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# On the Nature of Islamic Da‘wah

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The Editor

Allah, *subhānahu wa ta‘ālā*, has commanded the Muslim: ‘Call men unto the path of your Lord by wisdom and goodly counsel. Present the cause to them through argument yet more sound’ (Qur’ān 16:125). *Da‘wah* is the fulfilment of this commandment ‘to call men unto the path of Allah’. Besides, it is the effort by the Muslim to enable other men to share and benefit from the supreme vision, the religious truth, which he has appropriated. In this respect it is rationally necessary, for truth wants to be known. It exerts pressure on the knower to share his vision of it with his peers. Since religious truth is not only theoretical, but also axiological and practical, the man of religion is doubly urged to take his discovery to other men. His piety, his virtue and charity impose upon him the obligation to make common the good which has befallen him.

## I DA‘WAH METHODOLOGY

### A Da‘wah is not coercive

‘Calling’ is certainly not coercing. Allah (s.w.t.) has commanded, ‘No coercion in religion’ (2:256). It is an invitation whose objective can be fulfilled only with the free consent of the called. Since the objective is an exercise by the called of his own judgement that Allah is his Creator, Master, Lord and Judge, a forced judgement is a *contradictio in adjecto* and hence punishable with *jahannam*. Humanistic ethic regards coerced *da‘wah* as a grave violation p. 127 of the human person, second only to homicide, if not equal to it. That is why the Holy Qur’ān specified the means of persuasion to be used. ‘Argue the cause with them [the non-Muslims] with the more comely arguments’ (16:125). If they are not convinced, they must be left alone (5:108; 3:176–177; 47:32). Certainly, the Muslim is to try again and never give up that God may guide his fellow-man to the truth. The example of his own life, his commitment of the values he professes, his engagement, constitute his final argument. If the non-Muslim is still not convinced, the Muslim is to rest his case with God. The Prophet himself allowed those Christians who were not convinced by his own presentation of Islam to keep their faith and return home in dignity.

From this it follows that the societal order desired by Islam is one where men are free to present and argue their religious causes with one another. It is a kind of academic seminar on a large scale where he who knows better is free to tell and to convince, and the others are free to listen and be convinced. Islam puts its trust in man's rational power to discriminate between the true and the false. 'Truth is now manifest from error. Whoever believes [i.e. accepts the truth] does so for his own good. Whoever does not believe [i.e. does not accept the truth] does so to his own peril' (39:41). Islamic *da'wah* is therefore an invitation to think, to debate and argue. It cannot be met with indifference except by the cynic, nor with rejection except by the fool or the malevolent. If it is met by silencing force, then that force must be met by superior force. The right to think is innate and belongs to all men. No man may preemptively deny it to any human. Islamic *da'wah* operates only under these principles. Thomas Arnold's *The Preaching of Islam* is a standing monument to *da'wah* written by a Christian missionary and colonialist.

The principle that Islamic *da'wah* is non-coercive is based upon the Qur'ān's dramatization of the justification for the creation of man. The Qur'ān represents God as addressing the angels in *Sūrat al-Baqarah*, verse 30, with the words: "Lo! I am about to place a *khalifah* (vicegerent) on earth." The angels replied: "Will You place therein one who will do harm and will shed blood, while we sing Your praise and sanctify You?" He said: "Surely I know that which you know not." ' In another verse of the Qur'ān, *Sūrat al-Ahzāb*, 72, we read: 'Lo! We offered Our trust to heaven and earth. They shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it. But man assumed it ...' Both these statements are understood by Muslims as defining the purpose of man's existence, namely, that he is God's *khalifah*, carrier of the responsibility entrusted to him for the fulfilment of the divine will. That will is already fulfilled in part, within nature as natural law, and not yet fulfilled in another part, by man as moral law. This constitutes man's distinction from all other creatures. Only he acts freely and thus enables himself to actualize the moral part of the divine will. His essence is his capacity for responsible moral action. Coercion is a violation of this freedom and responsibility, and is utterly inconsistent with man's relation to the divine will. p. 128

