The Practice of Da'wa to Promote Relationship Building



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Introduction

Da'wa (invitation to believe in the religion of Islam) was practiced early in the history of Islam. After Mohammad settled in Medina, he started practicing da'wa via militant jihad. In the early and medieval Islamic periods, da'wa was closely connected to war, expansion, and occupying new territories. While scholars differ about Mohammad's original purpose of da'wa, traditional Muslim scholars claim that he intended right from the beginning to spread Islam beyond Arabia to the end of the world. Western scholars affirm that Mohammad started his invitation to Islam early in his life, but he did not intend for the religion to become a world religion. His followers were "chiefly concerned with territorial expansion, not religious conversion" (Kuiper 2021, 69). More recently, Islamic expansion has stopped, and da'wa has taken a more subtle approach, shifting toward a peaceful invitation to promote Islamic belief among future generations and inviting non-Muslims to believe.

Within the history of Islam, the role of women in da'wa was limited. In the early history of Islam, da'wa was practiced mainly through jihad by expanding into other territories. Local people were given the choice of death or subjugation. Women were not allowed to participate in jihad or lead men in prayer; therefore, they were not allowed to practice da'wa. In modern times, women are still given a limited role. They are not to be imams or to lead men in prayer (Bukhari, Hadith no. 7099), but they can be teachers to female students. After explaining the history of da'wa from early Islam to modern times, I will investigate the shift that occurred in the direction of da'wa and examine several study cases among Muslim women in different Islamic communities. By understanding and applying the principle of da'wa, Christian women in the U.S. and overseas can use culturally accepted practices to promote friendship with Muslim women and answer their questions about the gospel.





The Historical Practice of Da'wa

Da'wa During the Expansion of Islam

Da'wa is the act of inviting people to embrace Islam, roughly equating to the Christian ideas of witnessing and proclaiming the good news. Da'wa was originally proclaimed in a context of inter-religious debate. Mohammad and his followers practiced da'wa in a context of multi-religious groups who devoted a considerable amount of time to define their doctrines and beliefs. The writer of the Qur'an shows great awareness of other religious interlocutors and often addresses them by name with phrases such as "Oh people of the Book" (Surah 3:64), "Oh Polytheists" (or pagans) (Surah 6:106; 9:3), "Oh Jews," and "Oh Christians" (Surah 9:30). So, the Qur'an's da'wa was established among several competing da'was, but it was seen as superior.

In the Qur'an, variants of the word da'wa occur over 200 times (Lane 1968, 882-885). The term includes calling, inviting, summoning, exhorting, and invoking. It can have a secular meaning (an invitation to someone's house) or a religious meaning (calling someone to believe in Allah). In the Qur'an, Mohammad was sent to people as da'i to Allah (missionary preacher or caller). Allah speaks in Surah 33:45-46 stating, "O Prophet! surely We have sent you as a witness, and as a bearer of good news and as a warner, and as one inviting to Allah by His permission, and as a light-giving torch." In the Qur'an, the da'wa of Allah and Mohammad are virtually inseparable. Mohammad states in Surah 4:20, "O you who believe! obey Allah and His Messenger and do not turn back from Him while you hear." Similarly, in Surah 20:24, "O you who believe! answer (the call of) Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life." This is to indicate that da'wa is made decisively through Mohammad, the seal of the prophets (Surah 33:40).

Islamic da'wa is not meant to be local, but international. Mohammad's da'wa was mainly local. He directed it to Arab people. The first people that Mohammad invited to Islam were his wife (Khadija), his cousin (Ali), and his friend (Abu Bakr). Soon after, Mohammad started inviting his tribe. His da'wa began as a local invitation and almost immediately turned into a universal one—especially after he was well-established in Medina. On the one hand, Mohammad was an Arab man who was sent to Arab people with Arabic Qur'an (Surah 42:7). On the other hand, he was sent to the people of the Book, the Jews, and polytheists (Surah 7:157), who are all over the world. Muslim scholars use this analysis to emphasize the international goal of da'wa. Allah did not intend for only the Arabs to believe in him, he wanted the whole world to convert to Islam.



