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Da'wa

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DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199862634.013.006**[–] Abstract and Keywords**

Da'wa (literally, "call") refers not only to missionary work (i.e., spreading the message of Islam to nonbelievers). It also means reinforcing greater piety on the part of Muslims, appealing to Muslims to renew their religious commitment. Influenced by Muslim scholar Isma'il al-Faruqi, contemporary *da'wa* activity in the American context has underscored that the role of the *da'i* (the one who calls) is to invite "reversion" to one's natural or innate state of being in relationship with the divine. Islam was readopted by many twentieth-century African Americans due to *da'wa* work of the Ahmadiyya, the Nation of Islam, and others. Digital *da'wa*, using new social media and the Internet, and visual *da'wa* (e.g., satellite television and YouTube videos) add innovative means to propagating the faith and increasing Islamic literacy.

Keywords: Ahmadiyya movement, call, conversion, al-Faruqi, Isma'il, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, al-Mawdudi, Abul Ala', missionary work, Nation of Islam (NOI), propagation of the faith, reversion

Introduction

The meaning of the word *da'wa* is often translated as "missionizing," "proselytizing," "bearing witness," and "propagation of the faith." It has been used to refer to evangelical work, encouraging people to embrace Islam as the true religion, but it also has other meanings. From its earliest days in Islamic history, *da'wa* has often been viewed as a means to inspire fellow Muslims in their struggle to lead more pious lives. In the late nineteenth-century era of colonialism and the formation of the modern nation-state, reaching the non-Muslim other was not so much the aim of *da'wa* activity as was exhorting Muslims to "wake up" and rise to challenges presented by modernity—specifically, Western imperialism and the spread of a secular worldview. In more recent times, *da'wa* has served the purposes both of spreading the message to nonbelievers *and* reinforcing the imperative for greater piety on the part of Muslims.

A number of Muslim activist intellectuals present distinctive examples of these twin purposes at work within their specific settings and their modern world experience. But while intellectuals may have laid claim to critique and guide society in particular times and places, in *da'wa* activity they are certainly not alone. Also important are the everyday actions of ordinary people and organizations that carry out the lay passions and extol the virtues of Islam that are most useable to them and their agendas. All things considered, *da'wa* is a term that signifies a wide range of arguments that are sometimes at odds with each other because they are designed to accomplish different aims: to exhort and guide Muslims to practice what is considered to be proper behavior; to justify the existence of millions of Muslims in non-Muslim pluralistic societies (which a few have called *dar al-da'wa*, the place where Islam is to be propagated); and to address misinformation about Islam (or "misIslam") spread in the name of cultural warfare.

In this essay I follow three strands of thought about *da'wa*: the semantic meaning; the emphasis on education and solidarity during the late colonial era; and the shift in emphasis to meet the need to propagate the faith in the contemporary United States. What, for Muslims, is the imperative to propagate one's faith? What are some of its basic principles? What form(s) does *da'wa* take? To answer these questions, we need to look at text-based interpretations and at explanations that arise from context.

Da'wa in Islamic Teaching

The semantic field around the word *da'wa* gives us some insight into what the Qur'an teaches about the duty to propagate the faith. The root of the word *da'wa* means "to call, to summon, to appeal (or pray) to, and to invite."

The sense in which propagation of the faith is an act of *calling* or summons operates at a few levels. One level has to do with the Qur'anic teaching that testimony to the existence of the one God is paramount. Testimony, or *shahada*, is one of the five pillars of Islam, the first of the five crucial elements of what it means to live in "submission" to God (the literal meaning of the Arabic word *islam*). Apart from the solemn obligation to testify in the form of the *shahada*—*la ilaha ila Alla* (there is no god but God) *wa Muhammad rusul Allah* (and Muhammad is God's messenger)—how does one confess one's faith? The Qur'an (16:125) reads, "Invite [all] to the way of your Lord, with wisdom and beautiful preaching, and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious."¹ As significant as is the *shahada* as a confession, it is understood as only a minimum requirement designed to prime the pump for a lifetime of what is known as *da'wa*, a calling to witness according to one's ability and knowledge. Many commentaries cite this Qur'anic injunction to encourage Muslims toward moral eloquence and sincerity in calling people to follow in the way of God (*fi sabil Allah*).

The sense in which *da'wa* is an *appeal* has to do with the Qur'anic concept of the single act of prayer. In certain places the word "*da'wa*" is associated with intercessory prayer: "When My servants ask thee about Me, I am indeed close by and answer the prayer of everyone when they pray to Me" (Q2:186). Here the term means a supplication to God, an individual's invocation of God for a special purpose. The Qur'an is

filled with warnings against trying to call on a god other than the One God, and a primary message is that it is futile to appeal to false gods either in this life or the next. Only the One True God grants the appeal of his servants. In the same way, each of God's servants must recognize that God's *da'wa*—his summons—requires their faithful response. Thus, there is a double meaning—God both summons the faithful through his *da'wa* and God alone answers the *da'wa* of the faithful. This is reflected in the Qur'an (13:14): "To Him the prayer of truth [*da'watul haqq*] and all those they pray to, other than Him, answer them not at all, no more than if they stretched their hands out for water, which reaches them not, for the prayer of the unbelievers is futile." From this we can see that the basic meaning of the word "*da'wa*" as appeal or supplication is closely connected to the concept of monotheism (*tawhid*)—there is only One God to which the faithful are to pray and who can answer prayers.