### **B Da'wah is not a psychotropic induction**

It follows from the nature of judgement that *da'wah* cannot have for objective anything but a conscientious acquiescence to its contents on the part of the called. This means that if the consciousness of the called is in any way vitiated by any of the common defaults or defects of consciousness, the *da'wah* is itself equally vitiated. Thus a *da'wah* that is fulfilled through, or whose fulfilment involves in any way, a lapse of consciousness, a lapse of forgetfulness, a lapse in *ta'aqqul* or the intellectual binding of ideas and facts so as to make a cohesive and consistent whole, or a transport of emotion and enthusiasm, a sort of 'trip', is not Islamic *da'wah*. *Da'wah*, therefore, is not the work of magic, of illusion, of excitement, of any kind of psychotropia. In such work, the subject is not in control of his power of judgement, and hence, his judgement cannot be properly said to be his 'personal free judgement'.

The presence of God, that is as Ultimate Reality, Creator and Lord of the Universe, Judge and Master of all men, is a fact which can indeed enter common consciousness. Indeed, Islam holds that were consciousness to be tampered with, the object perceived would not be God, but something else. Under the tremendous impact of revelation itself, the Prophet's consciousness neither lapsed nor became vague as in a mystical experience, but continued to function normally and was even enhanced in its clarity and perception. That is why Islamic law does not recognize the conversion to Islam of the minor child; for his consciousness is presumed immature until he comes of age.

The principle that *da'wah* has nothing to do with psychotropic induction preserves the freedom and consciousness of choice which cannot be affirmed in case of dilation of consciousness by chemical or mystifying means. It protects the *da'wah* from being conducted for pleasure, happiness, freedom from care, *eudaemonia*—indeed, for anything but the sake of Allah. Any ulterior motive would vitiate it in both the giver and the recipient. On the other hand, unconscious conversion of any person who has been tricked into entering Islam is evil; more evil, of course, is the trickster.

### **C Da'wah is directed to Muslims as well as non-Muslims**

It follows from the divine commandment that *da'wah* must be the end product of a critical process of intellection. Its content cannot be the only content known, the only content presented. For there is no judgement without consideration of alternatives, without comparison and contrast, without tests of inner consistency, of general consistency with all other knowledge, without tests of correspondence with reality. It is this aspect of *da'wah* that earns for the called who responds affirmatively to its content the grace of *Hikmah* or wisdom. Allah (s.w.t.) described His prophets and saints as 'Men of *Hikmah*' precisely because their Islam was a learned thing, not a narrow-minded addiction to a single track of thought, certainly not a 'pre-judgement'. That is why *da'wah* in Islam has never been thought of as exclusively addressed to the non-Muslims. p. 129 It is as much intended for the benefit of Muslims as of non-Muslims.

Besides stemming from the fact of all men's equal creatureliness in front of God, this universalism of *da'wah* rests on the identity of imperative arising out of conversion to Islam. All men stand under the obligation to actualize the divine pattern in space and time. This task is never complete for any individual. The Muslim is supposedly the person who, having accepted the burden, has set himself on the road of actualization. The non-Muslim still has to accept the charge. Hence, *da'wah* is necessarily addressed to both, to the Muslim to press forward toward actualization and to the non-Muslim to join the ranks of those who make the pursuit of God's pattern supreme.

The directing of *da'wah* to Muslim as much as non-Muslims is indicative of the fact that, unlike Christianity, Islamicity is never a *fait accompli*. Islamicity is a process. It grows, and it is sometimes reduced. There is no time at which the Muslim may carry his title to paradise, as it were, in his pocket. Instead of 'salvation', the Muslim is to achieve felicity through unceasing effort.

### **D Da'wah is rational intellection**

Since *da'wah* is a critical process of intellection, it is of its nature never to be dogmatic, never to stand by its contents as if by its own authority, or that of its mouthpiece, or that of its tradition. For it to be critical means that it should keep itself always open to new evidence, to new alternatives; that it continually cast and recast itself in new forms, in cognizance of the new discoveries of human science, of the new needs of human situation. In making the *da'wah*, the *dā'iyah* labours not as the ambassador of an authoritarian system, but as the co-thinker who is co-operating with the *mad'ū* (the called) in the understanding and appreciation of Allah's double revelation, in creation and through His Prophets. So much for the standpoint of the *dā'iyah*.

