

CHALLENGES FACING DA'WAH IN THE CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN SOCIETY: SOLUTIONS FROM AL-ILORI'S TĀRĪKHU-D-DA'WAH

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Abstract

The mission of the Prophets and their successors was to spread the message of Islām, enjoin righteousness and forbid evils. Thus, the reformation of the individual and society was the basis for which they were sent by Allāh. However, globalization poses challenges to contemporary *Da'wah*. Against this, this study delineates major challenges facing contemporary *Da'wah*, and responses to them with particular reference to Al-Ilori's *Tārīkhud-Da'wah*. The research adopts historical and analytical methods. It reveals that the ineffectiveness of contemporary *Da'wah* is consequential to the behavioral and interactional perspectives of *Da'wah* workers, which includes the lack of cooperation among Islamic preachers, misuse of modern technology, and proliferation of Christian missionary in the Muslim world. Therefore, a successful *Da'wah* strategy cannot be actualized without considering the internal and the external challenges in a realistic manner. Having identified the challenges, the study recommends certain resolutions that are essential for every *Da'wah* worker in transforming *Da'wah* to suit the limelight of the 21st century.

Keywords: Challenges; *Da'wah*; Nigeria; Al-Ilori; and *Tārīkhud-Da'wah*.

Introduction

The term *Da'wah*, as in Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* denotes several but closely related meanings such as invitation, prayer, call, encouragement and congregation as mentioned by Al-Azhari (2001) and Al-jawhari (1987). Literally, *Da'wah* means to call, appeal, and invite people either towards the truth or falsehood, appeal for an aid or a call for help. Technically, it is an act of enjoining righteousness for people, and calling them to guidance and warning them against vices as stipulated in Islamic principles for them to achieve salvation in this world and the next (Ibn Fāris, 1979).

However, in the modern period, *Da'wah* often refers to Islamic missionary activities, which are increasingly characterized by long-range planning (Al-Bayyānūnī, 1987). Equally, in religious sense, *Da'wah* refers to an invitation addressed to men by Allāh and His Prophets, towards the belief in the religion of Islām (Abu Ammar, 2016).

Al-Ilori (2004) defines *Da'wah* as;

صرف أنظار الناس وعقولهم إلى عقيدة تفيدهم أو مصلحة تنفعهم وهي أيضا ندبة لإنقاذ الناس من ضلالة كادوا يقعون فيها أو من مصيبة كادت تحدث بهم.

Directing people's sights and thoughts towards a doctrine that is beneficial to them, or an interest that is useful for them. It is also a call to rescuing people from misguidance, and preventing a disaster that can befall them.

Da'wah covers all aspects of human life, personally and collectively. Whenever the term *Da'wah* is attributed to Islām, it means an effort to spread and convey the message of Islām to people. *Da'wah* is also defined as the initiative to motivate people to enjoin the right and forbid them from the wrong so that they may succeed in this world and in the hereafter (Munir, 2005).

In the same vein, Munir also stated that the formal meaning of *Da'wah* could be identified in two ways: teaching the religion of Islām, its basic elements, facts, values and legislations. The second

identification involves external spread and conveyance of the religion. This is because, Islām in reality, is a complete social system which comprises all facets of human activity, and all laws regulating this activity. By and large, *Daʿwah* focuses on Muslims who are unaware and ignorant of Islām, and towards non-Muslims, many of whom may be searching for truth (Dato Safei, 2018). Thus, the reformation of the individual and society, morally and spiritually was the basis for which the Prophets and Messengers were sent by Allāh.

The primary objectives of the *Daʿwah* of the Prophets and Muslims scholars that take up the mission in every generation can be summarized in the following points (Lafiagi, 2022);

1. *At-Tadhkīr* (reminding people of their responsibilities)
2. *At-Tabshīr* (giving glad tidings to the believers)
3. *Al-Indhār* (warning people of the evil aftermath of disbelief)
4. *Al-Amr bil Maʿrūf* (commanding righteousness)
5. *An-Nahyu an al-Munkar* (forbidding evil)
6. *Al-Mujādalah al-Ḥasanah* (a healthy dialogue with the non-Muslims)

However, entering the era of globalization, *Daʿwah* is faced with complex challenges internally and externally, both from behavioral and interactional perspectives. Facing the shift to modernization era which is an inevitable necessity, Muslims are demanded to adapt wisely, upgrade their reasoning, and update their methods of propagating the religion (Basit, 2013). Modern exposures have had imprints on the society, morally and culturally, which make the implementation of *Daʿwah* uneasy. This is because when people become increasingly inquisitive and sensitive to the happenings around them, instead of referring religious matters to the scholars of Islām, they rather go virtually, because of an easy access to information online (Lafiagi, 2022).

