



Al-Milal: Journal of Religion and Thought (AMJRT)

Volume 3, Issue 1

ISSN (Print): 2663-4392

ISSN (Electronic): 2706-6436

ISSN (CD-ROM): 2708-132X

Issue: <http://al-milal.org/journal/index.php/almilal/issue/view/6>

URL: <http://al-milal.org/journal/index.php/almilal/article/view/117>

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46600/almilal.v3i1.117>

AMJRT



Title Ahmed Deedat's Da'wah Approach and Its Socio-Religious Impact on Nigeria: An Analysis

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Received on: 11 August, 2020

Accepted on: 25 May , 2021

Published on: 30 June, 2021

Citation: AbdulGafar Olawale FAHM, "Ahmed Deedat's Da'wah Approach and Its Socio-Religious Impact on Nigeria: An Analysis," *Al-Milal Journal of Religion and Thought* 3 no. 1 (2021):126-148.

Publisher: Pakistan Society of Religions



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Ahmed Deedat's Da'wah Approach and Its Socio-Religious Impact on Nigeria: An Analysis

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Abstract

This study highlights the contributions of Ahmed Deedat to Da'wāh (Islamic propagation). It also examines the unique nature of his Da'wāh and identifies its socio-religious impact on Nigeria. Through exegetical and descriptive methods, the paper was able to decipher patterns in Ahmed Deedat's approach to Islamic propagation, particularly on comparative religious issues. This study finds that Ahmed Deedat's Da'wāh approach on Islam and other religions demonstrates an effective way of communicating about Islam. It can also be seen as succeeding in arousing the consciousness of the adherents of different religions especially Christians and Muslims to find practical evidences to support their beliefs, instead of just accepting the faith without seeking to deepen their understanding and belief system. This study concludes that his works on Islam and comparative religion often address issues that form foundation of an individual's belief. The effectiveness of this approach is seen in Nigeria's socio-religious circle in dealing with people of other faiths and to educate them about issues that are of mutual concern to promote dialogue on faith. In other words, his Da'wāh focused primarily on the theme of the Qur'ān, Muhammad, Islam, Jesus, Bible, and God as a way of propagating Islam. This paper, therefore, submits that Ahmed Deedat's outlook on Da'wāh has socio-religious implications for Islamic propagation in Nigeria and opens the way for further dialogue among adherents of different religions.

Keywords: Ahmed Deedat, Da'wāh, Islam, Propagation, Socio-religious

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Introduction

There are quite a number of religions in the world and Islam is one of the major ones. Islam is a faith rich in strong values and traditions and is observed by nearly two billion people in the world.¹The root-meaning of the word Islam is to enter into peace, and a Muslim is one who makes his peace with God and man. Peace with God implies complete submission to His will, and peace with man is not only to refrain from evil or injury to another but also to do good to him, and both these ideas find expression in the Holy Qur'ān itself as the true essence of the religion of Islam.²

Islam is thus, in its very inception, the religion of peace, and its two basic doctrines, the unity of God and the unity or brotherhood of the human race, afford positive proof of its being true to its name. On the other hand, *Da'wāh* is the invitation to Islam and is considered obligatory on all Muslims. That is why Prophets were sent and Prophet Muhammad followed in the footsteps of all previous Prophets. Moreover, just as following the ways of the Prophet is regarded as the best way in different phases and aspects of life so also are the engagement of Muslims in propagating Islam (*Da'wāh tūl Islam*). However, in today's world there is anxiety in taking the message of Islam to various parts of the globe, disregard for the basic principles of the work of *Da'wāh*, and more importantly, getting caught up in Western concepts to the extent of losing one's identity as a Muslim.³

Comparative religion conveys the notion of the study of religions through a systematic comparison of the doctrines and practices of different world religions. It also implies the study of all traditions and forms of religious life. More specifically, it is a discipline that makes historically informed consideration of commonalities and differences among religions.⁴ In other words, it involves not generalizing religion based on a single case. Also, the idea of a comparative study of religions suggests religious

¹ E. Husain, *The House of Islam: A Global History* (United Kingdom: Bloomsbury, 2019), 5.

