



## Evangelism In Muslim And Christian Contexts: A Comparative Study Of Mission Strategies

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**Abstract:** The idea of mission is not an exclusive concept and practice of a particular faith. Rather, it is a recognized practice among adherents of various religions, the Muslim and the Christian communities inclusive. The word “evangelism” from the Greek origin evangelion meaning ‘to bring good news’, which has its similitude to “At-Tabshīr” in the Arabic language. Evangelism is a child of necessity born out of the desire to execute God’s given mandate to the believers. The thrust of this paper is to critically examine evangelism in the Muslim and Christian contexts, with emphasis on the areas of convergence and divergence of mission strategies. The study employed historical, descriptive, and participatory observation methods for data collection. These availed the work the opportunity to trace related historical facts and describe issues as examined, while data were analyzed using a peer-reviewed submission of the authors. It was observed that the use of force in evangelism is unethical, inhumane, and irreligious. Therefore, the study recommended that adherents of both religions (Islam and Christianity) should embrace their similarities in mission and shun religious particularity and exclusivity.

**Keywords:** Christian and Muslim Contexts, Comparative Study, Mission Strategies

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### Introduction

The idea of evangelism is not an exclusive concept and practice of a particular faith. Rather, it is a recognized practice among adherents of various religions, the Muslim and the Christian communities inclusive. The word “evangelism” from the Greek origin evangelion meaning ‘to bring good news’, which has its similitude to “At-Tabshīr” in the Arabic language. From time immemorial, both religions (Islam and Christianity) have co-existed in the same society, relating in terms of marriage, social cohesion and development, and leadership, among several others (Albrecht, 2012).

Evangelism, the act of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, holds a central place in Christian practice and theology. Similarly, Da'wah, the Islamic practice of inviting people to understand Islam, is a fundamental aspect of Muslim religious

duty. Both Christianity and Islam, the two largest religions in the world, emphasize the importance of spreading their respective messages to believers and non-believers alike. However, the methods and strategies employed in these evangelistic efforts can differ significantly due to theological, cultural, and contextual factors.

This paper, titled "Evangelism in Muslim and Christian Contexts: A Comparative Study of Mission Strategies," seeks to explore and compare the mission strategies utilized by Christians and Muslims in their efforts to evangelize. By examining the historical development, theological underpinnings, and practical approaches of both religions, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how evangelism is conducted in diverse cultural and religious landscapes.

In Christian contexts, evangelism has evolved through various phases, from the early apostolic missions to contemporary approaches that incorporate modern technology and media. The methods employed can range from personal witnessing and community service to large-scale crusades and digital evangelism. Each strategy reflects the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation, aiming to effectively communicate the Christian faith in a manner that resonates with different audiences. In contrast, Islamic Da'wah emphasizes a different set of principles and practices (McClymond, 2010). Rooted in the Quran and Hadith, the mission strategies in Islam often involve personal interactions, educational efforts, and community-oriented activities. Islamic evangelism is also deeply intertwined with the concept of Ummah, the global Muslim community, which plays a crucial role in the dissemination of Islamic teachings.

By conducting a comparative study of these mission strategies, this paper will highlight the unique challenges and opportunities faced by both Christians and Muslims in their evangelistic endeavors. Furthermore, it will shed light on how these strategies are adapted to local contexts, especially in regions where religious plurality and interfaith interactions are prominent. Ultimately, this comparative analysis aims to foster a deeper understanding of the diverse ways in which evangelism is practiced and perceived across different religious and cultural contexts. It will also contribute to ongoing dialogues about interfaith relations, mutual respect, and the shared goal of promoting peace and understanding in a multi-religious world.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Evangelism: An Islamic Perspective**

Islam is a missionary religion that encompasses all facets of human existence and makes universal claims. Islam is a political religion as well, holding that the laws of Allah, as revealed in the Quran and demonstrated by the Sunnah (the customs and sayings of Muhammad's life, which are regarded as normative), must govern

both public and private spheres. Islam is a complete faith system that demands total submission of the individual to Allah. Muslims must demand that all people surrender to and recognize Allah as the ultimate ruler of the universe (Hamzah, 2021).