From the standpoint of the *mad'ū*, his process of intellection should never stop. His *īmān*, should be dynamic and always growing in intensity, clarity of vision and comprehensiveness. Moreover, conversion to Islam is not a sacrament which, once it takes place, becomes an eternal *fait accompli*. Islam knows of no 'justification by faith', certain of no 'justification' in the sense of *justi facti*. If lethargic and stagnant, *īmān* degenerates into narrow-mindedness and gradually impoverishes its subject. On the

other hand, its dynamism—its openness to new knowledge, new evidence and new life-situations, new data, problems, as well as creative solutions which may or may not be derived from the tradition—makes it a source of enrichment for the subject. Fortunate is he whose *īmān* increases in ‘*yaqīn-ness*’ (certitude) with every new day.

As rational intellection, *da‘wah* shows that in Islam, faith has to do with knowledge and conviction, whereas in Christianity it is, as Pascal found out, a blind wager. The Arabic word *īmān* does not mean ‘faith’ as Christians use the term. Rather, it means ‘conviction’. It does not involve the functioning of a sacrament. p. 130 There is no *ex opere operata* principle in Islam.

### **E Da‘wah is rationally necessary**

Islamic *da‘wah* is therefore the presentation of rational, i.e. critical, truth. It is not the proclamation of an event, or even of a truth (idea), but the presentation, for critical assessment as to truth value, of a proposition, a factum, which has theoretical (metaphysical) and practical (ethical) relevance for man. As to the recalcitrant will, Islam recognized it for what it is, namely, recalcitrant and delinquent, and left the subject of that will to himself until God guides him to the truth. It respected his will and his judgement and, indeed, it extended to him its protections and *Pax Islamica*. But it asked him to respond equally with peace and not to interfere with his neighbour’s right to listen and be convinced. Moreover, the Muslim of history has always presented his case in the open, never entered or practised his Islam in secret. His *dāwah* preceded his entry onto any international or interreligious scene. In consequence, he interpreted the killing of the *dā‘iyah*, the silencing of his *da‘wah*, as a hostile act, a rejection of the peaceful call to reason and argument, and not merely the opposition of a recalcitrant will. That is also why, once his call is answered not with conversion but merely with ‘yea, I will think’, the Muslim of history has spared absolutely nothing in so presenting his argument as to make it convincing; above all, embodying it forth in its universalism, justice and brotherhood.

That *da‘wah* is rationally necessary is implied by the fact that in presenting its case, Islam presents it as natural or rational truth. ‘Rational’ here means ‘critical’. Men differ in their use of reason but there would be no point to our dialogue unless we assume the truth to be knowable, that is, unless we believe it possible to arrive at principles which over-arch our differences. Therefore, the standpoint of Islam is not an ‘act of faith’, but one of ‘conviction’. It is one of knowledge, of trust in the human power to know.

### **F Da‘wah is anamnesis**

In commanding the Muslim to call men to the path of Allah, He (s.w.t.) did not ask him to call men to anything new, to something which is foreign or unknown to them. Islam is *dīn al-fitrāh* (*religio naturalis*) which is already present in its fulness in man by nature. It is innate, as it were, a natural constituent of humanity. The man who is no *homo religiosus*, and hence *homo Islamicus*, is not a man. This is Allah’s branding of His creation, namely, that He has endowed all men, as His creatures, with a *sensus numinus*, a *fitrah*, with which to recognize Him as Allah (God), Transcendent Creator, Ultimate Master, and one. It is history which confirms this natural faculty with its primeval perceptions and intellections, cultivates and enriches it or warps it and diverts it from its natural goal.

*Da‘wah* is the call of man to return to himself, to what is innate in him, to ‘objective’ or ‘phenomenological’ (i.e. with suspension of the indoctrinations and inculcations of history) reexamination of facts which are already given, and so in him. It is the p. 131 nearest thing to Platonic *anamnesis* without the absurdity of reincarnation or transmigration of souls. As such, the claims of *da‘wah* are necessarily moderate, nay humble! For the *dā‘iyah* is to do no more than the ‘midwife’, to stir the intellect of the

*mad'ū* to rediscover what he already knows, the innate knowledge which God has implanted in him at birth.

