

The Dissemination of Dakwah through the Instrument of Civilizational Dialogue and Wasatiyyah according to Nursi's Thought

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Abstract

The field of dakwah from an Islamic perspective is too wide to be commanded but it could be penetrated through various appropriate approaches or instruments. What needs to be understood is that dakwah should be carried out with the aim of delivering the goodness and beauty of Islam to everybody, especially the non-Muslims. This article aims to discuss two instruments of dakwah according to the thinking of Nursi, which is civilizational dialogue and wasatiyyah. Both these instruments in the current context are immensely significant and should appropriately be used wisely for dakwah related to the dissemination of Islam. This article applied the qualitative approach by using the content analysis method to analyse the primary and secondary resources. The findings show that Islamic dakwah in the current context needs to emphasise the aspect of dialogue, which is anchored on convincing arguments and delivered in an ethical and morally sound manner. Wasatiyyah portrays the openness of Islam in accepting positive values from any party, besides being able to nurture the genuine Islamic faith and Muslim identity to counter any negative elements.

Keywords: Islamic Dakwah, Nursi, Civilizational Dialogue, Wasatiyyah, Islamophobia.

Introduction

The field of dakwah (preaching) involves religion, culture and societal structure. Islamic dakwah is a continuous effort towards appreciating Islam in a personal, family, community and national context in all aspects of life until there emerges a term called khayr al-ummah. The welfare aspect brought along by khayr al-ummah is not only limited to the Islamic society but also includes non-Muslims who belief in the principles of peace and harmony among humans. This suits one characteristic of Islam, which is the blessing on all of nature.

The dakwah strategy is a manoeuvre used in dakwah to achieve its aims. The strategy is related to an instrument because both complement and need each other (Anshari, 1993). In the context of current dakwah, neglecting the elements of discourse, the tools in cultural dialogue as well as Wasatiyyah as instruments would negatively impact the spirit and flame of Islamic dakwah, whether at the national or the international level.

DIALOGUE OF CIVILIZATION AS A PLATFORM FOR DAKWAH

Dialogue on civilization is a very useful instrument in realising the principles of dakwah, as stated in the al-Qur'an. Allah SWT exhorted:

“Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided”

(al-Qur'an, al-Nahl 16:125)

“Dialogue” is the most accurate word to best describe the meaning of exclamation, advice and debate as outlined in the verse above because these three elements are included in the actual meaning of dialogue.

In the field of dakwah, the two aspects involved are verbal dakwah and action-oriented dakwah (*lisan al-hal*). For Nursi, both these aspects are very important when portraying the truth about Islam and both need to be applied the best way possible in a dialogue. Based on the thinking of Nursi, the two elements that could help dakwah succeed through dialogue are solid arguments and good moral values. Morality is the core element in inter-human dialogue, whether it is between individuals or amongst societies (Mohd. Najib et al, 2003). Nursi used the term *iqna`* to picture a dialogue that is anchored on strong arguments that would satisfy the party that is listening (al-Nursi, 1995; 1998). According to Nursi, a party in dialogue who is *muqni`* needs to possess in-depth knowledge, able to present arguments well and base the arguments on *syarak*.

The religious preachers (dakwah) and the *murshid* must become analyst (*muhaqqiq*) in order to master the aspects of *ithbat* and *iqna`*. Besides that, they must also become researchers (*mudaqqiq*) so that they do not destroy the *syariah's* equilibrium as well as become good presenters (*balagh muqni`*) that keep up with the current situation. They should also evaluate and consider each element according to the *syariah* (al-Nursi, 1995)

Dialogue is the best platform to encounter people who are categorised as targets of dakwah because according to Nursi, dialogue is a better option and has a deep effect. Nursi's life and way of thinking is proof that he rejects any form of violence and coercion. Nursi considers those who have no knowledge as using the subversive approach to achieve their objectives (al-Nursi, 1995). According to Nursi, the truth cannot be portrayed through force or coercion because the truth should be delivered through love. In the present context, it is evident that the Islamic world is forced to face various accusations and abuse due to the violent approach of a small group of Muslims to defend Islam. The Muslim community, especially in America, have to face various difficulties and pressures such as the issues of Islamophobia, Islam and violence as well as the loss of 'privacy value' in their daily lives (Oboler, 2010; Markham, 2009).