Aside from the duty to pray to the One God, Muslims are obligated to respond to the *da'wa* (the call) of the *agent* of the call, the *da'i*—the one who makes the call or invites. Muhammad is said to be *da'i Allah* in the Qur'an: "Prophet, we have sent you as a witness, as a bearer of good news and warning; as one who calls people to God by His leave, as a light-giving lamp" (Q33:45–46); and "Our People, respond to the one who calls you to God. Believe in Him: he will forgive you your sins and protect you from the painful torment. Those who fail to respond to God's call cannot escape God's power anywhere on earth, nor will they have any protector against Him; such people clearly have gone far astray" (Q46:31–32). Muhammad summons on God's behalf. Other prophets were also *da'is* in their own time, each called in some particular way to his own people. Like the prophets before him, Muhammad issued his own call summoning people to the straight path (e.g., Q23:73). In this way, the Qur'anic concept of *da'wa* includes the obligation to follow Muhammad's guidance (*sunna* or "lived example") on the straight path and is more than the simple confession of belief in the One God. The *da'wa* becomes the call to the straight path.

The sense of *da'wa* as an *invitation* leads us to a very important concept: the community of believers (*ummah*). The significance of the response to the invitation by the community cannot be underestimated. The community is directed to respond by "enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong" (Q3:104). In this sense, the *da'i* invites the entire community, and the community of believers in turn calls upon society at large to promote justice (*'adl*) and fight oppression (*zulm*). Thus, the obligation to call others to "do the right thing" can rather easily be understood as the believing community's response to the Prophet's call and, correspondingly, that community's duty to invite nonbelievers to follow in the way of God (*fi sabil Allah*, Q2:261) and accept the message of Islam. Not only the prophets but the community of believers itself is constituted as a *da'i*, one who summons or invites others to the faith. This has the dual effect of making a more just society and deepening the community of believers' acknowledgment of God and his Prophet.

The Qur'anic exhortation cited at the beginning of this section, "Invite [all] to the way of your Lord, with wisdom and beautiful preaching, and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious" (Q16:125), is addressed to Muhammad and can be read narrowly to apply to his discourses against his opponents.² However, in modern Islamic apologetics it has been relied on most frequently as the Qur'anic injunction for *da'wa* in general. It has become one of the most cited verses in support of the external mission of Islam and has encouraged the view that the propagation of one's faith is best pursued through patient argumentation, as opposed to forced conversion through military conquest. It is often coupled with the Qur'anic injunction that there is "no coercion in religion" (Q2:256) to support the notion of consent. Compulsion, force, bribery, threat, and exploitation are inconsistent with the sense of invitation, which in most modern usage must include the element of free will.

Da'wa Activity, Colonialism, and Muslim Solidarity

The doctrine of *da'wa* was given modern form beginning in the nineteenth century by Muslim intellectuals in various parts of the colonized Islamic world. The emphasis was on bringing Muslims to a better understanding of the moral imperative to rejuvenate Muslims and Islam in order to face the challenges of modernity. We should keep in mind that vigorous Christian missionary work accompanied European colonial government and was viewed by many Muslims as a political and cultural challenge. In India, for instance, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–1898) sought to convert his fellow Muslims to a modernist understanding of their religion. His concerns about the future of India were provoked by a sense of shortcoming compared with Western Europe's (specifically Britain's) military, scientific, and technological advancements. While the Hindus were readily adopting the new language, administrative science, and intellectual milieu of Britain's colonial rulers, Khan felt that the Muslims of India were sinking into cultural isolation. Preferring to have their sons study Arabic and Persian in traditional schools, the Muslim elites of India discouraged contacts with the British and strongly eschewed the introduction of new elements (e.g., modern science and technological education) in their lives. As a result, the social status and material fortune of the Muslims steadily declined. Khan chastised the religious leaders (*ulama*) and schools (*madrasas*) for failing to prepare the Muslims of India to face the new sociopolitical demands of the modern era.³

This trend toward cultural isolation was reversed in large part due to the effort of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who in 1875 founded the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh (renamed the Aligarh Muslim University in 1920), offering an education in science and rationalism that shaped graduates who then went out to the various regions of India to persuade other Muslims of the merits of this approach. In the belief that modern education was the key through which the Muslim decline could be redressed, the college at Aligarh emerged as an important center of Islamic modernism with which a number of important intellectuals were associated.⁴ Khan's ideas on education challenged conservative ways of thinking and acting to cultivate the exercise of critical rationality, presenting the case for a shift away from the undisputed power of the *ulama*. This marked the emergence of a new class of modern Muslim intellectuals who, aided by the technological and educational advancements of the late 19th century (primarily the establishment of modern educational institutions and the new print media), claimed the right to interpret Islam for themselves and speak for the Muslim community.⁵

The *da'wa* that Khan presented to his contemporaries was to modernize their outlook on religion and science. Muslim civilization(s) would be restored to former greatness by shunning customs that had resulted in the denigration of Islam, customs that in India were influenced by contact with Hindus and by accretions that had entered into Islam through the efforts of Muslim jurists, commentators, and Sufis. Only that part of Islam that Muslims consider to be divinely revealed (i.e., the Qur'an and a few authenticated Hadith) need be studied in light of science and reason. Khan, in effect, was conjuring the Muslim community into a nation by using the tool of *da'wa* to call upon Muslims to modernize their understanding of the material and the sacred worlds and (re)create solidarity in an age when ideas of nationalist self-determination and secularism had become a major influence. Khan argued that the traditional *ulama* and the jurists (*fuqaha*) had distracted believers from using their own intellects and hearts to discern the true meaning of Islam. He called upon the modern Muslim intelligentsia to provide a

reinterpretation of Islam and its institutions in light of present-day exigencies, an interpretation that would free Muslims from the tyranny of the past and provide a message of empowerment for the colonized Muslim. At the same time, he also encouraged the adoption of Western sociopolitical ideas and institutions of government and argued that the science of political economy, having been perfected by Europe, should be adapted for the benefit of the Muslim community. Strongly attached to Islam, Khan looked to Islamic revelation as an important source to help face the challenges of his times. He should also be understood, however, as being in very positive dialogue with Western political thought.