In line with this, the Almighty saddled His prophets with the responsibility of passing His messages, which contain glad tidings as a result of upholding the truth and detachment from falsehood to people. It is believed by the Muslims that the prophet closes the gate of prophethood, thus the need for the continuation of passing the glad tidings to people of the present generation. This led to the emergence of Islamic scholars who inherited the responsibilities of the prophet in conveying the message of God. This action is technically known under the Islamic umbrella as *Da'wah*.

Linguistically, the word "*Da'wah*," is derived from the verb "*Da'a*" which means to pray, call, urge, invite, seduce, encourage, and complain. It also denotes prayer, appeal, call, invitation, suggestion, encouragement, seduction, and request among others (Saputra et.al 2021). In a technical sense, *Da'wah* refers to an intentional endeavor to guide people toward the path of goodness, whether via words or deeds, to achieve welfare and happiness both here on Earth and in the Hereafter (Saputra et.al 2021).

It is generally agreed that Muslims are obliged to call and invite everyone to full submission to the one God (*Tawhīd*). This call is clearly expressed in the third chapter of the Qur'an, the historical context of which is a polemical dialogue of the prophet with visiting Christians from Najran who were urged to become Muslims. Allah says;

“Say [O Mohammad], O people of the Scriptures [Jews and Christians]: Come to a word that is just between us and you, that we worship none but Allah, and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take others as lords besides Allah. Then, if they turn away, say: Bear witness that we are Muslim” (Q.3:64)

The obligation of *Da'wah* is both a collective duty (*Fard kifāyah*) of the Muslim community and a personal duty (*Fard 'ayn*) of each Muslim (Fitria, 2020). This is not unconnected to the fact that preaching happens at various levels. It happens between oneself, family, and the society at large. Hence, it should be personally and collectively established as demanded by the circumstances.

The Quran and the hadith contain several references to *Da'wah*. The prophet himself is considered the prime model for the implementation of *Da'wah*. His life in word and deed is considered the normative model in all aspects of faith and life and valid for every succeeding generation. With a thorough comprehension of the

definition, components, forms, and application of *Da'wah*, Nuraedah, and Mutawakkil (2020) make a deduction of the following;

Firstly, *Da'wah* is not the same as lectures, sermons, or *Tabligh*. On the other hand, it encompasses the dissemination of religious teachings through oral (*Bi'l-Lisān*), written (*Bi'l-Kitābah*), and social action (*Bil-Hāl*) means as well as acts. Second, the system of *Da'wah* implementation consists of several components, including *Mad'uw*, or invited individuals, and *Dā'iy*, or preacher. Furthermore, some teachings derive from the Qur'an and Sunnah, to achieve enjoyment for humans in this world as well as the next. Third, individuals, families, and communities are among the targets of *Da'wah* (*Mad'uwuw*). This elaboration shows that *Da'wah* activities happen to be obligatory. Fourth, implicitly the above definition also implies that *Da'wah* must be well organized and planned. Because *Da'wah* activities are continuous and never-ending programs and need to be done together.

Experts typically define *Da'wah* differently than language would have it understood to mean. *Da'wah* is always defined as calls, suggestions, invites, and exclamations. This indicates that they (language and experts) both believe *Da'wah* to be persuasive rather than oppressive. They support educational *Da'wah* rather than coercive *Da'wah*. Any action that forces someone to choose between their life as a Muslim and their death is not classified as *Da'wah*. If the invitation to Islam is made by twisting the teachings of Islam to serve the materialistic goals of an individual or organization, it is not considered *Da'wah* (Albrecht, 2012).

Therefore, *Da'wah* in the sense of *Al-Amr Bi'l Ma'rūf Wa'n Nahy 'Ani'l Munkar* (encouraging virtue and forbidding evil) is an absolute condition for the perfection and safety of society (Saputra et.al 2021). This establishes the dire need of society, being a place of existence, to preach both individually and collectively. In other words, a society should not be left without constant remembrance of the purpose of creation and existence through preaching. Thus, a society is shaped according to those that live therein.

