

The Transmission mechanisms of the position and Functions of Prophets in Abrahamic Religions

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Abstract:

Prophethood, possesses a profound significance in the Abrahamic religions. Prophets act as mediums, through whom the message of God is received and delivered to people, and thus fulfill two kinds of epistemological and Responsible functions: one related to the prophetic “gnosis” of the divine message and the other to the missionary “responsibility” of enacting it. But do the position and functions of the prophets come to an end with his death? For the Abrahamic religions, the answer is ‘No’. In these religions, we are faced with a phenomenon that can be called the “Transmission of the position and functions of prophets”. This article attempts to explain this phenomenon in the context of the holy texts of these three religions and in the terms of the three mechanisms of Blessedness, Heredity and Successorship. Although, the separation between this mechanisms in analysis, necessarily, they are not separate in instances.

The first mechanism of such Transmission, by which the prophet transmits on his position and functions to his Children's, is Blessedness. Blessedness is a special covenant between God and Abraham, and is reported twice in the Old covenant. By this mechanism, God blesses to Abraham and promises to bless his Children's, to make them as many as the dust of the earth, and to make them victorious in the face of their enemies. Thus, the mechanism of blessedness becomes institutionalized in Abraham's family and household, and passes on from one generation to the next. In the New covenant, Jesus and Virgin Mary are called “the Blessed Ones”, Jesus is described as the Source of Blessedness for everyone, and all the true Christian believers are considered as the heirs to Abraham's Blessedness. In the noble Quran, not only the covenant of God's Blessedness with Abraham and Isaac is mentioned, but also Jesus is referred to as “the Blessed One” (“Mubarak”). However, it can be said that mechanism of Blessedness does not transmit the position and functions of Abraham as much

as, it paves the way for the other two mechanisms by making Abraham's children countless and victorious.

The second mechanism of such transmission is heredity: A father's properties are inherited by the other members of the family, especially by his children, after his death. Although, this mechanism may be too general in its inclusion to be an exclusive mechanism of the prophets, it undergoes a shift of meaning in theology as far as the prophets are concerned. It becomes something more than the mere inheriting of the father's properties by his children. In such a mechanism, another factor begins to emerge that can be recognized as a kind of supremacy within the family. It is as if some members of the prophet's family inherit a greater share than other members, and this can lead to their supremacy over the others. Therefore, it can be said that unlike Blessedness, heredity is a mechanism with a hierarchical nature. Compared to the other family relationships, a direct blood-relationship, especially between a father and his son, has a privileged status in heredity. Like Blessedness, heredity begins with Abraham; but unlike Blessedness which was a mechanism introduced by God, heredity is a mechanism introduced by Abraham. What the reports of the Old covenant indicate is that heredity is a more precious and exceptional mechanism than Blessedness, for here the designation of an heir demands first and foremost God's approval. It is as if by this mechanism, a share of the father's position and functions are left to the son. But the question is: What of the father's position and functions and to what measure are transmitted to the son by mechanism of heredity? The answer to this question is to be sought in Moses. Upon knowing his own imminent death, Moses, according to the Old covenant, asks God to appoint a leader for the Israelites, and God chooses Joshua, the son of Nun as Moses' successor. But God immediately declares that Joshua can take over only some of the functions of Moses. Joshua cannot receive God's messages directly and for such a purpose, has to go to Eleazar, the son of Aaron. This report proves that the position of leadership of Israelites after Moses is not hereditary; for if it was, it must have inevitably gone to a member of Moses' or Aaron's family. The functions of Moses' responsibility cannot be delegated by mechanism of heredity. In the Jewish establishment, neither the prophetic position nor the Judges' position is not delegated by mechanism of Heredity. In the Jewish tradition, the only thing that can be passed on by mechanism of Heredity is a kind of primal function related to the gnosis, fully manifesting itself in the "divination". The only eminent example of passing on the function of responsibility by mechanism of Heredity is God's covenant with David to establish his children forever as the kings to the throne of Israel. After the demise of David's kingdom, especially during and after the Babylonian Exile, Heredity accrues an ever more significance as a mechanism of transmission. It finds its ultimate reflection in the figure of the Christ. The Christ shall return the glorious days of David's Kingdom to the Jews, so he must be the rightful heir to David himself. Such a belief works itself in the Christian tradition and in the framework of having faith in Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah. The New covenant describes Jesus as "the physical son of David" and renders complete yet inconsistent genealogies of Jesus to recognize him as one of David's children. Even though Jesus is called "the christ" ("Al-Maseeh") in Quran, such use of the term cannot be taken as he really having the status of the Messiah. Moreover, the father-son relationship between David and Jesus cannot be construed from any verses of Quran. The holy Quran only mentions Solomon's Heredity from David.

