

PAUL'S MISSIONARY THEOLOGY FROM A MUSLIM PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

In this article, I have explored the difficulties of Muslims in understanding Paul's Missionary Strategy in the light of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. Since the approach to missionary work that Paul sets out in this passage was also followed by later missionaries who were following Paul's own model, an understanding of this passage will at the same time help us to understand the overall perception of Christian mission. In this context, I have considered some interpretations of this passage made by New Testament scholars and presented my own interpretations on certain points. Finally, I have evaluated the mission strategy of Paul within the context of understanding of Islamic *da'wah*.

Introduction

As is well known, every religious tradition claims that it has a universal message to proclaim to people of other faiths in order to gain them. For example, while Christians fulfill this objective through missionary activities, Muslims do it under the name of *da'wah* works. Here we would like to ask whether the strategies and means are important to fulfilling this task for Christians and Muslims. Or by doing this task, are the means and strategies not important, since the critical thing is to convey the message to the other? So it does not matter which strategies and means we are using in our proclamation of our message to them. Within this context we would ask whether every way which leads us to fulfill our task is legitimate or not?

In this study we will focus on 1 Cor 9:19-23, wishing to consider Paul's mission theology. As a result of his missionary

activities, Paul removed Christianity from being a sect of Judaism and brought it to the status of a world religion. For this reason, in the opinion of some New Testament scholars, Paul is the architect and shaper of today's Christianity; others consider him to be a theologian and the greatest missionary in the history of Christianity.¹ Since the approach to missionary work that Paul puts forth in this passage was also followed by later missionaries who were following Paul's own model, an understanding of this passage will at the same time help us to understand the overall perception of Christian mission (Fleener 2003, 11). In this context, first of all we would like to consider the interpretations of this passage by New Testament scholars and present our interpretations of certain points. And then by evaluating the difficulties² that Muslims experience in understanding the approach in this passage within the context of Islamic understanding of da'wah, we will try to find an answer to the basic question that is expressed above in various forms.

1 Cor 9:19–23 and to Become All Things to All Men

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all that I might win the more. And to the Jews I became as a Jew that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without

¹ Bowers 1993, 608–9. On the Christian side, some Christian scholars consider Paul to be the founder of Christianity; others see him, not as the founder, but as a theologian and missionary. As for Muslims, they consider Paul to have acted like he was on Jesus' side but actually to have been a person (maybe a spy) who spoiled Jesus' message. See Muhammad 'Ata ur-Rahim 1994, 58; cf. Gaudel 1990, 207, 269.

² This difficulty is not only for Muslims. J. D. G. Dunn (1997, 104-5) explains that Paul is a pragmatist and flexible in this matter. Dunn makes it clear that in our present time we will not be able to fully grasp the truth about the strategy that Paul puts forward in 1 Cor 9:19–23. Victor Furnish also stated in his 1993 presidential address to the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature that "If Paul commands attention still, it is not because he is or ever can be fully understood, nor because anybody can ever succeed in putting him in his place...." See J. Mcray 2003, 436.

law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men that I may by all means save some. And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it.

“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more” (9:19). As is seen here, Paul, in order to be able to win believers in Jesus Christ, explains that he gave up his freedom, or, saying it another way, he made himself dependent on his audience. As we know, in Paul’s day a slave had virtually no right to do what he wanted. The slave-owner determined most of the things their slaves would do and forced them to do it (Pratt 2001, 280). According to the Acts 22:28, Paul possessed the privilege of Roman citizenship, which brought him much advantage. Thanks to this citizenship he was born free, and in spite of having a great deal of privilege that being a citizen of Rome brought, this indicates how much he humbled himself for Jesus Christ for the sake of his ministry (Ibid.).