² 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī, *The Holy Qur'ān: Arabic Text English Translation and Commentary*, Al-Qur'ān 2:112 (Saudi Arabia: Presidency of Islamic Researches, IFTA, 1989), 46.

³ Mirza Yawar Baig, *Presenting Islam Today - Challenges and Thought Share: Presenting Islam in the Modern World*. (California: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), 15.

⁴ Mircea Eliade and R. Sheed, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1979), 18.

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manifestations and their effects on the level of an individual, society, institutions, and globally as well as their mutual interaction in history.⁵

The importance of comparative religion is made manifest when related to Ahmed Deedat's *Da'wāh* and works. Ahmed Deedat (1918-2005) was a South African based Muslim scholar, famous worldwide for his lectures and debates on comparative religious issues.⁶ This paper aims to discuss Sheikh Ahmed Deedat's *Da'wāh* approach and its socio-religious impact on Nigeria. Therefore, our aim in this paper is to examine the approach taken by Ahmed Deedat in inviting to Islam in various parts of the world. Also, this study intends to give the position of Ahmed Deedat on various themes found in Islamic traditions and beliefs. It also seeks through an inquiry into his works; how he has helped in influencing the propagation of Islam and in what way has his views aided the propagation of Islam in Nigeria?

Literature Review

The subject of *Da'wāh* (propagation/proselytization) has always been an issue of concern for religious scholars, researchers, and writers of different faiths. This is because there are various dimensions to propagation of one's faith. Juliana Finucane and R. Michael Feener in their edited work, *Proselytizing and the Limits of Religious Pluralism in Contemporary Asia* note various ways in which contemporary experience of processes of globalization pose new challenges and opportunities for religious groups to propagate their beliefs in Asian contexts.⁷

There are several works that have examined religious proselytization from Islamic perspective and this is based on the notion that Muslims have religious zeal to proclaim Islam to the non-Muslims, as attested in Chapter 16 verses 125 of the Qur'ān. Hence, quite a number of works have been written on *Da'wāh* as it relates to

⁵ Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 12.

⁶ Muhammed Haron, "Ahmad Deedat: The Making of a Transnational Religious Figure," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 27 no.2 (2014): 66-93; Brian Larkin, "Ahmed Deedat and the Form of Islamic Evangelism," *Social Text* 26 no.3 (2008): 101-121; Samadia Sadouni, "Ahmed deedat, internationalisation, and transformations of Islamic Polemic," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 43 no.1 (2013): 53-57; Vahed, G. 'Ahmed Deedat and Muslim-Christian Relations at the Cape, c. 1960-1980', *Journal for Islamic Studies* 29 no.1 (2009): 2-32.

⁷ J. Finucane and R. M. Feener, *Proselytizing and the Limits of Religious Pluralism in Contemporary Asia* (Singapore: Springer, 2013), 1-269.

comparative religions, religious communities, pluralism, Islam, Muslim issues, etc. Among such works are *Da'wāh and Other Religions: Indian Muslims and the Modern Resurgence of Global Islamic Activism*;⁸*Law and Religion in Indonesia: Conflict and the courts in West Java*;⁹*Islam, Religions, and Pluralism in Europe*;¹⁰*The Stated Motivations for the Early Islamic Expansion (622-641): A Critical Revision of Muslims' Traditional Portrayal of the Arab Raids and Conquests*.¹¹ In these works, *Da'wāh* or proselytization was examined from various dimensions. They were able to show that religious diversity, pluralism, and religious communities are issues that have been in the front burner of various researchers and writers.

Also, other works that have similar messages like the ones mentioned above include, for instance, Richard T. Antoun's *Muslim Preacher in the Modern World: A Jordanian Case Study in Comparative Perspective*;¹² Kajsa Ahlstrand and Goran Gunner's edited *Non-Muslims in Muslim Majority Societies - With Focus on the Middle East and Pakistan*;¹³ *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa* edited by Benjamin F. Soares;¹⁴ *In Search of Understanding: Reflections on Christian Engagement with Muslims after Four Decades of Encounter* by Clinton Bennett;¹⁵ *Islam: The Religion of Dialogue* by Muhammad Husayn Fadl Allah;¹⁶ *Hindu and Muslim Inter-religious Relations in Malaysia* by Theodore P.C. Gabriel;¹⁷ *Being German, Becoming Muslim: Race, Religion,*

⁸ Matthew J. Kuiper, *Da'wāh and Other Religions: Indian Muslims and the Modern Resurgence of Global Islamic Activism* (New York:Routledge, 2018), 1-296.

