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This paper investigates the various methods and merits of Qur'anic propagation using Allamah Tabataba'i's views.

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Quranic Methods of Propagation from the Viewpoint of Allamah Tabatabai

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Abstract

Propagation is a prevalent means of communicating thoughts, culture, and any message to other people. Various schools of thought have traditionally conveyed their messages to their addressees through different means. The best source of propagation is the Qur'an.

To perfect this subject, Prophetic Sunnah and conduct is used. In Qur'anic propagation, the following principles overshadow other methods of propagation: commitment to morality and values, significance of role models who were pioneers, correspondence between actions and sayings, indirect methods of propagation in practice, and taking situations into account which nowadays requires us to make use of movies, stories, novels and different media as a means of propagation as well as invoking the intellect and inviting people to think, use simplified speech, recognizing the capabilities and competencies of the

addressees and treating them wisely, using explicitness and clarification, impartiality and avoiding discrimination, and so forth. Using Allamah Tabataba'i's views, this paper investigates the above-mentioned methods and merits of Qur'anic propagation.

Introduction and statement of the problem

Propagation consists of important and interlocking methods – forming a whole – for mobilizing and directing social and individual forces to influence their personalities, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings to achieve a specific objective – be it political, military, and cultural; legitimate or illegitimate. Propagation is a tool that can be used for various purposes, depending on the propagator's goal. In this sense, propagation has a wide range and anyone can act as one.

In the second sense, which is based on the divine view, propagation refers to conveying the divine message. In this case, not everyone deserves to be propagator; rather, he or she should be familiar with the divine message, and then convey it to others.

Unlike the first sense which employs every method either legitimate or illegitimate, the second sense of propagation only adopts appropriate and legitimate methods, and this involves the propagator's familiarity with proper methods of propagation. This paper deals with some of them from the perspective of Allamah Tabataba'i, who is rightfully a propagator of Islam. In other words, considering Allamah Tabataba'i's views in his Qur'anic commentary al-Mizan, this article answers the following question:

What are key Qur'anic methods of call and propagation from Allamah Tabataba'i's point of view?

The literal meaning of propagation

Propagation (or doing tabligh) is a frequently used word in the Qur'an. It is derived from the word *balagha*, and the words *balaagha* and *bulugh* mean reaching the goal – be it in terms of time, place, or a specific issue, as indicated in *Lisan-ul-'Arab* (Ibn Manzhur, 8/420).3 Likewise, there lie meanings of adequacy and sufficiency in balagha as Farahidi referred to it in his book al-'Ayn: "ةيافكلا غيلبت و غلاب" meaning "*balagha*" and "*tabligh*" mean adequacy and sufficiency.4 In his book Mufradat, Raghib considered the root balagha to have both meanings.5 The essence of this word is being elevated to a higher level, and this refers to the difference between bulugh and wusul, because it is never said, "هدشا لصو ،ىيبصلا لصو ،رامثلا متلصو" This way, the sound reason for choosing the words derived from balagha for all following uses in the Qur'an is revealed:

"And when he had attained his maturity," (Yusuf, 12:22),

"And when the children among you have attained maturity," (Nur, 24: 59),

"And when he attained to working with him," (Saffat, 37:102),

"and when he attains his maturity and reaches forty years," (Ahqaf, 46:15),

"and the hearts rose up to the throats," (Ahzab, 33:10).[6]

Therefore, propagation means inviting somebody to a religion or ideology and leading him to the way intended by the propagator.

Background of propagation

God, the Glorified: the first propagator

Propagation and call to God has been ingrained in the root of divine religions; that is, Unity. As God does not need others to prove His holy essence; He does not need them to prove the requirements of His unity, including inviting people to Himself. At first, He was responsible for calling people to Himself, as occurred in the World of Dharr (the world before this material world):

"And when your Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their backs, their descendants, and made them bear witness as to themselves: Am I not your Lord? They said: Yes! We bear witness," (A'raf, 7:172).