Concerning this explanation, here is a different interpretation. The crowd that Paul addresses has an influence on the form of the message he announced. If it is desired that the audience understand the message, it must be presented suitable to its cultural forms, that is, an “Inculturation” method must be followed. It must be accepted that Paul’s carrying out a transformation of the gospel into Greek thought forms is the first example of this method (Chupungco 1989, 29). Some researchers, such as Adolf Schlatter and Georg Eichholz, have proposed that Paul wanted to convey the message in a form his audience would understand and made himself dependent on them; that is, in this passage he used this expression to show that he was their slave (Schnabel 2004, 954).

Paul, after making it clear in his expression that he was everyone’s slave, that is, that he would do whatever they wanted or whatever the situation would require, said, “And to the Jews I became as a Jew that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are

without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God . . . , that I might win those who are without law” (9:20–22). I wish to call attention to the following point in this expression. As is seen here, Paul mentions both Jews and those who are under the law in two separate sentences, and he also speaks about becoming like them. Are not “Jews” and “those under the law” the same? To some scholars, it seems obvious that they are.³ Why then would the same group be mentioned twice? By way of explanation, some have suggested that 1 Cor 9:19-22 forms a chiasmus (Lund 1942, 147-8). If Paul consciously constructed a chiasmus, perhaps he needed a group to contrast with “those without the law” in v.21. This is possible, but to suggest that Paul mentions “those under the law” merely to maintain chiastic structure is less than satisfactory. A more feasible possibility is that, in order to make his application as broad as possible, Paul intends for “those under the law” to refer not only to Jews, but to proselytes, God-fearers, and all who accepted (at least in part) the requirements of the Mosaic law. Hence, “those under the law” would be closely akin to but not identical with “the Jews” (Neller 1987, 134).

As is known, in Paul’s world, there were major differences between Gentiles and Jews in clothing, holidays, dietary habits, religious beliefs, family practices, and customs. Paul was known as “the apostle to the Gentiles,” but he also longed for the salvation of his own people, that is, the Jews, and was one who worked in this direction.⁴ If he had defended the rightness of the beliefs and practices of either one of these two groups, and if he had called the other group to identify with these, in our opinion, he would not have been successful. Thus this contradiction between the two groups naturally drove Paul, who wanted to win both of them, to

³ For example; Hans Conzelmann (1975, 160) claims the two terms are synonymously parallel; C. K. Barrett (1968, 212) makes similar assumptions.

⁴ Gal 2:7; Rom 10:1-2. Paul was convinced, not only that the voice of Christ had called him personally, but also that, through the special circumstances of the call, the mission to the Gentiles had been revealed as God’s will. To do otherwise would have seemed to him to be disobeying God’s command. See Martin Dibelius (1966, 67-8).

act flexibly⁵ and, like a chameleon, to change from one outward look to the other.

According to some scholars “not to be under the control of the law” (9:21) or in another expression, “to be free of the law” does not mean that Paul was not subject to any rule or law.⁶ Beyond this expression, it indicates that from now on Paul carried out all the requirements of the Law of Moses, especially dietary rules that separated Jews from Gentiles. Since Paul believed that God’s deliverance was only in a certain form through the intervention of Jesus Christ, in his theology on the point of the provision of salvation, from now on the law had no further function. In that case, the problem here is not whether Paul complied with a set of rules like purification or eating, but whether he applied certain rules according to his audience. For example, when Paul was in Lystra on his second missionary journey, he had Timothy circumcised whom he wanted to take with and whose mother was Jewish (Acts 16:3). In contrast, he did not think it necessary that Titus, who was not a Jew but a Greek, be circumcised (Gal 2:3). Is it not a contrast that Paul, who often in his letters indicates that the law lost its validity with the coming of the Messiah, had Timothy circumcised? Both F. C. Bauer, founder of the 19th century Tübingen School, who suggested that the writer of Acts formed the passage that told of Timothy’s circumcision, and F. F. Bruce, who believed that the circumcision had no connection with Paul and that, moreover, Timothy’s being circumcised was in order to change the appearance of even Paul’s missionary call, were working to come up with a solution to a difficult problem (Peerbolte 2003, 104).

