Da‘wah: Islamic Mission and Its Current Implications

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Islam is a missionary religion with universal claims, covering every aspect of human existence. Islam is also a political religion, teaching that both public and private space must be guided by the will of Allah, as revealed in the Quran. In Islam, the missionary function is not only an academic exercise but involves interacting with Muslims in daily experience, rubbing shoulders with them on the streets of our towns, at our workplaces, and in our schools. Muslims are obliged to call all humanity to submit to the total rule of Allah over the whole world. They believe that humanity finds Allah’s “straight way” only through Islam (sura 1:6–7).

As a Christian writing about Islam, I wish to make clear at the outset that I differentiate between Muslims as human beings and Islam as a faith system. My life has been enriched and challenged by encounter with many Muslims over the years. At the same time, I have become more and more convinced that Islam is an ideology, belief system, and missionary religion that is fundamentally and diametrically opposed to the central tenets of the Gospel. We must realize that Islam involves a corporate community of faith in which not every individual may share all aspects of the whole. I thus have no hesitation in saying that I find the majority of Muslims to be peaceable and peace loving. They are such, I would say, not because of, but in spite of, Islam.

After having been engaged in Christian mission in Asia for eighteen years, I came back to Germany in 1980 and soon realized the increasing challenge of Islam to church and society in my own country. Even in 1979 the awakening and increasing assertiveness of political and militant Islam prompted an editorial in the Guardian Weekly to state, “Islam has begun to make Marxism look decidedly familiar and manageable. . . . [Islam] presents itself as a powerful force in international affairs.”

Europe is now being forced to take a closer look at Islam and its influence because of Islamic beliefs about jihad (holy war) and da‘wah (from Arabic da‘a, meaning “call, invite,” referring to the Islamic mission, the “call” to submit to Islam). Doing so is no longer only an academic exercise but involves interacting with Muslims in daily experience, rubbing shoulders with them on the streets of our towns, at our workplaces, and in our schools and shopping malls. As we meet ordinary Muslims, we need to recognize that they are, first of all, fellow human beings with needs, hopes, and anxieties similar to our own. For Christians this challenge comes at a time when many traditional values have been undermined by materialism and secularism, but also a time when new religious movements are making inroads among people of all ages.

This new situation forces the church both to develop a biblical and Christian theology of religions and to affirm authentically Christian patterns of behavior. We are called to discover afresh in our generation what our apostolate and mission are. We must overcome our lack of confidence in the Gospel and understand more deeply what it means when the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ says to us, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21). The Gospel needs to be shared in an ongoing dialogue of love, life, and truth. We are called to be compassionate with the people who live among us, to be scholarly and accurate in our evaluation of Islam, and to remain absolutely true to Jesus Christ. Yet we would be foolish not to look squarely at the nature of Islam and discern its strategic da‘wah goals and concepts. We need to be aware of history and the prevailing cultural relativism of our day, lest we inadvertently facilitate the da‘wah strategies of organized Islam without realizing the potentially devastating effects on our civil and religious liberties. Traditionally, Islam has not granted religious liberty in the letter or spirit of article 18 of the U.N. Universal Human Rights Declaration.”

Where Sharia becomes the rule of life, human rights, especially for minorities, are strangulated, and civil liberties are curbed.

Nature and Scope of Islamic Da‘wah

Islam is not just a faith, concerned only with the spiritual aspects of life, and not just a religion, content to play a minority role in a society. The late Zaki Badawi, former president of the Muslim College in London, in explaining how Islam should impact all of life, stated: “The history of Islam as a faith is also the history of a state and a community of believers living by Divine law. The Muslims, jurists and theologians, have always expounded Islam as both a Government and a faith. This reflects the historical fact that Muslims, from the start, lived under their own law. Muslim theologians naturally produced a theology with this in view—it is a theology of the majority. Being a minority was not seriously considered or even contemplated.”

Muslims generally claim that Islam is the final religion and therefore rightfully supersedes all previous religions, which either are innately deficient or have been corrupted in the course of history. “And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers” (sura 3:85). This conviction and confidence is deeply embedded in the Islamic consciousness through the Quran and the sunna (e.g., see sura 3:110).

