentators such as *Bayḍāwī* (cf. Bayḍāwī, 1997 AD/1418 AH: 1, 168) have stated that humans hold succession from God in all these matters, with some commentators following *Bayḍāwī* listing these four as the matters of succession (cf. Ālūsī, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 1, 222). Others among them have referred to some of these tasks specifically as the tasks of human succession. *Zuhaylī* views the role of the successor as the cultivation of the earth, settling in it, and implementing divine commands (Zuhaylī, 1997 AD/1418 AH: 1, 125). In the interpretation of *Jalālayn*, the responsibility of the successor is also noted as implementing divine commands on earth (Muḥallā, 1995 AD/1416 AH: 1, 8) which encompasses all these various tasks within the four-fold mission articulated by *Bayḍāwī* for God's successor. Generally, these commentators have not provided a rationale for this interpretation, but it can be suggested that it is similar to some assumptions made in justifying the second perspective.

**Hamid Aryan, Mojtaba Mostashreq****3.4. Fourth Perspective: All Existential Aspects of the One Succeeded, Including Existential and Legislative Matters**

Another group of contemporary commentators has expressed a fourth interpretative view based on the characteristics of the one succeeded "*Mustakhlafun 'anh.*" This interpretation posits that what encompasses the matter of succession "*Mustakhlafun fih*" includes all aspects and matters that pertain to the one succeeded, whether in the realm of creation or legislation (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2009 AD/1430 AH: 1, 115; Misbah Yazdi, 1982 AD/1361 SH: Session 37, Part 2; Jawadi Amoli, 2010 AD/1389 AH: 3, 62-63; 92-95; 116-118; 125-127). Unlike the previous three perspectives, this view analyzes the matters of human succession from God based on the relationship between the successor and the one succeeded. There is ample evidence indicating that the matters and aspects in which humans hold succession on behalf of God (or what is termed as *Mustakhlafun fih*) are not confined to specific duties such as adjudication or the cultivation of the earth, mentioned in the prior views; instead, they encompass all existential and legislative aspects.

Several reasons and pieces of evidence support this view, of which we will mention some:

**3.4.1. The Generality of the Verse on Human Succession in Surah *al-Baqarah***

Among the verses of the Qur'an, only two verses clearly pertain to human succession from God. One of these verses refers specifically to the succession of Prophet David, which explicitly defines his domain of succession as "Judging and ruling justly among the people." In contrast, the other verse articulates human succession from God with the expression

### **The Thematic Domain of Human Succession from God: A Comparative Study of the Views of the Qur'an and the Bible**

"*Innī Jā 'ilun fil Arḍi Khalīfah*" (Q 2:30) in a broad and unrestricted manner. The context of the verse supports the understanding that the intended meaning of succession here is absolute (cf. Jawadi Amoli, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 92). Thus, according to the second verse, since human succession from God is stated in an unrestricted manner and not limited to certain legislative aspects or merely legislative matters, the scope of this succession encompasses all existential and legislative domains (see: Jawadi Amoli, 1389 SH, vol. 3, pp. 92-93).

#### **3.4.2. The Necessity of Congruence Between the Successor and the One Succeeded in Attributes**

Another reason for including the matters of succession with all existential and legislative aspects is that the successor acts as the representative and substitute for the one succeeded, thus reflecting and embodying all existential aspects, effects, judgments, and strategies of the one succeeded (cf. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2009 AD/1430 AH: 1, 115). Humanity is appointed as a successor to God to perform divine tasks, except for what solely belongs to God's majestic essence, which, based on rational and textual evidence, is outside the existential capacity of any being other than God.

Some other commentators have suggested that, based on the assumption that the rank of succession is exclusive to perfect humans; the successor in this verse is the absolute successor of God, not a relative one. This implies that just as God is "Encompassing of all things" (Q 41:54) and "A witness over all things," (Q 41:53) the successor must also encompass all creation with His permission and be a manifestation of His divine names. Nothing in the world exists in the name of the action and grace of God except that the successor possesses the perfection and capability to perform it; in other

**Hamid Aryan, Mojtaba Mostashreq**

words, the successor is like a mirror reflecting all the attributes of the one succeeded "*Mustakhlafun 'anh*" and the possessor of the form, thus being a "Comprehensive being." (Jawadi Amoli, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 3, 62-63) Therefore, "*Mustakhlafun fih*" presents a very broad scope, encompassing both existential and legislative matters.