⁵ Pratt 2001, 280. For similar explanations, see Wright (2004, 117); C. Hodge (2000, 164-166).

⁶ For example P. Richardson accuses Paul of not having followed his apostolic principle of accommodation consistently when he confronted Peter in Antioch: as Paul claims that he adapts to specific situations in a flexible manner, he should not have criticized Peter, who adapted his behavior to the demands of Jewish Christians from Jerusalem, having the right to do so as apostle for the Jews (see Schnabel 2004, 956).

Here are a few other examples on the same subject. Paul, after preaching and planting churches for years among the Gentiles on his three missionary journeys, returned to Jerusalem to support the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem on the point that he still lived in a manner that observed the law. In this way he was trying to show that he did not teach the Jews in the Diaspora that they should abandon Moses, saying that they should not have their children circumcised or should not follow their customs (Acts 20:25). Here Acts 21:20–26 is another striking example that can be mentioned in this regard:

When they heard it, they praised God. Then they said to him, “You see, brother, how many thousands of believers there are among the Jews, and they are all zealous for the law. They have been told about you that you teach all the Jews living among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, and that you tell them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs. What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. So do what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow. Join these men, go through the rite of purification with them, and pay for the shaving of their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself observe and guard the law. But as for the Gentiles who have become believers, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication.” Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having purified himself, he entered the temple with them, making public the completion of the days of purification when the sacrifice would be made for each of them.

As is understood from this passage, Paul wanted not only Gentiles, who previously had not been accountable to the law, but at the same time Jews who were found among the nations *not* to keep a set of commands in the law. Since he wanted the Jews to reject the Law of Moses, and in light of the probability that Jews, who had heard that Paul was coming, would kill him, he was asked to take part in a purification ceremony and to pay the sacrifice expenses for four people. Paul carried out this request. As we know, Paul, when he returned from Corinth at the end of the second missionary

journey, also had his hair cut at Cenchreae in order to give the same impression (Acts 18:18).

Also in the section of the first letter Paul wrote to the Corinthians where he discusses his opinions about the meat of sacrifices that have been offered to idols, we see that Paul displays the same approach. Here he makes it clear that, if something he eats would cause his brother to stumble and fall, for the sake of his brother not falling, Paul would not eat the meat (1 Cor 8:13). In this situation we can say this: namely, that Paul, if he had been a missionary working with Muslims, he would not have eaten pork; if he had been a missionary working with Hindus, he would not have eaten beef.

In this connection, on this point we wish to affirm the point of view in connection with the law made by Krister Stendahl, who is recognized as having brought a new dimension to the subject of Paul's vision. The understanding of Paul's Damascus road experience as his finding the way to God and his own personal conversion as leading to a rejection of the law has a long history, starting from Augustine. And until recently this understanding was accepted among Bible experts. However, recent scholars, particularly K. Stendahl, with the views put forth in his book *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, have caused a set of questions to be raised about the traditional understanding of Paul's Damascus road vision (Stendahl 1976, 7-23).

According to Stendahl, Paul's Damascus road experience, according to traditional definitions of a vision, was actually not a true religious change. According to him, Paul did not change religion. He now had a new call, but, as a Jew, he was serving the same Lord. As for his task, it was to bring the Lord's message to the Gentiles (Ibid. 7-8).⁷ This view of Stendahl's is correct, at least

⁷ When we consider the important changes that Paul experienced after the vision, we are of the opinion that something happened in this experience of Paul's that went beyond a call or a charge. Because first of all, after the vision, Paul's message changed: he began to announce Jesus in the synagogues, saying that Jesus was the Son of God. Second, his relation with

when we consider that Jesus and his first disciples were each Jewish and committed to the Mosaic Law and that there was then no such religion as Christianity (Koperski 2001, 44).