### **Evangelism in Christian Context**

Evangelism is the Christian way of saving the world from sin and its attendant effects such as death and damnation. The word evangelism comes from the Greek word "Evangelion" which means "good news" or "to proclaim the good news" (Harvestime International Institute, 2001). According to the *Diocese of Trenton*, the term evangelism means bringing the good news of Jesus into every human situation and seeking to convert individuals and society by the divine power of the gospel itself (*Diocese of Trenton*, 2017). Mack Stiles defines evangelism as "teaching the gospel to persuade" (Mack, 2014). The persuasion in the definition of Mack is to show that evangelism is done to win others and convince them to accept the new idea, belief, and faith that are being shared. Christians seek to convince nonbelievers

of the truth of the gospel. They hope that through this process, friends and family members will come to new life in Christ, discovering a renewed sense of joy and purpose (Armstrong).

Briska (2014) opines that the concept of evangelism is inviting non-Christians to the knowledge of Christianity and this is the right of every Christian to call others and share the story of their faith. Evangelism is a Christian mission to propagate the gospel to every nook and cranny in the world. It is communicating the gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit in such a way that men and women have a valid opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord and become responsible members of His Church (*Harvestime International Institute*, 2001). It must be stated here that evangelism is not church preaching, that is, preaching about the church that is good and where salvation can be obtained rather it is the teaching about the life of Jesus Christ.

Christian perspective on evangelism can also be traced to the pre-Jerusalem mission (during Jesus' ministry), the Jerusalem mission (during the initial propagation within Jerusalem city), and the post-Jerusalem mission (extending to Samaria and the deep crannies of the Roman Empire). Coleman stated that the Great Commission is not merely preaching the Gospel or baptizing a lot of people, nor teaching them precepts, but it is to "make disciples for Christ". Hence the will of the master is sealed by expanding (making disciples) the kingdom of God (Coleman, 1997). Christian believes that whenever they go on preaching to others with the aim of converting them to believers then it is obedience to the great commission. The great commission is Christian believes in the expansion of God's kingdom through the propagation of the good news about the birth, life, ministry, persecution, death, resurrection, ascension, and the second coming of Jesus Christ. Ogunewu (2014) writes:

Evangelization as a direct consequence of obedience to the Great Commission has been a principal preoccupation of the Church since its inception. It has been commanded as an abiding obligation of the church to the end of the age and successive generations of the Church have taken this mandate seriously over the centuries. The Acts of the Apostles reveal the zeal of the apostles in this direction and the early church is also not left out in the venture as through it the gospel spread to the nook and crannies of the Roman Empire.

The above submission of Michael affirms evangelism is Christian obedience to the Great Commission. Evangelism implies the desire to propagate the faith from one person to another. Michael Green quoted British Archbishop, William Temple in the days of World War II. He said, "To evangelize is to so present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit that men and women shall come to put their faith in

God through Him, to accept Him as their Savior and to serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His church" (Michael, 2023). Niemandt (2016) further describes evangelism as an essential part of God's mission and the calling of the church to tell God's story. In other words, the calling to evangelize is 'part and parcel' of the mission; 'it belongs to the very being of the church'. Jesus' missionary work included entering into the culture of the people and living with the inconveniences they had. He travelled all over the land of Israel on foot to preach the message (Lois, 2013).

There are several types of evangelism in Christianity. These types of evangelism include but not limited to one-on-one, personal, digital, group and cultural and cross-cultural evangelism. Evangelism can be referred to different terminologies in Christianity such as soul winning, witnessing, preaching, sermonizing, and proselytizing, amongst others. Christians carried out the work of evangelism as the ultimate duty of Jesus to every believer. Green explains that rather than just announcing moral obligations, religious mandates, or even a reforming agenda, early Christian preaching focused on a specific individual: the crucified Jesus (Green, 1990).

## **Mission Strategies in Islamic and Christian Contexts**

### **1. Mission Strategies in Islamic Context**

The idea of calling people to the Almighty, as with Him alone is salvation, is well established in the Islamic and Christian ideologies. This is not unconnected to the fact that these two religions become the most celebrated religions in the world today with huge numbers of adherents from both ends. In the same realm, both religions deem it fit to advertise and present their doctrines through various strategies of which similarities and disparities are recorded as regards individual strategies in achieving the same end.

