



Book Reviews

Matthew J. Kuiper: *Da'wa: A Global History of Islamic Missionary Thought and Practice*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021, 319 pp.

Matthew J. Kuiper is an assistant professor of religion at Hope College, USA. His latest book, *Da'wa: A Global History of Islamic Missionary Thought and Practice*, covers Islamic mission, *da'wa*, from its beginnings until the twenty-first century. Kuiper's previous book, *Da'wa and Other Religions: Indian Muslims and the Modern Resurgence of Global Islamic Activism* (Routledge 2017), deals with the same topic, though from a more geographically restricted Indian perspective. In *Da'wa and Other Religions* he focused on the Tablighi Jamaat movement and the Salafi preacher Zakir Naik and his Islamic Research Foundation, both of which are influential in contemporary global *da'wa*.

Da'wa: A Global History of Islamic Missionary Thought and Practice is divided into two main parts. The first focuses on the scriptural roots and premodern history of *da'wa*; the second on the modern world. The chapters include a range of text boxes, figures, and maps to supplement its key narrative. All the chapters end with summarizing conclusions that are very useful for reminding oneself of the key content, as the book includes an immense amount of detail in which one could easily drown. Moreover, the volume has clearly been written for educational purposes.

'Islam is a missionary religion' (p. 1), reads the first sentence of Kuiper's book, but academic Islamic mission theology, or in Kuiper's neologism *da'walogy*, is not well developed. *Da'wa* is usually understood as 'calling', 'inviting', and 'summoning' to Islam (p. 4), and it has risen to new prominence over the last century and a half, making it 'a pervasive and powerful concept in contemporary Islamic thought and activism' (p. 5). Here Kuiper strikes a chord, as anyone who has been following contemporary Islam cannot but be astonished by the massive amount of resources and effort being invested in Islamic missionary work by numerous states and independent Islamic organizations.

Kuiper's key analytic conceptualization in the book is the distinction between *Meccan da'wa* and *Medinan da'wa*. *Meccan da'wa* refers to a missionary invitation, and it is often non-political in nature and/or provided from a position of less political influence. It is suitable for mission in a minority position. *Medinan da'wa* is in Kuiper's words a 'religio-political summons', a call to join an Islamic political movement and to proclaim one's loyalty to it. It is delivered from a position of power or in the quest for it (p. 13). The Meccan–Medinan distinction refers to Prophet Muhammad finding himself in a minority position while in Mecca and only gaining political power after his migration (*hijra*) to Medina. Besides the above distinc-

tion, Kuiper also uses the concepts of Islamization and conversion to highlight the broader societal and individual processes and changes related to outcomes of successful *da'wa*.

The first part comprises four chapters, and they proceed in a mainly chronological order. Kuiper starts with a presentation of *da'wa* in the Qu'ran, which he summarizes as follows: 'the Qu'ran leaves open the question of whether *da'wa* is chiefly a polemical exercise, driven by an exclusivist theology of religions, or an exercise in finding common ground, driven by an inclusivist theology of religions' (p. 35). Muslims therefore need to turn to Prophet Muhammad and his companions to find answers to the specifics of *da'wa*, a matter in which the biographies of Muhammad and *hadith* literatures become important. In these sources *da'wa* comes in many forms, including *da'wa* through dialogue and debate, the noble Islamic character, Qu'ranic recitation, miracles, preceding military engagements, and martyrdom.

Having set the scene, Kuiper turns to the time after the Prophet's death in 632. He believes Islam was initially seen as the religion of the Arabs, and early Islamic expansion was more about territorial expansion than it was religio-cultural in nature. However, with both expanding and prolonging Muslim rule, the question of conversion and Islamization became increasingly salient. Moreover, increasing internal divisions within Muslim peoples add complexity to the is-

sue: 'Da'wa is not merely about the missionary propagation of Islam to non-Muslims, but also about active efforts to persuade or compete with other Muslims in the religious (and sometimes also political) sphere' (p. 85). Over several hundred years a primarily tribal Arab religion thus became an internally diversified powerful conglomerate of lesser kings and a multi-ethnic empire. Turning to the second millennium, we see a continuing expansion of Islam that was met by Turkic peoples and later Mongol rulers turning to Islam. Kuiper calls these events 'Islamisation through in-migration' (p. 93) and 'Islamisation by royal example or expectation' (p. 99). We should also note that Sufi brotherhoods gradually came to play a pivotal role in the spread of popular Islam. Muslim merchants were also important for *da'wa*. Eventually, *dar-al islam* reached its contemporary borders, spanning from South-East Asia to Morocco.

The second part of the book opens with a brief historical overview that helps understand the transformations of Islam in modernity, during which European colonial powers subdued most of the Islamic world. Thus, 'Muslims worldwide were confronted with the realisation that they were living in a world not of their making' (p. 158), leading either to tangible or felt minoritization. European modernity, including modes of organization and communication, were gradually adopted by Islamic actors, leading to significant changes in the practice

of *da'wa* too. In broad brushstrokes Kuiper sees three main alternative visions of the Muslim thinker in approaching modernity. Modernists attempt to update the Islamic faith to be in line with scientific and liberal values. Reformists aim to remove un-Islamic innovations and desire to return to the Qu'ran and *sunna* of the Prophet. Salafists, a subgroup of reformists, have focused on *da'wa*. Islamists target political power and aim to bring all life under Islamic control (p. 136f.).

Kuiper divides modern *da'wa* into two periods. The first lasts from circa 1850 to 1950. It coincides with European colonialism. The colonial period launched numerous examples of Meccan *da'wa*. Muslims 'embraced quietist styles of mission which were oriented towards grass-roots preaching, education and renewal' (p. 197). They also copied and modified techniques from Christian missionaries and missionary societies, including pamphlets, schools, types of training, and international conferences. For many movements quietism was a strategy rather than an absolute withdrawal from political ambitions. The period also brought the many internal divisions among Muslims, but perhaps most importantly, the role of Muslim women and mothers as teachers of future generations was widely acknowledged. A wholly new role for laypeople had emerged.

The second phase of modern *da'wa* starts around 1950 and lasts until today. Its characteristic features include a growing religious

marketplace, mass mediated Islams, and an increasing diversity of actors engaged with *da'wa*. The postcolonial age also witnessed the growing petrodollar wealth of many Muslim-majority states and individuals, which led to a huge resource flow into *da'wa*. The traditional Islamic authorities have had to conform to modern communications requirements, including the challenge from satellite television and internet superstar preachers. During this period the concept of *da'wa* has also been massively popularized, and Muslim-minority populations in developed countries have grown to greater prominence, including even widely known Muslim intellectuals. We are experiencing a renewal of *da'wa*, as Kuiper writes: 'If we speak of *da'wa* actors, they number not in the dozens or even hundreds, but in the millions' (p. 250). Both Meccan and Medinan *da'wa* orientations remain strong.

Da'wa: A Global History of Islamic Missionary Thought and Practice is designed as a university course book and will certainly work well in that context. However, the book is a major accomplishment in itself in providing a concise summary of the development of *da'wa* over fourteen centuries. Kuiper's notions of Meccan and Medinan *da'wa* are a useful shorthand for discussing how Islamic actors relate to the propagation of the Islamic faith in different contexts. Moreover, Kuiper's final chapter on the tremendous growth of *da'wa* actors in the last century and a half simply begs for more attention

to this phenomenon. Altogether, *Da'wa: A Global History of Islamic Missionary Thought and Practice* is a must-read for many scholars of Islam and a useful resource for others interested in contemporary religious life in which Islam is part of the picture.

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