⁹ M. Crouch, *Law and Religion in Indonesia: Conflict and the courts in West Java* (New York:Routledge, 2013), 1-214.

¹⁰ E. Aslan, R. Ebrahim & M. Hermansen, *Islam, Religions, and Pluralism in Europe* (New York:Springer, 2016), 1-303.

¹¹ Ayman S. Ibrahim, *The Stated Motivations for the Early Islamic Expansion (622-641): A Critical Revision of Muslims' Traditional Portrayal of the Arab Raids and Conquests* (New York City:Peter Lang, 2018), 1-240.

¹² Richard T. Antoun, *Muslim Preacher in the Modern World: A Jordanian Case Study in Comparative Perspective* (New Jersey:Princeton University Press, 2014).

¹³ K.Ahlstrand &G.Gunner, *Non-Muslims in Muslim Majority Societies - With Focus on the Middle East and Pakistan* (Oregon:Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009).

¹⁴ Benjamin F. Soares (ed.), *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa* (Leiden: Brill,2006)

¹⁵ Clinton Bennett, *In Search of Understanding: Reflections on Christian Engagement with Muslims after Four Decades of Encounter* (Oregon:Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2019).

¹⁶ Muhammad Husayn Fadl Allah, *Islam: The Religion of Dialogue*. trns. Najim Khafaji (Lebanon:Almalak Ed., 2003)

¹⁷ Theodore P. C. Gabriel, *Hindu and Muslim Inter-religious Relations in Malaysia* (Lewiston, New York:Edwin Mellen Press, 2000).

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and Conversion in the New Europe by Esra Ozyurek;¹⁸ and *Islam and Belief: At Home with Religious Freedom* by Abdullah Saeed;¹⁹ all discuss propagation, religious freedom and religious proselytization as issues of concern in contemporary society. Some of the authors analyse and address the need for dialogue among adherents of religions in various countries.

Among the works related to the subject topic is Lateef Mobolaji Adetona's "The Impact of Modern Technology on *Da'wāh* in the Third World Nations" which examined *Da'wāh* as an integral part of Islam and the means through which the message of Islam is spread. The importance of *Da'wāh* can therefore not be overemphasized for the sustenance of the Islamic Faith.²⁰

Another article on the subject is by Ahmad H. Sakr titled "The Islamic Concept of *Dawāh*". Author discussed basic meanings of *Da'wāh* as seeking favour (or hoping) in Allah by supplicating, enjoining a divine or spiritual call on others. *Da'wāh* is derived from the root *da'ā*, to call or invite, has the primary meaning call or invitation. In the religious sense, *Da'wāh* is the invitation, addressed to men by God and the prophets, to believe in the religion of Islam.²¹ Sohirin Mohammad Solihin's book *Islamic Da'wāh : Theory and Practice* examines the concept and practice of Islamic propagation stating that Islamic propagation itself involves publicizing of the messages and ideals of Islam, persuading the generality of the people to its acceptance and practicalization and seeking, employing words of wisdom and acts of right conduct, to establish in the society, a community diligent in faith and religion.²²

Another important contribution that help shape the understanding of the subject matter in this paper is the work of Abul Walid al-Hamawi and Ibrahim Abu Khalid, "Da'wāh : Getting it Right", in which the authors stated that the word *Da'wāh* can also

¹⁸ Esra Ozyurek, *Being German, Becoming Muslim: Race, Religion, and Conversion in the New Europe*.

¹⁹ Abdullah Saeed, *Islam and Belief: At Home with Religious Freedom* (Washington:Center for Islam and Religious Freedom, 2016)

²⁰ Lateef Mobolaji Adetona, "The Impact of Modern Technology on *Da'wāh* in the Third World Nations," *Journal of Arabic and Religious Studies* 16(2002), 136.