Along with this, Paul, as Stendahl and some other researchers⁸ who identify with his viewpoint have explained, essentially did not change his religion and, as a Jew, was serving the same God. But in that case, why did he think that the keeping of the requirements of the law of this God—at least the part dealing with circumcision—was no longer required for everyone? Paul, given his assignment by Jesus—who, while he was a Jew, was bound to the law—on the one hand, saying that the law was not without value (Rom 3:31, 7:12, 16; 1 Cor 7:19) did not oppose Jewish Christians who continued to carry out the law. On the other hand, even if the number of the sons of Israel was as many as the sand of the sea, as long as they did not believe in the Messiah they would not be able to be saved by being bound merely to the law (Rom 9:27), because Paul was insistent on the point that salvation came only through the Messiah. Approaching things in this manner, that is, because of cultural and ethnic reasons, Paul—who wanted to win people from both groups, Jew and Gentile, among whom he carried out missionary activity—in light of the conditions of his time, thought of it as a missionary strategy that a Jew, along with believing in the Messiah, would be able to carry out the requirements of the law, but that it would not be necessary to force Gentiles on this point, who earlier were not responsible to the law.⁹ That is, if we could express it briefly: this new understanding Paul had regarding the law is the result of his missionary responsibility toward the Gentiles.

Jesus' disciples changed. Finally, the form of his mission changed. He turned from a Gentile hater to a missionary who brought the gospel to Gentiles.

⁸ For similar explanations, see Rudolf Otto (1936, 232) and Ronald D. Witherup (2003, 20).

⁹ See A. A. D. Ajijola, *The Myth of the Cross*.

http://www.islam4all.com/myth_of_the_cross.htm (Accessed 29.04.2009).

Another reason for Paul's opposition to law comes from the sociopolitical structure in which he lived. As we know, Paul carried out his missionary activity within the borders of the Roman Empire, which had a distinctive tradition in the area of law, as in all other areas. Paul was telling the people who lived within such a system that they should believe in Jesus Christ for salvation and, together with that, that they also should respect the divine law. Given the fact that Paul was presenting an alternative to the existing Roman legal system, which was closely related to the imperial authority, and was directing people toward a different legal system, it is no surprise that Paul, who did not want to incur the wrath of the existing authorities, adopted such an understanding for the sake of avoiding conflict with the Roman administration and of carrying out his activities more comfortably (Gündüz 2001, 223).¹⁰

Paul, in this passage from 1 Cor 9 that we have tried to clarify, besides Jews and Gentiles, talks about another group of people, namely, "the weak" (v.22). "The weak" are possibly those believers at Corinth who were conditioned to eating sacrificial food as "idol food", conscious of the demons' presence (Johnson 2004, 148). As has been explained, the weaknesses, from the standpoint of knowledge and maturity, among the strong and well-informed people in the Corinthian church have not been taken into consideration. Besides, these persons insisted on the matter of eating the meat of animals that had been sacrificed for idols, and they thought that it was right for them to have freedom on the point of such behavior (in the first statement in the passage Paul called the Corinthians' attention to their freedom of behavior in this and several other matters, and also called their attention to the fact that he himself was free but, in order to reach his goal, had made himself a slave).¹¹ As for Paul, unlike them, he talked about

¹⁰ For more information about Paul's view of the Law, see H. J. Schoeps (1959, 168-213); D. Wenham (1995, 225-230); J. McRay (2003, 360-371).

¹¹ Pratt 2001, 281. For the explanation of this expression of Paul, see the immediately preceding passage in the same letter.

becoming like the weak ones in the manner of his behavior and in this connection about becoming weak together with them.

Paul, in order to win his audience, after the examples that he brings up, which he discusses in various forms, punctuates his words in the form of a general statement that reflects his basic mission strategy: “*I have become all things to all men that I may by all means save some*” (9:22; Fee 1987, 431-32).