The second reasoning can also be articulated anew for the inclusion of "*Mustakhlafun fih*" in both existential and legislative domains as follows:

Divine succession has multiple levels, as God has diverse manifestations. What is presented in the discussed verse (Q 2:30) represents the complete and perfect succession that enables the divine activities to be carried out through humans' actions in all aspects of the world. This means that since God is inherently knowledgeable and powerful, the perfect human also represents the full manifestation of that knowledge and power, possessing divine knowledge and power, embodying divine ethics, and having the domains of existence limited for him in the same way a human's body limits their actions. With God's permission, such a human can perform any action they will; this perfection belongs to both the essence (in the philosophical sense) and the inherent and actual attributes of God. The essence and attributes of the perfect human serve as God's successor, while their actions and effects are successors to God's actions and effects. That is, in all four aspects, the perfect human embodies God without possessing anything from them, and such a rank is unique to the perfect human, not even angels possess it (Jawadi Amoli, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 3, 93). The necessity of such succession in four directions ensures that "*Mustakhlafun fih*" encompasses all existential and legislative domains.

### **The Thematic Domain of Human Succession from God: A Comparative Study of the Views of the Qur'an and the Bible**

A final summary of the interpretative arguments concerning the extent of "*Mustakhlafun fih*" has been articulated by one of its proponents:

"The successor of God is the responsible manager of an organized chain within the system of potential existence. Accordingly, he has comprehensive knowledge of the details and characteristics of material entities, transforming their potential benefits into actuality, thus deriving various crafts and inventing tools. Consequently, many skills and crafts, including sciences and traditions, may have emerged through the prophets or under their guidance. Furthermore, he takes on the role of guiding the entire potential existence (both material and spiritual) and leads all beings by the permission of God, as he embodies all the beautiful names and attributes of God. He represents the "Hand of God," the "Eye of God," the "Ear of God," and so forth. Additionally, the legislative guidance of humans, admonition and preaching, detailing and explaining lawful and unlawful actions, implementing divine limits, protecting religious sanctuaries, and, in summary, establishing a just heavenly government is also his responsibility." (Jawadi Amoli, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 125-126)

It appears that the fourth interpretative perspective is stronger and preferred for two reasons:

First, the fourth perspective elaborately argues for its claims based on the verses, while the other perspectives have almost none that provide reasoning from the verses, narrations, or rational arguments to support their claims concerning what "*Mustakhlafun fih*" refers to in the interpreted verses.

Second, the fourth interpretative view outlines the scope of human succession from God in a manner that encompasses the claims of the other perspectives, making the fourth perspective somewhat a synthesis of the

**Hamid Aryan, Mojtaba Mostashreq**

previous views. Thus, accepting the fourth perspective does not negate the other views; however, the reverse is not true, as accepting one of the other three views would be seen as a negation of the fourth.

**4. The Perspective of the Old Testament on Human Succession from God**

The Old Testament, as the primary religious source for Judaism, does not explicitly discuss the succession of humans from God. However, one can extract concepts and evidence regarding human succession from God from various passages, thus allowing for a general outline of the Old Testament's view on the matters of human succession from God and its implications.

In the first chapter of *the book of Genesis*, it states that Adam was created in the image of God: "And God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... So, God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him.'" (*Genesis*, 1:26-27)

The Jewish commentaries on the *Old Testament* interpret the creation of man in God's image as follows: "It signifies that humans have received a divine spirit (soul) that endows them with the capacity for thought and choice. This aspect grants humans a high status, albeit limited to a human form (*Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin*, 38b). This "image" reflects the power and dignity granted to humanity, enabling them to have dominion over the world." (*Midrash Genesis Rabbah*, 8:12)

Accordingly, Adam was created in the closest existential rank to God compared to other creatures. This existential distinction sets humans apart from other beings and grants them a unique status. Such existential suitability in the creation of humans cannot be random or aimless, and

### **The Thematic Domain of Human Succession from God: A Comparative Study of the Views of the Qur'an and the Bible**

certainly, the Wise God must have had an intention and purpose for this creation. The necessity of existential harmony with God also implies congruence in actions, reinforcing the notion that humans are created in the likeness of God. The rational implication of God's actions suggests that human deeds should bear a divine quality, or in other terms, should reflect divine attributes. This characteristic can align closely with the capacity for succession and representation of humanity from God.

