Image of God Reconsidered through Character of Seth: Islamic Hadith Literature as a Bridge between the Holy Qur'an and the Judeo-Christian Resources

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Abstract

The concept of God has a significant place in the anthropology of Abrahamic religions. One approach to achieving greater unity among the teachings of the Quran and the Bible may be to focus on the character of Seth and his relationship with his father Adam, and his enjoyment of all divine privileges. While the Quran does not mention Seth, Islamic hadith sources can associate him with the generous Jewish-Christian figure. This research uses a comparative approach between the theology of Abrahamic religions and employs a componential conceptual analysis method. The results show that Seth's enjoyment of divine rule and Adam's knowledge in the Bible are expressed in combination with the image of God, while in the Quran, they are expressed analytically, with rule meaning caliphate and knowledge meaning Asmā'(names).

Keywords: Adam, Biblical anthropology, Quranic anthropology, Caliph of God, Asmā'

1. Introduction

The concept of the image of God was always inspiring in the anthropology of Abrahamic religions. Although a wide influence, this concept was a subject of debate too. If the image of God is understood in an everyday meaning, it leads to unacceptable anthropomorphism. Then it is particularly important to understand the depth of this concept in the relevant resources. Should be added the creation of man – namely Adam – by God in his image not only mentioned evidently in Genesis (1: 26-27) and further in Jewish- Christian religious literature, but also it is present in Islamic sources.

There is a famous Hadith, a saying narrated from the Prophet Muhammad which speaks evidently of God creating Adam in his image; but it is possible to be rooted in the Qur'an too with a different formulation. It is always useful for such an aim, to use semantic-theological bridges which help to find the common component between variants of concepts in different religions.

2. Theoretical Background

One of the themes that can help to make such a comparison between Jewish, Christian, and Islamic accounts is the figure of Adam's son, Seth, and the characteristics referred to him in both religions. The main question in this essay is what brings us to a deeper understanding of the concept of the image of God to use the accounts related to Seth as a semantic Bridge. The method used in this essay is componential semantics applied on the ground of a comparative religious study

2.1. Seth from Adam's Image to the Image of God

As a departure point, one could refer to a verse in Genesis speaking about Seth as follows: "And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named his Seth" (Genesis, 5, p. 3).

Genetically, it is very usual for all of Adam's children to be like their father in the face, even Cain. There is not understandable to restrict being in father's likeness and image to Seth unless the subject is not a physical similitude. Some resources tried to render this likeness to

beauty in the figure, as mentioned in the Book of Adam and Eve (Malan, 1882), saying:

"And Eve brought forth a son perfectly beautiful in figure and in countenance. His beauty was like that of his father Adam, yet more beautiful" (Malan, 1882).

The more serious commentary on this likeness is what is reflected in Jewish and Christian resources in the story of Seth struggling with a wild beast; in this story, the likeness is rendered to the fact that Seth is in the image of God like his father Adam. For example, we read in Haggadic literature as follows:

"Adam bade Eve go with Seth to the gates of Paradise and entreat God to have mercy upon him and send His angel to catch up some of the oil of life flowing from the tree of His mercy and give it to his messengers. The ointment would bring him rest and banish the pain consuming him. On his way to Paradise, Seth was attacked by a wild beast. Eve called out to the assailant, " How durst thou lay hand on the image of God?"

The ready answer came: "It is thine own fault. Hadst thou not opened thy mouth to eat of the forbidden fruit, my mouth would not be opened now to destroy a human being." But Seth remonstrated: " Hold thy tongue! Desist from the image of God until the day of judgment." And the beast gave way, saying, " See, I refrain myself from the image of God," and it slunk away to its covert. (Anderson & Stone, 1999, pp. 41-43; Ginzberg, 1909, pp. 93-94; Orlov, 2013, pp. 147-149).

This story is repeated and reproduced in Christian literature and some scholars such as Rivka Nir argued that the struggle between Seth and the beast should be understood as a struggle between the image of God and Satan (McGill, 2021, p. 43; Nir, 2008, pp. 327-339).