This approach maintains that human beings are endowed with adequate cognition and free will to pursue their own spiritual destiny through the study of the revealed message of God, that religious interpretation was no longer the exclusive purview of scholars and theologians. Each individual is called to respond to the invitation (*da'wa*) and has the capacity as a rational being to do so within his or her specific cultural heritage. Like Khan, Egypt's Muslim reformer Rashid Rida (d. 1935), reflecting the rationalist theology of his teacher, Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905), argued that the purpose of revelation is to elucidate what is already known through the human intellect. Prophets come to confirm and clarify what is intuitive (e.g., the existence of God), and so there is an essential unity in the beliefs of "the people of divine religions (*ahl al-adyan al-ilahiya*)" who have been exposed to divine guidance as well as having an innate disposition to believe in God and do good works.⁶ Of lasting impact were these reformers' efforts to strengthen Islamic awareness and solidarity in the face of modernity. Thus, *da'wa* increasingly came to be framed in terms of education (*tarbiya*).

For these Muslim reformers, then, the need to spread the faith stressed the importance of *da'wa* yet interpreted this as the imperative to bring Muslims back into the fold of a desirable theology (*kalam*) as much as, if not more than, the need to teach non-Muslims about Islamic principles and creeds. The technological, educational, and institutional changes wrought by the West, Christian missionaries, and the scholarship on Islam written by Western orientalists all made a lasting impact on the understanding of *da'wa*. As of the 1930s, *da'wa* increasingly became an endeavor to reform the individual, rather than the public institutions of society. Society was to be "Islamized" from below, and this vision can be attributed mainly to Egyptian Hassan al-Banna (d. 1949), the founder of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan*), and South Asian Abul Ala' al-Mawdudi (1903–1979), the founder of Jama'at-i Islami,⁷ who both left a powerful legacy among later generations of Islamists.⁸ For these thinkers, the educational and devotional aspects of *da'wa* require that Muslims more fully and self-consciously reappropriate their Islamic identity. They spoke of *da'wa* as the teaching that will bring deficient Muslims back to the "true Islam."

In contrast to the modernists, Islamists present a contemporary response to what has been called the "westoxification" of the Muslim world (i.e., the pollution of Islamic cultures with Western influences), attempting a reassertion of Islamic values and institutions in the face of Western economic, political, and cultural dominance around the world. This strand of thought increasingly rejects Western scholarship as a cultural attack on Islam and critiques those reformers who adopted or used Western sociopolitical ideas and institutions in their home countries. Islamists are highly critical of Western models of economic and political development as inappropriate transplants from another time and culture, and in their place advocate continuity with older forms of Islamic knowledge, law, and government. Generally Islamists today advocate a literalist interpretation of Islam as the solution for all political wrongs and moral shortcomings. From this perspective, *da'wa* is addressed to *all* people in order to educate others about the message of Islam. For this generation of Islamists, it has become obvious that the whole world is suffering, and the solution is to be found in the embrace of what is perceived as "the true Islam" practiced by *al-salaf al-salih*, or the first generation of Muslims of the Islamic era (i.e., the seventh and eighth centuries C.E.). Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), for instance, maintained that Islam is the perfect social order that achieved its moral excellence for a unique (although brief) period of time—when the community at Medina lived under God's guidance—before impurities and the evil forces of worldly materialism crept in. The significance of this historical period is that it can be created again; Islam's idealized state will be reestablished for the entire world to see and be persuaded by its superior values and principles.⁹ The South Asian thinker Abul Ala' al-Mawdudi argued that performing *da'wa* was the most important duty entrusted to Muslims. This meant witnessing not only through the spoken and written word but by example, illustrating the message of Islam by living it openly in a way that will entice others to examine the merits of the message. He succinctly summarized the core principle of his teachings on *da'wa*: "[t]he only objective behind raising you as a distinct Ummah (community), titled Muslim, as enunciated by the Holy Qur'an, is that you should leave no stone unturned in making out the truthfulness of the Faith before the whole of Mankind."¹⁰

But at what level is *da'wa* to be addressed? The modernist reformers' liberal interpretation generally accepted western ideas and institutions but gave them an Islamic justification, whereas the advocates of overtly Islamist agendas favored the opposite end on the continuum of attitudes and proposals regarding this-worldly engagement and the role of Islam in public life. This has had implications for *da'wa* activity whether it has been appreciated for its educational, devotional, or political ends. Under the diasporic conditions in which Muslims are living in (sometimes emphatically) non-Muslim societies, *da'wa* has become a refashioned conceptual tool that helps us understand what Tariq Ramadan has called the "new presence" of Muslims in Europe and North America. Specifically, immigration and conversion in "the West" during the twentieth century produced strong Muslim constituencies in many countries where Islam became the second or third most popular religion, after Christianity.