Da'wa during Medieval Times

During the medieval period (AD 632-1100), Mohammad's da'wa continued to expand after his death in AD 632. Within just under 120 years, Muslims conquered and established rules over territories stretching from North Africa and Spain in the West to the Indus River (South Asia) in the East. The generation who carried on Mohammad's conquest was traditionally seen as the best Muslims who ought to be imitated (Ibrahim 2018, 1-8, 145, 236-40). The Islamic beliefs and practices that were developed after Mohammad's death were projected back onto the life of the Prophet in order to grant them legitimacy (Kuiper 2021, 69). The Islamic conquests were understood as following the steps of Mohammad, and many Muslim thinkers and regimes throughout history believed that "expanding the borders of Islam through military jihad was one of the chief duties of a Muslim ruler" (Surah 9:29; also Kuiper 2021, 68).

Muslim commanders issued a da'wa to Islam before attacking new cities. However, scholars do not agree whether the intention behind the conquests was to foster conversions to Islam or to expand into new territories. In the seventh century, the Arab-Muslim elites created a dual society in which the conquerors would constitute an aristocracy and the conquered people became a subject population who worked and served under Islamic rule. As Kuiper mentions, "The former would serve as military elite and the latter as producers and taxpayers. Given their need to fund the expanding Islamic empire, it is clear that the Arab rulers were less than eager to seek the conversion of non-Muslims" (Kuiper 2021, 69). This strategy brought more funding and allowed for more expansion. Because of the conquests, many other nations such as Turks, Persians, Kurds, Mongols, and others embraced Islam to avoid taxes.

During medieval times, the Abbasid Empire was the first Muslim movement to organize da'wa (see Sharon 1983, 19). Guided by divinely sanctioned leadership, their da'wa was a restoration of the pure Islam attributed to Mohammad. This period of history also witnessed a mass production of theological works as they pursued intra-and inter-religious dialogue. Many debates occurred in the court of some caliphs to win Christians to Islam. Moreover, Islam spread as immigrants entered Muslim domains (Dar al-Islam) and gradually converted to the dominant religion. For example, Turkish migration between the ninth and the twelfth centuries led many Turks to become Muslims (Levi and Sela 2010, 48). Muslim sects, such as Sufis, did their da'wa through preaching, offering spiritual protection, building institutions, and serving as heroes of the faith modeling and mentoring other young Muslims (Kuiper 2021, 122).



Da'wa in the Modern Era

During the colonial and post-colonial periods (1500-1945), an idealized epoch of Islamic history started, which included the emergence of tajdid or reforms (Kuiper 2021, 144). Muslims were able to indigenize Islam in new territories. One of the famous eighteenth-century reformers was Mohammad 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792), who allied with Ibn Saud's regime in Najd, creating a military expansion throughout Arabia with the Wahhabi da'wa. Kuiper explains that "in order to justify militant expansionism, 'Abd al-Wahab drew on the hadiths and legal precedents . . . regarding the necessity of extending da'wa to unbelievers before fighting them, and he argued that this principle could also be applied to wayward or false Muslims" (Kuiper 2021, 145). In Wahhabis' theology, da'wa was generally connected to jihad and military expansion.

In the modern era, Muslims started experiencing the world differently. During this time, Europe was experiencing the Enlightenment and the scientific revolution along with new Western styles of schooling, human rights (especially women's rights), and the abolition of slavery. During that time, the Islamic world was ruled by a sole authority, the Caliph or the Sultan, who forbade the use of Western technologies (e.g. printing press) because of the possibility of religious innovation (Robinson 1993, 233). Therefore, Islamic reformation was not an option. Muslims did not practice da'wa because they were not expanding.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the old-style elites (e.g., the sultans) were challenged by foreign administrators, soldiers, and locals who were educated in the West as journalists, lawyers, and bureaucrats. Western technologies, such as the invention of airplanes, telephones, and later, computers, and the internet, changed people's lives, including Muslims. Muslims started using Western technologies to travel, communicate, study, and conduct business. All these things decreased the image of the sultan and allowed the Muslim world to be controlled by non-Muslims. During this time, Muslims began immigrating to Western countries, and all Muslims, immigrants, and those who stayed in their countries began to use Western technologies to conduct da'wa.