However, the *Old Testament* articulates the goal of this creation as follows: "...to have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (*Genesis*, 1:26). It further emphasizes this role of governance by saying: "And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (*Genesis*, 1:28)

Thus, the *Old Testament* clearly states that the purpose of creating Adam and humans is to dominate the earth and govern earthly creatures, indicating that this purpose is not limited to worldly matters but is also dedicated to the cultivation of the earth and governance over it. The mention of creatures such as the fish of the sea, birds of the heavens, and other beings in verse 26 is not intended to limit governance to these beings; rather, it serves as an example since verse 28 broadens this to include "Fish of the sea, birds of the heavens, and every living thing that creeps on the earth." Furthermore, in the same verse (26), it generalizes it to "Over all the earth," indicating dominion over all life forms." (cf. Cuthbert A. Simpson, in: *The Interpreter's Bible*, 1952: 1, 483)

**Hamid Aryan, Mojtaba Mostashreq**

This theme is also echoed in the Psalms, where the status of humanity in relation to God and the angels is articulated, reminding us of their worthiness of governance over all creatures on earth:

"What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than God, and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea." (Psalm 8:4-8)

In *the book of Genesis*, at times, the responsibility of humans is limited to the protection of a part of the earth: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it." (*Genesis*, 2:15) This limitation seems to pertain specifically to a particular event in the life of Adam and his wife before their fall, without questioning the previously stated generality. Regarding the location of the "Garden of Eden," based on various interpretations, it can be concluded that this garden was part of this very earth, considered the best place for human habitation due to its favorable living conditions. The pristine nature of this area provided an excellent opportunity for spiritual self-cultivation for humans; hence, to poetically express it: "God walked in the garden." This figurative expression suggests that divine presence in that location was comprehensible and continuous (cf. Walter Russell Bowie, in: *The Interpreter's Bible*, 1952: 1, 492-495).

Furthermore, in elucidating this mission of humanity, the book of Judges states, in reference to the prophet Judah after the death of Joshua: "The Lord said, "Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand."

### **The Thematic Domain of Human Succession from God: A Comparative Study of the Views of the Qur'an and the Bible**

(Judges 1:2) Additionally, in the book of Ezra, it is mentioned: "Cyrus, king of Persia, says: "Yahweh, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah." (*Ezra*, 1:2)

In the book of Jeremiah, it is also stated: "See, I have appointed you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant." (*Jeremiah*, 1:10) God fulfilled this mission by teaching His word to Jeremiah: "Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth." (*Jeremiah*, 1:9) Thus, this word possesses inherent power and has an existential effect; it has the capability to encompass that power and acts on behalf of God, carrying a divine responsibility (cf. Stanley Romaine Hopper, in: *The Interpreter's Bible*, 1952: 5, 804-805).

From these passages in the Old Testament, one can derive the following conclusions:

First, although the Torah does not explicitly mention the succession of humans, some passages indirectly convey something about the mission and responsibilities of humans, from which concepts similar to those of human succession or roles akin to those of a caliph in the Qur'anic sense can be inferred.

Second, these passages suggest that humans, as representatives of God on earth, are tasked with cultivating the earth and ruling over its creatures.

Third, humanity's representation from God began with the creation of Adam and has been transmitted to other humans, including the prophets like Judah, Jeremiah, and others.

**Hamid Aryan, Mojtaba Mostashreq**

Fourth, from the perspective of the Torah, this succession is not only limited to earthly domains without an independent otherworldly aspect, but it also encapsulates the cultivation of the earth and its inhabitants. Naturally, this succession is primarily duty-oriented and, regarding divine elects, also status-oriented. In reality, humans, as successors of God, are obligated to fulfill their role in the cultivation of the earth and governance over it in every age.

**5. The Perspective of the *New Testament* on Human Succession from God**

In the *New Testament*, there is no explicit mention of the term or expression "Human succession from God." However, this part of the Scripture presents Jesus Christ in such a way that He holds superiority over all creatures, including angels, and performs divine works:

"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they." (Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews, 1: 1-5).