In terms of their numbers and permanent settlement, Muslims in non-Muslim societies are experiencing completely new circumstances. They reflect on their texts in this new context, ask questions, and experiment on educational, theological, social, political, and cultural levels. Recognizing that we live in a time of "deep intellectual ferment and transformation," Ramadan evaluates and defines the conceptual space of "the Western abode" to be not *dar al-harb* (the abode of war) but rather *dar al-shahada* (the abode of testimony), a space of responsibility in which the possibility of permanent involvement—to achieve more just conditions—exists.¹¹ *Dar al-shahada* is any environment that guarantees freedom of conscience and worship to Muslims, allows them to fulfill their religious obligations, protects their physical integrity, and is not in fact a hostile space.¹² In somewhat different fashion, Faisal al-Mawlawi calls the West the *dar al-da'wa*, the abode of invitation, the space in which the Islamic message needs to be spread. Regardless which appellation one prefers, the very process of reworking categories of fiqh classifications as *this* but not *that* always problematizes the area around the category. With the abode of invitation (*dar al-da'wa*) we get not only its opposite—rejection—but endless debates around what is invited, who is invited, what and who is rejected, and where one ends and the other begins. All of this suggests that despite the pitfalls represented by dichotomized thinking about "Islam and the West" or "the West and the rest," a place like the United States still appears to be an abode where Muslims can live securely with certain fundamental rights guaranteed. We are left with the question, then, for those who locate themselves within this abode: Has the work of *da'wa* been refashioned in truly significant ways?

Propagation of Islam in America

Considerable Muslim proselytizing took place in the United States during the twentieth century, much of it among, though by no means confined to, African Americans.¹³ In fact, conversion has been a significant part of the African American Muslim experience for more than 100 years, making Islam a noteworthy American religious tradition. However in spite of this reality the word “*da'wa*” is rarely mentioned in the literature and discourse by and about Muslims in the United States.¹⁴ This might be because *da'wa* activity, in Muslim majority countries, has been aimed at convincing already existing Muslims to embrace a politicized Islam rather than reaching out to non-Muslims in order to gain new proselytes. Or it might be because more expansive (i.e., not literal) interpretations of *da'wa* as “propagating the faith” have emphasized outreach and education rather than proselytization, supporting the creation of Muslim organizations and Islamic centers that offer public seminars, talks, and opportunities for interfaith dialogue. Or perhaps *da'wa* is understated because it is represented less by institutional efforts than by individuals striving to assume moral responsibility for their own condition.

In this section I explore four aspects of contemporary *da'wa* in the United States. The first is a brief look at the historical role of *da'wa* in the formation of a few key African American Muslim communities. The second aspect is found in the commitment to education represented by the ideas of Palestinian-American thinker Isma'il al-Faruqi. I then discuss the recent *da'wa* manuals written by and for American Muslims, concerned with the scriptural and the pragmatic implications and requirements of the faith in their everyday lives. Finally, I look at the way in which conversion narratives give us insight into what triggers conversion and what else besides conversion might be counted as *da'wa*.

How Islam came to America is covered elsewhere in this volume. A brief summary is needed here, however, in order to illustrate the place of *da'wa* in that process. Muslims in America are a very diverse group that came from many different places at different times. The historical record indicates that the first known Muslims in what is now the United States came as chattel slaves during the period of the Middle Passage.¹⁵ However, under the conditions of slavery, it was not possible for slaves to maintain their original Islamic practices and the traces of Islam in early America have all but disappeared. Today, as a result, many African American Muslims came to Islam through the conversion process largely through the Muslim organizations established well after the post-Civil War Reconstruction period in the United States. One of the first of these organizations was the Moorish Science Temple of America founded by Noble Drew Ali in the early 1900s. Another was established in the 1930s as the Lost-Found Nation of Islam, better known as the Nation of Islam or NOI, under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad. This organization's mission was to restore African Americans to their original religion, language, and culture through Islam. Aided by his young minister, Malcolm X—possibly the NOI's most famous convert—Elijah Muhammad during the 1950s and 1960s brought the NOI to national attention as a militant Islamic black nationalist group. *Da'wa* meant “fishing for converts”¹⁶ in the NOI's vocabulary, which is what members were strongly encouraged to do especially among young people and the incarcerated.

The Ahmadiyya Movement, founded in the Punjab region of India in the late 19th century, also encouraged African Americans to protest their second-class citizenship in the United States by converting to Islam. During the 1920s, an Indian immigrant by the name of Muhammad Sadiq established himself in Detroit and Chicago as an Ahmadiyya missionary. In short order he tapped into the popularity of the pan-Africanist movement of Marcus Garvey, lecturing at United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) meetings and gaining converts to Islam in the process. Sadiq's message compared Islam to Christianity and attempted to demonstrate Islam's superior claim to rationality, universalism, and progress. Moreover, it described Islam as the proper religion for Africans and argued that racial inequality in America could be traced to the corrupting influence of Christianity, which debases people of color. In this manner, Sadiq's *da'wa* activity was moderately successful. Although he did not limit his proselytizing to the African American community, Sadiq frequently encouraged Garveyites and their sympathizers to link their black nationalism with Islam, hoping to create a sense of group solidarity in the midst of racial oppression. In 1923, he wrote in the pages of the journal he started, called *The Moslem Sunrise*:

My dear American Negro ... the Christian profiteers brought you out of your native lands of Africa and in Christianizing you made you forsake the religion and language of your forefathers—which were Islam and Arabic ... Christianity cannot bring real brotherhood to the nations. Now leave it alone. And join Islam, the real faith of Universal Brotherhood, which at once does away with all distinctions of race, color, and creed.¹⁷

By the 1940s the Ahmadis claimed between 5,000 and 10,000 American converts, half of them African American.¹⁸ However, a rift developed between the national leadership of the movement—almost entirely South Asian—and African American local leaders. This split is especially noteworthy in the cases of Cleveland, Ohio, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where two of the earliest and best known black “Sunni” mosques were built by those former members who rejected the Ahmadiyya Movement's centralized authority—the First Cleveland mosque (1936) and the First Muslim Mosque of Pittsburgh (1945).¹⁹