Muslim scholars changed their da'wa strategies after being in contact with Christian mission organizations. After benefiting from many Western advancements and inventions that colonialists left behind, Muslims began to translate the Qur'an into many languages. They also started empowering lay Muslim people and preparing them to practice da'wa (Kuiper 2021, 155). The Muslim political leaders who led Muslim nations in the post-colonial and modern periods were secular nationalists or socialists.



Though they look at Islam symbolically, they were largely concerned with shaping modern nations. Kuiper observes, "The peoples of these nations were to be mobilized, educated and disciplined by the state, not for religious ends, but for seemingly secular projects of national development" (Kuiper 2021, 205). Therefore, da'wa took a different direction. It was no longer reliant on jihad, but happened by empowering lay Muslims and by teaching Islam to non-Muslims.

The Process and the Methods of Teaching Da'wa

From its inception until the present era, da'wa has shifted its focus from militant expansion to a more peaceful and educational approach. Islamism and the Back-to-the-Root Movement is a modern political ideology that emerged as a new phenomenon during the twentieth century (Roy 2004). Islamism is a response to the formation of secular states that emerged in postcolonial Muslim countries. Therefore, da'wa has become important to raise awareness of Islam. Nur Fuad states, "Da'wa is seen to be a crucial process to raise consciousness among Muslims on how they can overturn the situation through a religio-political revival" (Nur Fuad 2020, 20).

Although da'wa is directed toward men and women (Surah 33:73), women have been absent from participating in da'wa throughout history. In most traditional societies in the past, men played the decisive role in the socio-economic, political, and religious sectors, while women played the supporting roles. However, after the post-colonial developments and the influence of the West on the Muslim world, many Muslim women in different Islamic countries gained some religious authority, allowing them finally to be part of Islamic da'wa. This progress has helped strengthen the Islamic belief and the community among Muslim women. In what follows, I provide examples of the role of da'iyat (female religious teachers) and how they practice da'wa today in Syria, Indonesia, and the Western world.

Muslim Women and the Work of Da'wa in Syria

Modern da'wa in Syria was established by Imam Ahmed Kuftaru who tried to connect Sufi practice with orthodox Sunni Islam (Chagas 2011, 209). Kuftaru allowed women to have their voice within the system. The female Kuftariyya (named after Kuftaru) is formed by various independent and interconnected circles (halaqat). Each circle is led by a charismatic female who leads hundreds of students. Gisele Fonseca Chagas explains, "They are organized by a hierarchical principle that can be described metaphorically as a pyramidal form, with the top position being occupied by the



da'iyat" (Chagas 2011). One of the Kuftariyya members states, "We are as a tree. Shaykh Kuftaru is the root, Shaykh Ramadan Dib is the stem, Anisa Nadwa [Miss Nadwa] is the branch, and we, as her students, are the leaves. It is a chain and we are all connected" (Chagas 2011). These da'iyat are knowledgeable in Islam. Some are academically trained and hand-picked by Imam Kuftaru himself. They teach the Qur'an and explain it through stories and examples from everyday life.

In Syria, Muslim women doing da'wa focus on strengthening the weak. Chagas describes the bond between the da'iyat and their students:

The strong emotional connection linking the disciple to the shaykh is an important element that gives this relationship a feeling of trust and intimacy, which affects all aspects of the disciple's life... the framework for the love mobilized by the female disciples to their Anisa [teacher], the charismatic leader, was based on her as a role model for embodied correctness performed by her (Chagas 2011, 211).

The women are willing to listen to Anisa and her moral teachings because of her strong charismatic presence. The goal of this movement is to spread Islam throughout the Syrian society, encouraging Muslim women to commit to religious practices such as prayer, fasting, and veiling. The circles meet in the mosques because of the Syrian government's surveillance on their activities to ensure there is no political agenda going on as they grow in their knowledge of Islam. These government limitations are not stopping the circles from growing and influencing more women to become better Muslims.