According to the interpretation of the Two Testaments, these passages illustrate the unparalleled status of Christ within the system of creation. On one hand, He is described as a reflection of divine glory and the complete

### **The Thematic Domain of Human Succession from God: A Comparative Study of the Views of the Qur'an and the Bible**

manifestation of God's essence; while on the other hand, He is introduced as the agent of creation and inheritor of all things (cf. Alexander C. Purdy, in: *The Interpreter's Bible*, 1952: 11, 600-601). The key point is that while angels share certain divine attributes with Christ, His superiority over the angels' lies in His bearing a name that is greater than theirs. This name is the one by which God called Jesus His son, granting Him an existence that others are deprived of (cf. *ibid*: 603-604).

The *New Testament* further elaborates on this superiority: "But to which of the angels did He ever say: "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool?" (Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews, 1: 13)

Among these passages, there is also a mention of Adam, where God commands angels to worship (prostrate) him at the time of his creation: "But when He brings the firstborn into the world, He says, "Let all the angels of God worship Him." (Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews, 1: 6).

Some Christian commentators have attributed the title "Firstborn" to Jesus (cf. *Bible Societies in the East*, 1988: 695; Thomas Hale & Stephen Thorson, 1997: 891). However, this attribution is inconsistent with the context of the surrounding passages. For instance, in the previous verse, Jesus is introduced as "The Son of God." (cf. Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews, 1: 1-5) Yet, in this verse, the phrase suddenly changes to "Firstborn," and in subsequent passages, the term "Son of God" is again used to refer to Jesus (cf. *ibid.*, 1: 8). Furthermore, this passage first discusses angels and then returns to the subject of Jesus. In other words, it begins by talking about the creation of Adam, then mentions angels, and finally refers to Jesus.

Therefore, if "Firstborn" were intended to refer to Jesus, this sudden shift in terminology would lack logical justification. On the other hand, given the

**Hamid Aryan, Mojtaba Mostashreq**

semantic closeness between these passages and the story of the creation of the first human in *the Qur'an* (Q 2:30-34) as well as other sacred texts like the *Kenza Rabbah* (cf. *Kenza Rabbah Yamin*, Book One and Two), this interpretation is supported.

Additionally, Paul, in a letter to the Corinthians, states: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (*First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 3: 16-17). One of the authors of "The New Testament Practical Commentary" interprets the defilement of the temple of God as sin and distraction by worldly matters, such as gossip, false teachings, and quarrels (cf. Thomas Hale & Stephen Thorson, 1997: 636).

This passage emphasizes the divine aspect of humanity through the expression of God's Spirit dwelling within humans. This expression is used only for humans, as there is no similar mention regarding other beings, suggesting a unique status for humanity among creations. In this regard, one could argue that these statements align with the notion of human succession from Almighty God.

According to the *New Testament* text, God Almighty addresses Jesus Christ as "Lord," stating: "You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands" (Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews, 1: 10). However, in another context, the goal of Jesus' succession is described as the establishment of justice: "Behold My servant whom I have chosen, My beloved in whom My soul is well pleased! I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He will declare justice to the Gentiles." (Matthew, 12: 18)

### **The Thematic Domain of Human Succession from God: A Comparative Study of the Views of the Qur'an and the Bible**

Yet, when considering the verses preceding and following this passage, it becomes clear that the mission of Jesus is not limited to establishing justice; rather, it pertains to organizing the affairs of all humanity and guiding them, as it also speaks of healing people and attending to their needs (for example, cf. Matthew, 12: 10-13, 15, 22, and 31-37).

The *Gospels* also recount a conversation Jesus (peace be upon him) had with His disciples, where He, while providing moral guidance, states: "The Father has committed all things to Me..." (Matthew, 11: 27) In the *Gospel of John*, this same idea is mentioned by John the Baptist: "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand." (John, 3: 35)

Some Bible commentators explain this passage simply as referring to the responsibilities mentioned in Jewish tradition; that is, those responsibilities and teachings which had previously been assigned to humanity have this time been entrusted to Jesus (peace be upon him) (cf. Sherman E. Johnson, in: *The Interpreter's Bible*, 1952: 7, 389). Others, with more detail, consider the scope of this delegation to be so extensive that it encompasses the kingdom and its mysteries (cf. *Bible Societies in the East*, 1988: 68). Some others believe that this phrase signifies the delegation of all power, wisdom, and authority of God to Christ (cf. Thomas Hale & Stephen Thorson, 1997: 201).