Although E. P. Sanders (1983, 185-6)¹² states that the best way to read 1 Cor 9:19–23 is to accept it as an exaggerated form, calling attention to the difficulty of accepting it as literal. Paul—whom Schnabel explains as formulating in this passage the principle of a missionary lifestyle, without making clear any limit to it (Schnabel 2004, 953; also Haacker 2003, 27), and who possessed a very sharp intellect—as was seen in the above explanations, adopted an understanding of mission that considered it legitimate to use all kinds of means in order to realize his goal and to assume various outward forms.¹³ But what is Paul’s reason for following such a strategy?

In Gal 1:10 Paul affirms that his goal is not to please people: “Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ.” But in 1 Cor 10:33, with an understanding that is the exact opposite of what he says in Galatians, he talks about how he works to please everyone in every way. In what follows, wanting to show himself in the right, he talks in terms of preparing himself, not for his own benefit, but to obtain their salvation. That is, as we have understood, Paul’s goal is the spread

¹² Since he sees the wrong conclusions that such an understanding would bring forth, Sanders points out the difficulty of understanding this passage as a literal description of Paul’s behavior.

¹³ This understanding, although not systematic, which considers every road permissible in order to reach a goal, reminds us of a Machiavellian understanding, which was systematized, being improved by the Italian thinker Machiavelli (1469–1527).

of the gospel and winning more people.¹⁴ In order to realize this goal, the strategy followed and the methods used have no importance.¹⁵

Paul made three major missionary journeys between 46 and 58 CE. On these journeys he established local churches in important cities in the world of his time such as Ephesus, Corinth, and Thessalonica. Paul, who had the goal of announcing the gospel to more people, understood that, after establishing new churches, he had to leave the area and, to lead these newly formed churches, appoint leaders selected by each assembly. Paul, in the first letter he wrote to Timothy, lists the following characteristics that should be found in the leaders of this church:

This is a trustworthy saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that rules well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless (1 Tim 3:10).

Paul makes it clear that, even if people possess these characteristics, they must first be tested and only then, if there are no areas of their lives that can be criticized, can they take up their responsibilities. The theology of Paul, who in our opinion is not a systematic theologian, is full of inconsistency, and in this matter also a difficulty comes to light. That is, for Paul, who thought it

¹⁴ In the passage we are considering in 1 Cor 9:19–23, Paul makes this point five times, speaking of winning “the more,” “Jews,” “those who are under the law,” “those who are without law,” and “the weak.”

¹⁵ For more information about missionary strategies of Paul, see J. H. Kane (1976, 72-93); R. Allen (1989); W. P. Bowers (1993, 608–9).

was legitimate that he himself uses all kinds of means in order to win more people, to want a leader like himself to have a set of qualities that, in our opinion, contradict what Paul himself is—like to be known as a good person among other people outside the community and *to be one whose actions line up with his words* — is, to be quite frank, a rather bizarre matter.

No matter how much in recent times it might even be debated in academic circles (Neller 1987, 129-42), if one looks at the course of history, it will be seen that Paul's mission strategy itself, which we have tried to explain above, has been adopted and put into practice in every period, including in our own days, by missionaries who take it as a model. For that matter, this was also Paul's wish. In 1 Cor 11:1 Paul, just as he takes Christ as an example, wants Christians to take himself as an example. That is, from this we understand that this method is a strategy that is not an understanding unique only to Paul but is also something desired to be carried out by missionaries who follow Paul's own example. If we could give an example from our own day, for missionaries in foreign countries, it is recommended that they carry out their activities based on the seminars they receive on how they should carry out their activity and on the books written to guide them. They should live close to the living standards of the people in the area, that they dress like them, that they eat the local food and make it seem like they are adopting their audience's beliefs— that is, as required by this principle, in order to win the person they are with, they act not as they are but in different manners (Dorr 2000, 222-39; Borthwick 1987, 133-45; Whiteman, 1997).