In this regard, Allamah Tabataba'i wrote, "If one ponders on verse no. 172 of the chapter A'raf, he realizes that this verse refers in details to a fact that was mentioned briefly in the above verse. It refers to the human origin of mankind before coming to this world. God has differentiated between people and had made every man bear witness as to himself, "*Am I not your Lord? They said: Yes.*"[7]

Propagation: the duty of the prophets

In the second place, God has assigned the prophets to carry out this great and sacred task, saying,

"***O Prophet! Truly We have sent you as a Witness, a Bearer of Glad Tidings, and Warner, And as the one who invites to God by His leave, and as a lamp spreading light,***" (Ahzab, 33:45– 46).

The Prophet's invitation to God is the very act of inviting people to the belief in One God, which necessitates belief in the divine religion. The reason why God has made his calling to the divine religion contingent upon God's permission is to indicate his prophetic mission.[8]

The main responsibility of prophets is to convey the divine message to people. In the story of the Prophet Noah, he told the upper class and chiefs of his tribe who called him a misled person,

"I deliver to you the messages of my Lord and I am a faithful adviser to you," (A'raf, 7:68).

That is, as I am a prophet sent to you, I have no duty but to propagate the messages of God. This is repeated about the Prophet Hud, the Prophet Salih (a.s.), the Prophet Shu'aib, albeit a bit differently.

In verse no. 66 of the Qur'anic chapter al-Mai'dah, conveying the message of God is considered the main duty of the Prophet, and if he fails do it, he would not fulfill his prophetic mission:

"O' Messenger! Proclaim* [*the message*] *which has been sent to you from your Lord. And if you do, then you have not fulfilled His mission," (Ma'idah, 5:67).

According to Allamah Tabataba'i:

Although the Prophet Muhammad has many titles, he was addressed as Messenger, because this verse concerns propagation, and the appropriate title for this occasion is Messenger, since the use of this title itself indicates the reason for the command; that is, the necessity of propagation which was pointed out to the Prophet. This indicates that the Messenger of God has no responsibility but to proclaim and convey the message and the one who accepts this responsibility will definitely implement its strategy which is propagation.9

"For only the delivery of the message is* [*incumbent*] *on you," (Ra'd, 13:40),

Commenting on this verse, Allamah Tabataba'i wrote: "You [the Holy Prophet] do not have any responsibility except a clear propagation void of any ambiguity and secretiveness, because you are a Messenger of God and such a messenger does not have any responsibility except this."10

Propagation: the duty of all people

After the Prophet of Islam, neither a prophet with a new Shariat (i.e. Arch-prophets) nor a prophet propagating the Shariat of another prophet is sent to people, and it is the duty of the Infallible Imams and during the occultation of the Infallible Imams, the responsibility of religious scholars to propagate the message of Prophet Muhammad. Hence, propagation enjoys a high status, and the real propagators of Islam, in fact, convey the message of Prophet Muhammad, who himself conveys the divine message.

The Qur'an grants such a high status to propagation that it considers guiding one person equal to guiding all people as according to it, killing one person is tantamount to killing all humans:

"If anyone slew a person - unless it be for* [*punishing for*] *murder or mischief in the land - it would be as if he slew the whole people and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people," (Ma'idah, 5:32).

In *al-Mizan*, there are numerous hadiths that define life in this verse as intellectual life, guidance, and rectification which result from propagation, although on the surface, this verse means saving a man from being drowned, burnt, or killed by another person. For example, in his book al-Kafi, on his own authority, Kulayni narrated from Fudail ibn Yasaar, who asked Imam al-Sadiq, "What did God mean when He said, 'if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people'?" The sixth Imam replied, "It means saving a person from being burnt and drowned." I asked him again, "Does it mean

saving a person from error and corruption?" He answered, "This is the best esoteric interpretation of this verse."[11]

This prominent position has always attracted the best people to itself, and they have wholeheartedly and sincerely tried to keep divine guidance alive and guide the ready hearts to the Unity of God.

The Qur'an has always invited elite Muslims to hold this privileged position:

"And let there may arise out of you a group of people inviting [people] to all that is good, enjoining the good, and forbidding the evil," (Qur'an, 3:104).

