

**Da'wah in the Modern Age:
Strategies against Extremism and Fundamentalism**
*Model Da'wah Pasca Moden dan Strategi Penolakan Fundamentalisme
Radikal dalam Dakwah*

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ABSTRACT

The basic character of Islam is peaceful, gentleness, prestigious and keeping human rights and full of tolerance. The basic characters reflected in its teachings, as can be seen in al-Qur'an and Hadith or Prophetic Traditions. All these good deeds had been practiced by Rasulullah Muhammad ﷺ. So, the truth of Islam should be well propagated and socialized to all people in the world. Islamic dakwa in this case should be represented from the Islamic basic characters, by way of love, gentleness, peace and tolerance. If in the performance of Islamic dakwa has the phenomenon of radicalism and fundamentalism approach, so the approach is not really represented or reflected from the Islamic basic characters, but it is imported from outside. Therefore, to reach the brilliant success of Islamic dakwa, especially in Indonesia, all should be referred to Islamic basic characters which are friendly, gentle, interesting, peaceful, and full of tolerance, as well as the materials used, approach taken, and the qualification of the da'i or preacher. Otherwise, the activity of dakwa will be contra-productive with the purposes of dakwa according to al-Qur'an and Hadith or Prophetic Traditions.

Keywords: *Dakwa model, radicalism, fundamentalism*

ABSTRACT

Fakta bahwa Islam membawa ajaran yang toleran dan kasih sayang bagi seluruh umat manusia tidak selamanya dipahami dan dilaksanakan dengan baik oleh penganut Islam bahkan para da'i sekalipun. Banyak orang menampilkan pesan Islam dengan cara paksa dan kekerasan sebagaimana terlihat dalam gerakan fundamentalis dan ekstremis akhir-akhir ini yang dilakukan kelompok-kelompok tertentu. Ini jelas merupakan kekeliruan. Da'wah harus dilakukan dengan hikmah dan bijaksana, sesuai dengan konteks masyarakat dan perkembangan zaman. Tulisan ini akan memaparkan pentingnya kontekstualisasi da'wah di era moden dengan menampilkan wajah Islam yang toleran dan strategi dalam menghadapi gerakan-gerakan fundamentalis dan ekstremis terutama di Indonesia. Metode penulisan menggunakan pendekatan normatif dengan mengedepankan pemahaman yang substantif terhadap sumber-sumber ajaran Islam terkait masalah da'wah. Dalam upaya kontekstualisasi da'wah di Indonesia, penulis menggunakan pendekatan sosiologis dengan mengedepankan kararakter kultural masyarakat Indonesia yang plural, ramah, toleran dan mudah menerima nilai-nilai dari luar. Kesimpulan tulisan memberikan nuansa bahwa karakter ajaran Islam yang ramah sebenarnya sangat mudah diterima masyarakat Indonesia yang juga memiliki karkater yang sama, karenanya da'wah yang relevan di negeri tersebut tidak perlu mengambil pola-pola yang berlaku

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dalam masyarakat lain. Da'wah dengan cara kekerasan jelas tidak relevan dan justru akan menyulitkan penerimaan Islam dalam masyarakat.

Kata kunci: Model da'wah, radikalisme, fundamentalisme

Introduction

Islam is a religion which brings blessing to the universe (*rahmatan lil 'Alamin/* QS. Al Anbiya: 107). Its normative content and values allows for a meaningful and ordered human life. At once universal and particular, Islam has been historically proven to be able to bring harmony, peace, and prosperity to its adherents and their neighbors. However, in the modern age, Muslims have been accused of extremism and fundamentalism, as well as being held responsible for many of today's terroristic acts. *Da'wah* (Islamic mission, call, propagation, or proselytization), an important component of Islamic teaching, is thus a vital aspect in strategies to combat these atrocities, as well as the image that Islam allow them to happen.

Da'wah in Islamic history has often been conducted in a pluralistic, multicultural and multireligious society. Indonesia is a case in point. There are a number of theories concerning the entry of Islam and the process of Islamization in the archipelago. All of these theories confirm that Islam came to Indonesia in a peaceful, non-violent manner. Even though Islam did not enter other parts of the world such as South Asia and Africa as peacefully, it does not have the record of imperialism or colonialism that other religions had. The Islamic missionaries (*da'i*) who came to the archipelago conducted *da'wah* with wisdom, avoiding physical or psychological conflict.