Muslim Women and the Work of Da'wa in Indonesia

Similar to the Kuftariyya in Syria, the Tarbiyah)education) movement in Indonesia was established to improve the religious life of Muslim women. Emerging around 1968, the Tarbiyah movement grew largely in big cities as a response to social change and emerging political competing parties. Campus mosques in secular universities held weekly studies circles (liqo) during the 1970s and 1980s (Nur Fuad 2020, 25). The liqo focused on improving the private piety of individuals, but they also attempted to develop a public agenda to Islamize local communities and, ultimately, the nation.



Both men and women participated in the liqo, though they met separately. The female liqo were led by Muslim female trainers, and each one included six to ten disciples. The lessons revolved around Islamic ideologies. Trainees were recruited from the neighborhood areas and sessions lasted around three hours (Nur Fuad 2020, 29). Meeting in disciples' homes and focusing on friendship and mutual encouragement, this type of da'wa helped Muslim women to find a community and safe place to share their life stories, find friends, and improve their religious life. On rare occasions, it was also a place for sharing the faith with non-Muslims.

Muslim Women and Da'wa in North America

Da'wa looks different in the Western world. Since Islam is not the majority religion in the US, religious leaders and places of worship function differently than in Muslimmajority countries. For instance, a mosque in the US is seen as a place of prayer and religious activities, including da'wa. The imam is a prayer leader, a preacher, an administrator, a counselor, an educator, an accountant, and a person who has duties related to conducting weddings and funerals (Poston 1992, 95). In Islamic countries, Poston states, "a multiplicity of institutions and officials share the duties of education, administration, and 'pastoring.' Legislative and judicial needs are met by the Shari'a law courts . . . Educational needs are met by the madrasas . . . Moral ethics are enforced by a combination of governmental decrees and the social pressure created by the Islamic ambiance" (Poston 1992, 95). In other words, in Muslim-majority countries, there are Islamic universities run by Muslim faculties who teach the fundamentals of religion to students, who in turn become imams, professors of Islamic studies, and Islamic jurists. The Islamic studies students can specialize in certain activities and not just become imams at the mosques; whereas in non-Muslim majority countries, the imam is just one person who has multidisciplinary roles in his mosque and among his community. This is to say that non-Muslim majority countries lack the institutions and the personnel, and the mosques function as multifunction centers to serve many needs. The multifunctional roles of imams forced many of them to establish multipurpose Islamic centers where they could teach Arabic language, Our'anic studies, and practice da'wa.

Muslims living in the U.S. encounter challenges raising their kids and teaching them about Islam, strengthening their own faith, and practicing da'wa toward non-Muslims. According to Thomas Arnold, unlike Christians, Muslims "had no specially trained agents, organized proselytization system, or priesthood to do missionary work. Muslim individuals of all ranks of society had labored for the spread of Islam" (Arnold 1896, 332-33). Responding to this need, Muslims started practicing da'wa with two goals in



mind. First, they wanted to strengthen the faith of the existing community which was influenced by Western culture and the second is to practice da'wa. Howe writes:

MSA [Muslim Student Association] activities extended well beyond university campuses and included efforts to reach out to non-Muslim Americans. By the 1970s, MSA members had founded mosques, started financial trusts, created educational programs for both adults and children, and published copious periodicals, pamphlets, and other devotional and didactic literature such as the Parents' Manual (Howe 2019, 291).

The goal of these activities is to improve the public image of Islam (Howe 2019, 291). After 9-11 event, Islam lost its reputation as a world religion and was accused of being a religion that encourages hate. As social fears increased, it became more difficult to invite Americans to embrace Islam voluntarily. So, removing the notoriety of Islam among non-Muslims became a priority for da'wa in America. CAIR (the Council on American-Islamic Relations) is an example of another organization that was established in the US "to promote a positive image of Islam and Muslims in America" (CAIR n.d.). The organization uses media relations, lobbying, and education to make sure that Muslims in America are represented and empowered.