The most effective means of inviting people to an action is knowledge, and when action is taken and its effect is observed, it becomes the best teacher that teaches man that knowledge. All this gives impetus to a righteous society with beneficial knowledge and good deeds to protect and preserve its knowledge and civilization as effectively as possible. If members of that society see that somebody violates this knowledge, they will guide him back to knowledge and do not leave the person who has deviated from the right path alone. They do not permit him to fall into the abyss of wickedness, evil and corruption; every member of society confronts that deviated person and forbids him from corruption.[12]

For any believer to fulfill his duty and responsibility properly, he should make use of various methods for propagation.

Main methods of propagation from Allamah Tabataba'i's perspective

Allamah Tabataba'i considered the following the main methods of propagation:

Introducing role models

A method of propagation which can be psychologically influential is to introduce good and bad models. Hence, a propagator can actualize the reality.

According to Allamah Tabataba'i, many methods have been used in the Qur'an to guide people and propagate Islam; one of them is introducing role models. According to him, "The Noble Qur'an itself has used these dialectical techniques; that is, logical reasoning, argumentation, and admonition. It has also invited the Ummah to follow its example; that is, they should prove the theoretical issues through logical reasoning, and in practical philosophy they should argue based on the indisputable or the statements that contain a lesson and warning. In defining its purposes, the Holy Qur'an has validated the Prophetic Sunnah and considered Prophet Muhammad a role model whose example Muslims must follow. Thus, they recorded and preserved his orders and words, and followed his conduct as a student follows his master's scientific conduct."[13]

This method was used in the Qur'an; Prophet Muhammad and Prophet Abraham were explicitly introduced as the best role models:

"Indeed there is in the Messenger of God an excellent example [***to follow***] ***for anyone whose hope is in God and the Final Day,"*** (Ahzab, 33:21).

According to Allamah Tabataba'i, "The word 'example' (هوسا) means 'following somebody', هللا لوسر یف means 'as regards the Messenger of God', and example as regards the Messenger of God means 'following him'. The reason for mentioning هللا لوسر یف مکل which means 'you must follow the Messenger of God' and which involves continuity, is to indicate that this is a permanent duty and you must always follow and obey him.

This verse means that a requirement of the prophethood of Messenger of God and your belief in him is your following his path in both sayings and actions. You can see that he is enduring so many hardships and fighting many battles in the way of God; you must follow in his footsteps.[14]

Likewise, as for Prophet Abraham, God said in the Qur'an,

"There is for you an excellent example [***to follow***] ***in Abraham and those with him,"*** (Mumtahina, 60:4).

This verse means that you – Muslims – must follow Prophet Abraham in his conduct and characteristics as well as believers (Allamah Tabataba'i, 19/230). Sometimes the Qur'an introduces role models implicitly, for example,

"And [***remember Prophet***] ***Ayyub*** (***Jacob***)***, when He cried to his Lord, 'Truly distress has seized me, and You are the Most Merciful of the merciful,'"*** (Anbiya, 21:83).

In the above verse, there is a reference to the way Prophet Ayyub talked to God. After talking of his disease, he only said, "*and You are the Most Merciful the merciful*" and he did not make request to God imperiously. This is a perfect example to follow, and God presents it to people.

Variety of role models in the Qur'an

In the Qur'an, we come to know of various role models, each of whom enjoyed special characteristics and made use of numerous methods of training and propagation to guide people.

Sometimes the Qur'an introduces men who are role models like Prophets Idris (Andreas) and Dawood (David):

"And mention in the Scripture of Idris. Surely he was a truthful man, a prophet," (Maryam, 19:56),

and sometime it introduces prominent women:

"O Maryam! God has chosen you and purified you and chosen you over the women of all nations," (Ale-Imran, 3:42).