²¹ Ahmad H. Sakr, "The Islamic Concept of *Dawāh*," *The Muslim World League Journal* 25 no.8 (1997): 2.

²² Sohirin Mohammad Solihin, *Islamic Da'wāh: Theory and Practice* (Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia, 2008), 10.

be applied to the propaganda, whether open or not of false Prophets.²³ However, it is important to note that the Qur'ān, which is the primary source of information in Islam, lays down some guidelines on *Da'wāh* activities. The verses which speak on *Da'wāh* include the following: "Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong".²⁴ "Who is better in speech, than one who calls {Men} to Allah, works righteousness and say: "I am of those who bow in Islam".²⁵ "Invite to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: For thy Lord knows the best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance".²⁶

All the above works establish the need for *Da'wāh* and that Muslims should invite others to the way of Allah. It is in following this outlook about Islamic propagation that Ahmed Deedat started his *Da'wāh* activities. Also, it can be deduced from the works mentioned above that Islam enjoins embarking on *Da'wāh* without compromising one's faith and that the language of communication adopted in *Da'wāh* must portray decency and be salutary. Moreover, the use of wisdom to propagate the message of Islam was also encouraged. Therefore, this paper has a unique stance in exploring *Da'wāh* and its socio-religious impact, finding what are the approach of Ahmed Deedat and to what extent was his *Da'wāh* method influence in Nigeria. Summarily, the general make-up of the present study is different as compared to works done previously on Ahmed Deedat and his brand of preaching.

Research Methodology

This paper offers observations on the concept of *Da'wāh* , its scope and its significance in the life Ahmed Deedat. The author highlights the discussion on the unique nature of his *Da'wāh* and identifies its socio-religious impact on Nigeria. This research is qualitative, in which a textual analysis technique is applied on classical, as well as relevant contemporary materials on Islamic propagation. This study takes into account various Islamic outlooks through citing the verses in the Qur'ān and other scriptures laden with the message of Qur'ān, Muhammad, Islam, Jesus, Bible, and God as explained

²³Abul Walid al-Hamawi and Ibrahim Abu Khalid, "Da'wāh: Getting it Right," *Nida'ul-Islam* 26 (1999): 5.

²⁴ Al-Qur'ān 3:104

²⁵ Al-Qur'ān 41:33

²⁶ Al-Qur'ān 16:25

by Ahmed Deedat. In addition, works relevant to the themes of Qur'ān, Muhammad, Islam, Jesus, Bible, and God were also consulted. Furthermore, a discourse on Ahmed Deedat's *Da'wāh approach* was elaborated upon with the aim to understand the various ways in which he carried out his preaching of Islamic message. Subsequent sections examined his outlook on Islam and Christianity as well as how his propagation of Islamic teaching affected the socio-religious conditions of Muslims in Nigeria.

Discussion

Ahmed Deedat's Da'wāh Message

Ahmed Deedat was a charismatic, self-taught Muslim writer, preacher, and public speaker from South Africa. He was most famous for engaging Christian evangelists in public debate. He was widely known for inviting people to Islam. This led to his various inter-religious debates with people of other faiths as well as recorded lectures on Islam and other religions. It was as a result of his missionary works that he was awarded the King Faisal International Prize in 1986 at Saudi Arabia. Deedat's approach to *Da'wāh* can be found below:

His Qur'ānic Message

One of the ways used by Ahmed Deedat in propagating the message of Islam is the Qur'ān. He tried to convince sincere Jews and Christians, people, who hold good opinions about Islam, that the source of Muhammad's revelation is God Almighty, and the Holy Qur'ān is the infallible Word of God perfectly preserved.²⁷ To prove the divine authorship and the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān he advanced two arguments. Firstly, the Qur'ān was revealed to someone who was an unlearned person an *Ūmmīy* Prophet, i.e., one who could not read or write.²⁸ This point was also reiterated by Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), one of the most influential authors of the nineteenth century, in his work regarding the educational qualifications of Muhammad (SAW). He says: "One other circumstance we must not forget: that he had no school learning; of the thing, we call school learning none at all".²⁹ Allah (SWT) testifies to the veracity of this claim saying:

²⁷ Ahmed Deedat, *Al-Qur'ān: The Ultimate Miracle* (Durban: Islamic Propagation Centre, 1979), 25.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History: Six Lectures; Reported, with Emendations and Additions - Primary Source Edition* (Charleston, South Carolina: Nabu Press, 2013), 62.