Since the beginning of the MSA (Muslim Student Association) movement in 1970s, women have been involved in a very limited capacity compared to their male peers. They served in roles that "reflected the organization's emphasis on gendered complementary spheres of social influence" (Howe 2019, 295). However, the MSA women's committee has had several publications related to parents, children, and families. Condemning sexual immorality and individualism in Western society, they have regarded Islam and the West as incompatible. For example, Jameela, an American Jewish convert to Islam, moved to Pakistan in 1962 and published dozens of books and pamphlets in many languages. She saw Islam and the West in oppositional terms, and she wrote to denounce American feminism. Howe writes, "She expressed horror at the movement's agenda, which included, according to Jameelah, the abolition of marriage, 'unqualified equality for men and women,' and unrestricted access to contraception and abortion" (Howe 2019, 299). Her da'wa was an alert to Muslim women not to be Americanized by Western culture but to protect themselves and their families by adhering to Islamic culture and standards. The early Islamic da'wa in modern times encouraged segregation from Western culture.



After 9-11, women became more involved in da'wa and contextualizing Islam within American culture. Educated Muslim women engaged in the political, economic, and religious aspects of life. They were also involved in fundraising for mosques, Islamic centers, and long-distance travel to national conferences to promote da'wa movements. For example, Linda Sarsour, who was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, and who became the face of Islamic feminism in America, wrote, "As an American Muslim woman I need to dispel myths about my faith, teach my community's stories, and preach courage in the face of injustice" (McLaren 2017, 147–161). Her da'wa was to increase and improve the public knowledge about Islam among non-Americans.

Another Muslim American woman who practices da'wa in the US but follows a different approach than the ones mentioned above is Haifaa Younis. She is an American who was born in Iraq and lived many years in Saudi Arabia. She graduated from the Mecca Institute of Islamic Studies and founded the Jannah Institute in the U.S. to teach women various Islamic studies courses. Younis' message does not focus on feminism or improving the image of Islam in the US as much as women's purification of the heart (tazkiay) and their relationship with God. Her institution is dedicated to women who would like to strengthen their relationship with God and know more about the Qur'an.

Chen and Dorairajoo interviewed several imams in various mosques in the U.S. to study how da'wa work is practiced in the U.S. They discovered that American Muslims understood da'wa in two ways. Indirect da'wa discusses the similarities between the two religions rather than emphasizing the superiority of Islam (Chen & Dorairajoo 2020, 1-17). Other Muslims took indirect da'wa to embody traits such as good personalities and behaviors. Chen and Dorairajoo explain that "the interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims played a decisive role in changing the latter's negative images of Islam, especially after the '9/11 attacks' when Islamophobia became an American obsession (Chen & Dorairajoo 2020, 6).

Direct da'wa, on the other hand, consists of sharing information about Islam with non-Muslims—regardless of their beliefs—and organizing inter-faith dialogues. However, Muslims did not follow the organized Christian way. Instead of making attractive brochures and distributing them on the streets, they preferred to share resources directly with people who showed interest in Islam (Chen & Dorairajoo 2020, 7). An Indonesian Muslim migrant explains, "I would love to keep in touch with the new Muslims once I meet them. I understand converts' pains and hardships they face from their families, friends, and our society. If we do not offer assistance during their difficult period, they probably will leave Islam soon" (Chen & Dorairajoo 2020, 8). Building



relationships and showing personal interest in people's lives have played a major role in da'wa among women.

The shift that happened in Islamic da'wa can be attributed to American culture. Women who live in the US have the freedom to choose their education, career, and direction in life. Many devout female Muslims took their da'wa from Allah seriously and dedicated their education and career to furthering the Islamic cause. Haifa Younis, for instance, is an American, board-certified obstetrician, and gynecologist; however, she left her job and founded the Jannah Institution to practice da'wa among women. She does not present herself as a theologian (Muslim women leave this job to their male partners), but she seeks to change the wrong image of Islam and strengthen the beliefs of her communities. Christian missionaries can learn several lessons from such Muslim women.