Da‘wah and Jihad

It is generally agreed that Muslims are obliged to call and invite everyone to full submission to the one God (note the central place of tawḥīd, or “oneness [of God],” in Muslim teaching). This call is clearly expressed in sura 3, the historical context of which is a polemical dialogue of Muhammad with visiting Christians from Najran whom Muhammad urged to become Muslims. “Say [O Mohammad], O people of the Scriptures [Jews and Christians]: Come to a word that is just between us and you, that we worship none but Allah, and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take others as lords besides Allah. Then, if they turn away, say: Bear witness that we are Muslim” (sura 3:64).

It also appears in Muhammad’s invitation letter to the Byzantine emperor Flavius Heraclius (ruled 610–41), warning him to heed the call of Islam or to bear the consequences of his rejection.

The late Sheikh Abdul Azeez ibn Abdullaah ibn Baaz, for-
humanity must be called to make the shahada, or public confession: “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the apostle (messenger) of Allah.” The Islamic nation, that is, the Ummah (the worldwide Islamic community), is the instrument to fulfill and establish Allah's will on earth through da'wah. Tawhid is impossible without Muhammad, and allegiance to Allah includes obedience to Muhammad. Through da'wah humanity is invited to witness to the truth of Islam and the conviction that Muhammad is the final prophet of Allah. Through confessing the shahada a person becomes a Muslim and joins the Ummah.

The Quran and the hadith (the body of traditions or sayings attributed to Muhammad) contain several references to da'wah. Muhammad himself is considered the prime model for the implementation of da'wah. His life in word and deed is considered the normative model in all aspects of faith and life and valid for every succeeding generation. Sheikh ibn Baaz states further that “the aim of da’wah is to bring the people out of the darkness and into the light, and to guide them to the truth until they hold on to it and are saved from the Fire and the Anger of Allah.” Resistance to da’wah on the part of hearers leads inevitably to jihad, provided that the power balance in the area of resistance is in Islam’s favor: Since all power and territory is considered to belong to Allah, Muslims affirm their duty and right to Islamicize all of life in all countries of the world. Territory once gained is especially considered to belong forever to Allah; if it should be lost politically, every effort should be made to regain it. The need to overcome unbelief (kuffar) and to establish “Dar al-Islam” (lit., house or abode of Islam, that is, a realm where the Muslim religion may be freely practiced) may require more than verbal da’wah, especially if the invitation is rejected. Ali Isa Othman, for some years adviser to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), states, “The spread of Islam was military. There is a tendency to apologise for this and we should not. It is one of the injunctions of the Quran that you must fight for the spreading of Islam. . . . Fighting for God (Jihad) has a wider meaning. It may be militant, or it may be evangelical, in the Christian sense. The militant is not excluded. This is because, according to the Quran, communities have always resisted a prophet’s offer of guidance from God.”

Soon after his migration to Medina, Muhammad was willing to apply military and political pressure in order to implement Allah’s will.

At the same time, jihad can create the conditions for people to accept Islam through da’wah, rather than being killed or having to live as dhimmi (non-Muslims in a Muslim state, who live under certain restrictions), since Allah is ultimately the protector and guardian only of those who truly believe. Ibn Baaz is clear in asserting the need to use coercion against any resistance to establishing the Islamic order. “The aim of da’wah and jihad is not to shed blood, take wealth or enslave women and children; these things happen incidentally but are not the aim. This only takes place when the disbelievers refrain from accepting the truth and persist in disbelief and refuse to be subdued and to pay the jizia (tax levied on free non-Muslims living under Muslim rule) when it is requested from them. In this case, Allah has prescribed the Muslims to kill them, take their wealth as booty and enslave their women and children.”

Institutional Support and Inspirational Source

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and Saudi-financed institutions pay special attention to organizing and assisting Muslims who live in the West, not only as a bridgehead for da’wah, but also for their value as an interest lobby for generating finances and for the influence that they, like Rachid Ghannouchi who returned in 2011 from London to Tunisia, can assert back to their countries of origin. In addition, powerful networks of Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood have global networks of institutions and think tanks in the Islamic world and in the West. They have organized mosque communities to strengthen Islamic identity and awareness of belonging to the worldwide Islamic Ummah and to support the idea that their being in the West is ordained by Allah to spread the knowledge and acceptance of Islam.