However, in the last decade, there have been reports that *da'wah* in the archipelago are being conducted based on a fundamentalist-extremist religious understanding. In the midst of a rapidly changing social, political and cultural trend, Indonesian Muslims, especially the professional and educated segment, found the simple spiritualism of Islamic fundamentalism attractive. Starting early in schools and universities, fundamentalist *da'i* has managed to attract a significant number of followers. This phenomenon is worrying for the success of *da'wah* in the long run. For more than a thousand years, Islam has grown in this area through peaceful *da'wah*. The fundamentalist trend, if unchecked, may lead to unfortunate consequences for Muslims as well as non-Muslims here and in other parts of the world.

Islam, Extremism, and Fundamentalism

A number of Muslim scholars have refused the label of radical fundamentalism being attached to Islam. In his paper entitled *The Myth of Islamic Fundamentalism*, Ilyas Ba-Yunus has stated that the term was first used in 1978 at a Bible conference in New York. In the late twentieth century, this term, in addition of extremist and terrorist, were used to label 'hardline' Muslims, especially after the bombing of World Trade Centre building in New York on September 11, 2001. Despite the scholars' rejection, the term fundamentalism, extremism, and terrorism, have been continuously used in the mass media, creating a negative image of Islam.

Historically, fundamentalist action was first ignited by the conflict between Ali ibn Abi Thalib as the fourth Righteous Caliph and Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan as the Governor of Damascus. The conflict was resolved through arbitration (*tahkim*). Ali's followers were upset with this method of resolution, accusing both Ali and Mu'awiyah as committing a major sin for not following the Qur'an and Hadith. They then broke out of Ali's group and form their own group, the Khawarij. Among this group's main characteristics was the ease in which they consider others not in their group to be outside the fold of Islam (*kafir*). Only their interpretation of Islam was correct, others' were considered deviant. They did not hesitate to commit violence and even murder to achieve their objectives.

To Muhammad Amin al-'Alim, fundamentalism is a school of thought which interprets religious texts in a rigid and literal manner. He criticized fundamentalist thought for having lost its relevance in an ever-changing and complex modern age. Muhammad Sa'id al-Asymawi offered a more nuanced understanding, distinguishing between *activist political fundamentalism* and *rationalist spiritualist fundamentalism*. The first term refers to Muslims who struggles for Islam to be a political force, while the second refers to Muslims who desires to return to the Qur'an and the tradition of the first generation Muslims.

Based on the previous elaboration of fundamentalism, it can be seen that fundamentalism has been interpreted in a positive and negative manner. Some has considered Islam to have fundamental aspects, and some criticize the method in which these aspects were practiced. Indeed, there is near universal condemnation by scholars, Muslims or not, of those who uses extremist and terroristic methods to bring about their fundamental version of Islam. There are several characteristics of the latter fundamentalist group: *first*, their interpretation of religion tends to be textual, rejecting contextual understanding which they deem reducing the sacredness of religion; *second*, they tend to reject religious diversity which they deem as harmful; *third*, they monopolize religious interpretation, taking only their understanding as authoritative and true, considering others' deviant; there is a correlation between fundamentalism, fanatisme, exclusivism, and intolerance, and militancy. In addition, the following interesting observation can be made on this fundamentalist group: *first*, their spirit and faith in right action or struggle (*jihad*), which is always being performed as an action to defend religion; *second*, their orientation to apply Islamic sharia as a solution to life problems; *third*, their declaration of war against secular views; *fourth*, their tendency to use force to do good and forbid evil.

For Bassam Tibi, the ideology of fundamentalism in Islam may be more dangerous than extremism or terrorism. Fundamentalist *da'wah* may add to Muslims' problems, instead of alleviating them. There are at least five problems with this type of *da'wah*: *first*, its tendency to disrupt peace may attract the attention of the government unwantedly, being perceived by government officials as a security threat; *second*, its exclusive approach may cause internal strife between Muslims who have different understanding or interpretation of Islam, causing disunity and reluctance to cooperate among them; *third*, fundamentalist achievements may only be temporary and ephemeral, as they do not engage with the deepest part of Muslims' heart; *fourth*, it may cause a large gap between religion and culture, such as has happened in Spain and Chechnya; *fifth*, it may place Muslims in a cornered position when conflicts and disharmony arise internally in the community and externally in society.