Hamzah (2021) submits that; it might take more than just verbal *Da'wah* to combat *kuffar*, or unbelief, and create "*Dar al-Islam*," or a place where Muslims can freely practice their faith. This is especially true if the offer is turned down. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) adviser for a while, Ali Issa Othman, asserts that "Islam was spread militarily." One of the precepts of the Quran is to strive towards the propagation of Islam. Jihad, or fighting for God, has a deeper significance. It might be evangelical in the Christian sense or it could be belligerent. The militant is not excluded. This is because, according to the Quran, communities have always resisted a prophet's offer of guidance from God. However, since Allah is ultimately the protector and guardian of only those who genuinely believe, jihad can also create the conditions for people to accept Islam through *Da'wah* as an alternative to being killed or forced to live as *Dhimmi* (non-Muslims in a Muslim state, who live under certain restrictions).

Ibn Baaz (1998) makes it quite evident that force must be used to crush any

opposition to the establishment of the Islamic order. "Shadow-casting, plundering, or the enslavement of women and children are not the goals of *Da'wah* or *jihad*; they are incidental outcomes. This only takes place when the disbelievers refrain from accepting the truth and persist in disbelief and refuse to be subdued and to pay the *Jizyah* (tax levied on free non-Muslims living under Muslim rule) when it is requested from them. In this case, Allah has prescribed the Muslims to kill them, take their wealth as booty, and enslave their women and children. This connotes the idea that man must be persuaded by various means to be part of the successful ones as far as he is under the Islamic community.

There are applicable examples for today's Muslims in the Madinah Charter, the prophet's ten years, and political Islam. Muhammad's actions demonstrate how, by keeping his opponents in agreement, he was able to "transform step by step the given structures of society." For these Muslims, the Prophet's period in Madinah is ideal (Khurram, 1986). His concept served as inspiration for the modern Islamic *Da'wah* strategy, which uses and influences the institutions of a given culture to accomplish its goals of influencing society as a whole rather than focusing solely on individual converts.

*Da'wah* in general has been grouped into three forms, namely; orally, through writing, and *Da'wah* through social action, development *Da'wah* and by example commonly referred to as *bil-hal* (Saputra et.al, 2021)

**a. *Da'wah Bi'l Lisān* (Oral preaching).**

Has reached a very old age, which is as old as human age. Bilateral *Da'wah* which is almost synonymous with *Tabligh* (communication) is generally divided into two (2) types. First *Da'wah*; directly or without media, that is, between the preacher and the invitee face to face. Second *da'wah*; uses media (channel), that is, a situation whereby the preacher and the invitee do not face each other and this model of communication is called secondary communication. *Da'wah* through media such as television, radio, film, tape, and other media instruments.

**b. *Da'wah Bi'l- Kitābah* (Preaching through writing).**

Islamic *Da'wah* is not only limited to oral *Da'wah* activities but also through writing. This is not a new form of *Da'wah* that appeared on the surface, when the printing press was first invented, but was implemented by the prophet (SAW) fifteen centuries ago. According to historical records, in the sixth year of the *Hijrah* (migration to Madinah) of the Prophet, he began to develop the area of *Da'wah*. Preaching was extended by sending letters to the leaders and kings at that time, in which the Prophet invited them to embrace Islam. No less than eight letters were sent by the Prophet to the head of state and the king who were accompanied directly by eight very wise

companions.

**c. *Da'wah Bi'l-Hāl* (Preaching through social action).**

It is estimated that this term emerged around the 70s (**is there any reference to this**). However, no reference has been found that explains who the first originator of the term was. This term has a very broad meaning, as well as the field it covers. It is identical to the *Da'wah* of development or Muslim development. Preaching in this sense is expected to support aspects of community life, so that in the end each community has the ability to address the needs and interests of its members, especially in the fields of economy, education, and public health.

However, *Da'wah* today involves much global strategic thinking and analysis, along with local action and implementation, and includes the role of the OIC at the United Nations, in the European Union, and in the Council of Europe. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), along with its related institutions, has become the major international political *Da'wah* organization (John, 2006). Muslim outreach (*Da'wah*) has become increasingly visible in recent years due to the use of a variety of methods, some of which have been similar to those used by Christians.