Also, as a second example, it is necessary to mention people who hide their identity after changing to Christianity from various other religious traditions. David Barrett and Todd Johnson explain that, as of the year 2001, there are 14 million Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims who have hidden the fact that they became a Christian in

order not to attract the attention of members of their former religion and to participate more effectively in mission activities (Barrett and Johnson (2001)).¹⁶ Certainly this situation is one that overlaps with the mission strategy of Paul, whom Heikki Räisänen describes as “hopelessly inconsistent or insane or an idiot or a rhetorically self-serving chameleon” (Eisenbaum 2000-2001). However, because such an attitude does not at all harmonize with Islamic belief, it is natural that Muslims have difficulty when it comes to understanding it. Moreover, even some NT scholars like Räisänen argue that it is necessary to stop trying to understand Paul.

An Evaluation on 1 Cor. 9:19-23 in the Context of Islamic *Da'wah*

Islam, in spite of its assertion that it is the last and universal religion, has given people the opportunity to choose their faith freely because of the verse, “There is no coercion in regard to religion” (Al-Baqara 2/256). This statement means that everyone can choose any religion he/she likes and also, that those who choose Islam cannot be forced to do anything. Mushriks (heathens), Jews and Christians living in Islamic states have freedom of religion and the freedom of conscience. For example, a Christian can choose Islam or another religion freely just as a mushrik can be Jew or Christian. Nobody can be forced to be a Muslim. An example of this is when Sultan Mehmet II gave the Orthodox Christians freedom to continue in their faith and worship after the capture of Istanbul.

In another verse it is said that “(O Prophet!) go on admonishing them, for you are only admonisher; you are not there to coerce them” (Al-Ghashiya 88/21-22). With this verse it is demanded by

¹⁶ See www.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/globalchristianity/gd/findings.pdf (Accessed 26/04/2009).

Muhammad that someone should be only a witness, herald, and warner. Beyond this, it is demanded from him or her not to force anybody to change their religion and not to interfere in their free wills.

“To force” mentioned in the verses given does not absolutely mean “to force physically.” This author believes it should be viewed as compulsion when the inviter transmits his faith or practice to others deviously in order to convert them to his religion and that, as Paul does, he or she becomes everything for everyone because these kinds of things affects people’s choices.

As it can be understood from the verses above as well as the verses below, it is demanded from Muslims to invite the followers of the other religion to the way of Allah on condition that they will not force, in other words, not influence the free wills of others:

Call men unto the path of your Lord by wisdom and excellent admonition. Present the cause to them through argument yet more sound. Your Lord knows best who has gone astray from his way and who is rightly guided (An-Nahl 16/125)

To every people have we appointed rites and ceremonies which they must follow: let them not then dispute with thee on the matter, but do thou invite (them) to thy Lord: for thou art assuredly on the Right Way (Al-Hajj 22/67).

The word *da’wah* is derived from an Arabic consonant-root, *d-’-w*, with several meanings, such as call, invite, persuade, pray, invoke, bless, demand, and achieve. Consequently, the noun *da’wah* has a number of connotations too. Isma‘il Al-Faruqi defines *da’wah* most succinctly from the Qur’anic verses mentioned as fulfillment of the commandment “to call men unto the path of Allah.” (1982, 33). According to another definition, the invitation is “a sacred duty that, beginning from one’s own person, like the example of circles forming a halo around a stone thrown into the water, passes in turn to one’s family and relatives, to one’s neighbors and friends, and that extends first to Muslims and then, in stages, to all humanity” (Önkal 1981, 14).

This term has been conceptualized, institutionalized, and applied for divergent purposes throughout the course of history. Theologically, *da'wah* refers to the call of God to Islam, conveyed by the prophets. The invitations of prophets and messengers call people out of darkness into the light; rescue them from evil, sins, and pain.¹⁷ So the crucial point in the two Qur'anic verses mentioned above, if we look at them carefully, is that Allah asks Muslims to invite other people, not to become like Muslims themselves, but to walk on the straight ahead (of Allah), in other words, to call them personally to Allah himself. Christian missionaries, who necessarily understand the "Great Commission" as the fundamental basis of their mission, call members of other religions to become personally like themselves by being baptized and by personally becoming a member of a church. Muslims, in contrast, invite those who are not Muslims to become the slaves of Allah, who is the fundamental reality, the Creator and Sustainer of everything.

