The Teleological Virtue-Based Foundation of a Transcendent Model of Good Governance from the Perspective of the Noble Quran

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Abstract

The present study aims to elucidate the teleological foundations of a transcendent model of good governance from the perspective of the Noble Quran. Its central research question is: What are the Quranic foundations of the virtue-oriented teleology of Islamic governance? This question was addressed through the methods of thematic exegesis and thematic analysis. To this end, Quranic verses were classified into three levels: origin, path, and ultimate end, and the Quranic implications for governance were derived. The findings indicate that the order of existence is founded on causality and teleology, and that every action has an agent and an end. God is both the efficient cause and the end in Himself. The ultimate end of creation is the "knowledge of God" and attainment of the "meeting with God" (*liqā' Allāh*), which are achieved through worship and servitude. This absolute and unlimited end is not confined to the worldly life but encompasses all of creation. Accordingly, the ultimate end of governance is to create the conditions for knowledge of God and for human beings to attain spiritual elevation and illumination. Intermediate ends include justice, security, welfare, responsible freedom, education and human development, and participation. Functional objectives are manifested in categories such as fulfilling trusts, justice, and establishing equity, among others. Thus, governance within this model is a divine trust that derives its legitimacy from God's lordship and guidance, and whose responsibility rests with those authorized by Him. To achieve this end, the goals of governance must be designed and delineated in accordance with the framework of the Sharia, so as to ensure the simultaneous material and spiritual advancement of human beings.

Keywords

Good Governance, Virtue-Oriented Teleology, Ultimate End, Thematic Exegesis, the Noble Quran

Introduction

In the field of governance, there is a meaningful relationship between the choice of a foundational approach and the form that governance takes. Different models, such as governance aimed at poverty reduction, economic development, or Islamic governance, all pursue worldly or otherworldly felicity, and the model of governance takes shape on the basis of the approach adopted. Moreover, the indicators used to evaluate governance are determined by its defined ends. The determination of goals and ends is an important and distinguishing dimension of governance. Accordingly, the question "What do we govern for?" reveals the differences among various models. In materialist governance, the ultimate end is often centered on the economy and material development, with individual and social felicity defined in terms

of ever-greater access to material welfare. In contrast, the end of Islamic governance extends beyond material development and economic welfare, emphasizing the interdependence of material development and spiritual elevation. It should be noted, however, that "the West" must not be regarded as a monolithic or homogeneous entity. Some strands of Western philosophy, including the philosophies of Aristotle and Aquinas and the virtue ethics tradition represented by MacIntyre, are grounded in teleology and virtue. What distinguishes dominant models of modern governance is the prevalence of secular and materialist approaches in many contemporary theories of governance. Therefore, the critique advanced in this article is directed at materialist models, not at the entire Western intellectual tradition. This article seeks to identify the distinctive features of the Islamic model of good governance in comparison with other models by focusing on its ends from the perspective of the Noble Quran. This model emphasizes the centrality of both the material and spiritual dimensions of governance. On the one hand, it stresses the guidance and reform of society under divine laws; on the other, it regards the attainment of worldly welfare and otherworldly felicity as guiding principles for the principal programs of governance, rather than restricting its concerns to material matters alone. To identify the model of good governance grounded in divine guidance, attention to origin and ultimate end is of fundamental importance. Unlike the materialist outlook, the theistic worldview regards the order of existence as founded on teleology. On this basis, the principal research question of this article is: What are the Quranic foundations of virtue-oriented teleology for a model of Islamic governance? The subsidiary questions are as follows: What are the philosophical and Quranic foundations of teleology? What are the different levels of ends in governance? How can one move from the ultimate end to the intermediate ends and functional objectives of governance? What are the practical indicators of this model? The article's contribution is threefold. First, it clearly distinguishes among the ultimate end, intermediate ends, and functional objectives of governance, thereby preventing the conflation of different levels of teleological analysis. Second, it connects Quranic teleology to concrete governance policies and practices through Quranic concepts such as trust, justice, and divine sovereignty. Third, it offers an operational definition of virtue-oriented, teleological governance and identifies its indicators.