Nursi stated that the modern day society is a group that is highly educated and civilised. They will not receive truth delivered through violence and coercion but rather they would prefer a dialogue based on intelligent and persuasive arguments. For Nursi, this is the kind of jihad that needs to be initiated when facing other civilizations. Nursi's firm stance on this matter is clearly seen when he argued in court while defending his method of dakwah by saying:

The weapon is (Parti al-Ittihad al-Muhammadi) in the form of arbitrary arguments whereby the victory over the literate moderns is only through iqna' and via the show of anger or coercion. The truth can only be vindicated through love and affection. Meanwhile, enmity is shown towards those who are wild and fanatical (al-Nursi, 1998).

During external Jihad, we must change our guard by using more potent weapons such as by using arbitrary arguments because victory over the civilized group could only be achieved through iqna^c and not through coercion (al-Nursi, 1995).

Violence causes Islam to be despised and ostracised, while dialogue that is muqni^c followed by good morals is able to attract the target group set by dakwah towards Islam. Nursi's method of dakwah that uses the dialogue platform emphasises on oratory prowess and actions because the dakwah's target group (mad'u) not only wants to witness the truth and beauty of Islam through oratory prowess but it must be proven by practical initiatives. According to Nursi, this kind of dakwah approach not only defends Islam but more than that, it is capable of attracting people to accept Islam as their principle of life. Nursi's confidence is evident in his speech;

If we practice good moral values and nurture strong beliefs (iman) pertaining to our actions and behaviour, followers of other religions would surely embrace Islam in numbers. Moreover, possibly countries around the world would bow to Islam (al-Nursi, 1395H)

The dialogue on civilization is a crucial channel for interaction between civilizations in this era of globalization. The world is a smaller place now, like a town, and inter-human interactions amongst various civilizations could occur with ease, just like what is happening now and Nursi anticipated this. He saw two factors that contribute towards the intra-civilization interaction process, which was namely, the progress in science and technology as well as the desire to "find the truth" that would eventually form human attitudes in the modern era. According to Nursi, both these factors are capable of portraying the truth about Islam to other civilizations, which before this (during Nursi's time) were prohibited due to the ignorance towards Islam, obsession towards religion and the unfounded loyalty to a group of religious scholars (al-Nursi, 1395H). With this, the current global situation that seriously needs a platform for civilizational dialogue should be taken advantage off by Muslims to defend and disseminate the truth of Islam.

WASATIYYAH AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN DAKWAH

Good relations between civilizations need to be formed through the Wasatiyyah approach (moderation) by accepting all positive values and rejecting negative values from any civilization. Hence, the similarities between civilizations would create a consolidated entity and differences would not lead to a clash in civilizations. Nursi had emphasised on this

approach through Khutbah Shamiyyah that rejects the two approaches in the form of ifrat and tafrit.

The ifrat approach is too 'soft', so much so that there is no preliminary mechanism. In the context of civilizational relations, this approach refers to accepting the West in total without screening the positive and negative elements. Among the leaders who share this thought are Salamah Musa and Taha Husayn. This group assumes that modernization and westernization are one and are inseparable. This means that the Muslim society wishes modernization to grace their country totally according to the West without considering the traditional cultural values and national identity (Samu, 2004). They believe that without Westernization, modernization will not succeed. Taha Hussayn stated in his book *Mustagbal al-Thaqafah fi Misr*;

It is the only one and there is no other alternative, whereby we must follow the journey of the Europeans and adopt their way of life so that we are of equal standing with them and become their ally in achieving a civilization whether it is good or bad, sweet or bitter well liked or despised, admired or scorned. Those who do not share this view are deceitful or have been deceived (Husayn, 1973)

According to him, the Muslim community needs to ardently adopt westernisation until the West totally accepts the Muslim community. In other words, the Muslim and Western societies should unite on all perspectives (Husayn, 1973).