Lessons Female Missionaries Can Learn from Islamic Da'wa

Emphasizing Christian Piety

Piety is a very important trait most Muslims all over the world emphasize in their teachings. Some of them even consider piety as an indirect da'wa that attracts non-Muslims to Islam. For a Muslim, being pious means adhering to religious norms, such as praying, fasting, dressing modestly, and being a submissive wife. Chen and Dorairajoo's study shows that ninety-six percent of their interviewees (who were Muslim converts) had contact with Muslims before their conversion to Islam (Chen & Dorairajoo 2020, 9).

Some of the misconceptions that Muslims have against Christianity are related to fasting and praying. Not all Muslims know that Christians fast, pray, and help the poor. Therefore, Christian missionaries should explain to their Muslim friends that fasting, prayer, and helping others do exist in Christianity. Jesus instructed Christians to pray privately (Matt 6:6); whereas, Muslims' prayer is done in public. The call of prayer (adhan) should be performed loudly to remind every Muslim of the time of prayers. In Muslim-majority countries, men are encouraged to go to the mosques to pray and women pray at home. Moreover, fasting for Muslims is a public act. Muslims—men and women—are commanded to fast during the month of Ramadan. In the Qur'an, fasting is prescribed (Surah 2:183) and in the Hadith, Allah will award those who fast the month of Ramadan by forgiving all their past sins. Mohammad said, "Whoever observes fasts during the month of Ramadan out of sincere faith, and hoping to attain Allah's rewards,



then all his past sins will be forgiven'" (Bukhari, Hadith no. 38). CBS News reports that in the U.S., hundreds of Muslims gathering in Times Square in New York to pray during the month of Ramadan (CBS News, 2022). The article quotes several people participating in this public act to further da'wa and improve the image of Islam in the US.

Many Muslims think that Christians have loose morals, and do not pray or fast. The main reason for this misconception is that Christians pray and fast privately in their homes and churches. In Christianity, praying, fasting, and almsgiving are supposed to be done quietly, not publicly or it will lose its merits (Matt 6:6-18). For a Christian, these acts, especially good deeds, are supposed to be done privately because they are the results of a personal relationship with the Creator. They are not meant to be used for evangelism or to gain rewards in heaven. Muslims, on the other hand, believe that praying and fasting publicly is a form of da'wa. People who see them praying publicly and abstaining from eating food will ask them questions about Allah, which will give them the opportunity to share about Islam.

Christians, whether those who live in Muslim-majority countries or Muslim-minority countries, can take advantage of the month of Ramadan by inviting their Muslim friends over to share a meal and explaining what the Bible teaches about Christian prayer and fasting (Matt 6: 6, 16-17). Christians can even take this opportunity to pray for their Muslim friends who are observing prayer and fasting during this month to have a stronger relationship with God. God can show them the truth while their soul and heart are open during this time.

Answering Muslim Misunderstandings about Christian Teaching

Muslims have many cultural and theological misconceptions about Christianity. They reach these conclusions by reading the Qur'an (e.g., Trinity), or through the teaching of their religious teachers. Since many Muslim women participate weekly in Islamic circles to study the Qur'an, their da'iyat might address Christianity. However, the da'iyat are not qualified to teach Christian theology, and many Muslim women do not study the Bible on their own to investigate more deeply the doctrines that have been taught. Nur Fuad writes, "During my observations, however, I rarely found a situation in which the mentor built a good learning environment that encouraged the trainees to raise questions. In many cases, the trainees were passive, and tended to be afraid to express their opinions" (Nur Fuad 2020, 30). This problem might be cultural, especially since women are encouraged to follow their fathers or husbands; however, many men do not



raise critical questions as well because the Qur'an discourages Muslims from asking critical questions (Surah 5:101).

Christian missionaries, therefore, have a great opportunity to listen to the misconceptions that their Muslim friends have and address them over time. For example, the MSA included several articles where the writers equated the West with Christianity (Chen & Dorairajoo 2020, 7). But do the Western Christians think as Muslims think? Are all Westerners followers of Christ? Christians who live in the West would not agree with this description. Many Christians would not classify Hollywood, for instance, as Christian, but Muslims might equate between the two. Unless a Christian woman takes the time and effort to explain this truth to Muslim women, Muslim women may not have a chance to hear it.