This is only a snapshot of *da'wa* activity in the first half of the twentieth century, and like all photographic representations it has a perspective that puts some features into sharper focus than others. However, it shows at least something about the unique development of Islamic *da'wa* in the United States and the macro questions of religious interpretation, race, and identity. In large part, the appeal of the message was about universal brotherhood, critique of the status quo, and a resistance to racial hierarchy. Importantly, it also shows that face-to-face (also known as “door-to-door”) proselytizing afforded the opportunity to make strong social connections and to customize meaningful linkages between the personal life experiences of the “missionized” and the content of the message. All three organizations I have mentioned—the Moorish Science Temple, the NOI, and the Ahmadiyyas—continue to operate in the United States though each has experienced extensive change and limited influence. Once reliant on interpersonal networks to strengthen their organizations, these groups and others like them in recent years have had to face very different challenges from those of the first half of the twentieth century. Not the least of these are the ubiquitous technology of the Internet and the greatly increased range of Islamic sects, orientations, perspectives, practices, and materials newly available in the United States as a result of changes in immigration. Given that each of these groups articulate a theology and practice rituals that other Muslim groups find problematic, their efforts at proselytizing have been countered by other Muslims who want to neutralize their message, which is considered to deviate from so-called normative Islam in important ways.

The recent large-scale immigration of Muslims to the United States has dramatically altered the demographics of the Muslim American population. Among other things, it has resulted in unprecedented growth in the number of mosques and Islamic schools, organizations, and publishing houses in the United States. This growth in organizational life led to changes in the conceptualization and practice of *da'wa* in the

United States. Forms of *da'wa* were developed in the second half of the twentieth century that had broader segments of the American audience in mind. First, modeling an exemplary lifestyle became a popular method for propagating the faith. Like Mawdudi's idea of *da'wa* by example, this strategy is to live in such a way that others will be attracted to the Islamic message and may be persuaded by example to embrace Islam. In this way, the everyday performance of Islamic values is favored over the concept of preaching/teaching by word. This method also tends to be more conservative and status-quo-oriented than the messaging of the past (e.g., that Christianity is racially oppressive). Second, the concept of *da'wa* broadened to include an emphasis on education of both the so-called nominal Muslim and the non-Muslim American. In important ways this resembles the point made by Muslim reformers of the nineteenth/twentieth century, that education (*tarbiya*) empowers the individual Muslim to perform *da'wa*. This approach has followed two trajectories at once, exhorting the Muslim constituency to equip themselves with better Islamic knowledge, and addressing people of other faiths.

Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi (1921-1986), founder of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) and professor at Temple University from the late 1960s until his death in 1986, was very influential in defining a successful *da'wa* strategy that saw as necessary both the call for greater ecumenism and coexistence with other faiths, and the imperative to lead Muslims (and others) to a better understanding of Islam. In direct contrast to the work of his precursors in the United States, Faruqi's approach was to engage in dialogue with other faiths in a manner that did not deliberately "score points" for Islam at the expense of other religions. Instead he emphasized the notion of *din al-fitrah*, the natural religion, arguing that Islam is innate and that God has endowed humanity with an intuitive faculty to recognize God's presence in the natural world. *Da'wa* in this understanding is an invitation to return or "revert" to one's natural state of being in relationship with the divine, shedding all indoctrinations of history; thus the role of the *da'i* is that of a "midwife" inspiring the one who is called to rediscover what God has already put within his or her conscience. Moreover, *din al-fitrah* is said to be at the base of all historical religious experience. Adherents of all (monotheistic) religions are equal members of a universal brotherhood. The essence—theocentrism—is knowable and is revealed in the Qur'an for all to know, although the basic message can also be found in the revelations given to other prophets.²⁰ This becomes the basis for interfaith dialogue. Faruqi advocated Islamic *da'wa* as a means to enable the individual to assume his or her birthright, to become the vicegerent (*khalifah*) of God in order to refashion the world in accord with God's will. The emphasis is placed on the moral obligation to inform and educate according to one's abilities without concern for the result, which is to be determined by God, for "God guides whomever he will to the straight path." In the end both the convert and the long-time Muslim are charged with the responsibility to deepen their knowledge for the sake of improving the culture and circumstances of the United States.²¹

In terms of the need to enlighten the nominal Muslim, Faruqi wrote that "the Islamic vision provides the immigrant the criterion with which to understand, judge, and seek to transform the unfortunate realities of North America." This particular directive increasingly can be found in literature aimed at a Muslim audience post-9/11. It implies an obligation to transform not only their own lives but the society, and so *da'wa* is more about social activism than it is about directly gaining new converts. Recently, *da'wa* has also been used to encourage Muslim Americans to redress the widespread negative images of Islam ("Mislam") in American institutions, media and culture by learning more Islamic knowledge themselves in order to properly educate the American public (more on this below). This approach means counteracting stereotypes about Islam and Muslims stemming from the non-Muslim environment.