This development caught the attention of many contemporary writers who authored books and wrote articles, in order to proffer solutions to the challenges of *Daʿwah*, and restore the pristine glory of Islamic *Daʿwah* in building a healthy society and creating a strong bond amongst the *Ummah*. One of these scholars is Az-Zahbī, who claims that the challenges facing *Daʿwah* can be summarized to lack of funding and lack of strategies from the *Daʿwah* workers. The present discourse, however, looks into other possible challenges and solutions.

Also, Siti Zainab, Nor Muslim and Abdul Azis, submit, in a combined effort, that the influence of modern life has pushed Muslims increasingly to follow the flow of change, and contemporary issues began to penetrate human life; both urban and rural areas, which have also entered the *Daʿwah* system that is being developed by the preachers and *Daʿwah* scientists in Indonesia. The researchers in this study, discuss the challenge of modernity and globalization on *Daʿwah* in Indonesia, as against the present research work that sets its focus on Nigeria.

However, despite the number of scholars who have written on this discourse, the present researcher was prompted to study the submission of Al-Ilorī because of his active involvement in *Daʿwah* and the relevance of his discussion to contemporary Nigerian society where he hailed from. Therefore, this study delineates major challenges faced by contemporary *Daʿwah*, both internally and externally, and how to respond to these challenges, with particular reference to Al-Ilorī, in his book, *Tārīkh-d-Daʿwah*. His submissions, along with those documented by other scholars of Islām, would serve as parameter for measuring the contemporary happenings regarding *Daʿwah*, and also a means of taking contemporary *Daʿwah* back into the golden area and transforming it to suit the modernity of the 21st century.

To achieve this objective, the paper is divided into the following sections; introduction, brief information on Al-Ilorī, overview of his discussion on the challenges facing *Daʿwah*, solutions to the challenges, and conclusion.

Brief Information on Ādam Al-Ilorī

Ādam bin ʿAbdul-Bāqī bin Ḥabībullāh bin ʿAbdullāh Al-Ilorī, a native of Ilorin as his epyname presupposes, was born in 1917 at Waza in the Dendi Local Government of the Republic of Benin. His mother ʿĀ'ishah was a princess of a reigning King of the town, and his father was an Islamic scholar (ʿAbdur-Raḥīm, 1976). Al-Ilorī hailed from ancestors who were people of knowledge, wisdom and noble characters. As a son of an Islamic scholar, he received his early elementary Qur'ānic education under the tutelage of his father. He studied from him the Qur'ān and other Islamic sciences such as *Fiqh* (Jurisprudence), *Ḥadīth* (Prophetic tradition), *Mahdhun Nabīyy* (Prophetic eulogy) and some poetic fragments before traveling to different states and countries in the quest for more knowledge (Abubakre, 2012).

He founded *Markaz at-Taʿlīm al-ʿArabī wal Islāmī* (Center for Arabic and Islamic learning) in the year 1952 at Abeokuta, an Institution that was moved to Agege in 1957. He liberated the study of Islām and Arabic from the traditional methods. He was a multi-talented scholar and a man of many holds. He was the founder of *Rābiṭatul ʿUlamā'i wal A'immaḥ* (League of Alfas and Imams), the membership of which covers seven states in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Throughout his life, he led the prayers as an *Imām* at his *Jum'ah* mosque which was and still a model for students and graduates of his institutions and other admirers. He gave his sermon in a spontaneous Arabic which was given interpretation into Yoruba every Friday. He was a prolific writer and a sound scholar with over one hundred books and manuscripts in Arabic on Islām and related subjects. Among his works is the book under study, *Tārīkh Ad-Da'wah Ilālāhi Bayna Al-Ams wa Al-Yawm*.