As *anamnesis*, *da'wah* is based upon the Islamic assertion that primeval religion or monotheism is found in every man (*din al-fitrah*), and that all he needs is to be reminded of it. The function of the prophets is to remind people of what is already in them. Christianity has approached this position in the literature of the Apostolic Fathers and particularly in the Enlightenment. But it receded from this position in the nineteenth century because western man was too deeply committed to his ethno-centrism to accept the universalism implied in that position. Let us remember that Immanuel Kant, the prince of the Enlightenment, held that 'to be black is an argument', and categorized the world's races in order of ascendancy with the Europeans on top. This was a failure of nerve on the part of Christendom.

### **G Da'wah is ecumenical par excellence**

Islam's discovery of *din al-fitrah* and its vision of it as base of all historical religion is a breakthrough of tremendous importance in interreligious relations. For the first time it has become possible to hold adherents of all other religions as equal members of a universal religious brotherhood. All religious traditions are *de jure*, for they have all issued from and are based upon a common source, the religion of God which he has implanted equally in all men, upon *din al-fitrah*. The problem is to find out how far the religious traditions agree with *din al-fitrah*, the original and first religion; the problem is to trace the historical development of religions and determine precisely how and when and where each has followed and fulfilled, or transcended and deviated from, *din al-fitrah*. Holy writ as well as all other religious texts must be examined in order to discover what change has befallen them, or been reflected in them, in history. Islam's breakthrough is thus the first call to scholarship in religion, to critical analysis of religious texts, of the claim of such texts to revelation status. It is the first call to the discipline of 'history of religions' because it was the first to assume that all religions had a history, that each religion has undergone a development.

Islam does not claim for itself, therefore, the status of a novelty, but of a fact and dispensation at least as old as creation. The religious life of man, with all its variety across the ages is rehabilitated under this view not as a series of vagaries, but as attempts at true religion, Monotheism is said to be as old as creation.

Islamic *da'wah* begins by reaffirming this ultimate base as genuine and true. It seeks to complete the critical task of sifting in the accumulated traditions the wheat from the chaff. We are not impressed by the claim of latter-day ecumenists, advocates of interreligious dialogue, toleration [p. 132](#) and co-existence, who assert the ultimacy of any religious system because it is religious. For such a claim is the absolutization of every religion's propositions, which is nothing short of cultural relativism. Indeed, such ecumenism is non-representative of the religions which claim that what they propose is *the* truth, and not merely *a* claim to the truth among many claims. And it is rationally inconsequential because it counsels the juxtaposition in consciousness of contrary claims to the truth without the demand for a solution of their contradiction. By avoiding all these pitfalls and shortcomings, Islamic *da'wah* is ecumenical, if ecumenicity is to have any meaning besides kitchen cooperation among the churches.

*Da'wah* is ecumenical *par excellence* because it regards any kind of intercourse between the Muslim and the non-Muslim as a domestic relationship between kin. The Muslim comes to the non-Muslim and says 'WE are one; we are one family under Allah, and Allah has given you the truth not only inside yourself but inside your religious tradition which is *de jure* because its source is in God.' The task of dialogue, or mission, is



thus transformed into one of sifting the history of the religion in question. *Da'wah* thus becomes an ecumenical cooperative critique of the other religion rather than its invasion by a new truth.

## II DA'WAH CONTENT

Islam's view of other faiths flows from the essence of its religious experience. This essence is critically knowable. It is not the subject of 'paradox', nor of 'continuing revelation', nor the object of construction or reconstruction by Muslims. It is crystallized in the Holy Qur'ān for all men to read. It is as clearly comprehensible to the man of today as it was to that of Arabia of the Prophet's day (570–632 AC) because the categories of grammar, lexicography, syntax and redaction of the Qur'ānic text, and those of Arabic consciousness embedded in the Arabic language, have not changed through the centuries. This phenomenon is indeed unique; for Arabic is the only language which remained the same for nearly two millennia, the last fourteen centuries of which being certainly due to the Holy Qur'ān.<sup>1</sup> For Muslims, this essence has been on every lip and in every mind, every hour of every day.