In Arabic, if the word اصطفا (or 'choosing') becomes transitive with على ('over'), it refers to superiority. This اصطفا is different from اصطفا without the word على , which means submission. Thus, choosing her over all women the world refers to her superiority to other women.[15]

The Qur'anic role models sometimes emerges from the lowest social class; for example, Prophets Moses, Ayyub, and Hud, and occasionally from the court; for example, Prophet Solomon, the believer of the Pharaoh's nation, and Asiyah – Pharaoh's wife. Likewise, some Qur'anic role models such as the believer of the Pharaoh's nation and People of Cave propagated Islam for a short time, and some others such as Prophets Noah and Luqman were undertaking this mission for decades or even centuries. Some invited people to Islam in comfort (such as Prophet Solomon) and others in extreme hardship; for example, Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) in the jail of the Egyptian king and Prophet Muhammad under pressure of the polytheists.

In the Qur'an, sometimes an individual and sometimes a group is introduced as a role model to human society; an exemplary group such as People of the Cave:

"They were youths who believed in their Lord, and We advanced them in guidance," (Kahf, 18:13).

The Men of the Cave were youths who had such a belief in God that He was satisfied with them. If such a belief were not meant, it would not be attributed to them, and God would not say *"who believed in their Lord."* Likewise, in *"We advanced them in guidance,"* after faith, guidance accompanies increase in belief which causes man to be guided to whatever results in satisfaction of God.[16]

Eloquently conveying the message

The close relation between form and content and the effect of proper form of propagation on attracting intellects and hearts are issues that do not require much discussion and argumentation. The matchless eloquence of the Qur'an – the miracle of Prophet Muhammad – indicates this as well. That is why God points this out to the Messenger of God and tells him to talk to people in an influential way:

"And speak to them articulately* [*so that it*] *reaches their inner-selves," (Nisa, 4:63).

That is, tell them a word that penetrates their hearts so that they understand what you tell, know the evil results of their behavior and the fact that if it is proved they are hypocrite, a severe punishment due to God's wrath will be sent upon them (Allamah Tabataba'i, 4/440).

Using indirect methods

In addition to making use of direct methods, propagators sometimes use indirect methods for achieving more effects or for other reasons; an example is arousing feelings and emotions.

Arousing emotions

Arousing feelings and emotions is among the effective indirect methods of propagation, and the Holy Qur'an frequently benefits from it to convey its message. For instance, to warn people of unfair division of inheritance, the Qur'an evokes paternal emotions and makes them imagine their orphaned children:

And let those who if they left behind weak offspring would be afraid for them also fear [***in their behaviour toward orphans***]***. So let them fear God, and speak justly,"*** (Nisa, 4:9).

On the surface, the sentence 'those who if they left behind weak offspring would be afraid for them also fear [in their behavior toward orphans]' means the necessity of kindness and affection for the orphaned and weak children who are not under guardianship of anybody to manage their affairs, work for their benefits and against their losses, and keep abjectness away from them. It should be noted that the issue of frightening and threatening in this verse is not limited to those who already have weak children because God said, 'if they left behind', not 'if they left behind their weak offspring'.

Thus, this sentence addresses all those in such a situation; that is, those who are of mercy and humanity and are affectionate toward the weak and orphaned offspring; such people are true humans. Consequently, this sentence can mean: "If people are of humanity, they should fear God as regards orphans, because the orphaned children of other people – like their orphaned children – are weak and deserve compassion, so people should be worried about them" and their situation should be monitored so as not to be oppressed and their rights not violated. Thus, if somebody worries about and fears abjectness, he or she should try to prevent it.

In this verse, people are not ordered to have compassion and the like; rather, they are ordered to fear God and be pious only to warn them that what you do with others' orphans, namely seizing their property and violating their rights, will be done to your offspring after your death. The Qur'an points out that whatever you inflict on orphans will be inflicted on your offspring after your death.[17]

Argumentation

This method of propagation used by in the Qur'an has advanced logical, scientific arguments as regards various issues, and in many occasions it has invited its opponents to put forward arguments.

"And they say: "None shall enter Paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian." They are their [***vain***] ***desires. Say: "offer your argument if you are truthful",*** (Al-Baqara, 2:111).