The Challenges of Da'wah according to Al-Ilorī

Al-Ilorī, in his discussion, summarizes the challenges facing contemporary Da'wah to four points;

1. Inundation of Da'wah world with incompetent and unskilled individuals
2. Insatiable hunger of Muslims for a materialistic life
3. Wrong approach to Da'wah
4. The Influx of Christian Evangelists into the Muslim world

He expatiates the above points as follows:

(a) Inundation of Da'wah world with Incompetent and Unskilled Individuals

Al-Ilorī believes one of the major problems facing contemporary Da'wah is the involvement of incompetent and unskilled individuals in it. The activities of these charlatans pose dangers to the pristine teachings of Islām. According to him, Da'wah is an honorable mission, but its prosperity lies on two things; knowledge and action. This is because, whoever possesses the knowledge of Da'wah but does not engage in it, could be likened to someone who keeps away antidotes from his neighbors who are groaning in pains, and whoever engages in the mission without adequate knowledge, is like one who treats patients without any medical expertise. He concludes by saying that the combination of knowledge and action in Da'wah activities makes one an inheritor of the Prophets and Messengers, and a successful *Dā'ī* (Da'wah practitioner).

According to him, ignorance among the Muslims creates misgiving and misunderstanding, misperception and misrepresentation, mistrust and hostility, of images, both false and true, which seems to have become permanently lodged in hearts of the non-Muslims. Most of the impressions and perceptions created by ignorant Muslims are ill-founded. Da'wah today faces the challenges of unskilled individuals who do not know where and when to kick-start their activities, or who do not prepare and plan ahead, or who work for different purposes, worldly or political, more than they work for the course itself, the hereafter and the Lord of the worlds. Therefore, they turned Da'wah into a commodity that is being put off for sale.

Also, Al-Ilori, in his explanation of incompetence in the *Da'wah* terrain, places emphasis on lack of proficiency in Arabic Language by some *Da'wah* workers. He submits that an aspiring *Dā'ī* must possess an in-depth knowledge of Qur'ān and *Sunnah* before he could embark on the mission, and the understanding of these sources relies majorly on proficiency in the language of the Arabs. It is on this note that he explains the historical connection between Islām and Arabic, and concludes with remarks of many past scholars of Islām, such as Ibn Quṭaibah and Imām Mujaḥid, who have subscribed to the essentiality of Arabic Language for every *Da'wah* worker. They believe deficiency in the language of the Arabs might render *Da'wah* activities unproductive and misleading.

(b) Insatiable Hunger of Muslims for a Materialistic Life

Al-Ilori questions the large number of graduates of Islamic Universities, and the scarcity of those who devoted themselves to the course of *Da'wah*. He claims that the majority of graduates of Higher Institutes today have distanced themselves away from *Da'wah*, because it is not a white-collar job where riches can be generated, and ranks can be upgraded to greater levels. They rather aspire for government jobs, for a better living. He reiterates that most graduates of Islamic Studies today, want to live the life of ministers, ambassadors and commissioners, even with their knowledge that most of the Prophets and their successors in every generation chose aesthetic lives. He continues by saying that since the Umayyad dynasty, when the *Da'wah* was separated from politics, *Da'wah* has been furnished with thorns, not surrounded by sweet basil and not covered with carpets except for worldly sweetness that comes out it occasionally.

He submits that the ascetic living of our predecessors was instrumental in the spread of Islām and its teachings in different parts of the world, as no one enters a country, or a city today, small or large, without finding a Muslim, whether devoted or passive.

Al-Ilori (2004) gives the credit of this achievement to the preachers among individuals, groups, states and governments, and to Schools, Institutes and Universities that have been the centers of *Da'wah* for hundreds of years. He concludes that, however, people began to doubt and suspect the credibility of Islamic practitioners when they abandon *Da'wah* for a greener pasture.

(c) Wrong Approach to *Da'wah*

Al-Ilori submits that the contemporary Muslims are poor in their *Da'wah* methodologies and strategies compared to the Christian Missionary that takes an interest in training their evangelists intensively before they could embark on evangelism. The Christians believe it is necessary to practice the process of monasticism and priesthood, just as the knowledge of chemistry, pharmacology and anatomy, are necessary in medicine, and also as learning the law and the legal profession are important before taking the judgeship. No matter how knowledgeable a man is in other fields of knowledge, he cannot carry out evangelism until he undergoes necessary trainings in the Institute of Missionary. It is on this account that Higher Institutes and Colleges were established almost in every part of the world to train missionaries, who are to endure the hardships of missionary, to practice subsistence and contentment, and to live in remote areas where luxury is removed.

Every Christian denomination around the world has Institutes and Colleges for training and graduating missionaries. The first of this type in West Africa dates back to the year 1827 AD, in the city of Sierra Leone. The first of this kind in Nigeria was established in 1934 in Ogbomosho, Oyo State, and beside it was a big hospital.