Anyway, this interpretation of Genesis' statement about Seth being in the likeness of Adam, makes the figure of Seth the second pace of human beings as the image of God, generation after generation. It is evidence that such an understanding about the position of Seth can make him a semantic bridge to solve the issue of the image of God.

We know that Seth has a significant place among Gnostic trends including Mandaism, Manichaeism, and Christian sects. In connection with Seth as the image of God, particularly, it is worthy to pay attention

to Christianized Barbeloites which in the later 2nd century, had fused with the Sethites to form the Gnostic Sethianism. In the beliefs of this group, "Seth and Christ were identified as bearers of the image of God who had recently appeared in the world as the Logos to rescue Jesus from the cross" (Turner, 2001, p. 259).

Among Muslim ancient sects, a near belief is recorded from Ğanāḥiyya, a sect considered an extremist Shia sect. They believed that the spirit of God was entered inside Adam, after inside Seth, and then after that 'image (ṣūra)' was circulated among people (Baġdādī, 1977, p. 236; Īğī,1997).

2.2. Seth as Caliph of Adam

It is known from the Qur'an (2:30) that Adam was the caliph of God on the earth and now, we are tracing the sources speaking of this caliphate transmitted to Seth. After speaking about the connection between Adam's image and the image of God, it is important to know of Islamic accounts speaking about Seth as the caliph of Adam who was caliph of God. Although there is no mention of Seth's name in the Qur'an, he is well-known in Islamic exegesis and hadith literature.

The oldest account is a word narrated of Kaʾb al-Aḥbār, a figure supposed to be a Jew from Ḏu-l-Kilāʿ tribe of Yemen who converted to Islam and became a strongly influential scholar. He says in this concern that according to the command of God, Adam addressed his son Seth and said: "O my son! You are my caliph (successor) after me; thus, you must try to live with piety and to grasp the strong cord (of truth) (Ibn ʿAsākir, 1995, p. 281).

Also, a Hadith narrated from Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir mentioned that when it was the time of death for Adam, he gathered all his offspring including men and women, and said to them: "O my children! God had revealed to me that he shall raise my spirit up and commanded me to nominate my best child, the gift of God – i.e., Seth - as successor. This is God who has chosen him for me and for you. Then listen to him and obey his commands, because he is my successor and my caliph upon you. Then all of them said: "We shall listen to him, obey his commands, and don't disagree with him" (ʿAyyāšī, 2001, p.307).

Another Hadith received from Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 765) the sixth imam, says that Gabriel commanded the angels to stand in a queue

behind Seth … and Seth said: "O Gabriel! How it may come right for me while you are in the highest rank of the angels?" Gabriel said: "Do you know that God created your father Adam and introduced him to the angels and commanded us to pray to him; then he was our leader to be this a tradition in his offspring. But today God makes him die and you are his successor and heir of his knowledge, and you are expected to take his position (Rāvandī, 2009, p. 210; an abridged version: Al-Ṭabarī, 1986, p.101).

In the resources from the 10th century, we come across several times in the official Persian translation of the Qur'an known as Tarǧome-ye Tafsīr-e Ṭabarī with the name of Seth as caliph of Adam (Yaġmāyi, 1977, pp. 398- 399). As well, the historical book of Muṭahhar ibn Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī introduced Seth as Adam's successor, his viceroy, and the caliph after him (Maqdisī, n.d.: 3, p.11). A century later, Ǧurǧānī says that while the time of death was coming to Adam, God revealed and commanded him to nominate Seth as caliph upon his offspring; then he had raised to preach them … and had nominated such as caliph" (Ǧurǧānī, 2009, pp. 661- 662).

In the 12th century, Meybodī says that "Adam prepared Seth, nominated him as his caliph on the earth and had bestowed to him his testimony" (Meybodī, 1992, 8, p.408). Also, Ibn al-Ǧawzī (d. 1201) opened a chapter in his historical work with the title "the account of the caliphate of Seth instead of his Father Adam" (Ibn al-Ǧawzī, 1992, p.229).