In 1980 the Islamic Council of Europe announced a strategy for the Islamization of Europe: “Once a community [of Muslims] is well organized, its leaders should strive to seek the recognition of Muslims as a religious community having its own characteristics by the authorities. Once recognized, the community should continue to request the same rights the other religious communities enjoy in the country. Eventually, the community may seek to gain political rights as a constituent community of the nation. Once these rights are obtained, then the community should seek to generalize its characteristics to the entire nation.”

This da’wah strategy is derived from early Islam. In a paper entitled “The Charter (Constitution) of Medina,” Amir Zaidan, formerly of the Islamic Association of Hessen and lecturer at the University of Frankfurt, states that the Muslims in Germany need to understand the importance of their historical roots, especially the political and communal events soon after Muhammad’s arrival at Medina. He writes, “The first historical activity of the prophet Mohammed (salla-ilahu, alaihi wa sallam [may Allah honor him and grant him peace]) right after his arrival in the exile of Medina was the purpose establishment of an Islamic identity in order to transform step by step the given structures of society. . . . In order to regulate the political relations of the Muslims to the other communities, the inhabitants of Medina entered into a written agreement and contract with the new rulers, the new immigrants as well as the natives and all other minorities who dwelled there.” He even states that, from this concept of the “Charter of Medina,” one could construct the idea of a power-sharing constitutional statehood for the Muslims living in the West. Zaidan fails to mention, however, that when Muhammad arrived at Medina the majority population were Jews. During Muhammad’s
lifetime, they were either sent into exile or eliminated, and Muhammad became the arbitrator of all conflicts. In the early days of Muhammad’s preaching in Mecca, da’wah was a call and summons to faith in the one God. But soon after his move away from Mecca and his migration to Medina, he was willing to apply military and political pressure in order to implement Allah’s will (see suras 9:5; 9:111; 8:60). Contracts, which were negotiated by putting others under duress, could later be broken at will. These practices, which left the non-Muslim “unbelievers” in a legally precarious position, created a climate of uncertainty, which throughout the centuries has accompanied dhimmitude, or minority status, of Jews and Christians under Islam.

For Muslims who represent political Islam, the Charter of Medina and Muhammad’s ten years there are relevant models for today. Muhammad’s behavior shows how he could successfully “transform step by step the given structures of society” by keeping his opponents in limbo. The time of the Prophet in Medina is an ideal for these Muslims. Inspired by his model, the present-day Islamic da’wah strategy does not primarily aim at individual converts but seeks to achieve its society-wide goals by using and influencing the institutions of a given society. It demands special privileges for Muslim communities, including space for observance of Sharia. These objectives are to be achieved through keeping the societal and governmental institutions busy with an Islamic agenda. Yusuf Al Qaradawi, the influential president of the International Union of Muslim Scholars and of the European Fatwa Council, states in a fatwa: “Muslims in the west ought to be sincere callers to their religion. They should keep in mind that calling others to Islam is not only restricted to scholars and Sheikhs, but it goes far to encompass every committed Muslim.”

**Global and Local Interrelatedness**

At its meeting in London on July 10, 2006, the European Council for Fatwa and Research, of which Al Qaradawi is president, called on Muslims living in the West to abide by the laws in their respective countries and to respect the rights of non-Muslims. But the council also stated: “While abiding by the host country’s laws, Muslims are also asked to form Islamic bodies to organize their personal issues in accordance with Shari’a.” Furthermore, this body recommends that Muslims in the West spare no effort in getting the countries in which they live to recognize Islam as a religion and Muslims as a community that should enjoy full rights—in other words, agitate for a parallel Islamic community. Al Qaradawi has a popular weekly program on Al Jazeera and has been prominently present on the Web. He has repeatedly stated that Islam will triumph over the whole world. Referring to a hadith saying that Constantinople and Rome will both be conquered for Islam, he argues that, since this prophecy has been realized for Constantinople (now Istanbul), “thus remains the second part of the prophetic tidings to be fulfilled, the conquest of Rome, through which Islam will enter Europe once again. . . . Most probably this conquest will be through the power of word and pen, not through military force.”