Al-Ilori (2004) admits that this methodology in Islamic *Da'wah* can only be traced back to the first generation of Islām, or to some revivalists among Muslim scholars, and some *Ṣūfī* scholars. Although some Islamic Institutes and Universities, such as Al-Azhar, Az-Zaytūnah, Al-Madīnah University, Khartoum, the Institutes of India, and dozens of their like in the Arab-Islamic world, still teach students the rules of the Arabic language, the principles of Islamic law, graduate preachers,

orators and Imāms who propagate *Da'wah* until today. He concludes that, contemporary *Da'wah* in Nigeria is in dire need of people who are competent, skilled and updated, and are ready to propagate *Da'wah* for the sake of Allāh.

(d) The Influx of Christian Evangelists into the Muslims World

When the missionaries invaded the Islamic world, and showed amazing activities in every field, in the field of education, medicine, employment, publishing and distribution, and the field of planning and organizing, enticed people with material wealth, their influence extended to all parts of the country, and their nightmare became a heavy burden on the hearts of believers in all countries. According to Al-Ilori (2004), their threats to Islamic *Da'wah* can be summarized in colonialism, orientalism and westernization.

Colonialism is the invasion of the Christian evangelists into Islamic countries, to exploit their bounties, and enslave their people under the pretext of European intellectual, moral, material, cultural and political privileges. Western colonialists are supporters of crusade missionaries who work together side by side and for one purpose. If the colonists advanced to a country and gained ground, they invite missionaries to it, and declare an absolute freedom of preaching and for this reason, colonialism and evangelization mixed like water and wine. The bishops of churches were the ambassadors of colonialism in every colonial country, so colonialism put the affairs of education and medicine in the hands of the Crusader missionaries, and every government hospital bears the emblem of the Red Cross. Anyone who graduates from government schools must swear an oath of obedience to the church to preach the crusade in every position he holds, whether he is a ruler, manager, judge, minister, teacher, merchant or maker. Having realized the teachings of Islām as the only obstacle that could obstruct their flow, they weakened Islamic civilization, replaced it with western, and caused disunity among the Muslims by providing deliberate misinformation and distortion of truth through the instrumentality of the mass media.

Orientalism, according to Al-Ilori (2004), is the faking of love and loyalty to the etiquette, culture and language of Islām where a priest or a monk disguises as a student or a researcher of an eastern historical truth, so he mixes with Arab scholars in cities, villages and institutes to learn the Arab language, and their traditions with the intention of undermining them. Afterwards, he authors, in his own language, a book about Islām. A book that contains fabrications and misinformation, thereby harms Islām and the Muslims.

The first known Institute of this kind is the Institute of Oriental Studies, which was established in 1916 at the University of London, and then other universities in America, Canada and other countries of Europe worked in same manner. Their goal was to distort the beautiful face of Islām, question the true beliefs of Muslims, overturn the facts in the manner of fallacy, understate the value of the classical Arabic language, and to give preference to the colloquial or what they call (modern Arabic) over the old, so the Muslim students in their Institutions become enemies of Islām and Arabic language, and then prefer the cultures of the west over Islamic cultures. (Al-Ilori, 2004).

Lastly, Westernization is the diverting of Muslims' directions in different parts of the world, from their respective countries to complete their studies in the west, where their healthy thoughts will be polluted, and then turn to atheists who believe what they want and criticize what they want out of freewill. On their return to their respective countries, they begin to wage war against their people, culture, traditions and creed. They see goodness in what they brought from the west, and evils in the teachings and doctrinal beliefs of their ancestors and scholars, and are always filled with rage and hatred for those who cling to that language, belief and culture. They believe they have religious and intellectual superiority over every other person. A poet said:

إذا شئت أن تحيا سعيدا لديهم فلا تك عربيا ولا تك مسلما

If you wish to live happily among them, neither should you be an Arab nor a Muslim.