The verse dismissed this possibility by fighting them and saying, "You have no strong argument." That is, God ordered the Prophet to demand them a reason by saying, "offer your argument if you are truthful."

"Or have they taken for worship [***other***] ***gods besides Him? Say, "Offer your argument. This*** (***the***

Qur'an*) *is the Reminder for those with me and the Reminder for those before me," (Anbiya, 21:24)

This verse is also an example of prohibition through presenting the reason or evidence which is a technical term of debate. It means that one demands reason of the other side of the debate that claims something, and also says that the reason why I demand a reason of you is that I can present an argument against yours.

In this verse, God ordered His Messenger respond to polytheists who adopted a god other than God by saying "offer your argument," because claim cannot be accepted without offering arguments. On the basis of intellect, man cannot accept and trust such a claim, and the reason why I demand an argument is the divine scriptures sent down by God; these scriptures do not accept your claim; rather, they strongly oppose idol– worship. There is the Qur'an which is a Reminder, a divine scripture, and a contemporary book, as well as other divine scriptures such as the Torah and the Bible, which all consider deity and worship specific to God.

Or it means that in the Qur'an which has being revealed to me for the mankind contemporary with me and in the past divine scriptures which were Reminder for the past people, whatever concerns worship is exclusive to God, and all these divine scriptures consider Him only deserving of deity.[18]

Open debate

A propagation method of divine leaders and prophets for confronting their opponents was open and logical debate, examples of which can be found in the words of all prophets. For example, according to Allamah Tabataba'i, Prophet Noah made use of all methods of debate to convince the polytheists:

"They said: O Noah! Indeed you have disputed with us and lengthened dispute with us, therefore bring us what you promised us [***divine punishment***] ***if you are from among the truthful,"*** (Hud, 11:32).

This verse concerns the words of polytheistic leaders of Prophet Noah's tribe. After their failure to debate logically and dismissed his argument and the doctrine he invited them to, they uttered these words. In fact, they wanted to consider him unable, as they said: "You cannot do anything, and cannot bring the chastisement you threatened us with." What they mean by 'what you promised us' was the severe punishment which Prophet Noah had warned them of at the beginning of his call to God…

The following verse indicates the long duration of his call to God,

"So he remained among them a thousand years save fifty years," (Ankabut, 29:14).

Likewise, this verse shows the great variety of his propagation methods,

"He said: O my Lord! Surely I have called my people night and day! But my call has only made them flee more. And whenever I have called them that You may forgive them, they put their

fingers in their ears, cover themselves with their garments, and persist and are puffed up with pride. Then surely I called to them aloud. Then surely I spoke to them in public and I spoke to them in private," (Nuh, 71:5–9).

Thus, the arguments of Prophet Noah in the above verses were offered throughout hundreds of years (Allamah Tabataba'i, 10/215).

Relating to the people

This method is mostly of use when one debates with his opponents. Preserving his correct belief, the propagator accords with the words of his addressees to an extent. With his impartiality and flexibility, he shatters their false beliefs and argues for his true viewpoints in a timely manner.

Sometimes to reveal the truth and achieve the purpose, one must succumb to the opposing side outwardly, and then with a step–by–step approach, prepare him for accepting the truth. If the propagator wants to invite the addressee to the truth without his being prepared and at the very beginning, he may face an adverse reaction. The Qur'an instructs people to speak in accordance with their beliefs. A prime example of this is seen in the debates of Prophet Abraham with the star–worshippers. At first he accompanied them, then expressed his views, and finally conveyed his message. Prophet Abraham introduced himself as the worshipper of the moon, stars, and the sun. However, Allamah Tabataba'i referred to verses 43–47 of the chapter Maryam on Prophet Abraham's offering argument to his father:

O my father! Truly the knowledge has come to me which has not come to you, therefore follow me, I will guide you to a right path. O my father! Do not worship Satan, surely Satan is disobedient to the Beneficent God. O' my father! Surely I fear that a punishment from the Beneficent God may afflict you so that you may be a friend of the Satan. He said: Do you dislike my gods, O Ibrahim? If you do not desist, I will certainly stone you, and leave me for a time. He said: Peace be on you, I will pray to my Lord to forgive you; surely He is ever Affectionate to me. (Maryam, 19:43–47)