Many Islamic Web sites illustrate how the role model of Muhammad and the early history of Islam are an inspiration and textbook for today. The global migration of refugees and the mass exodus of able young Muslims to the West is seen as a modern hijra (emulating the emigration of Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina). Throughout Islamic history, migration and intermarriage have served as means to facilitate the Islamization of society.

Approximately 15 million Muslims live in western Europe. Quite a few have gained citizenship in their adopted countries. In Europe as a whole there are about 50 million Muslims, half of them in Russia. The influx of significant numbers of Muslims into western Europe from the mid-1950s onward coincided with a resurgence of fundamentalist Islam, and even liberal-minded Europeans need to realize that the presence of Muslims in Europe cannot be isolated from what is happening in the rest of the Islamic world. Islam sees the secularized and postmodern West as decadent. One part of da’wah strategy is therefore aimed at countering the faith-corrupting influences of Western society. Muslim diplomats and members of international agencies strengthen Islamic interests in Europe and the West. Students from Islamic countries are found in almost every university. Many of them are highly motivated Muslim activists, well organized and often linked to political Islam. They may be involved in the politics of their home countries or may be part of global Islamic networks.

Yet neither in Islamic countries nor in the West are Muslims a monolithic block. They also experience the challenge of globalization and clashes of culture. Living in the free West, they are at times keenly aware that not all is well in Dar al-Islam. Yet to acknowledge why so many Muslim countries fail to grant social justice, human rights, and religious liberty to all their citizens would cause a loss of face. Instead, Muslim opinion shapers present themselves as a despised and marginalized community.

At the same time, the West is increasingly on the agenda of Islamic revival and its da’wah strategies. The best Muslim thinkers are analyzing its cultural context in an effort to discern its strengths and weaknesses. Coordinated da’wah strategies are being developed, including the use of semantics to imprint Islamic thought patterns and concepts. Ismail Raji al Faruqui sought to make Islamic terminology part of the everyday German language. So-called islamological translations create new words. Amir Zaidan seems to have made it his goal to introduce untranslatable Arabic into German. New conservative translations of the Quran and other Islamic literature promote this process.

While Muslims are unabashedly involved in da’wah, they at the same time reject Christian missionary approaches to them. The Crusades, colonialism, and Christian mission are considered the capital sins of the West. Globalization and Western dominance, which are stoutly resisted, are seen as the reason for the corruption of the Islamic world. Islam clearly does not accept other religions as equals. For Muslims, the so-called Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) are not in parity. Islam is the only and unique religion; the Quran always speaks in the singular about religion (e.g., sura 3:19, 85; 48:28).

Muslims want to convince their dialogue partners to embrace Islam. After all, each non-Muslim is seen as a potential Muslim who must be brought back to the true faith. Every newborn child is considered to be a genuine Muslim who, except for a contrary education and upbringing, will continue in Islamic...
Da’wah today involves much global strategic thinking and analysis, along with local action and implementation.

Islam as the only true religion and teaching on stage how easy it is to “revert” to Islam. The number of prominent Muslims, some of them very outspoken, is increasing. Quite a few have published books and explained why they embraced Islam and why others should do the same.

Dialogue with Christians and secular society is quite often seen, within the framework of da’wah, as an opportunity to interact, not with the goal of greater mutual understanding, but in order to create favorable conditions for the Muslim community. In these interactions, Muslims have shown a general tendency to depict themselves as victim and to present grievances in order to gain favor and privileged conditions for the Muslim community. There has been much strife in Germany over the Islamic dress code, with Muslims demanding women-only days for public swimming pools and exemption from coeducational activities. Muslims have also demanded halal and finance the dissemination of Islam throughout the world. The objective is to propagate the principles of Islam and to coordinate and finance the dissemination of Islam throughout the world. Muslims are currently using the present global economic crisis to promote Islamic banking through investment in industry and commerce. This too is part of the Islamist da’wah agenda.