The shift in meaning of *da'wa* as education (*tarbiya*) so the Muslim can contribute to the advancement of society has not entirely left the concept of missionary work out of the picture. At the same time there has been an increase in the output of what I will call "*da'wa* manuals," written in English, to encourage Muslims to engage in *da'wa* activity. One can find on the Internet a burgeoning cottage industry of manuals and training videos with respect to proselytizing. Media technology has facilitated this process and the new media have shaped current *da'wa* trends in myriad ways. A new spin on old methods has merged the traditional rationale for propagating the faith and renewing Muslims' religious commitment with the new digital media and the Internet in ways that are mindful of changes in context. To get the flavor of this one need go no farther than the Texas Dawah Convention.²² In addition, satellite television has added a "visual *da'wa*" dimension known around the world as Islamic televangelism. Moreover, contemporary *da'wa* materials addressing a western audience mark an important break with methods used around the world. On the international scene, so-called bricks and mortar institutions—academies in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and other Muslim countries—offer programs for the education and training of imams, community leaders and other professionals, which continue to draw on historical understandings of *da'wa* as being tied to a particular path to God. For instance, in Pakistan the International Islamic University houses a *da'wah* academy that has developed an integrated approach for national and international propagation of Islam. Most of the students are trained to be imams in mosques rather than scholars, and beyond the traditional curriculum the *da'wah* academy runs international educational (*tarbiya*) training camps largely for young people from different parts of Asia and Africa but also increasingly for Muslims who are experiencing religious pluralism. The general aims are to cultivate a *salafi* orientation, to re-Islamize the *ummah*, and to integrate various ethnic, social, and sectarian groups under the aegis of a central authority in charge of Islamic renewal, which can be seen in the academy's journal, *Da'wah Highlights*.²³ But because of significant language and culture gaps most of these graduates are not successful in the American context. Preferred are the seminars, conferences, and training courses for Muslims offered in American institutions well-versed in the vicissitudes of life in pluralistic settings. While most curriculum include very little if anything specifically called "*da'wa*," they all teach theology, jurisprudence, literature, Arabic language, etc., for the purpose of increasing Islamic literacy. The goal is to acquire and circulate knowledge and illustrate Islamic virtues to the wider Muslim community and to the non-Muslim public sphere, seeking to raise the general level of discourse. Many publish literature, audio-visual materials, computer software, and other aides to communicate the message. All utilize the Internet to advertise their materials.²⁴ While a portion of the messaging reflects an exclusivist viewpoint and extols the superiority of Islam as a religion and way of life, the vast majority of these materials adapt to pluralism by expressing respect for what is sacred to others and for religious freedom.

Some websites specifically offer *da'wa* manuals in skills training. One such source posts articles and lectures in English with such titles as the "ABCs of *da'wah*," "the Prophet's *Da'wah* Methodology," and "What Are YOU Doing for the *Da'wah*?"²⁵ This source offers video and lesson plans on proper presentation and communication, as well as research and statistics to equip the *da'i* with the necessary prerequisites to offer guidance to seekers. There is even a section on how to conduct *da'wa* in the age of the iPhone with the message that Muslims have a lot of work to do in order to counter the disinformation about Islam spread by anti-Islamic websites, rants on YouTube, and powerful bloggers.

In the early years of this century WhyIslam.com, the media project of the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), was launched as a *da'wa* activity. ICNA thought this essential because, according to its website, "given the prevalent misinformation, misunderstanding, and stereotypes

coupled with our duty to spread truth about Islam and our community,” new methods of *da'wa* were needed. Advertising through signs on city buses, billboards, transit stations, shopping centers and so on, the advocacy organization’s main goal has been to reach the general public in order to clarify misconceptions. The ad copy prominently displays a 24-hour hotline with a toll-free telephone number with “live operators” to answer questions about Islam and Muslims.²⁶

As Muslims have become more visible in the American society, the fears and contempt for them, which used to be expressed less openly, are now easily found on cable news talk shows, media campaigns, and other locations. Mitt Romney’s aide declared that the presidential candidate opposed the construction of the Park 51 (also given the misnomer the “Ground Zero mosque”) Islamic community center because it had the potential for becoming an extremist headquarters for “global recruiting and propaganda.”²⁷ In 2011, U.S. congressman Peter King (R-NY), chair of the House Homeland Security Committee, held a highly publicized hearing to determine whether American Muslims are law-abiding people and whether they ignored the radicals among them. Without giving any evidence, King once declared that as many as 80 percent of mosques in America are run by extremists.²⁸ Thus, Muslims have raised *da'wa* to a new level in order to respond to the fear and address several stereotypes that link Islam to terrorism and extremism.

Many organizations, such as Sound Vision, an online purveyor of Islamic educational materials, have incorporated *da'wa* into interfaith relations. Sound Vision offers many products to introduce Islam to a Western audience. Its founder, Abdul Malik Mujahid—Chicago-area imam, executive producer of Chicago’s RadioIslam.com, host of a daily one-hour radio talk show, and current chair of the council of the World Parliament of Religions—has been recognized globally as a leader in promoting interfaith dialogue. Imam Mujahid encourages his fellow Muslims to take a gradual approach to *da'wa*. After several years of *da'wa* efforts in the United States, Muslims have made few inroads because, he argues, Americans are immune to religious messaging. Because of their preference for talking about immediate subjects such as sports, the weather and celebrities, Americans by and large are not responsive to questions of a deeper nature. Nevertheless, Mujahid continues, Americans are equally committed to fair play, and when one gives them something to read things begin to happen. Americans, he writes, are tolerant in the sense that while they may dislike a particular group—an often-cited example is communists—they will staunchly defend the right to have books expressing the group’s viewpoint on the public library’s shelves. Thus, solid American commitments to fair play and to the right to free thought and expression create an appropriate milieu for *da'wa* work, and the challenge is to adjust older *da'wa* strategies to the Western environment of secularism and pluralistic values.²⁹ In a related vein, the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), one of the largest and oldest umbrella organizations for Muslims in the United States, has established an office for interfaith and community alliances, which functions as an informational bureau to offer a positive image of Islam and Muslims and to engage in joint projects with other mainstream religious organizations. An example is the “standing shoulder to shoulder” campaign, which aligns the United Church of Christ and others to stand with American Muslims and uphold American values.³⁰ The stated rationale for this initiative is to break down barriers and dispel misunderstanding.