Finally, it is worthy to refer to a statement of Rumi (d. 1273) which says: "Adam's son was strong and matured and was neglecting the desires of this earthy world. Thus, a message came down from God that he should be the caliph of Adam" (Aflākī, 1983, p. 493). Rumi also says in a poem of him:

آن کز آدم رست و دست شیث چید پس خلیفهش کرد آدم کان بدید

"Seth, who had grown out of Adam and gained what he gained in his hands.

Thus, Adam made him caliph, while saw him with these virtues (Rumi, 1994, p. 195).

2.3. Image of God and Piety

The story of Adam in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is strictly connected with the eating of the forbidden fruit, a sin. In this concern, some religious resources, especially in Judaism bridges the concept of the image of God and piety in Seth's figure. An account speaking of sin as a cause affecting man's capacity to be an image of God is observable in the Haggadic story of Seth's struggle with the wild beast previously narrated.

Further, we should pay attention to some interpretations of the verse of Genesis saying:

"Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man" (Genesis. 9: 6).

At first, it should be considered explanations of some Rabbis, scholars of Mishna and Midrash who discussed the matter. Rabbi Akiva ben Yosef lectured: He who sheds blood is regarded as though he had impaired [God's] likeness. What is the proof? Whose Sheddeth man's blood, etc. What is the reason? For in the image of God made human.

Also, Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah lectured: "He who refrains from procreation is as though he impaired [God's] image. What is the proof? For in the image of God made human, which is followed by, and you, be ye fruitful, and multiply. Finally, it is Ben Azzai who lectured: He who refrains from procreation is as though he shed blood and impaired [God's] likeness. What is the proof? Whose sheddeth man's blood, etc.; why? For in the image of God made human, which is followed by, and you, be ye fruitful and multiply" (Yevamot, p. 63; Midrash Rabba, 1977, p.280).

This theme is discussed in the Qur'an too, while the issue of negation of murder and crime on the earth relates to the special position given to Adam; here 'caliph of God' instead of 'image of God.' The Quranic verse referred to is the following:

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّى جَاعِلٌ فِى الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَنْ يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ

وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ قَالَ إِنِّى أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ (بقره/٣٠)

"And when thy Lord said unto the angels: Lo! I am about to place a viceroy in the earth, they said: wilt Thou place therein one who will do harm therein and will shed blood, while we, we hymn Thy praise and

sanctify Thee? He said: Surely, I know that which ye know not." (Pickthall's translation).

Now from a positive standpoint, some sources speak of Seth guarding the dignity of the image of God by avoiding all the sins. As the first step, it is important to refer to a passage in the Book of Jubilees (Charles, 1913) which considers Seth as one of the seven pious men of the pre-Abrahamic times (Charles, 1913, pp. 24-25; Ginzberg, 1909, pp. 150, 274).

Some relevant information may be followed in connection with a verse in Genesis that says: "And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the Lord (Genesis, 4:26). Introducing Seth's son, Enosh as a turning point in this verse of Genesis, led the commentators to further teachings. In this regard, first of all, it is worthy to refer to the explanation given in Bereshit Rabba, one of the Misrash sources claiming that Seth and his son Enosh were the last human beings to be created solely in the image of God; after their death creatures began to appear (Genesis Rabba, 23:6, cited in Hirschberg, 2007, p. 319).

Further, one should consider a conversation with Abba Cohen Bardella who was asked: "[Why does Scripture enumerate] Adam, Seth, Enosh, and then become silent"? He replied: "Hitherto they were created in the likeness and image [of God], but from then onward Centaurs were created Four things changed in the days of Enosh: The mountains became [barren] rocks, the dead began to feel [the worms], men's faces became ape-like, and they became vulnerable to demons (Ginzberg, 1909, p. 123).

Ginzberg refers to the fact that the generation of Enosh were thus the first idol worshippers and the punishment for their folly was not delayed long. God caused the sea to transgress its bounds, and a portion of the earth was flooded. This was the time also when the mountains became rocks, and the dead bodies of men began to decay. And still, another consequence of the sin of idolatry was that the countenances of the men of the following generations were no longer in the likeness and image of God, as the countenances of Adam, Seth, and Enosh had been. They resembled centaurs and apes, and the demons lost their fear of men. (Ginzberg, 1909, p. 123).