1. Research Methodology

The research employs the method of thematic interrogative exegesis (*tafsīr mawḍūʿī istinṭāqī*), based on the approach of Ayatollah Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr. In this method, the exegete brings together different verses concerning a particular subject and, by synthesizing and analyzing them, presents the Quran's perspective on that subject. The exegete collects all verses relevant to the subject under investigation and focuses the analysis on their content rather than their wording (Javadi Amoli, 2009d, p. 50). According to this method, the exegete does not begin the inquiry from the text itself but instead starts from outside the text, with the realities of life. The exegete must consider all human experiences and the ideas developed in relation to the subject, as well as the problems each experience has engendered and its positive and negative aspects. The exegete then turns to the Quran, poses the questions arising from this inquiry, and seeks the Quran's answers. In general, the methodology of the present study combines thematic exegesis through interrogation, thematic analysis, and insights from contemporary approaches to governance. Accordingly, in the first stage, following the method of thematic exegesis, existing needs and problems are presented to the Quran in the form of questions, and the Quran is interrogated to elicit its responses. In the next stage, three steps are undertaken using thematic analysis. First, basic themes are identified, consisting of Quranic expressions related to ends and governance. Second, these themes are organized into organizing themes: the agent-related system, the internal system, and the teleological system. Third, global themes are derived, comprising the ultimate end, intermediate ends, and

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functional objectives. Thus, following this methodological framework, the study seeks to examine the ends of good governance as presented in the Noble Quran.

2. Concepts and Theoretical Literature of Governance

The concept of governance entered the literature of political and social sciences more broadly around 1990, with the emergence of new ideas concerning the macro-level management of the political and social system (Boer, 2018, p. 10). Before this period, governance was generally regarded as synonymous with government. Government was initially understood as a process, but subsequently came to be conceptualized as an institution or a set of institutions, one social actor among others, or one sector of society alongside such sectors as the private sector and civil society organizations (Zahedi, 2012, p. 31). This shift in perspective led to a distinction between the two concepts. The United Nations Development Program defines governance as the exercise of political, economic, and administrative authority to manage a country's public affairs at all levels. Another definition describes governance as the formulation, application, and enforcement of rules and the management of public affairs. In this definition, the rules governing public affairs encompass all the constituent domains of governance, including civil society, policymaking, government, bureaucracy, the economy, and culture (Carrier, 2007, p. 12). The United Nations defines governance as the exercise of economic, political, and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It encompasses the mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests (Meidari & Kheirkhah, 2004, p. 116). The definitions cited above emphasize guidance, interaction, control, and the regulation of activities in the interests of the people, or citizens. In this sense, governance concerns the processes through which society is administered and the manner in which power is exercised. It can therefore be understood as referring to how government is conducted, how people are governed and directed, and how governmental affairs are administered and regulated (Meidari, 2004, p. 194). In light of these characteristics, governance can be defined as an interactive process through which collective action, guided by shared goals, determines who does what and how society is directed toward collectively desired ends. The purpose of governance, in this conception, is to define, understand, and explain how society is governed (Ansell & Torfing, 2013, p. 5). Governance thus encompasses all processes involved in the administration of society's affairs. Accordingly, transcendent, teleological good governance, as conceptualized in this article, refers to a model of societal administration in which laws, institutions, and policies are designed to create the conditions for human flourishing, justice, security, welfare, responsible freedom, and, ultimately, proximity to God. This conception of governance goes beyond procedural definitions by emphasizing teleology and virtue.

According to a World Bank report from the late 1980s, the central strategy for good governance was identified as strengthening the capacity of the state. The report emphasized that priorities differ from one country to another and that each country can adapt the model of good governance to its own culture, values, and norms, thereby defining its own national variants. The central premise of the governance debate, therefore, is that there is no one-size-fits-all rule: approaches to improving governance vary across societies. Accordingly, good governance for any society is the model that can best enable that society to achieve its goals and reflect its everyday realities (Meidari & Kheirkhah, 2004, p. 284). On this basis, models of governance can be designed and defined differently in accordance with varying circumstances and contexts.

The process of governance is framed by three questions, the answers to which determine how society's affairs are administered and establish the foundations of governance: Who governs? What is governed? And how is the process governed? (Ansell & Torfing, 2013, p. 46). Within this framework, the answer to the question of what is governed depends on the type of

governance adopted, which is defined in terms of its goals and ends. These goals distinguish different models of governance from one another. For example, in Western models of governance, the ultimate end is often understood in terms of economic growth and economic welfare (Kaufmann & Kraay, 2002). Accordingly, individual and social felicity is primarily associated with the greatest possible accumulation of capital and material prosperity. This perspective is not endorsed by the Islamic model of governance, in which the ultimate end entails the integration of material development with spiritual development. Development that leads solely to improvements in material welfare and economic prosperity is not, from an Islamic perspective, desirable in itself. This view does not categorically reject material development; rather, it regards such development as a means to human growth and spiritual elevation. The desirable model of governance is therefore one that combines spirituality with material welfare.