“And thou was not (able) to recite a book before this (book came), nor art thou (able) to transcribe it with thy right hand. In that case, indeed, would the talkers of vanities have doubted”.³⁰

Had Muhammad (SAW) been a learned man or had he been able to read or write many might have had reasons to doubt his claim that the Qur’ān is God’s Word. He could not write the Qur’ān. The Qur’ān refers to him as the unlettered prophet. The Qur’ān even notes that the Muhammad - who became a Prophet at age 40 - never wrote a book or anything before. Secondly, the Book (the Qur’ān) itself, carries its testimony that it is from God. Study it from any angle scrutinize it. Allah challenges the doubters’ saying: “Do they not then consider the Qur’ān carefully? Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found therein many contradictions”.³¹

Deedat noted that several times when miracles were demanded from Muhammad the Prophet of God, he was made to point to the Qur’ān. Moreover, men of knowledge, with literary skills and spiritual insight, who were honest enough to themselves, recognized and accepted the Qur’ān as a genuine miracle.³² Also, the miracle of the Qur’ān is that it yields its knowledge to each mind within its capacity and degree of intellect. It gives to the mind that which satisfies it. Thus, the illiterate quite content to listen to the Qur’ān being read or recited while the literate obtains a great deal of contentment and satisfaction from reading or listening to its meaningful elucidation. The highly educated find its miraculous features challenging and stimulating to their mind and thought. This is because within the Qur’ān the basis for all knowledge a man may attain by Allah’s will, at any period, can be found when such knowledge is attained and the relevant verse for enlightenment cited authenticity.³³

Ahmed Deedat believes all the words in the Qur’ān were carefully chosen when he wrote that “every word of the Quranic text is meticulously chosen chiselled and placed by the All-Wise Himself. They carry God’s fingerprint and are the Signs of God”.³⁴ If those critics and sceptics spent as much time in an honest and unprejudiced study of the

³⁰ Al-Qur’ān 29:48

³¹ Al-Qur’ān 4:82

³² Ahmed Deedat, *Muhammed, the Greatest* (New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 1999), 10.

³³ Muḥammad Mutawallī Sha’rāwī, *The Miracles of the Qur’ān* (London: Dar Al Taqwa, 1989), 15.

³⁴ Ahmed Deedat, *What the Bible Says About Muhammad (pbuh)* (South Africa: Kazi Publications, 1991), 16.

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Qur'ān's language and its depth of meaning as in seeking defects or lapses of memory depth of to justify their futile attempts of discrediting Allah's divine message to mankind, they would have long ago discovered the futility of their endeavours.³⁵

Ahmed Deedat's argument amongst others is that human author can never remain consistent in his teachings for twenty-three years. Passing through the most conflicting vicissitudes of life, a man must somewhere along the line make compromises, must contradict himself. No man can ever be the same always in his preaching as the message of the Holy Qur'ān is consistent with itself throughout.

He maintains that the Qur'ān contains many matters relating to the nature of the universe which were unknown to man before but which subsequently, through discoveries of science, have fully confirmed a field where an untutored mind would have most certainly lost in the wild and contradictory speculation. How could he then pronounce truths of scientific nature that no other human being could have developed at that time, and all this without once making the slightest error in his pronouncement on the subject.³⁶

With these arguments, Ahmed Deedat was able to prove to the antagonists that the Qur'ān is the veritable word of God. He demonstrates its miraculous construction which only an omnipotent, omniscient Being could have produced. It is on this basis, therefore, that Deedat believes a Muslim has to invite non-Muslims to Islam with the Qur'ān in one hand and logic in the other. He believes the Muslims should march forward for the conquest of the hearts and minds of mankind with the message of the Qur'ān.