**2. Mission Strategies in Christian Mission**

To spread the gospel, the church has developed several strategies that are reportedly employed by churches catering to younger generations in the community. These strategies differ from one church to the other. However, despite the increase and diversity in the strategies adopted by churches today, the below are identified strategies used in evangelism.

**a. Street preaching method**

The act of street preaching is one of the most common methods used in the propagation of the gospel. Street preaching can also be called street evangelism, open-air preaching, and public preaching. It involves evangelism on a larger scale where thousands and millions of people are preached to at a particular time. Christians moved in groups or individuals when carrying out evangelism on the street through the use of a public address system, or the use of mouth to reach out to their audience. Street evangelism is the practice of employing wisdom and taking into account all socially, culturally, and legally permissible behaviors to inform people about the New Covenant through Christ in public settings (McClymond, 2010). Christians in the 21st century often engage in street evangelism daily and weekly. Days are set aside for public preaching by the church and members are also encouraged to carry out evangelism individually.



#### **b. Educational Establishments**

Schools are established for the continuity of the gospel. One of the instruments employed by early missionaries was the establishment of schools which abetted to eradicate illiteracy and also enhanced the propagation of the gospel. Early missionaries saw the need to establish schools where people will be taught about literacy, numeracy, and Christian education. This is important because it brings the gospel nearer to the people in a formalized way other than street preaching. In mission schools today, hymns and praises are sung to praise God, and some Christian activities such as fellowship, are duly observed. These schools continue to carry on the legacy of the mission schools founded by the early missionaries. According to Rotimi Omotoye, the school was Crowther's chief method of evangelization. He introduced the mission into new places by setting rulers and elders interested in the idea of a school of their own and usually, it was the school that he asked the senior missionary at each station to give his chief attention (*Conforming to Jesus Ministry*, 2023).

The 21st Churches establish schools from primary to tertiary institution levels. Schools such as Redeemer's University of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Anchor University of the Deeper Life Bible Church, the Covenant University of Bishop Oyedepo, Bowen University of the Baptist Mission and Joseph Ayodele Babalola University of the Christ Apostolic Church amongst others are founded to carry out the legacy of Christian education and evangelism. These schools also include seminaries or theological colleges where pastors and missionaries are fully equipped for the gospel work.

#### **c. Digital Evangelism Method**

The common trend in evangelism today is the use of digitalization. Digitalization pertains to the process of creating and executing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) systems, along with the resulting modifications to organizations. It entails the conversion of socio-technical structures that were previously facilitated by non-digital artifacts into ones that are facilitated by digitized artifacts (Omotoye, 2023). Christians now easily spread the gospel through social media, the internet, and online sites. Church services are now held both online and physically, sermons can be accessed and retrieved via church websites. This digitalization had now made evangelism easy and quick to reach the expected audience within a particular location or indoors.

#### **d. Distribution of Relief Materials to the Poor and Community**

The church has also been able to evangelize the gospel to the poor and the community where they resided by catering to the poor and distributing relief materials to the community. Evangelism is not just about preaching the gospel in words but also about service to humanity which can be seen in the act of giving and catering for the less privileged in the society thus making the society a better place. The church as a community of believers has over time engaged in contributing to the welfare of the society by giving food items, distribution of clothes, construction of wells and tap water amongst others. During the COVID-19 era, churches also distributed food items to the community such as Emmanuel Baptist, Sabo-Oke, Ilorin, Redeemed Christian Church of God, and so on.

**e. Tracts Distribution**

Today, it is very typical for churches to distribute leaflets, most of which have a gospel focus. These pamphlets are frequently labeled with titles that allude to their evangelical content. A number of these pamphlets, such as "Jesus is Coming Soon," "Time is Short," "A Christian," "Road to Heaven and Hell," and "You are not alone," among others, demonstrate Christians' awareness in sharing the gospel. Nwanguma confirms that literature evangelism is also evident in The Redeemed Evangelical Mission (TREM). It is no gainsaying that tracts distribution is a common practice in the society today. Some Christians have an interest for distributing tracts and thus whenever they step out of their houses; they go with tracts that will be exhausted before returning home.