Islamic opinion makers and heads of leading Islamic organizations strongly encourage Muslims to fulfill the obligation of da’wah to the West. As Khurram Murad states, “On the one hand, there is the requirement of building and reinforcing the Muslim sense of identity, self-assurance and confidence. . . . On the other, there is the goal of bringing the same West to Islam, which is part of the Islamist da’wah agenda. Intellectuals and institutions related to the Muslim Brotherhood play a central part in the planning of global da’wah. The so-called Project, described in a document found in Switzerland during an investigation of Islamic terrorism, illustrates how da’wah, which is publicly distanced from violent jihad, nevertheless aims at the same end result: an Islamic takeover. The soft da’wah and the hard jihad both aim to undermine and transform civil societies and bring them into Dar al-Islam. They move together in the direction of supplanting democratic, freedom-loving civil societies.

Political Islam has become increasingly impatient since September 11, 2001, and the subsequent military conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Various efforts have been made to polish Islam’s tainted image and to stress the rhetoric that Islam is peace-loving. The West is generally blamed for all ills, and great efforts are under way to curb so-called Islamophobia. The head of religious affairs in Turkey has on several occasions expressed his concern that Islamophobia and criticism of Islam endanger world peace.

The OIC has created an international forum for da’wah to
We may not know where history is going, yet we can be certain that Europe now faces an immense challenge from Islam. Bernard Lewis, for one, has predicted that Europe will be under Islam by the end of the twenty-first century. He may be correct, and in certain areas the takeover could happen even earlier.

The idea of a global caliphate not only embraces the Ummah in its entirety, but also conquers the West for Islam, which is a dangerous Islamist dream. Many want to achieve this goal through da’wah; others think jihad is the best approach. Conflicts are unavoidable unless these issues are recognized and efforts are made to neutralize Islam’s current totalitarian presuppositions. The free world needs to be resolute in protecting human rights and religious liberties for the entire world and therefore needs to resist anything that undermines the Declaration of Human Rights and its related conventions.

While sounding innocuous, the thought of a new world order, summarized by Muhammad Taqiuddin Al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, 1996), Arabic insertions in the English text of this Quran are omitted, and the use of capital letters has not always been followed.

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verse. There is, however, debate among scholars over whether this verse has been abrogated. See the illuminating paper by Patricia Crone, “Islam and Religious Freedom” (delivered at the Orientalistenitag, Freiburg, Germany, on Sept. 24, 2007, http://orient.ruf.uni-freiburg.de/dotpub/crone.pdf, in which she refers to various interpretations of sura 2:256 throughout Islamic history.


19. Ibn Ishaq, *Das Leben des Propheten* (Kandern: Spohr, 1999). In this connection it is also advisable to look afresh into the exegetical rule of *al-nasikh wa al-mansukh* (lit. “the abrogating and the abrogated”), by which an earlier quranic verse might be abrogated if it stands in conflict with a quranic verse revealed later. See www.sunnipath.com/library/books/B0040P0021.aspx.


27. Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, *Toward Islamic English* (Herndon, Va.: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1986).


29. See also the translation by German convert Ahmad von Denffer, *Das Leben des Propheten* (Kandern: Spohr, 1999). In this connection it is also advisable to look afresh into the exegetical rule of *al-nasikh wa al-mansukh* (lit. “the abrogating and the abrogated”), by which an earlier quranic verse might be abrogated if it stands in conflict with a quranic verse revealed later.


31. See *“Fatwa Against the Call for the Unification of the Religions”* (fatwa no. 19402, dated 25 Muharram 1418H), www.sunnahonline.com/ilm/ageedah/0002.htm.


38. See http://www.pierrevogel.de.

39. See Murad Hofmann, Hedayat Ullah Hübsch, and many more. The Internet is full of stories on why so-and-so became a Muslim, as well as hundreds of Web sites giving da’wah guidance and telling how to become a Muslim (e.g., www.diewahreligion.de/jwplayer/index.html). See Urvia Shavit and Fredric Wiesenbach, “Muslim Strategies to Convert Western Christians,” *Middle East Quarterly*, 16, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 3–14, www.meforum.org/2104/muslim-strategies-to-convert-western-christians.


43. Murad, *Da’wah Among Non-Muslims in the West*, pp. 8ff.


47. See http://ecij.org/UN/.


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