His View about Muhammad (SAW)

Ahmed Deedat's love for the Prophet (SAW) has been built in him by his father since when he was young. His father Hossen would not tolerate any kind of disrespect for the prophet due to his intense love for him.³⁷ Ahmed Deedat wrote books on the personality of the Prophet Muhammad to show that he was a true Messenger sent by God to all mankind. In his book *Muhammad the Greatest*, he started with Qur'ān 68 vs 4 which reads: *And surely thou hast sublime morals.*

³⁵ Sha'rāwī, *The Miracles of the Qur'ān*, 16.

³⁶ Maurice Bucaille, *The Bible, The Qur'ān & Science* (New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2012), 15.

³⁷ A documentary video titled "The Story of Ahmed Deedat" by Al-Majd T.V.

Another reason that can be deduced from why he wrote on Muhammad was because of the inferiority complex among the Muslims about the Prophet and the kudos given to him {the prophet} even by the non-Muslims. He gave various examples of people changing the topic of his lectures thinking it would be too provocative to say something like “Muhammad {pbuh} the Greatest” instead they change it to “Muhammad the Great” and gave the reason of printer’s error for changing the title of the original topic and advertising the wrong title. Another example he gave is the Muslim of Indianapolis who change the title “What the Bible says about Muhammad (pbuh)” to “A Prophet in the Bible”. An uninteresting title and as was to be expected the attendance left much to be desired.³⁸

Ahmed Deedat in his work *Muhammad the Greatest* also quoted people who professed different religions apart from Islam and what they say about Muhammad. Authors such as Micheal H. Hart who placed the Prophet in number 1 out of 100 in his book *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History*, William McNeil, a United States historian of the University of Chicago, James Gavin a retired lieutenant general of the United States army, Jules Masserman United States psychoanalyst who all mentioned the reason they have high regard for the Prophet. Some of the quotes from non-Muslims about the Prophet in his work are:

He was Caesar and Pope in one; but he was Pope without the Pope's pretensions, and Caesar without the legions of Caesar: Without a standing army, without a bodyguard, without a palace, without a fixed revenue. If ever any man had the right divine, it was Muhammad for he had the powers without its instruments and without its supports.³⁹

George Bernard Shaw says: “I have studied him, the wonderful man and in my opinion far from being an anti-Christ, he must be called the saviour of humanity”.⁴⁰ Micheal H. Hart says: “My choice of Muhammad to add the list of the world's most influential persons may surprise some readers and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both religious and secular

³⁸ Ahmed Deedat, *Muhammed, the Greatest* (New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 1999), 3.

³⁹ Smith R. Bosworth, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism* (London: Darf Publishers Limited, 1986), 92. Cited in Ahmed Deedat, *Muhammed, the Greatest*, 4.

⁴⁰ Cited in Ahmed Deedat, *Muhammed, the Greatest* (New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 1999), 17.

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level”.⁴¹ Ahmed Deedat also emphasizes the fact that Muhammad is the natural successor to Christ. He says: “Muhammad's (pbuh) succession to Jesus Christ (pbuh) is multifaceted (1) Chronologically, in history as sequence of event in time (2) By being chosen by God. (3) In the fulfilment of the prophecies of his predecessors, and last but not least by bringing the Guidance of God to perfection”.⁴²

Looking at the first reason given by Ahmed Deedat it can be said that Prophet Muhammad (SAW) came after Jesus Christ for Prophet Muhammad came some six centuries later. Prophet Muhammad talked about Prophet Isa as a true messenger of God and who Allah endowed to perform miracles. Also, the Prophet (SAW) was chosen by God can be seen in the title *Mustafa* meaning “Chosen”. The Qur’ān says in an unequivocal term: “It is He who sent amongst the Unlettered a Messenger from among themselves, to rehearse to them His signs, to purify them, and instruct them in the Book and Wisdom, although they had been before in manifest error”.⁴³

Another reason given by Ahmed Deedat is the coming of Prophet Muhammad is a fulfilment of the prophecies both in the Qur’ān and Bible. The Bible says in Deuteronomy 18: 18: “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren, and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him”. Therefore, to Deedat, looking at the Jews and Arabs they are brothers because they come from the same father Abraham or Ibrahim. Ismail and Ishaq are the sons of Ibrahim, therefore, their children are brethren to one another.⁴⁴