The fundamental difference between Islamic and secular models of governance lies in their respective goals and ends. Prevailing models of governance generally emphasize worldly felicity, with rulers seeking to satisfy their citizens' aspirations in this regard, sometimes at the expense of the rights of citizens in other societies. By contrast, the religious model of governance is virtue-oriented and pursues worldly and otherworldly ends simultaneously. To attain human perfection and felicity, believers sometimes forgo their own comfort and well-being and strive to acquire spiritual rather than material benefits (Zahiri, 2014, p. 93). In general, virtue-oriented teleology, as understood in this article, refers to an outlook according to which existence, human beings, and governance are purposive, and whose ultimate end is not merely material welfare but human perfection and spiritual elevation. Within this outlook, virtues are not merely means to achieving well-being; they are themselves part of the ultimate end.

3. Teleological Foundations of the Order of Existence in the Good Governance Model

From the perspective of Islamic philosophers, the world is founded on a system of causality. According to this rational argument, every action has both an agent and an end; that is, no action occurs without an efficient cause, and no undertaking comes into being without a purpose. In the system of cause and effect, the number of causes cannot be infinite; rather, the series of efficient causes must necessarily terminate in an agent that acts through itself (*fāʿil bi-l-dhāt*), since an agent that acts through itself does not need its agency to be supplemented. The same argument applies to the series of final causes: the teleological order of things must terminate in an end that is an end in itself (*ghāya bi-l-dhāt*); otherwise, a problem of circularity or infinite regress would arise. Thus, the existence of an ultimate end in itself within the order of existence is necessary (Javadi Amoli, 2009c, p. 519). This argument provides the philosophical foundation for teleology. On this basis, the theistic worldview finds meaning in the relationship between agency and the ultimate end of existence. The order of existence is understood as purposive and directed toward ends, an understanding grounded in the order and perfection of creation, or in the design and governance of the universe. This, in itself, establishes that the universe is purposefully ordered. Furthermore, from the perspective of philosophers and theologians, things have been governed according to a consciously intended purpose. The term teleology indicates that nature proceeds toward an end and that the order of nature demonstrates that it has been designed for a purpose. Natural bodies move consistently in the same ways to achieve their results; hence, the source of their motion is intention rather than chance. They can therefore be directed only by an intelligent being, a wise governor who guides them toward their ends (Eskandari, 2018, p. 90). The purposiveness of the universe is also affirmed in various Quranic verses. The Noble Quran declares that the creation of the universe is founded on truth and rejects the notion that it is mere play or amusement, affirming

that God did not create the heavens, the earth, and all that lies between them as a pastime (Quran 21:16). Moreover, God did not create the heavens and the earth in vain; rather, the Quran emphasizes that every being in the universe has a wise purpose that constitutes its final cause. Accordingly, human beings, as the noblest of created beings, cannot be understood as existing without a purpose. The Quranic verses indicate that God has placed all that is in the heavens and the earth at humanity's disposal so that every being may attain its perfection. Since human beings possess the potential for eternal life, all the constituent parts of the universe are made to contribute to their attainment of everlasting life and felicity. In other words, the universe's resources and beings are all directed toward helping human beings attain eternal felicity. According to Quran 2:21–29, God has a purpose in creating things and has created nothing in vain or as a mere plaything. The purpose of creating the heavens and the earth is also connected to the creation of human beings and the provision of their needs, enabling them to attain their true perfection. Furthermore, God's purpose in creating human beings is that they attain *taqwā* (God-consciousness and piety). More broadly, the purpose of creating the universe and humanity is human development and perfection. Created beings manifest their purposiveness and their harmony with human needs, thereby demonstrating their readiness to nurture the perfected human being and provide for human needs (Tabataba'i, 1995, p. 110).