Another popular theological misconception that Muslims raise is related to the crucifixion of Christ. Many Muslims expressed to me that they cannot believe in a God who has died. Mona Siddiqui wrote a chapter exploring the different theological views of the doctrine of salvation and redemption; however, she still cannot understand how can God die. She states, "The cross is powerful and the crucifixion is sorrowful. But as I sit here I feel that while the cross speaks to me, it does not draw me in. Its mystery is moving, but I cannot incline towards what it says about a God in form, a God who undergoes this inexplicable agony for an inexplicable act of mercy" (Siddiqui 2013, 242-243). This objection is very common and may even be difficult to answer. A good response is to clarify that in the crucifixion, God did not die. Rather, Jesus was raised from the dead because he is God. Learning the historical evidence about the resurrection of Jesus and its theological significance might help Muslims understand the redemption plan. The Apostle Paul reminds Christians that their job is to "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor 10:5, NIV). Missionaries, therefore, have a great responsibility to clarify religious and social misconceptions about Christianity.

Creating Religious Circles

Since Muslim women involved in da'wa are already accustomed to participating in religious circles, this could also be a strategy for Christian missionaries. One of the main struggles for immigrants coming to the West is the loss of their families and relationships, especially among women who come from traditional backgrounds and gender roles. Most of these women are stay-at-home moms and often do not speak the local language. I met many who do not want to work because they think that this is a



man's role. Their role is to cook, clean, and take care of the children and the husbands. However, because these women are at home most of the time, they feel bored and need social connections that will fill their time and needs.

Christian women can respond to this social need. When they see a new family in the neighborhood, they can offer their help to settle the new family and orient them to their new environment. Christian women can invite the new immigrants over, teach them English, take them shopping, and learn new recipes with them. Hospitality is a key in ministry. Paul writes to the church in Rome to "practice hospitality" (Rom 12:13). Hospitality is love in action because relationships require time and patience. Hospitality will open the door to many future conversations including religious ones.

When Christian women build community with immigrants, they can start home circles and home groups. These groups require a lot of time, love, and patience. Nur Fuad states, "Most of the ligo or halgat meetings that I attended . . . were noisy, with children crying and screaming. Consequently, the lessons were often stopped for a number of short periods whilst the mothers calmed their children down and got them back playing with their toys or else took them away from the circle. The ligo allows mothers to bring their children as it aims to accommodate mothers' responsibilities" (Nur Fuad 2020, 29). Despite the difficulties and the responsibilities of their children, Muslim women were enthusiastic and committed to improving their skills in learning and reciting the Our'an. Christian women can learn from these circles how to be patient and attentive to their Muslim neighbor's needs. They can understand and use the daily life challenges to build a strong relationship and ultimately share the gospel. Social networking is critical in these circles because it helps build personal relationships. The liqo, halaqat, or Islamic circles made it easy for the mentors to build the ethos of the groups and to disciple the trainees. Christian women have a great opportunity to build something similar to these circles and minister to immigrants.

Conclusion

Historically, women's role in da'wa was limited because of the status given by male theologians. Excluding women from da'wa was mostly for religious reasons and partially cultural. The Qur'an and the Hadiths include many verses that limit women's leadership (Hadith 1409 & Bukhari, Hadith no. 7099), and women's roles in many cultures were limited to the home and family. Despite the historical limitations, Muslim women were able to develop their leadership skills by constructing religious circles to strengthen the belief of weak sisters and spread Islamic da'wa to non-Muslims. While



the Syrian and the Indonesian examples were restricted to a few Muslim women leading other women, the Western examples, relatively speaking, were broader. Western teachers target Muslim women living in the Western world via conferences, published literature, and public lectures.

The main lesson that most Western missionaries can learn is the importance of relationships. Western culture is known to be individualistic; however, female missionaries should learn from Muslim women that personal friendships have more effects on human beings than lectures and written pamphlets. Personal relationships show the person's genuineness. The real change this relationship can make in a person's life is far more effective than hypothetical information. Moreover, correcting wrong conceptions about Christianity is also crucial, especially if it is done in a hospitable atmosphere where personal relationships are prioritized.

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