Furthermore, other parts of the prophecy talk about putting *my words into his mouth*. In Q112 vs1-4, Allah says: “Say: "He is Allah, (the) One and only. Allah the eternal absolute. He begetteth not, nor is he begotten. And there is none like unto Him”. The word “say” that started the chapter shows that words were put into the mouth of Prophet Muhammad by Allah Himself by commanding him to “Say”. During the next twenty-three years of his prophetic life, words were "put into his mouth", and he uttered them. They made an indelible impression on his heart and mind.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Michael H. Hart, *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History* (New York: Citadel Press, 1978), 10.

⁴² Ahmed Deedat, *Revelation of the Truth, Vol. 1.* (Lagos: Imran Memorial Press, n.d.), 30-31.

⁴³ Al-Qur’ān 62:2

⁴⁴ Ahmed Deedat, *Revelation of the Truth, Vol. 1.* (Lagos: Imran Memorial Press, n.d.), 15

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Lastly, Ahmed Deedat raised the point that Muhammad brought the Guidance of God to perfection. The Qur'ān had come to confirm, correct, and complete divine revelation or whatever was left of it in unworthy hands.⁴⁶ Allah says: "This Qur'ān is not such as can be produced by other than Allah; On the contrary, it is a confirmation of (revelation) that went before it and a fuller explanation of the Book wherein there is no doubt from the Lord of the worlds".⁴⁷

The Prophet was foretold in many ways, and when he came he showed many clear signs, for his whole life from the beginning to end was a miracle. He fought and won against odds. Without learning from men he taught the highest wisdom. He melted hearts that were hard, and he strengthened hearts that were tender and required support. In all his sayings and doings men of discernment could see the working of God's hand, yet the sceptics called it sorcery or magic. Some even went further call him mad! Describing his miraculous fulfilment of prophecy enchantment of which later became the most solid fact of human history.

Ahmed Deedat and Christianity

His Stand on the Personality of Jesus

Jesus (Isa) (A.S) holds a very high position in the House of Islam, though the Christians seem sceptical when this is said. When Ahmed Deedat discusses the issue of Jesus Christ he did not avoid Maryam the mother of Isa. That Maryam (A.S), the mother of Isa (A.S), was indeed a righteous woman and honoured above the women of all nations. Ahmed Deedat discussed the personality of Jesus Christ Isa (A.S) in the light of the Qur'ān and the Bible. The Muslims believed, that Jesus was one of the mightiest messengers of God, that he was the Christ i.e., the messiah (the anointed one); that he was born miraculously without any male intervention, that he gave life to the dead by God's permission no Muslim is a Muslim if he does not believe in Jesus (A.S).⁴⁸

Ahmed Deedat opined that the Christians need to understand that the true spirit of charity which the Muslims display, always towards Isa and his mother, Maryam, which is based on the Qur'ān teachings on faith. He (the Christian) does not know that the Muslim does not take the holy name of Jesus, in his language without saying Hazrat

⁴⁶ Abu Umar Al-faruq, *Islamaphobia* (Lagos: Salsabil Associates, 2003), 38.

⁴⁷ Al-Qur'ān 10:37

⁴⁸ Ahmed Deedat, *Christ in Islam* (New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2008), 28.

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Isa (A.S) (meaning revered Jesus) or Isa *alāthīss- salām* (Jesus, peace be upon him). Ahmed Deedat noted in his book *Christ in Islam* that:

The Christian does not know that in the Holy Qur'ān Jesus (pbuh) is mentioned by name five times (5x) more than the numbers of times the prophet of Islam is mentioned in the Book of God To be exact twenty-five times as against five.⁴⁹

Looking at Jesus in the light of the Bible, the Christians believe that Jesus was given birth through an immaculate conception a view also shared by the Muslims. But one thing Ahmed Deedat would never agree with the Christians about is that Jesus is God or the son of God. Yusuf Ali says in his commentary on Q3 vs 39 that:

After the description of the high position which Jesus occupies as a prophet, we have a repudiation of the dogma that he was Allah, or the son of Allah, or anything more than a man. If it is said that he was born without either a human rather Adam was also so born. Indeed, Adam was born without either a human father or mother.⁵⁰