**The essence of Islam is *tawhīd* or the witnessing that there is no god but God.** Brief as it is, this witness packs into itself four principles which constitute the whole essence and ultimate foundation of the religion.

**First, that there is no god but God means that reality is dual**, consisting of a natural realm, the realm of creation, and a transcendent realm, the Creator. This principle distinguishes Islam from p. 133 trinitarian Christianity where the dualism of creator and creature is maintained but where it is combined with a divine immanentism in human nature in justification of the incarnation. *Tawhīd* requires that neither nature be apotheosized nor transcendent God be objectified, the two realities ever-remaining ontologically disparate.

**Second, *tawhīd* means that God is related to what is not God as its God**, that is, as its creator or ultimate cause, its master or ultimate end. Creator and creature, therefore, *tawhīd* asserts, are relevant to each other regardless of their ontological disparateness which is not affected by the relation. The transcendent Creator, being cause and final end of the natural creature, is the ultimate Master Whose will is the religious and moral imperative. The divine will is commandment and law, the 'ought' of all that is, knowable by the direct means of revelation, or the indirect means of rational and/or empirical analysis of what is. Without a knowable content, the divine will would not be normative or imperative, and hence would not be the final end of the natural; for if the transcendent Creator is not the final end of his own creature, creation must be not the purposive event consonant with divine nature but a meaningless happening to him, a threat to his own ultimacy and transcendence.

**Thirdly, *tawhīd* means that man is capable of action**, that creation is malleable or capable of receiving man's action, and that human action on malleable nature, resulting in a transformed creation, is the purpose of religion. Contrary to the claims of other religions, nature is neither fallen or evil, nor a sort of *Untergang* of the absolute, nor is the absolute an apotheosis of it. Both are real, and both are good—the Creator being the

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<sup>1</sup> Controversies have arisen, as they certainly may, in the interpretation of the Qur'ānic text. What is being affirmed here is the fact that the Qur'ānic text is not bedevilled by a hermeneutical problem. Differences of interpretation are apodictically soluble in terms of the very same categories of understanding in force at the time of revelation of the text (611–632 AC), all of which have continued the same because of the freezing of the language and the daily intercourse of countless millions of people with it and with the text of the Holy Qur'ān.

*summum bonum* and the creature being intrinsically good and potentially better as it is transformed by human action into the pattern the Creator has willed for it. We have already seen that knowledge of the divine will is possible for man; and through revelation and science such knowledge is actual. The prerequisites of the transformation of creation into the likeness of the divine pattern are hence all, but for human resolve and execution, fulfilled and complete.

**Fourthly, *tawhīd* means that man, alone among all the creatures, is capable of action as well as being free to act or not to act.** This freedom vests him with a distinguishing quality, namely responsibility. It casts upon his action its moral character; for the moral is precisely that which is done in freedom, i.e., done by an agent who is capable of doing, as well as of not doing, it. This kind of action, moral action, is the greater portion of the divine will. Being alone capable of it, man is a higher creature, endowed with the cosmic significance of that through whose agency alone is the higher part of the divine will to be actualized in space and time. Man's life on earth, therefore, is especially meaningful and cosmically significant. As Allah has put it in the Holy Qur'ān, man is God's *khalīfah*, or vice-gerent on earth.<sup>2</sup> It is of the nature of moral action that its fulfilment be not equivalent to its non-fulfilment, that man's exercise of his freedom in [p.134](#) actualizing the divine imperative be not without difference. Hence, another principle is necessary, whereby successful moral action would meet with happiness and its opposite with unhappiness. Otherwise it would be all one for man whether he acts, or does not act, morally. Indeed, this consideration makes judgement necessary, in which the total effect of one's lifetime activity is assessed and its contribution to the total value of the cosmos is acknowledged, imbalances in the individual's life are redressed and his achievement is distinguished from the non-achievement of others. This is what 'The Day of Judgement' and 'Paradise and Hell' are meant to express in religious language.