Moreover, Jesus, in response to the amazement of the Jews regarding His miracles, states:

"The Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son

**Hamid Aryan, Mojtaba Mostashreq**

gives life to whom He will. For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son." (John, 5: 20-21)

According to some teachings from the Bible, this succession is not limited to Jesus Christ or the first human but extends to other humans as well, such that Christ grants some of the roles He holds for Himself to Peter:

"When Jesus came into the regions of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'" (Matthew, 16: 13-19)

The expression "The keys of the kingdom of heaven" signifies his dominion and authority over the kingdom of heaven and its matters. As the *New Testament* records in a passage from Jesus speaking to the Galilean women after His resurrection: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me." (Matthew, 28: 18) With such a bestowal, this great mission becomes possible (cf. George A. Buttrick, in: *The Interpreter's Bible*, 1952: 7, 622), and it becomes evident that the matters of Christ's succession transcend earthly issues and encompass the kingdom of heaven as well. Furthermore, the transfer of this mission to another person (Peter)

### **The Thematic Domain of Human Succession from God: A Comparative Study of the Views of the Qur'an and the Bible**

indicates that other humans also possess the capacity to hold the position of divine representation in these same matters, but its actualization requires the mediation and essence of Christ.

New Testament commentators regard the purpose of human creation as this very mission. Although they do not use the terms "Vicegerent" or "Vicegerency," (ibid.) the *New Testament* refers to the idea in other passages, emphasizing that every human has the potential to attain a position where they can exercise authority over all matters besides God. When the disciples of Jesus asked why they were unable to heal, He responded:

"Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." (Matthew, 17:20-21)

Paul also states in a letter to the Corinthians: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? ... Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?" (1 Corinthians, 6:2-3)

Jesus promises His disciples that they will judge among the Children of Israel in the end times after His return to the throne of glory and sovereignty: "Assuredly, I say to you, that you who have followed Me will, in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matthew, 19:28) This passage seems to hint at the return of the apostles alongside Jesus in the future and their governance.

In the first letter of Paul, this judgment is extended to encompass both humans and angels: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the

**Hamid Aryan, Mojtaba Mostashreq**

world? ... Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?" (1 Corinthians, 6:2-3)

Furthermore, commentators on the *Gospel* note that Jesus Christ, in the position of God's vicegerent, never claims independence or independent power but rather receives all His authority and abilities from the Lord. He follows the divine model and realizes God's objectives. According to these commentators, God, by granting powers to Christ, has given him the right to grant life and existence to chosen individuals. However, this authority does not imply arbitrary use of power; Christ is obliged to act solely within the framework of divine will and in the name of God, doing only those things that God has commanded him to do (cf. Howard, in: *The Interpreter's Bible*, 1952: 8, 546).

From the above passages in the New Testament, one can gather that humanity is the vicegerent of Almighty God in this world, and the scope of their vicegerency includes both natural matters such as raising the dead, moving mountains, and possessing all affairs besides God, as well as legislative matters like judgment and arbitration, etc. However, this vicegerency is fundamentally centered on the figure of Jesus, and it is through his existence that this status is transferred to his followers.

## **6. Comparison of the Views of the Quran and the Bible on Matters of Human Vicegerency from God**

Comparative studies primarily reveal the similarities and differences surrounding the subject under examination. Based on what has been presented in previous sections of the article regarding the viewpoints of the Quran and the Bible on this matter, it can be summarized that their

## **The Thematic Domain of Human Succession from God: A Comparative Study of the Views of the Qur'an and the Bible**

commonalities are rooted in the singular divine origin of these texts, while the existing differences stem from the theological and anthropological foundations of their teachings.

The teachings of the Quran are centered on monotheism, underpinned by the belief in the pure nature of every human being at birth, the inherent dignity, and the voluntary, acquired virtues of each individual through faith, righteous deeds, and servitude to God. The vicegerency of humans from God is also based on this understanding. Although the theology of the Old Testament is monotheistic, it carries a racial connotation (the superiority of the chosen people) and is focused on material life and the dominance of the chosen people, shaping its view of human vicegerency and its nature and scope accordingly.

Christian theology, grounded in the Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), emphasizes the divine sonship of Jesus Christ, with its anthropological perspective focused on original sin and humanity's purification and salvation through Christ and His sacrifice. However, since the main subject of this discussion does not delve into the foundational anthropological principles of the viewpoints of religions and sacred texts, this brief mention suffices to highlight the differences in perspectives among these texts.