Here is the point we wish to stress: It does not matter which religion we talk about; when an "inviter" or "a missionary" calls people to his own religion and when he explains his religion's principles and rules, he may sometimes begin with certain fervor. Soon after beginning in such a manner, however, the work of explaining and defending his own religion may change into that of defending himself and of struggling with his opponent. In this manner, the religion that at first invited him comes finally to a state of being made concrete in his own personality (el-Bûtî 1982, 23). For example: in the Battle of the Trench (CE 627), Hazrat Ali had overwhelmed and knocked to the ground a powerful infidel soldier who had been brutal against the Muslims. Ali took out his sword and, just before killing the infidel, gave him one last invitation to Islam. When Ali did that, the warrior, who could not stand being defeated, and so Ali would kill him quickly, spit in Ali's face, who was ready with his sword in the air. When this

¹⁷ C. Hedin, J. Torsten and D. Vesterlund (2004, 170). See also A. H. M. Zahniser (2002, 558).

happened, Ali suddenly got off the soldier and put his sword back in its scabbard. He gave up the idea of killing him. The infidel, who expected to die, did not understand anything about what just happened. With surprise, he asked Ali, “You had drawn your sword. There was nothing at all to stop you from killing me, so why did you change your mind? Why did your anger suddenly subside?”

Hazrat Ali answered: “I was wielding my sword for Allah. I am Allah’s lion; I am not a slave to my own desires. At first, I was going to kill you for the sake of Allah. But after you did what you did against my person, if I had killed you, I would have been doing it for the sake of my own person. However, everything I do must be for the sake of Allah.” It is certainly clear that we must follow this path. All can agree about the conclusion that comes to light in following this road.¹⁸ Today, as we know, this understanding underlies the source of the struggle among the various groups that are in the same religion.

As we have tried to explain in the examples presented above, the basic reason that Paul’s general missionary strategy expressed in 1 Cor 9:19-23 which cannot be accepted by Muslims, is that it seems like *taqiyya*. *Taqiyya* combines the meanings “defend oneself, avoid, hide, conceal, dissimulation, act hypocritically, pretend to be a friend with someone you don’t like, conceal one’s true opinions and beliefs.” *Taqiyya* is a more complex concept and it is most prominent within *Shia’h* rather than *Sunni* Islam. Normally, a Muslim is expected to declare his belief, so to deny it is a grave sin. However, according to tradition, the Shi’ite imams were faced with oppression from the Sunni majority, and in order to preserve the well-being of both their followers and themselves, they dissimulated.¹⁹ As is evident, in the understanding of *taqiyya* we are talking about a person engaging in hypocrisy. In contrast,

¹⁸ In spite of this understanding concerned with *Da’wah* there might be some Muslim groups who go beyond these bounds. Such understandings do not accord well with Islam.

¹⁹ For more details see R. Gleave (2004, 678-9); J. W. Morris (2005, 8999-9000); O. Leaman and K. Ali (2008, 140-1).

Allah asks all Muslims, including those who invite others to Islam that they not behave hypocritically, as expressed in the saying of Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi, “Either come across to others as you really are, or be just as you come across to others.” In many verses the Holy Quran strongly condemns religious hypocrites who act in a way that hides their true identity (At-Tawba 9/101, Al-Baqara 2/9-12, Al-Maeda 5/41, Hud 11/5).