Although the mentioned resources speak of the image of God ending after Enosh, some Haggadic scholars like Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer speak of the future generations of righteous people who will be the descendants of Seth (Hirschberg, 2007, p.319). Connected with this teaching, some other resources generalize the image of God to pious men; a righteous Jew by Jewish scholars, or a righteous Christian by Christian scholars (Ginzberg, 1909, pp. 66, 68).

These opinions could be better understood under the light of a Davidian account, narrated both in the Psalms and the Qur'an, which says: צַדִּיקִים יִירְשׁוּ־אָרֶץ וְיִשְׁכְּנוּ לָעַד עָלֶיהָ:

"The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell in it for ever" (Psalms, 37: 29)

وَلَقَدْ كَتَبْنَا فِى الزَّبُورِ مِنْ بَعْدِ الذِّكْرِ أَنَّ الْأَرْضَ يَرِثُهَا عِبَادِىَ الصَّالِحُونَ (انبياء/١٠٥)

"Before this We wrote in the Psalms, after the Message (given to Moses): My servants the righteous, shall inherit the earth." (Yusuf Ali).

"And verily we have written in the Scripture, after the Reminder: My righteous slaves will inherit the earth" (Pickthall's translation).

A remarkably close content also exists in the New Testament as follows: μακάριοι οἱ πραεῖς, ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew, 5:5).

2.4. Seth and His Knowledge of Asmā᾿

We know from the story of man's creation in the Qur'an that when God nominated Adam as his caliph (successor) on the earth, He taught him the asmā᾿ (the names), which is reflected in the verse:

وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِى بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

(البقرة/٣١).

"And He taught Adam all the names (asmā᾿), then showed them to the angels, saying: Inform Me of the names of these, if ye are truthful" (2:31).

In some Islamic resources about Adam's story, Seth is introduced as the successor of his father in receiving granted knowledge of asmā᾿. In this regard, in a Hadith narrated from Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 733), the fifth imam of Shia, he says that when it was the time for Adam's death, he was commanded by God to nominate Seth as his

successor and to teach him all knowledge of asmāʾ (ʿAyyāšī, 2001, p.306; also, an abridged version: Rāvandī, 1988, p.924).

Further, in a historical context, ʿAlī ibn Ḥusain al-Masʿūdī (d. 956) says: "When God wanted to make Adam die, commended him to announce his son Seth as successor and to teach him all the knowledge granted to him, and he did" (Masʿūdī, 196, p. 75).

Further, Qutb al-Dīn Rāvandī (d. 1177) says that "he was Seth who knew all the asmāʾ (the names) after his father's death" (Rāvandī, 1988, p.922, ed. Imam Mahdi).

The transmission of knowledge granted by God from Adam to Seth was an issue of discussion by Muslim mystics too. The well-known scholar, Ibn Arabi in this concern speaks of granted knowledge and claims that it was dedicated to Seth. He announces that "every person who speaks in accordance with granted knowledge, his spirit is granted by Seth's spirit, unless the case for the Last Prophet" (Ibn ʿArabī, pp. 65-66). Around this saying of Ibn Arabi, some of his commentators explain that he meant by granted knowledge, knowing the divine asmāʾ which was specifically for Seth among all Adam's offspring (ʿAfīfī, p. 27; Bābā Roknā, 1980, p.223; Qaiṣarī, 1996, p. 474).

Further, he is Rumi who announced that "Seth had been granted the knowledge of asmāʾ and wisdom and had been nominated as teacher of his brethren" (Aflākī, 1983, p. 493). Introducing Seth as the only successor for Adam regarding knowledge of asmāʾ in Islamic resources is comparable with the specific place of Seth as the image of God in Judeo-Christian literature at a macro level.

3. Conclusion

In comparison between the content of the Old and New Testaments from one side, and Islamic religious literature from the other side, we find the character of Seth, son of Adam as a bridge between the discourses. The comparative reading proves that what is expressed synthetically in the Bible and its descendant resources as the 'image of God', usually is analysed to components in Islamic literature. The latter sources speak of the given dominion and power using the concepts of 'caliph of God' and the given knowledge is expressed by the concept of teaching asmāʾ (the names).

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