4. Orders Governing the Existence and Human in the Good Governance Model

According to the theistic worldview, three systems govern the order of existence. (1) The System of Agency. The created universe is organized according to a system of causes and effects, whose origin is the independent agent, self-sufficient in essence, namely, God, the Exalted, who is the "First of the first" (*Awwal al-awwalīn*) (Javadi Amoli, 2004, p. 106). 2. The Internal and External Systems. The internal and external order of beings points to the existence of a wise ordainer. Each being has been created in such an orderly and well-equipped manner that none of the necessities it requires, nor any of the faculties that contribute to its perfection, has been omitted. The internal order of things and the systematic relationships among them constitute one dimension of the argument from design (Javadi Amoli, 2004, p. 108). 3. The Teleological System. Each being pursues a particular goal and end, while the origin and ultimate source of all ends is none other than God, the Exalted, who is the end desired in Himself. All beings seek absolute and unlimited perfection, and God, in addition to being characterized as the "First of the first," is also described as the "Last of the last" (*Ākhir al-ākhirīn*) (Javadi Amoli, 2004, p. 111). The common principle underlying these systems is Allah. Although God, the Exalted, manifests Himself in the system of agency as creation, in the internal system as wisdom, and in the teleological system as guidance, this multiplicity of manifestations converges in the unity of the One who manifests Himself, namely, the Divine Essence. Through the system of agency, we arrive at Allah; when we examine the internal organization of each being, we find it to be a sign of the One God; and when we consider the teleological system, we likewise discern the unity of God. Thus, God is the First and the Last, while the middle of this system, too, manifests His unity. This is the meaning of pure *tawḥīd* (divine oneness) (Javadi Amoli, 2004, p. 106).

According to the Islamic theistic worldview, which identifies the origin and ultimate end of human existence and movement, as well as the program that guides this movement, Islam has a set of common principles organized around three fundamental elements: (1) the receptive principle (mabdaʾ qābilī): all human beings share the same innate constitution; (2) the teleological principle (*mabdaʾ ghāʾī*): the goal and ultimate end of the course of human existence are the same for all; and (3) the efficient principle (*mabdaʾ-i fāʿilī*): all human beings have the same Creator. Given the unity of the efficient principle, the teleological principle, and the material principle of human beings, the law governing them must also be one: Islam. Islam

claims to be universal and all-encompassing because it has been ordained by the Originator of the universe and humanity and in accordance with their ultimate end (Javadi Amoli, 2009b, p. 24). Given that, according to the theistic worldview, three systems govern the order of existence, Islam likewise recognizes three systems governing human beings—systems that non-theistic schools of thought do not attribute to human beings. First, the system of agency concerns the causes of human beings' coming into existence and their development, all of which are created by the one and only God. Second, the internal system specific to human nature consists of an immaterial spirit and a material body. Human beings are neither spirits without bodies, like angels, nor bodies without spirits, like earthly and plant matter. What constitutes human beings' humanity is their imperishable spirit, which is accompanied by their perishable, earthly body. Third, the specific teleological system holds that human beings do not cease to exist when their bodies die. Rather, they remain alive and, after departing from this world, enter the enduring realm known as the Resurrection. Identifying the systems that govern human beings determines the ends of governance. In non-theistic, materialist, and empiricist schools of thought, however, human beings lack both a system of agency and a teleological system, while their internal system is confined to matter and the body; the spirit and spiritual phenomena are likewise interpreted in material terms (Javadi Amoli, 2009a, p. 44). On the basis of this worldview, divine governance is teleological, and the relationship between its system of agency and its teleological system provides the foundation for delineating the model of good governance grounded in divine guidance.

5. Ends in the Model of Divine Good Governance

In the model of good governance, goals guide the course of action and determine the strategies to be pursued. In the social and political spheres, having a clear goal helps people keep their destination in view and continue moving toward it without losing sight of their direction. According to the teachings of the Noble Quran, the ends of good divine governance can be divided into several categories. (a) At the macro level, the Quranic verses identify the attainment of the status of God's vicegerent (*khalīfat Allāh*) as the fundamental goal of human creation, toward which the movement of the entire society must be directed (Seyyed-Bagheri, 2015, p. 209). In divine governance, considerable attention is paid to human beings, their needs, and the course of their development, such that attaining these goals requires careful and sustained planning. From the perspective of the Noble Quran, God has guided human beings toward lofty goals by sending prophets and showing them the path they are to follow. Implementing and putting into practice the commands and teachings of the Quran and Islam, and leading human beings to felicity, would undoubtedly be inconceivable without the presence of a ruler authorized by God. (b) According to the teachings of the Quran, the ends pursued by the model of divine governance create the conditions for human elevation. Even worldly goals are not devoid of the greater purpose of elevating human beings, since human beings must attain spiritual illumination. The divine ruler pursues the worldly objectives of government alongside its spiritual objectives, organizing the rational dimensions of society and collective life in a manner aligned with the moral, spiritual, and divine development of society. For example, although reforming affairs and developing the land are among the worldly and general objectives of religious government, such objectives are achieved through attention to its spiritual and distinctive objectives. In other words, the establishment of equity and justice creates the conditions for the practical realization of these worldly objectives (Vaezi, 2006, p. 231). (c) The Noble Quran adopts a guidance-oriented approach to goals and ends in the model of divine governance. According to its teachings, divine governance is grounded in guidance, and whatever goals the ruler pursues, they are all directed toward elevating and illuminating human beings. Indeed, even the laws governing society are intended to secure the interests and felicity of society and all human beings. In non-divine models of governance, however,