As we know, Prophet Muhammad never deviated from his course of action—whether he was in the environment of idolatrous Mecca or whether, after the Hegira, he was in Medina and busy with relating with Jews and Christians. Despite offers of all kinds of things by the polytheists in Mecca, such as property, wealth, and high position in order to get him to change his lifestyle, he simply said, “Even if they put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left, I’ll never change my behavior!” and rejected their proposals. In explaining this point, we find no confidence in Paul’s changing from one outward look to the other in order to gain worldly benefits. The point we want to make is that Hazrat Muhammad, in order that the message of Islam be spread and that more people become Muslim, did not assume different identities and did not behave as Paul did, trying to please everyone.

In some verses of the Quran, such as, “Therefore stand firm (in the straight path) as thou art commanded!” (Hud 11/112); “Now then, for that reason, call them to the faith, and stand steadfast as thou art commanded, nor follow thou their vain desires!” (Ash-Shura 42/15); “O ye who believe! Why say ye that which ye do not? Grievously odious is it in the sight of Allah that ye say that which ye do not?” (As-Saff 61/2–3), both Prophet Muhammad and Muslims, whom Allah commands to follow Muhammad as an ideal model, is asked to be straight ahead, in other words, in the context of our matter not to alter completely their appearance and also not to act hypocritically. As indicated in the Sura of Al-Kalam 68/9, persons addressed may ask the inviter to flatter themselves but he should not take such expectations into consideration.

Prophet Muhammad also invited Muslims to avoid this kind of bad behavior by sayings like, “The worst of people is the two-faced who comes to these people with one face and to others with another.”²⁰

Conclusion

By the way a writer expresses the nature of the Islamic *Da'wah* or of the Christian mission, it is possible for those addressed to be influenced from two directions—by reason or by feelings and emotion. When looked at carefully, it can be said that matters that influence the heart are usually more effective than matters that influence the mind (el-Bûtî 1982, 48). Thus, to give a recent example, we may evaluate in this framework the approach of missionaries who in 2006 went to Indonesia in the wake of the earthquake and tsunami that struck there and who tried to help people in various ways, carrying out their missionary activities in this manner. Consequently, for inviters of Islam or Christian missionaries it is normal that they should convey the message in a form their audience would understand and in this context they may learn the language and culture of the person addressed, and speak to people in an attractive way. But it is unacceptable to win adherents by going beyond the bounds of what could be considered acceptable or honest, completely altering their appearance in order to please everyone or even deceiving people by assuming a false identity in order to promote their message.

Today there is profit in reminding people that the reason for the preconceptions that Muslims have against the term “inter-faith dialogue” is that, Christians, who act along the lines of the understanding of Paul that we have advanced here, have throughout history carried out their missionary activities under various understandings and outward guises. It is obvious today,

²⁰ Bukhari, chapter of Judgements, 27, chapter of Good Manners 52; Abu Davud, chapter of *Good Manners*, 39.

though, that people holding different beliefs often live in a given area as neighbours, share the same work places and, thanks to the mass media, are extremely well informed about each other. They feel the need for members of different religions to cooperate in order to promote peace in our globalized world (Crafford 1995). For this reason, we must set aside our traditional prejudices, based on our different historical experiences, which influence our views of members of different religions and our relations with them. This is one step. Another is that we should view the people we see, not as enemies to be suspicious of, but as potential friends (Volf 2005, 11). And, in relation to our subject, as representatives of the pluralist approach would say, nobody should force the followers of other religions or insist on converting them to his/her religion:

I venture to offer two concluding comments on the pluralist position as it is set out in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*. One is from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge. The culture in which this type of thinking has developed is one in which the most typical feature is the supermarket. In a society which has exalted the autonomous individual as the supreme reality, we are accustomed to the rich variety offered on the supermarket shelves and to the freedom we have to choose our favorite brands. It is very natural that this mentality should pervade our view of religion. One may stick to one's favorite brand and acclaim its merits in songs of praise; but to insist that everyone else should choose the same brand is unacceptable (Newbiggin 1989, 168).

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