Furthermore, one can recognize not only a literal but also a figurative Heredity from the prophets in the worldviews of the Abrahamic religions. The Jewish thought accepts the figurative inheritance of all Jews from the prophets, and the new covenant also points out the inheritance of the Christians from Abraham; but conditions such inheritance to a belief in Jesus Christ. If it is asked what of Abraham's position and functions are inherited, the answer shall be Abraham's Blessedness. But, why isn't there any mention of inheritance from Jesus himself in the New Covenant? The simplest answer is that Jesus does not have any children in the first place to make any discussion of his true heir possible. Therefore, it is the figurative children, instead of the actual children, of Jesus Christ that inherit from him in

the Christian thought. The Quran refers the mechanism of Heredity back to Abraham, but accepts such transmission of leadership only for those children of him who are neither sinner nor oppressors. In the same line of reasoning, Quran refers to the three paradigmatic examples of Heredity from the prophets: Solomon's Heredity from David, John the Baptist's Heredity from Zechariah, and John the Baptist's Heredity from Jacob's family. Most of the Sunnites scholars describe the Heredity of the prophets as being those functions related to the prophetic gnosis of the divine message, whereas most Shiite scholars consider such Heredity to be the functions related to the prophetic responsibility of enacting the divine message via ruling over people. However, there are Muslim scholars who believe that Prophethood and its Gnostic functions are not things that can be transmitted by mechanism of Heredity.

The third mechanism of such transmission is Successorship, which was introduced to Abrahamic religions by Moses. In contrast to the other two mechanisms of Blessedness and Heredity, Successorship's most distinctive feature is that it is not limited at all to the prophet's family. The New Covenant does not accept that Jesus Christ has a "successor", for the concept of Successorship requires death as its necessary condition. But Jesus never dies, and the issue of his Successorship is thus always redundant. The Christian establishment, however, accepts the concept of "successors" of Jesus Christ. Successorship is mentioned only once in the Quran: Before Moses ascends the Mount Sinai with Joshua, he appoints Aaron as his successor to the functions of prophetic responsibility. In the various traditions of Abrahamic religions, Joshua and Peter are respectively recognized as the successors of Moses and Jesus.

The figure of Joshua in the Old Covenant is a concoction of the Prophet, the Judge and the War Leader. The most outstanding chapter of Joshua's life is when Moses asks God to appoint a successor to be the leader of the Israelites in his stead, and God selects Joshua for such an office. But he has to only continue the function of Moses' responsibility. Joshua is neither from the family of Moses nor even from his tribe. Although, all the Israelites are described as the followers of Joshua in the Old Covenant, some Jewish Scholars harbor suspicions and doubts about such a belief. According to the reports of the Old Covenant, Joshua does not appoint any successor for himself. The New Covenant does mention Joshua, but only in passing as the one who "gives rest" to the Israelites and acts as an agency through which their society is established and maintained. Nevertheless, since the mission of Moses in saving the Israelites is only accomplished through Joshua, he acquires the status of a prefiguration of Jesus, as the Savior, in the Christian thought. The holy Quran also refers to Joshua's testimony about the Promised Land and his successive attempts to call on his people to fight and enter the Land as the fulfillment of the divine promise. Joshua has such a high status among the Muslim Interpreters of Quran that they equal him to "the Chivalrous Youth" (فَتَاهُ) mentioned in the Chapter of the Cave (18:67). Even though the Quran does not speak of Successorship of Moses by Joshua and the Shiite scholars do not consider this to certainly be the case, Joshua's status as the successor of Moses is generally accepted in the Islamic thought.

The Christian establishment considers Peter to be the successor of Jesus, and he is even recognized by the Christian tradition as the first believer in Jesus, although not without some doubts again. What the collective reports of the New Covenant indicate is that Peter isn't, at least during Jesus' life, superior to the other Apostles, and that the religious authority of Christians is by no mechanism confined to him. But after Jesus' death, Peter step by step goes on to acquire a superior status in relation to the other Apostles. He is there at the center of the reports narrated in the Acts of the Apostles; he is the first disciple who sees Jesus after his Resurrection; and finally, becomes the speaker of all the other Apostles and the leader of all Christians. He calls himself the Chosen One by God and is thus recognized as the best disciple of and the closest disciple to Jesus Christ. The only one who dares to stand against him is Paul. Unlike Peter, Paul confines the function of Peter's missionary responsibility

only to the Jews. Historical studies show that the prominence of Peter's status among the Apostles begins to be highlighted only in the second and third century B.C., but never wins a universally accepted approval. But a question remains to be asked: To which of Jesus' functions is Peter a successor? The only valid answer is that he is a successor to the gnostic functions of the Old Covenant, for Jesus himself does not have the functions of a universal missionary responsibility, let alone Peter who is just a successor to him. In the Catholic reading of Christianity, the mechanism of Successorship does not end with Peter, for Peter himself has successors who go on to maintain his gnostic status and function within the framework of the Catholic teaching called the Apostolic Successorship. It is in such a reading that the spiritual authority and credibility of the Holy Church, the Pope and all the Bishops come from the Apostles of Jesus Christ in a series of continuous Successorships. Such a mechanism is considered to be a guarantee of the validity of faith and receptivity of divine grace for all Christians. Gradually, the teaching of Successorship is applied and generalized to the Pope and the Bishops in so far as it is fixed as an established procedure of the Catholic Church after St. Augustine. Ultimately, such a teaching ends up in the supremacy of the Roman Church over other Churches as well as of the Pope over his counterparts and colleagues. Furthermore, the Church of Rome also considers itself to be entitled to the Patrimony of St. Peter. However, the followers of the Protestant and Anglican Churches disagree with such a teaching and beg to differ on this issue.

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