### **6.1. Commonalities**

#### **6.1.1. The Superiority of Humans Among Beings and Their Representation by God**

Both the Quran and the Bible agree on the superior status of humans in relation to other creatures, explicitly or implicitly stating that humans hold a form of representation and vicegerency from God within the order of existence. The Quran clearly states in verses 30 to 34 of Surah *al-Baqarah*

**Hamid Aryan, Mojtaba Mostashreq**

and in verse 11 of Surah *al-A'raf* that God has granted humans the status of vicegerency and has elevated them over creation through the teaching of names.

Similarly, the Old Testament emphasizes the unique status of humans by explicitly stating that they were created in the "Image of God" among all other beings, assigning them the mission of governance and dominion over the earth and its creatures (Genesis, 1:26-28). According to the teachings of the New Testament, Christ is described as a being superior to the angels (Letter to the Hebrews, 1:4-5), through whom God created the worlds (Hebrews 1:2), the earth, and the heavens (Hebrews 1:10), entrusting all matters of the cosmos to Him (Matthew, 11:27; *John*, 3:35). He was tasked with establishing justice and fairness in the world on behalf of God (Matthew 12:18), and His disciples are also said to have the potential to attain this status (Matthew 16:13-19; 17:20-21).

**6.1.2. Governance of the Earth and Its Cultivation**

Despite the differing perspectives of the Abrahamic religions and their sacred texts regarding the nature of the affairs over which humans serve as vicegerents of God, the teachings of the Quran and the Bible share a common consensus that humans are at least entrusted by God with the governance of the earth and its cultivation. Therefore, according to all three texts, the responsibility and mission of humanity is to strive for the cultivation of the earth and to implement divine objectives among its inhabitants by organizing society and governance.

In the Old Testament, the limit of human mission and responsibility aligns with this shared understanding and does not extend beyond it, even though Jewish theology, distinct from the Old Testament theology, has taken

## **The Thematic Domain of Human Succession from God: A Comparative Study of the Views of the Qur'an and the Bible**

on a strongly racial and earthly hue. However, in the New Testament, the scope of vicegerency is somewhat broader, emphasizing justice and fairness, which presents a more comprehensive understanding of governance. The Quran, transcending the horizons of the Testaments, envisions the establishment of governance in a more expansive manner, considering both the material and spiritual dimensions of social life. Thus, there is a consensus among all three texts regarding the establishment of a governing principle that is in some way attributed to God.

### **6.2. Differences**

#### **6.2.1. Difference in the Perception of Human Status and the Scope of the Vicegerent's Mission**

In the Quran, human vicegerency is a status granted by God in an ontological and inherent manner, signifying the existential superiority of humans over other creatures. Indications such as the use of the term "Vicegerent" in verse 30 of Surah *al-Baqarah*, knowledge of divine names, the incapacity of angels to access knowledge of those names, and the similarity and shared attributes between the vicegerent and the one being represented, all suggest that the mission and vicegerency of humans from God surpass material contexts and the realms of worldly life; rather, they encompass various natural and legislative matters across both the physical and metaphysical domains.

In contrast, the Old Testament primarily views the scope of the vicegerent's mission within the realm of earthly order and practical governance, limiting it to dominion over creatures and the cultivation of the earth (Genesis, 1:26–28; 2:15). Even in cases such as the prophecy of Jeremiah, spiritual aspects are aligned with social reform, warning

**Hamid Aryan, Mojtaba Mostashreq**

authorities to serve this same purpose (Jeremiah 1:9-10). Consequently, from the perspective of the Old Testament, vicegerency is considered more of an executive duty rather than a human status arising from the potentialities and actualities of human existence, and stemming from the similarity between the vicegerent and the one being represented in attributes.

The New Testament, while primarily focusing on the role of Jesus Christ in vicegerency from God, expands the mission of humans as divine representatives to both heavenly and earthly realms, relating it to all associated worlds (Letter to the Hebrews 1:1–5; Matthew 16:19; 28:18). Therefore, the New Testament offers a perspective that is closer to the Quran's view and does not confine vicegerency solely to earthly matters.