spiritual goals are pursued in order to secure material objectives, rather than for the sake of human elevation. If the obstacles to doing so were removed, these models would abandon spiritual goals as well (Sobhani, 1991, p. 424). (d) The goals and ends of divine governance derive from revelation. Since the teachings of the Noble Quran are comprehensive and in harmony with human nature (*fiṭra*), their goal can be none other than human elevation, perfection, and felicity. Accordingly, every program it proposes is intended to realize this very goal. Because the goals of governance, from the perspective of revelation, originate with the One who created human beings and the world and knows what human beings need in order to attain the status of God's vicegerent, these goals are formulated so as to connect, on the one hand, to the physical realm (*mulk*) and, on the other, to the spiritual realm (*malakūt*). By contrast, programs whose origins are non-revelatory are human constructs. Given that human beings themselves acknowledge the fallibility of human-made programs, how can they claim to guarantee the perfection and felicity of other human beings? (e) In the comprehensive vision of the Noble Quran, the purpose of creation and the cosmic order is articulated in a way that clarifies the path human beings are to follow in the created universe. The explanation of this path depends on whether one adopts a theistic or a materialist worldview. According to the verses of the Noble Quran, two purposes are identified for the creation of the cosmic order. On the one hand, the purpose of creating the cosmic order is to enable human beings to attain knowledge of divine oneness (*tawḥīd*): "It is God who created seven heavens, and of the earth the like of them. The command descends among them, so that you may know that God has power over all things and that God encompasses all things in knowledge" (Quran 65:12). On the other hand, the Quran declares the sincere worship of God to be the purpose of creation: "I did not create the jinn and humankind except to worship Me" (Quran 51:56). The reason for identifying these two purposes is that the first verse takes into account the purpose pertaining to the theoretical intellect and the cognitive dimension of the human being, whereas the second considers the purpose pertaining to the practical intellect and the evaluative dimension, so that human perfection may be secured through sound knowledge and righteous action (Javadi Amoli, 2009c, p. 519). Thus, the fundamental purpose of the creation of the world and humanity is knowledge, which pertains to the cognitive dimension, and worship, which pertains to the evaluative dimension. When human society becomes learned, knowledgeable, and devoted in worship, it reaches its destination; otherwise, it suffers loss (Javadi Amoli, 2010b, p. 405). Accordingly, human beings have an ultimate end in the order of existence, namely, meeting their Lord (*liqāʾ Allāh*). Before attaining this end, however, they live a worldly life, which they must understand and whose purpose they must fulfill (Mesbah Yazdi, 2006, p. 24).

According to the teachings of the Noble Quran, numerous verses indicate that creation is purposive. They establish that the creation of the universe is neither amusement nor futile, rejecting the notion that God created the heavens, the earth, and all that exists between them as a plaything: "We did not create the heaven and the earth and all that is between them in play" (Quran 21:16). Likewise, the purpose of human beings in a divine society is not, in accordance with the notion that "there is nothing but our life in this world," merely to enjoy the world and derive benefits from one another. Rather, their lives are grounded in both this world and the Hereafter, and in the connection between these two realms, so that they may attain the meeting with God. In light of this argument, the principal goal is clear: a particular end cannot be attained by just any means; rather, a specific goal must be pursued through appropriate actions. In a monotheistic theistic worldview in which the human goal is the meeting with God, the principles and foundations are likewise those brought by the prophets (Javadi Amoli, 2009a, p. 85). On this basis, God is the ultimate ruler, possessing absolute power, while the Perfect Human Being is the one who elucidates, interprets, and expounds that rule. According to this understanding, God's principal and ultimate purpose in creation is for human beings to attain