Tabataba'i infers from these verses that Prophet Abraham knew the truth and had faith in the One, Who manages his affairs, does him good, and reveres him excessively is verily God, the Glorified. Therefore, when he said the stars, the moon, and the sun are "my Lord," he only wanted to succumb to his enemies so that his words might be comprehensible to them. He outwardly considered himself having the same belief as them and assumed that their superstitious beliefs were true, and then through well–founded statements, he proved their misguided belief. This kind of argumentation can best cause the enemies to be fair, prevent from their revolt and prejudice, and prepare them for hearing the truth.[19]

Question and answer

Another method of propagation is question and answer. In many cases and to prove such important truths as Unity of God, negation of polytheism, and resurrection, the Qur'an uses the question and

answer method for propagation. A prime example of this method is when someone brought decomposed bones to Prophet Muhammad and asked him, "Who can resurrect them?" In response, he said,

"…He will give them life Who created them for the first time…" (Yaseen, 36:79) and

"Is not He Who created the heavens and the earth able to create the like of them? Yes! And He is the Creator, the Knower," (Yaseen, 36:81).

Verse no. 81 includes a rhetorical question, and it advances the very argument of verse no. 79; that is, "…He will give them life Who created them for the first time…" The only difference is that the statement in the verse no. 81 is more comprehensible than that in verse no. 79 because the latter refers to the creation of man as a proof of God's ability to resurrect him, but the former offers the creation of the heavens and the earth as a proof of His power since according to the voice of conscience and the word of God:

"Certainly the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of the men," (Ghafir, 40:57).

In fact, these Qur'anic verses mean how one can dare to say that God, Who created the vast heavens and the earth and designed the astonishing system of universe with its bloodcurdling and amazing sub-systems of which the existing human systems are some simple examples, cannot recreate people. No one can dare to say so, because God is an Omnipotent and all-Knowing Creator.[20]

Moderation in relationships

An effective way of conveying the divine message is practicing moderation in relationship with others. The Qur'an points out that Islam and belief in Unity are based on human innate disposition; it can lead man to the right path in his life. According to the Qur'an, the basis of Islam is human innate disposition; no one doubts its judgments and everyone considers his or her perfect life to be the very issues that his innate disposition (*fitrah*) decrees and leads him to. This innate disposition decrees that the only thing based on which man's individual and social are guaranteed is monotheism, and defending and propagating it, as well as protecting it are the legitimate rights of humankind. People are to demand these rights by any possible means.

Since a person may go to extremes, the Qur'an has shown the way of moderation. It first demanded these rights by the mere call to Islam, and has ordered Muslims to tolerate their being persecuted by pagans; second, Muslims must defend the lives, property and territory of Muslims, and repress the aggressors; and third, they must declare war and initiate battles that are in defense of humanity and monotheism. Islam never declared a war before it invited people to the right path leniently and giving them ultimatum as this is evident in the history of Islam and biography of Prophet Muhammad, whose conduct was so. God said:

"Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice and dispute with them in a manner that is best. Indeed your Lord knows best those who stray from His way, and He knows best those who are guided." (Nahl, 16:125).21

Elsewhere in the Qur'an, God said:

"Adopt* [*a policy of*] *excusing* [*the faults of people*]*, bid what is right, and turn away from the ignorant." (A'raf, 7:199).

"زخا" (derived from the word زخ, meaning 'Hold to something'). This refers to practicing something and not abandoning it; thus, 'Hold to forgiveness' means [O' Prophet!] always conceal the evils others do to you, give up the right of revenge that social wisdom prescribes, and never abandon this practice. Of course, this applies to the evils done to Prophet Muhammad when his rights were violated, but when others' rights are violated, the intellect does not prescribe overlooking it because forgiveness makes people commit sins, and results in serious violation of people's rights and damaged reputations.