The book *How to Tell Others About Islam*, written by the Muslim American convert Yahiya Emerick, is a manual for *da'wa* training. Because Islam has no ordained clergy or a category of professional missionaries, Emerick argues, it is incumbent upon all believers to summon others to the right path. One means suggested to do this is a *dars* or a study circle. Emerick’s book contains advice about best practices, when and where to perform *da'wa*, the ethics of calling people to Islam, the challenges of reaching Hispanic and Asian communities, and the challenges presented by popular culture, the military, gender-consciousness, etc. It also provides doctrinal justification for the performance of *da'wa* and suggests the *da'i* not rely on pamphlets or literature to do the job. Emerick believes the “old fashioned” method of personal contact or face-to-face proselytizing is most effective.³¹

Activities associated with *da'wa* in the United States, then, can be summarized in the following ways. First, there is missionary work, calling non-Muslims to embrace Islam, which Faruqi and others have referred to not as conversion but as *reverting* to the natural religion. Second is exhortation directed at already existing Muslims to guide them to a more righteous path. And third is the circulation of Islamic knowledge, which results in a more just society. Given this range it is problematic to consider conversion to be the only appropriate measure of the impact of *da'wa* because it applies only to missionary work. It leaves out the effect of propagandizing Muslims and the spread of Islamic knowledge. Nevertheless, the conversion process is typically the one location to which researchers look to see whether *da'wa* is effective. Recent years have seen an increase in conversion studies done in the humanities and social sciences, showing that conversion language speaks of new forms of relatedness, of possessing a newly inscribed “communal self defined through the gaze of others.”³² Moreover, the conversion occurs primarily because it corresponds with the convert’s preexisting feelings about truth and meaning.³³

In many Muslim conversion narratives a common theme emerges: conversion (often referred to as *reversion*) is a gradual awareness of converts that their ideas and beliefs had always been “Islamic” though they had realized it only recently. These are narratives of recognition; for instance, “I was a Muslim and just wasn’t aware of it” or “So it was almost natural to become a Muslim, it was always what made sense anyway.”³⁴ According to most accounts, there was no dramatic turning point and, although other Muslims are an important source of inspiration, many converts relate that they were convinced by reading books, especially the Qur’an. Notably, however, many converts say that they began to learn more about the religion only after they had embraced Islam; for instance, “The next morning, I started looking into Islam.” Thus, there is only scant evidence in the narratives to suggest that direct proselytizing resulted in conversion. Rather, it is typical that the new convert knew someone—a brother-in-law, a friend, a spouse—who attracted him or her to investigate the religion. Establishing close social ties with a Muslim is often the precursor to becoming a Muslim.

Trends in Latino Muslim conversion offer insights into this debate. Some Latinos convert to Islam as a way of connecting with an uprooted past in Spain. Others use Islam as a means to distance themselves from the scandals and bloody history of the Roman Catholic Church. Still others are finding their way to Islam through marriage and other family connections. As Islam continues to make inroads into the Latino community, it is clear that there is also a prison connection. While conversion among the incarcerated was brought to the public’s attention many years ago with the “reversion” to Islam of several African Americans in prison resulting many constitutional court battles in the 1960s and 1970s,³⁵ in this century an increasing number of prison converts has been Latino. According to one analyst, the spread of “Prislam” groups connects religious ideology with Latino gang values, presenting what may be the most likely domestic security threat and source of extremism among American Muslims.³⁶

Conclusion

Da'wa in the United States, where Muslims live as a minority faith, is a constant (if sometimes understated) factor motivating the welfare of the community. The obligation to summon the faithful is translated into the need for better education and more accurate information. Those who were born Muslim need education to become both more "pious" and better able to interact successfully with majority society. New converts are attracted by the living example of Islamic values embodied by Muslims in their midst; once their curiosity is stirred, they tend to seek out more information for themselves. And finally, the "mislam" proliferating in post-9/11 America is viewed as an urgent call to Muslims since it can only be counteracted by the clear and convincing presentation by Muslims of reliable information about Islam. Da'wa activity is seen as an integral part of something much larger: the efforts of ordinary Muslims to spread information about their faith.

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Notes:

- (1) This and all Qur'anic passages are from the translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, accessed at Oxford Islamic Studies Online.
- (2) Another interpretation of this verse reads, "Prophet, call [people] to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good teaching. Argue with them in the most courteous way, for your Lord knows best who has strayed from His way and who is rightly guided." For this interpretation and a similar discussion, see Paul E. Walker, Reinhard Schulze, and Muhammad Khalid Masud, "Da'wah," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, accessible at Oxford Islamic Studies Online. Available at: http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com.proxy.library.ucsb.edu:2048/article/opr/t236/e0182?_hi=4&_pos=3#match. Accessed July 30, 2012.
- (3) See Iqbal Singh Sevea, *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal: Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 7.