Da'wah Without Violence

Islam is a religion of *da'wah*. As such, *da'wah* activities should be performed at all times with the intention of inviting people to obey God and to live in peace, in accordance with the common interpretation of Islam as peace. There are several ways for this to happen: *first*, *da'I* must also be able to calm his or her community and offer solution and help to life's problems. Allah has stated in the Qur'an, "*Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them 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.*" (QS. An-Nahl: 125). As such, a *da'I* is expected to possess wisdom in carrying out his or her activities (*da'wah bi al-hikmah*). *Hikmah* in the verse has at least three meanings, all of which indicate that *da'wah* must be based on peace and calm through knowledge, patience (*hilm*), and prudence.

The use of violence in *da'wah* is in opposition of Islamic values. Allah has stated in the Qur'an has stated: "*So by mercy from Allah, [O Muhammad], you were lenient with them. And if you had been rude [in speech] and harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from about you. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult them in the matter. And when you have decided, then rely upon Allah. Indeed, Allah loves those who rely [upon Him]*"(QS. Ali Imran: 159). Based on this verse, a *da'i* should carry out *da'wah* in peace and calm, in addition of systematic and well-planned (*shalih*).

Second, in terms of approach, *da'wah* should apply symbiotic one combining structural and cultural approach at once. Structural approach can be understood as governmental empowerment, particularly which the officials must maximally participate in developing community. They also have to build Islamic institutions as *amar ma'ruf*, and must maximally combat social disease as *nahi munkar* because through law enforcement and law upholders, the government can enforce the values of Islamic *da'wah* effectively. The structural approach can be well implemented if there is a mutual trust between government and religious communities.

In line with this, *da'i* should be tolerant and build the partnership with all parties, including government. The existence of partnership with the government should continuously criticize all kinds of systems, policies and institutions which are not relevant with people's demand and need. One of the functions of *da'i*, *ulama* and law-upholders as prophetic heirs is to conduct controlling function towards government by giving good inputs for better development.

Da'i can utilize politics as *da'wah* instrument. Political activity as well as economic activities, social efforts, cultural movements, scientific and technological activities, art creation, law codification and are some instrument examples for the propagation. Creating politics as *da'wah* instrument is quite important as the prophets also utilized politics in their *da'wah*.

The cultural approach is humanistic by nature and it applies non-violence one. Culture is something inherent for people. The exact understanding towards a culture will help *da'i* to use good strategy to propagate the Islamic values. Internalization of Islam by way of this cultural net will produce integrated religiosity. Therefore, *da'i* must keep the cultural islamization, not to develop it into syncretism.

Indonesian culture is gentle, lenient and peaceful. It is as a matter of fact a fertile country for the spread of *da'wah* by means of non-violence approach, since its soft culture is close to Islamic norms. Thus, the preachers in this country obviously need to contextualize their Islamic *da'wah* approach with Indonesian culture and not necessarily to import Arab and Western cultures. This "symbiotic *da'wa*" now becomes a national requirement in the framework of creating *baldatun thayyibatun warabbun ghafur*.

Conclusion

Islam is a universal religion and guidance for all people in the world for their salvation in the world and hereafter. As a life guidance, Islam will bring peace, order and welfare. The basic character of Islam is peaceful, gentleness, prestigious and keeping human rights and full of tolerance as reflected in its teachings in The Qur'an and Hadith. So, the truth of Islam should be well propagated and socialized to all peoples in the world with a relevant approach in accordance these Islamic basic characters.

The recent performance of Islamic *da'wah* in Indonesia with the appearance of the phenomenon of radicalism and fundamentalism approach really is not derived from the Islamic basic characters, but rather influenced from outside. Such an approach is really not only against the basic characters of Islam but also opposed to the Indonesian cultural characters which are moderate, soft and tolerant. To reach the brilliant success of Islamic *da'wah* in Indonesia, a *da'i* thus should contextualize it with the these cultural characters in his materials, approach, and even the qualification of the *da'i* or himself. Otherwise, the activity of *da'wah* will be contra-productive with the purposes of *da'wah* as directed in the Qur'an and Hadith.

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