**Similarities and Differences in Mission Strategies: In Islam and Christianity**

Mission in the Muslim and Christian perspectives has a point of intersection and dissection. The following are areas of similarities between the two religions:

- 1. Oral preaching:** Evangelism using oral means is a common strategy between Muslims and Christians. Christians practice oral evangelism via physical, one-on-one, and street evangelism to win souls for Christ. In Islam, oral preaching is termed *Da'wah Bi'l Lisān* which can be done through face-to-face or media.
- 2. The use of writing:** Islamic *Da'wah* is not only limited to oral *Da'wah* activities but also through writing. Before the advent of printed texts, letters were used to propagate the faiths among Muslims and Christians. Not less than eight letters were sent by the Prophet (SAW) to the head of state and the king who were accompanied directly by eight very wise companions. Among the Christians, several letters were sent by the early apostles such as Paul and Peter. In the current Nigerian society, both Muslims and Christians adopted the use of printed texts to convey their faiths to the targeted audience.
- 3. The use of social action:** Social action was employed by the Muslims and

Christians to propagate their faiths. Both faiths distributed relief materials to the poor, the community, and others who are less privileged. This act has been found not to only contribute to the expansion of both faiths but has also necessitated the promotion of humanity and sustainable development in society.

4. **Outreaches:** Outreaches are organized in a long and short-distance order by both faiths to further propagate their tenets and make disciples. Muslims and Christians often engage in reaching the unreached communities which are both far and near at strategic periods such as the festive periods or during particular days of the year.
5. **Mission groups:** The emerging mission groups in the Islamic domain in Nigeria include the Ahmadiyyah, Ansar-ud-Deen, Nasfat, and *Salafiyyah* among others whose objective is to establish and convey the message of Allah to the masses. In the Christian circle, several churches have their own mission groups such as the United Mission Church of Africa, the Redeemed Christian Church of God, and Christ Apostolic Church among many others.

## **Differences**

### **1. The philosophy of Jihad and Crusades**

Jihad was seen as one of the ways Islam was spread in the early years of its formation. Though, in the 21st century Nigerian society, among Muslims, it is no longer called with the name Jihad but rather, a subset of Jihad since activities regarding Muslim missions have been partially accepted to be militarized. Extremists such as the Boko Haram are still holding to the philosophy of Jihad to conquer the world. Christians on the other hand, engaged in crusades in the 10th century to recapture lands from the Muslims who lived there. However, the use of militarization has become a thing of the past in Christianity. Christian missions engage in dialogue and peaceful negotiation during missionary work.

### **2. Digital worship**

The use of digital worship often referred to as online worship or evangelism has been common among Christians. Christians often adopt digital methods in evangelism compared to Muslims.

### **3. Tracts and other printed materials**

The mention of tracts often connotes Christian activities to method of evangelism. Christians often distribute tracts to evangelize on the street, in the neighborhood, and in the Church, amongst others.

### **4. Billboard theology**

This is a rampant method among Christians. There is virtually no Christian church where at least a billboard and or banner is not placed. In addition, the major streets in some States in Nigeria such as Lagos, Kwara, and Ibadan among others

are decorated and redecorated with designs on billboards to inform the public and evangelize the society.

### **Conclusion**

Calling to the way of God is an established belief in both the Islamic and Christian communities. Both communities find interest in making the world godly and are striving through various means to convey the message of God which is solely glad tidings as a result of associating with virtues and dissociating from deficiency. In order to achieve the common goal, both communities came up with various strategies as circumstances warrant in order to achieve their goal. The continuous devising of methods both in the past and the current world in conveying the message of God is not unconnected to the fact that both communities believe that the world cannot ideally exist without constant remembrance of God. Thus, preaching becomes an all-time engagement. From this end, it can be objectively concluded that there remains the establishment of the same objective through different but not opposite methods. Hence, attention should be drawn more to the essence and objective behind the methods and not the methods. The goal remains the establishment of a Godly world.

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