**6.2.2. Differences in the Implications of Human Vicegerency**

The Quran regards human vicegerency as a form of absolute representation from God, which entails involvement in all aspects of the universe, ranging from the physical realm to the metaphysical, encompassing all legislative matters, including ethical and practical laws, from the organization of individual affairs to the establishment of justice and equity in society. In contrast, the Old Testament views this responsibility as predominantly earthly, necessitating efforts to cultivate the material aspects of the earth, utilize its resources, and create the necessary framework for governance over its inhabitants and creatures. However, in the New Testament, where vicegerency is primarily established for Christ and consequently for His specific followers (Matthew, 16:19), it is not limited to the earth and material affairs; rather, it requires engagement in natural matters by the

### **The Thematic Domain of Human Succession from God: A Comparative Study of the Views of the Qur'an and the Bible**

vicegerent and attention to the legislative affairs of both humans and even supersensual beings, such as judging angels.

#### **Conclusion**

From the comparative examination and perspectives of the Quran and the Old and New Testaments regarding the affairs and matters where humans act as vicegerents of God, the following conclusions can be drawn:

In the Quran, the vicegerency of humans from God is clearly and explicitly stated, but without limiting it to any specific area or domain. This broad interpretation indicates that the matters subject to human vicegerency, according to the Quran, are extensive and encompass both natural and legislative affairs. Furthermore, the nature of the vicegerent in relation to the Vicegerent's source (God) implies that humans should be manifestations of the existential perfections, attributes, and beautiful names of the Vicegerent's source. Therefore, the divine vicegerent is tasked with carrying out divine work in all respects, whether in natural or legislative matters.

The viewpoint of commentators who restrict the vicegerency of humans from God to the cultivation of the earth, or to ruling and judging fairly among people, or to those two subjects plus establishing rights and managing people's affairs, is incompatible with the broad and contextual nature of verse 30 of Surah *al-Baqarah*, and lacks valid support from verses and traditions.

In the Old Testament, the vicegerency of humans from God is implied and indirectly stated. According to the description in the Old Testament, God created only humans in His image, which means He endowed them with divine spirit (soul) and the capacity for thought, choice, and will, thus

**Hamid Aryan, Mojtaba Mostashreq**

granting them the ability to dominate the earth and its creatures. The necessity of this capability entails acting in a manner that reflects divine pleasure, which is framed within a mission to cultivate the earth and rule over its inhabitants.

In the New Testament, human vicegerency from God is articulated with a focus on the nature and status of Jesus Christ, and it is depicted around His existence. This status is transmitted to His followers. According to New Testament teachings, the scope of human vicegerency from God is broad, including natural affairs such as resurrecting the dead and possessing all matters besides God, as well as legislative matters like judging and arbitrating among people and even judging angels.

A comparison of the teachings of the Quran and the Testaments regarding human vicegerency from God reveals that both sacred texts agree on the superiority of humans among beings and their qualification for vicegerency and representation of God on earth. Despite existing differences in the views of the Quran and the Testaments regarding the scope and examples of vicegerent affairs (matters subject to vicegerency) and the manner of its realization, rooted in the theological and anthropological foundations of these texts, there is consensus on the principle that cultivating the earth and governing its inhabitants falls within the mission of the divine vicegerent.

Regarding the differences between the views of the Quran and the Testaments, it can be said that the subject of matters related to human vicegerency from God is depicted more clearly in the Quran than in the Testaments. The Quran regards the vicegerency of humans from God as a form of absolute representation that encompasses management of all affairs of the universe, both material and metaphysical, and the establishment of

### **The Thematic Domain of Human Succession from God: A Comparative Study of the Views of the Qur'an and the Bible**

justice. Meanwhile, the *Old Testament* considers vicegerency primarily a material and earthly matter. However, in the New Testament, similar to the Quran, vicegerency is extended to all realms.

The Quran, with a comprehensive and monotheistic perspective, expands human vicegerency to encompass all material and spiritual, natural and legislative aspects, applying divine agency to the vicegerent except in matters exclusive to God's essence.

In the Old Testament, the affairs subject to human vicegerency from God are mainly related to organizing the superficial and material aspects of human life and are limited to matters such as cultivating the earth and ruling over its inhabitants, with less focus on spiritual and metaphysical dimensions.

The New Testament presents human vicegerency more expansively than the Old Testament, including both heavenly and earthly realms. Therefore, the New Testament offers a perspective on human vicegerency that is closer to the Quran. Nonetheless, its primary focus remains on the person of Jesus Christ.

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