**Fifthly, *tawhīd* means the commitment of man to enter into the nexus of nature and history, there to actualize the divine will.** It understands that will as pro-world and pro-life and hence, it mobilizes all human energies in the service of culture and civilization. Indeed, it is of its essence to be a civilizing force. In consequence, Islamic *da'wah* is not based upon a condemnation of the world. It does not justify itself as a call to man to relieve himself from the predicament of an existence which it regards as suffering and misery. Its urgency is not an assumed 'need for salvation' or for compassion and deliverance from anything. In this, as in the preceding aspects, Islamic *da'wah* differs from that of Christianity. Assuming all men necessarily to be 'fallen', to stand in the predicament of 'original sin', of 'alienation from God', of self-contradiction, self-centredness, or of 'falling short of the perfection of God', Christian mission seeks to ransom and save. Islam holds man to be not in need of any salvation. Instead of assuming him to be religiously and ethically fallen, Islamic *da'wah* acclaims him as the *khalīfah* of Allah, perfect in form, and endowed with all that is necessary to fulfil the divine will indeed, even loaded with the grace of revelation. 'Salvation' is hence not in the vocabulary of Islam. *Falāh*, or the positive achievement in space and time of the divine will, is the Islamic counterpart of Christian 'deliverance' and 'redemption'.

The Islamic *da'wah* does not, therefore, call man to a phantasmagoric second or other kingdom which is an alternative to this one, but to assume his natural birthright, his place as the maker of history, as the remoulder and refashioner of creation. Equally, his joys and pleasures are all his to enjoy, his life to live and his will to exercise, since the content of the divine will is not 'not-of-this-world', but 'of it'. World-denial and life-abnegation, asceticism and monasticism, isolationism and individualism, subjectivism and relativism



are not virtues in Islam but *dalāl* (misguidance). Islam stands squarely within the Mesopotamian religious tradition where religion is civilization and civilization is religion.

**Finally, *tawhīd* restores to man a dignity which some religions have denied by their representation of him as ‘fallen’, as existentially miserable.** By calling him to exercise his God-given prerogatives, Islamic *da‘wah* rehabilitates him and reestablishes his sanity, innocence and dignity. His moral vocation is the p. 135 road to his *falāh*. Certainly the Muslim is called to a new theocentrism; but it is one in which man’s cosmic dignity is applauded by Allah and His Angels. Christianity calls man to respond with faith to the salvific act of God and seeks to rehabilitate man by convincing him that it is he for whom God has shed his own blood. Man, it asserts, is certainly great because he is God’s partner whom God would not allow to destroy himself. This is indeed greatness, but it is the greatness of a helpless puppet. Islam understands itself as man’s assumption of his cosmic role as the one for whose sake creation was created. He is its innocent, perfect and moral master; and every part of it is *his* to have and to enjoy. He is called to obey, i.e. to fulfil the will of Allah. But this fulfilment is in and of space and time precisely because Allah is the source of space and time and the moral law.

Man, as Islam defines him, is not an object of salvation, but its subject. Through his agency alone the moral part, which is the higher part of the will of God, enters, and is fulfilled in, creation. In a sense, therefore, man is God’s partner, but a partner worthy of God because he is trustworthy as His *khali‘fa*, not because he is pitifully helpless and needs to be ‘saved’.

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## A Christian among Muslims

Bishop Kenneth Cragg

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When Paul, in [Romans 5:8](#) tells his readers that God commends his love to us in that Christ died for us, he uses a very intriguing Greek word *sunistemi*. It means to cause to consist, ‘to substantiate’. In Christ and his death for us sinners the love of God presents its credentials, evidences its true nature. From this follows the old translation: ‘God commends’. In all commendation there is a search for recognition but a search based on the belief that what is made evident reaches into a capacity to be recognized which the other party is felt to possess. Credentials, by definition, are always this way. What they offer is related to what can reciprocate. To ‘commend’ is not only to authenticate but to expect. The truth has to find its acknowledgement in the other’s consent. It is looking for that in the other party which can be its ally in receiving it.

All this is very central to the business of witness. God does not ‘impose his love upon us’. Nor does he dictate it. ‘Behold I stand at the door and knock.’ This is the divine pattern. For only the free can be the faithful. So there is no place for ‘imposition’ in the trust of the