The tafrit approach is a strong approach that rejects the flexibility mechanism in any one matter. In the context of this discussion, the tafrit approach means the rejection of anything Western in total. This approach is considered as a response to the ifrat approach. Those who believe this approach assume that whatever comes from the West is detrimental and not beneficial, which means that there is absolutely nothing good from the West that could benefit the Muslims. Thus, even more unfortunate is that any attempt to procure the positive values of the West is assumed to be a corrupted form of thinking that leads to a corrupted *aqidah*. Al-Mawdudi explained this belief by saying;

The supporters of this second approach, until to this day, still hold on to old traditions without wanting to evaluate their behaviour and do not want to use their time with some seriousness and focus to analyse what they have inherited from the previous generation; on what needs to be maintained and what needs changes.

The best approach to build a strong relationship between the West and Islam would be the *Wasatiyyah* approach or a sense of moderation that does not totally accept or reject other civilizations. This was the approach firmly and consistently applied by Nursi. This approach needs honesty and courage in making evaluations and taking action. Honesty and courage when stating the truth, is the self-evaluation of weaknesses for future betterment and at the same time, this improvement process could be imitated and learned by others. This is in accordance with the Hadith by the Prophet s.a.w. that attests to this truth. The Prophet exhorted:

The truth (*hikmah*) is when things belonging to the *mukmin* are missing and no matter where it is found; hence, whomever finds it has the right over the things (*al-Tirmidhi,1998*)

Nursi developed this modal approach by diagnosing the strengths and weaknesses that exist in Islamic and Western societies. According to Nursi, Islam is a religion that is capable of lifting human civilization to its ultimate apex by emphasizing a balance between spiritual and physical aspects. Nursi explained that it must be admitted that the weakness of Muslims is a reality and needs improvement. Hence, Nursi also reminded us that the weakness is caused by the attitude of Muslims themselves and not by the teachings of Islam. This indicates the existence in the differences between Islam and Muslims. Weaknesses and deficiencies could exist in Muslims and this shows the degree of confidence and the process of practicing Islam in these Muslims. Nevertheless, Islam has never been weak or deficient based on the divine deliverance by Allah s.w.t. This is in line with the emphasis by the Prophet s.a.w. meaning, "Islam occupies a high stature and there is nothing that can overcome it" (al-Bukhari, 1422H).

The diagnosis by Nursi explains the actual cause of the weaknesses of Muslims. He summarised five main factors that causes these weaknesses, which were i) feelings of despair, ii) loss of truth in social and political life, iii) desire for enmity, iv) ignorance of the relationship between spirituality among Muslims, v) wide spread cruelty, and vi) the determination to pursue personal interests (al-Nursi, 1395H).

When evaluating Western civilization, Nursi evaluated it with all fairness, without outrightly receiving or rejecting Western civilization. The West, according to him is divided into two, which is positive and negative. The positive side of the West is its greatest contribution to developing human civilization, which is through developing science and technology. For Nursi, the positive values in Western civilization are the product of true Christian teachings and depicted from Islamic civilization. The other races, especially the Muslims who reaped the benefits from the positive values of Western civilization, must be thankful to the West for the contributions. Nursi understood poverty, hunger and needs as the reality that the Islamic world had endured at a time that it really mattered.

Nursi understands that poverty, hunger and lack of basic needs were a reality experienced by the Islamic world when it most needed material development (Janan, 2010). He said that the negative values found in Western civilizations exist due to human thinking, especially among philosophers, which is not based on religious values. This kind of thinking leads to difficulties and destruction of human civilization by supporting a kind of philosophy that rejects divinity (for example atheism) and enthrones materialistic philosophy to the world (al-Nursi, 1999).

Thus, by using the wasatiyah approach, Nursi had succeeded in introducing a positive understanding that is capable of bridging not only Islamic and Western civilizations but also between the different civilizations on this earth. Based on this approach, all the societies on earth need to work towards sieving through and selecting the positive values from any of the civilizations for the good of the country and their civilizations. This approach is capable of avoiding the feeling of doctrinaire (taasub), enmity and at the same time help distance oneself from feeling apathetic and losing self-identity.

Conclusion

The principles of civilizational dialogue that uphold the values of similarity and accept differences in a positive manner could be successful by appreciating a moderate manner of thinking (wasatiyyah). This could be achieved by making civilizational dialogue a field of dakwah, which is carried out harmoniously by emphasizing the appreciation of etiquette and ethical dialogue.

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