their final perfection and the station of proximity to God. Accordingly, the ultimate and principal end of divine governance is also human elevation and the attainment of final perfection, while its other goals provide the necessary means for realizing this end. Thus, the ultimate ends of creation include knowledge of God, the Exalted, who is the end and final cause of all existence and for whose sake the world was established (Javadi Amoli, 2008a, p. 401). Another goal is worship, although this is an intermediate end. The ultimate goal is for human beings to cross the bridge of worship and reach the destination of certainty. For as long as a person has not attained certainty, their worship, beliefs, moral qualities, and, in short, everything they possess remain vulnerable to decline and destruction. Once a person attains certainty, however, they have achieved the purpose of worship and, consequently, the ultimate purpose of creation (Javadi Amoli, 2010a, p. 332). In light of the foregoing, the principal end of the process of good divine governance is to create and expand the conditions for attaining proximity to God. Of all beings, only human beings, as part of the order of existence and the noblest of creatures, traverse the path that begins with "Indeed, we belong to God" (*innā li-llāh*) and leads toward "and to Him we shall return" (*ilayhi rāji'ūn*). Their final abode will be to attain a place in the proximity of God: "Indeed, the Godwary will be amid gardens and rivers, in a seat of truth, near an Omnipotent Sovereign" (Quran 54:54–55). This path and its practical program constitute the model of good divine governance, which delineates the beginning and ultimate end of human beings within the cycle of the order of existence. In such a way that, in Islamic society, everything is placed at the service of human elevation, which is achieved through proximity to God. Accordingly, the model of good divine governance creates the conditions for attaining proximity to God and elevating human beings.

6. Levels of Ends in the Model of Divine Good Governance

To avoid conflating different levels of ends, three levels must be distinguished. This distinction prevents, on the one hand, the conflation of the functions of government with the ultimate end of human beings and, on the other, makes it possible to evaluate the effectiveness of government at the levels of intermediate ends and functional objectives. Accordingly, with respect to the internal system, whose ends pertain to the physical dimensions of human beings, the ends differ according to the model of governance. There are two types of ends for human beings within the internal system: intermediate ends and ultimate ends. In explaining the model of good governance in terms of the ends associated with the internal system, determining whether human governance on earth belongs to the category of ultimate ends or intermediate ends is an important issue. On the basis of the Quranic verses discussed in this section, the following argument can be made: if human vicegerency means succession on earth in proclaiming, elucidating, explaining, implementing, and upholding the bounds prescribed by Islam, then it is an intermediate end—a stage along the human journey toward the ultimate end. However, if what is meant is divine vicegerency with respect to all that is other than God, then this vicegerency constitutes the ultimate end of human beings and the final destination of their becoming (Javadi Amoli, 2002, p. 118).

The ultimate end of creation and of human existence encompasses knowledge of God, worship, the meeting with God, and divine vicegerency. This end transcends the process of governance, which serves merely as a means and a framework for its realization. As Ayatollah Javadi Amoli explains, the ultimate end of human beings has two aspects: one related to God, namely, the "meeting with God," and the other related to all that is other than God, namely, "God's vicegerency" (*khilāfat Allāh*). The difference between these two aspects can be understood in terms of the distinction between the third and fourth journeys of the four spiritual journeys (*asfār arba'a*). The wayfarer who reaches the station of the fourth journey through divine grace will, of course, be more perfect than others. Accordingly, the furthest point is attained only by

such a Perfect Human Being, as a result of their manifestation of the Greatest Name and the culmination of their existential perfection. Thus, some attain the meeting with God but, being wholly absorbed in that very encounter with the Real, undertake no further journey for the purpose of exercising divine vicegerency over all that is other than God. Others, however, who attain the station of *jamʿ al-jamʿ* (the all-comprehensive union), assume the mission of divine vicegerency while simultaneously experiencing the meeting with God through immediate, witnessing knowledge. With God's permission, they govern all that is other than Him. By combining the meeting with God and vicegerency on His behalf, they not only attain the ultimate end of human beings but themselves become the ultimate end of creation and the furthest point of the manifestation of the Real in the mirror of creation (Javadi Amoli, 2002, p. 118). Accordingly, on the basis of this argument, the ultimate end in the model of divine governance is the governance of all that is other than God within the created universe and the leading of human beings to the meeting with God. Clearly, attaining this end requires traversing a path.