Combating the Challenges of *Da'wah* Activities

In combating the myriads of challenges facing contemporary *Da'wah*, Al-Ilori suggests the following;

1. Attention should be given to the steps of the Christian Missionary, and their methodologies should closely and carefully studied, so that the Muslims can learn their plot and counter their moves, as to save themselves, their children and grandchildren from falling victims to their plans.
2. Establishment of centers of training for aspiring *Da'wah* workers, just like the Christian Missionary that take an interest in an intensive training for their prospective evangelists before they could embark on evangelism. Al-Ilori believes *Da'wah* will strive ceaselessly against these walls of ignorance, prejudice, and hostility, and find a way to overcome them through rigorous teachings of basic foundations of Islām.
3. Adoption of the *Da'wah* methodologies of the Prophets and Messengers of Allāh, most especially the *Ūlū al-ʿAzm* (The Resolute Messengers) among them. These Messengers were sent to mankind like many other Prophets of Allāh, but their determination and steadfastness in the propagation of the religion of Allāh placed them in a high and leading rank among other Prophets. They are five (5) in number, and the list includes Prophet Nūḥ, Prophet Ibrāhīm, Prophet Mūsā, Prophet ʿĪsā and Prophet Muhammad. Al-Ilori submits that the Messengers have adopted different styles and methods in *Da'wah*, and their methodologies should serve as a manual for every *Da'wah* practitioner.
4. Adoption of an ascetic lifestyle of the Prophets and early predecessors, who had lived a simple and moderate life, even with the riches some of them were blessed with. He advises that contemporary Muslims, most especially the graduates of Islamic Studies to engage more in *Da'wah*, and should endure the hardships of the course, practice subsistence and contentment, and be able to live in remote areas where luxury is removed in order to neutralize the inundation of Christian evangelists in those areas. There is hardly a village, most especially in Yorubaland that does not have a church and primary schools within the church.

Other ways of combating the contemporary *Da'wah* challenges include;

1. Strengthening *Da'wah* with Modern Technology

There appears to be a consensus on the compelling reason for preachers of Islām to utilize modern instruments to carry out the mission of *Da'wah*. Technology has broken down physical, geographical and political barriers that once may have stood in the way of completing things proficiently and effectively (Dato Safei, 2018). The new breed of techno-*Da'wah* is a critical perspective for advanced Islām. Without them, it would be troublesome to present the genuine Islām in this post-modern world that we currently live in. Unlike Al-Ilori's era, the new era is becoming more techno-smart, and the better way to approach the post-modern generation is to use technology to narrow the gap between the *Dāʿī* (caller) and the *Madʿūww* (invited). ICT, for instance, could be utilized to share and disseminate information on Islām. Multimedia could be used to teach kids and adolescent how to read the Qur'ān correctly. This would make learning the Qur'ān more interesting, especially to today's children. Social media is another powerful tool to propagate the religion. A wise use of the platform will enhance the propagation of the religion.

2. Display of Real Islamic Lifestyle

Word alone, however, does not suffice. *Da'wah* can be by writing, speaking, behavior, manner, sharing and caring with and for others. The best *Da'wah* is to be a good example. Success in *Da'wah* work means first of all knowing Islām and Qur'ān and being familiar with the traditions and stories of

the Prophet Muhammad's life, for only then it is possible in conversation to give answers to followers of other faiths (Muhammad, 2018).

Da'wah through humanitarian causes should be pondered thoughtfully in order to prove the fruit of Islām. Without such credibility, the whole effort of *Da'wah* will be rhetorical and devoid of meaning. Unfortunately, it has been left to Christian missionaries to work on such lines (Olalekan, 2022). Showing the fruit of the teaching is more effective than calling to something abstract and theoretical which is written on papers.

4. Establishment of Standard Arabic and Islamic Schools

There is a dire need for the establishment of Standard Arabic and Islamic Schools, infused with Western education subjects most especially in the rural areas. With an Islamic oriented curriculum, students' scope will be widened to the basic knowledge of Islam and they will also receive quality education that will sharpen their thoughts (Siti Zainab, Nor Muslim and Abdul Azis).

Conclusion

Da'wah or calling people towards submission to Allāh is one of the major themes of the Qur'ān. The Muslim *Ummah* is commissioned to play a role in creating peace, justice, balance, moderation, and fairness within the Muslim community, and in the human society at large.

However, the strategy of *Da'wah* has to be proactive and not reactive. Modern challenges to *Da'wah* are both methodological and phenomenological. The era of globalization modernity has its own peculiar challenges. The major challenges *Da'wah* faces today are actually more complex. The preacher's competence, geographical condition, changes in mindset, attitudes, and social behaviors are a number of real challenges faced in the regency.

By and large, this study has been able to establish that a successful *Da'wah* strategy cannot be actualized for our contemporary time, let alone the future, without taking the internal as well as the external challenges in full consideration in a realistic and comprehensive manner. Finally, serving Allāh through serving humanity needs to become the rallying point of *Da'wah* movements, their activists and advocates.

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