All Qur'anic verses prohibiting Muslims from oppression, corruption, assistance for oppressors, inclination to and humbleness before them, as well as all verses involving Islamic laws and principles prevents Muslims from overlooking the above vices.

Hence, what is meant by "Hold to forgiveness" is overlooking the evils done to the Prophet himself as was his conduct; throughout his life, he never got revenge on anyone.

The above discussion is based on others' interpretation on the word 'وفع' as referring to forgiveness; however, in some narrations from Imam Sadiq, forgiveness means moderation (Kulayni, 4/53). This comprehensive commentary suits the content of the above verse. Although the first commentary involves repetition through the sentence ("And turn away from the ignorant"), in the second commentary, there is no repetition (because the sentence وفعلا زخ has one meaning and the sentence و ارض عن المشركين has another.)22

Recognizing the capabilities of the addressees

According to Allamah Tabataba'i, there are various ways leading to God in terms of their perfection and imperfection, sparseness and prevalence, and the extent of their proximity to the source of truth and the right path; for example, the way of Islam, faith, worship, sincerity and humbleness. In contrast, there is paganism, polytheism, denial of God, revolt, and sins which are at various levels of misguidedness. In the Qur'an, God said about both groups,

"And for* [*each group*] *are degrees according to what they did, and that He shall pay them back fully their deeds and they shall not be wronged," (Ahqaf, 46:19).

This resembles the divine teachings the intellects have different understandings of because of people's various levels, as the following verse says:

He sends down water from the skies, and the channels flow, each according to its measure: But the torrent bears away to foam that mounts up to the surface. Even so, from that [ore] which they heat in the fire, to make ornaments or utensils therewith, there is a scum likewise. Thus, God [by parables] shows Truth and Falsehood. For the scum disappears like forth cast out; while that which is for the good of mankind remains on the earth. Thus, God sets forth parables, (Ra'd, 13:17).

Commenting on "Invite [all] to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and debate with them in ways that are best and most gracious," (Nahl, 16:125), Allamah Tabataba'i also referred to the difference of capabilities, saying, "No doubt in this verse, the three conditions of 'wisdom', 'preaching' and 'debate' concern the style of speech; the Messenger of God was ordered to invite people to Islam in one of the above three ways each of which is a particular method for the call to Islam although 'debate' in its particular meaning is not considered a way of propagation.23

The above verse keeps silent regarding the use of 'wisdom', 'preaching' or 'debate' because recognizing which method to use is the responsibility of the propagator himself; the most effective method is to be used. As the circumstance arises, it is possible that all three ways, two methods, or one of them is resorted to. The reason why this was mentioned is that it is not correct to assume that on the basis of the above verse, the Messenger of God was ordered to use of all three methods in all situations, because the verse does not imply that all three methods should be used for all addresses and in all situations.24

Maintaining equality and avoiding discrimination

Maintaining equality and avoiding discrimination plays a vital role in conveying the divine message. God said in the Qur'an,

"And say: 'I believe in the Books which God has sent down; and I was commanded to establish justice among you. God is our Lord and your Lord: for us* [*are the outcomes of*] *our deeds, and for you are yours. There is no contention between us and you. God will bring us together, and to Him is* [*our*] *return,'" (Shuraa, 42:15).

In the above verse, God said, 'Tell people I believe in all scriptures sent down by God, and guarantee equality in confirmation of and belief in the divine scriptures.' By divine scriptures, it refers to the revealed books of divine religions.

The sentence "and I was commanded to establish justice among you" means that I must have equal attitude to all, I must not prefer the strong to the weak, the rich to the poor, and the renowned to the layperson, and I must not consider the white superior to the black, Arabs to non-Arabs, and Hashimites or Quraishites to others. The call targets on the public, and considers all people equal.

The sentence "I believe in the Books which God has sent down," also refers to considering all revealed books equal in that all people must believe in God and the divine religion.