- (4) Ibid., p. 8.
- (5) Ibid., p. 12.
- (6) See Abdulaziz Sachedina, *Islam and the Challenge of Human Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 204.
- (7) See Jamaat-I Islami (Islamic Political Party) is the Indo-Pakistani party founded in 1941 that represented Mawdudi's intellectual contribution, defining the nation as the *ummah*, or religious community, as the core of the Islamic state.
- (8) Islamist is a term used increasingly in the late twentieth century to designate those who advocate the slogan, "Islam is the solution (*Al-Islam huwa al-hal*)," associated with the idea that the Islamic *shari'a* provides guidance for all aspects of human life. In general they advocate for the creation of an Islamic state and are opposed to 'secularism' understood as a system of government and society that is based on Western-derived ideas and practices.
- (9) See Yvonne Y. Haddad, *Contemporary Islam and the Challenge of History* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1982): 92–3.
- (10) See Maulana Abul Mawdudi, *The Evidence of Truth* (Lahore, Pakistan: Islamic Publications, Ltd., 1967): 3–4.
- (11) See Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004): 104.
- (12) Ibid., p. 70.
- (13) Islam has become modestly popular among Hispanics in the United States. In 1997 the Latino American Dawah Organization was founded to disseminate information about the history of Islam in Latin America and Spain, and to promote Islam among Hispanics in the United States. See www.latinodawah.org.
- (14) Noteworthy studies include Larry Poston, *Da'wah in the West: Muslim Missionary Activity and the Dynamics of Conversion to Islam* (1992), and Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, "On the Nature of Islamic Da'wah," in *Christian Mission and Islamic Da'wah: Proceedings of the Chambesy Dialogue* (1985). See also Joseph Henry Smith, *The Practice of Dawah Activity in the North America and the Attraction of Islam*, a Ph.D. dissertation written at Fuller Theological Seminary (1994/5).
- (15) See Sylvaine Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 140.
- (16) See Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (New York: Basic Books, 2011): 102.
- (17) Ibid., p. 83.
- (18) Ibid., p. 84.
- (19) Ibid., p. 213.
- (20) This is what Faruqi called "Islamicity." See Isma'il R. al-Faruqi, "Towards a Historiography of a Pre-Hijrah Islam," *Islamic Studies* 1, 2 (June 1962): 65–87.
- (21) From al-Faruqi, "On the Nature of Islamic Dawah," especially pp. 47–40.
- (22) Information is available at <http://goingtotdc.com/>. Accessed January 11, 2013.
- (23) See David A. Kerr, "Islamic Da'wa and Christian Mission: Towards a Comparative Analysis," in *International Review of Mission*, 89, 353 (2009): 150–72; see p. 159. See also Jamal Malik, "Islamic Mission and Call: the Case of the International Islamic University, Islamabad," in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 9, 1 (1998): 31–47.
- (24) For instance, see Sheikh Kamal al-Mekki, and his online seminar called "Shahadah: Fiqh al-Dawa." Available at: <http://forums.almaghrib.org/showthread.php?t=43376>. Accessed September 27, 2012. See also the Soundvision Foundation, a nonprofit founded by Abdul Malik Mujahid of Chicago, at <http://www.soundvision.com/Info/education/pubschool/edu.dawapublic.asp>. Accessed September 27, 2012, for "dawa in public schools," extensive advice on strategies for Muslim students to spread the message.
- (25) See www.dawahskills.com, accessed on August 28, 2012. See also www.themodernreligion.com, accessed September 5, 2012, which provides information on what it means to convert with such subheadings as "Islam is for those who think," "Islam is your birthright," and an explanation that every person is born a Muslim because we are all created by God.
- (26) Accessed on December 12, 2012, at www.whyyislam.org. For another example of da'wa as corrective of misinformation, see The Deen Show at www.thedeenshow.com.
- (27) Boston Globe editorial, "Romney's Cave-in on Mosque Violates His Own Principles," August 25, 2011, last accessed on January 13, 2013, at http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/editorials/articles/2010/08/25/romneys_cave_in_on_mosque_violates_his_own_principles/.
- (28) For discussion, see Kathleen M. Moore, "Muslim Advocacy in America," in Jeffrey Kenney and Ebrahim Moosa, eds., *Islam in the Modern World* (New York: Routledge, 2013).
- (29) See Abdul Malik Mujahid, "A Case for Indirect Methods of Da'wa: In Light of American Reading Habits and Tolerance," last accessed January 13, 2013, at <http://www.dawanet.com/research/indirect.asp>.
- (30) Last accessed on January 13, 2013, at <http://www.shouldertoshouldercampaign.org/>.

- (31) See Emerick, *How to Tell Others About Islam*, 3rd ed. (Long Island, N.Y.: International Books & Tapes Supply, 1996).
- (32) See Andrew Buckser and Stephen Glazier, eds., *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003): 2.
- (33) See Rebecca Sachs Norris, "Converting to 'What' Embodied Culture and the Adoption of New Beliefs," in Buckser and Glazier, eds., *Anthropology of Religious Conversion* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003): 171.
- (34) For conversion narratives, see Carol L. Anway, *Daughters of Another Path: Experiences of American Women Choosing Islam* (Lee's Summit, Missouri: Yawna Publications, 1996); Anna Mansson McGinty, *Becoming Muslim: Western Women's Conversion to Islam* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Karin Van Nieuwkerk, "Islam is your Birthright': Conversion, Reversion, and Alternation: the Case of New Muslimas in the West," in Jan N. Bremmer, Wout J. van Bekkum and Arie L. Molendijk, eds., *Cultures of Conversions* (Lueven, Paris, and Dudley, Mass.: Peeters Press, 2006): 151–64. See also this website soliciting conversion narratives for a book, *Latino Muslims: Our Journey to Islam*, at www.latinomuslim.com.
- (35) See Kathleen M. Moore, *Al-Mughtaribun: American Law and the Transformation of Muslim Life* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995).
- (36) See Pearlit, "Islam, Prisons and Latinos," an article for Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, February 2, 2012, last accessed January 13, 2013, at <http://www.ispu.org/GetArticles/48/2557/Publications.aspx>.

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