7. Functional and Executive Goals in the Model of Good Governance

Religious government, as the most important institution in an Islamic society, has two interrelated goals: an ultimate goal and an intermediate goal. The ultimate goal of government is the elevation of society and the spiritual illumination of human beings. Derived from the lofty purpose of the prophetic mission and the revelation of the Quran, this goal determines the principal purpose of religious government. Accordingly, divine government must create the conditions for illuminating human society and liberating it from darkness. Various forms of intellectual, doctrinal, and moral deviation, enslavement to carnal desires, and susceptibility to temptations and machinations are among the forms of darkness whose underlying conditions religious government must strive to eliminate, so that all members of society may attain the straight path of truth through liberation from such darkness.

Servitude to God (*ʿubūdiyya*) is another end of religious government. It entails the exercise of authority in the service of the worship and servitude to God prescribed for human beings. This goal is realized through God-centeredness and divine oneness (*tawḥīd*). The most important question raised in discussions of governance is: Why should a ruler seek to elevate human beings? On the basis of Quranic verses, this question can be answered as follows. (a) Governance as a Divine Trust. Quran 4:58 states: "Indeed, God commands you to deliver the trusts to their rightful owners, and when you judge between people, to judge with justice." This verse establishes two fundamental principles of governance: the faithful discharge of trusts and justice. From this perspective, governance is a divine trust that must be entrusted to those worthy of it and exercised on the basis of justice. The verse explicitly addresses those who exercise authority, obligating them to fulfill two essential duties: discharging trusts and judging justly. These two principles constitute the foundation of the legitimacy of governance in the Islamic model.

(b) The Purpose of the Prophetic Mission: Establishing Equity. Quran 57:25 states: "Certainly We sent Our messengers with manifest proofs, and We sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that people may uphold equity." According to this verse, the purpose of the prophetic mission and, consequently, of religious governance is to establish equity and justice in society. This goal, in turn, creates the conditions for realizing the ultimate end. According to the Quranic verses, the implementation of justice is a duty and an objective incumbent upon all messengers and religious rulers. Giving due attention to this duty is therefore of fundamental importance in religious government.

(c) Good Governance as a Means of Fostering Worship and Societal Elevation. Quran 22:41 states: “Those who, if We grant them power in the land, establish prayer, give zakat, enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong.” This verse summarizes the functions of good governance under three headings: worship (prayer), social welfare (zakat), and ethical oversight (enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong). These three dimensions correspond precisely to the objectives that religious governance must strive to realize.

(d) Governance Belongs to God. Quran 12:40 states, “Judgment belongs to none but God. He has commanded that you worship none but Him.” Quran 38:26 states, “O David! Indeed, We have made you a vicegerent on earth; so judge between people with truth.” According to these verses, governance in society is a divine right that derives from God’s lordship and guidance, while the grave responsibility of exercising it rests with those authorized by Him. Accordingly, a divine ruler is one who is authorized by God and judges according to the truth (Amid Zanjani, 2014, p. 230). No one other than God is entitled to exercise authority and govern, for He has commanded that none but Him be worshipped (Quran 12:40). The Noble Quran adopts a guidance-oriented approach to goals and ends in the model of divine governance. According to its teachings, divine governance is grounded in guidance, and all the goals pursued by the ruler are directed toward elevating and illuminating human beings. Indeed, even the laws governing society are intended to secure the interests and felicity of society and all human beings. In non-divine models of governance, however, spiritual goals are pursued in order to secure material objectives, rather than for the sake of human elevation. If the obstacles to doing so were removed, these models would abandon spiritual goals as well (Sobhani, 1991, p. 424).

The intermediate ends, or functional objectives, of the model of divine governance, as derived from the Quran and the teachings of the Infallibles, comprise freedom, order and security, economic prosperity and welfare, justice, education, and human elevation. These objectives receive fundamental attention in the theory and practice of governance. The functional objectives are articulated in the teachings of the Infallibles. Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq states: “There are three things that all people need: security, justice, and abundance (prosperity)” (Ḥarrānī, 2003, p. 320). The importance of security can be explained by the fact that it is one of the basic necessities of human life. It is in a secure society that good governance can take concrete form. The Quran also addresses the importance of security. One of the prayers of Abraham was, “My Lord, make this city secure” (Quran 14:35). The existence of security, therefore, is one of the most important prerequisites for social life and a significant dimension of the model of good divine governance.