Finally, the sentence “and I was commanded to establish justice among you,” involves considering all people equal; all should be invited so as to know about the revealed divine law.[25]

Openness and being clear

An effective propagation method is to clarify the message and make it explicit. God said in the Qur’an,

“Therefore reveal openly what you are commanded, and turn away from polytheists,” (Hijr, 15:94).

The words عدصد، قرف، لصف mean the same. The purpose of the verse was to announce the Prophet’s mission. Hence, the verse means:

‘Now that everything has been said and you [the Prophet] are ordered to overlook [their faults], you introduced yourself as the one who warns them of Our chastisement for those who divided [Scripture into arbitrary parts] (Hijr, 15:90), you should not fear anything. Announce the truth and make your call public.’

Thus, the verse,

“Truly, We suffice you against those who scoff at you,” (Hijr, 15:95)

gives reason for the verse,

“Therefore reveal openly what you are commanded, and turn away from polytheists,” (15:Hijr, 94)

as its words informs us implicitly that those who scoff at the Prophet are those who divided [Scripture into arbitrary parts] which were referred to above in the verse no. 90. In a word, this verse means: ‘Now that everything has been said, do not hesitate, make your call to the truth public and turn away from polytheists’.[26]

Correspondence between words and action

Commenting on the verse,

“O’ you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do?” (Saff, 61:2),

Allamah Tabataba’i says, “Although it seems that all believers are rebuked in this verse, it concerns the correspondence between words and action, and breaking the promise. This interpretation is right, because when man’s outward appearance does not correspond to his inner state, he will do any deed.”[27]

He also added, “God, the Almighty, is enraged most by one’s saying something which he does not act upon, because it is a sign of hypocrisy.”

Saying something one does not act upon is different from not acting upon what one said before;

sometimes one cannot manage to act upon what he said before or he breaks his promise. But sometimes from the very beginning when one gives a promise, he intends not to fulfill it; the latter is considered hypocrisy, not the former. The former results from lack of endeavor and weak willpower which are in themselves vices and obstacles to man's salvation because God has made man's salvation contingent on his doing good deeds voluntarily and gaining some rewards; the keys to these two are having great determination and effort. If we encounter someone who gives a promise but fails to fulfill it and breaks it, we understand he has weak will–power; such a person is not hoped to reach salvation.[28]

Commitment to morality and values

Commitment to morality and values are so important in religious call that in the Qur'an, sometimes self–purification precedes teaching in terms of significance,

"It is He Who has sent amongst the Unlettered a Messenger from among themselves, to read His Signs (Qur'anic verses) to them, to purify them, and to teach them Scripture and Wisdom," (Jum'ah, 62:2).

To Allamah Tabataba'i, the reason why self–purification is mentioned before teaching in this verse is that it discusses the Prophet's training the believers where self–purification is more important than teaching.[29]

Hence, Islam includes the perfect degree of all praiseworthy characteristics and virtues, and Prophet Muhammad – as its propagator– embodied all of them. He said,

"I was sent as a prophet to perfect noble traits of character," (Nuri, 11/188).

Conclusion

According to Allamah Tabataba'i, propagation and invitation to values are processes that started when mankind was created by God first. To this end, God himself was the first one to invite mankind to the religious values; He then gave this great responsibility to the divine prophets. After the prophets and in the course of time, the Imams, Friends of God, and religious scholars assumed the responsibility of religious propagation and call.

As a divine religion, Islam devoted considerable attention to propagation. Numerous verses – directly and indirectly – deal with propagation, its methods and rules, and its spread and limitations. Allamah Tabataba'i discussed the following either explicitly or implicitly; propagating belief in God, propagation as the main responsibility of the divine prophets, propagation as the responsibility of all people, extensiveness of propagation, methods and rules of propagation, perseverance in propagation, and limitations on effectiveness of propagation.

According to him, the Qur'an has made use of various methods for propagation, and these methods are

mostly considered direct ways of propagation. Adhering to values and principles are so important that in propagation by the Prophet, self- purification was considered more significant than and preferred to teaching. Nevertheless, under some circumstances, it used such indirect methods as arousing feelings and emotions to achieve positive results.

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