Justice is another intermediate end in the model of divine governance. As indicated in Quran 57:25, the implementation of justice is a duty and an objective incumbent upon all messengers and religious rulers, and giving due attention to it is of fundamental importance in religious government. Without ensuring that justice is upheld, no society can draw near to the desired state of spiritual illumination, for injustice is the worst form of darkness and the darkest veil obstructing spiritual perfection. Alongside the intermediate ends identified for good governance, religious texts also refer to other objectives of good government, such as resolving disputes, gaining ascendancy over fabricated religions and polytheistic governments, distancing oneself from tyrants, and refraining from acting in accordance with their wishes. All these objectives acquire their meaning and are realized in the service of the ends discussed above (Javadi Amoli, 2008b, p. 26).

Responsible Freedom. Freedom in the model of divine governance is responsible freedom; that is, a form of freedom defined within the framework of divine laws and with due regard for human responsibility toward God and society. This freedom provides the conditions for human elevation. The embodiment of good divine governance, emphasized in religious government,

is the ideal city, which members of society establish by adhering to religion and from whose existence they benefit. The people of a land who, through spiritual elevation and justice, enjoy the assured fruits of the objectives of religion, such as "desirable economic progress," "security," and "freedom," move toward the fulfillment of their aspirations by benefiting from a healthy and balanced society. They can thereby draw near to the Divine Essence and open their being to the perspective of the soul and spiritual illumination (Javadi Amoli, 2008b, p. 27).

Education and Human Elevation. Education and human elevation are among the intermediate ends of religious governance. Religious government must create the conditions for the moral and spiritual education of society so that human beings may move toward spiritual illumination and proximity to God.

Public Participation and Partnership. In discussions of governance aimed at achieving collective goals, determining the basis of relationships and interactions among different social groups and institutions is an important issue. The key factor that shapes and determines the basis of interaction among different groups in governance is partnership. Partnership is a concept that goes beyond participation. Under this arrangement, individuals, groups, and, more generally, different actors each contribute resources, much like the members of a company, and work together in a shared undertaking. In this context, no individual or entity occupies a position above the others. Rather, all work alongside one another, carrying out specific activities in accordance with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Taken together, these activities constitute the administration of the affairs of society as a whole (Monavvarian, 2000, p. 19). This perspective points to a set of changes that take place both within government and throughout society. From this standpoint, these changes include the development of new forms of public management in which government increasingly confines itself to a steering role—that is, setting strategic goals and objectives—as opposed to earlier conceptions under which government was responsible for provision and delivery, or for administering and providing services. Drawing on this approach, the concept of governance focuses on identifying the most important objectives for managing society.

Conclusion

One of the important dimensions of the model of good governance is the determination of its goals. In the transcendent model of good governance from the perspective of the Noble Qur'an, ends can be defined at three levels: the ultimate end (*liqāʾ Allāh*, encounter with God), the intermediate end (human elevation), and functional objectives (justice, security, welfare, freedom, education, and human development). These ends are grounded in a theistic worldview. In this model, governance is a divine trust and a means of fostering servitude to God and human elevation. The ruler must therefore seek to elevate human beings, since judgment belongs to God and rulers possess legitimacy only by His permission. The teleological model of governance, through its guidance-oriented and virtue-based approach, creates the conditions for human elevation. Accordingly, this perspective gives rise to a model of enabling governance—that is, governance whose principal duties include creating the conditions necessary for the realization of governance's ends in society, including freedom, order and security, economic prosperity and welfare, justice, education, and human elevation. Consequently, each of these criteria is assessed not solely by materialistic indicators but with due regard for the three systems: the system of agency, the internal system, and the teleological system. This contrasts with materialistic models of governance, which focus exclusively on the internal system. The model of good governance must therefore pursue a divine end so as to establish a correspondence between the agent (governance) and the goal (human perfection). Governance in society is a divine right that derives from God's lordship and guidance; no one

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other than God, or those authorized by Him, has the right to govern people. God has entrusted this grave responsibility to the prophets, who possess infallibility. The prophets assume responsibility for human felicity and guidance, leading human beings along the straight path toward elevation. To attain this goal, the ends of governance must therefore be designed and delineated in accordance with the program of the sharia, thereby determining the course by which society may attain its desired state.

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