Further, Deedat observes that if the Christian split hairs by arguing that Adam was “created” from the dust of the ground, whereas Jesus “begotten” in the womb of Mary. This is his response: “The Muslim takes exception to the word begotten, because begetting is an animal act, belonging to the lower animal functions of sex. How can we attribute such a lowly capacity to God?”⁵¹

Another point that must also be noted is that Ahmed Deedat does not believe that Jesus died on the cross or was crucified. Looking at the various evidence he brought in his book *Was Christ Crucified*. He believes he (Jesus) was reluctant to die for he (Jesus) knew the Jews want to kill him and so Jesus prayed to God to deliver him. It must be noted that all the evidence brought by Ahmed Deedat was from the Bible and not from the Qur'ān, in other words, he, Ahmed Deedat, was trying to say even from the evidence and the events in the Bible, Jesus did not die on the cross. Ahmed Deedat quoted one of the most widely read theologians of the second half of the twentieth century in his (Deedat's) *Crucifixion or Cruci-fiction* as saying:

⁴⁹Ibid., 4.

⁵⁰ ‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī, *The Holy Qur'ān: Arabic Text English Translation and Commentary*, Al-Qur'ān 2:112 (Saudi Arabia: Presidency of Islamic Researches, IFTA, 1989), 158.

⁵¹ Ahmed Deedat, *Christ in Islam* (New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2008), 29.

The Death of Jesus on the cross is the centre of all Christian theology... All statements about God, about creation, about sin and death have their focal point in the crucified Christ. All Christian statements about history, about the Church, about faith and sanctification, about the future and about hope stem from the crucified Christ.⁵²

In other words, what Ahmed Deedat is trying to say is that if the crucifixion of Jesus has been faulted Christianity would have no basis. This is why he brought various examples such as; Jesus only stayed on the cross for 3 hours; was alive when spear thrust his body on the cross; Always in disguise for the Jews not to recognize him; Never shown himself to the Jews; took only short trips; Never said "I was dead and now I am alive; Mary Magdalene was not afraid on recognizing him; Pilate marvels on hearing about his death amongst other evidence.⁵³

Deedat maintains that the study of the crucifixion was thrust upon him by those of the Christian faith who claimed to be his benefactors and well-wishers. He seriously took their concern to heart and studied and researched objectively using their sources. He also noted that he does not expect anyone to ask him about his belief as a Muslim concerning the crucifixion. His belief he says is “the Qur’ānic believe as categorically stated in Chapter 4 vs 157”.⁵⁴ To support Deedat’s assertion, A.S. Suleman noted about the crucifixion of Jesus that:

⁵² Ahmed Deedat quoted Jürgen Moltmann, Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology at the University of Tübingen in Germany. He is a German Reformed theologian. Also, he contributed many books to the field of theology, including *Theology of Hope* (1964), *The Crucified God* (1972), *Man* (1974), *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (1975), *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (1980), *God in Creation* (1985), *The Way of Jesus Christ* (1989), *The Spirit of Life* (1991), *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (1993), *The Coming of God* (1995), *How I Have Changed: Reflections on Thirty Years of Theology* (1997), *The Source of Life* (1997), *God for a Secular Society* (1998), *Experiences in Theology* (2000), *Science and Wisdom* (2003) and *In the End—The Beginning: The Life of Hope* (2004). Among the books co-authored with his spouse Dr. Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel include *Humanity in God* (1983), *God—His and Hers* (1991), and *Passion for God: Theology in Two Voices* (2003).

⁵³ Ahmed Deedat, *Christ in Islam* (New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2008), 30.

⁵⁴ Ahmed Deedat, *Crucifixion or Cruci-fiction*. (Jeddah: Abul-Qasim Publishing House, 1984), 88.

The agility of the Jews in the crucifixion episode should be seen from the fact that the Jewish Priests were trying to make a sacrificial lamb out of Jesus, rather than God sacrificing His Son' for any vicarious purposes.⁵⁵

Suleman also continued those facts abound to show that Jesus was not crucified. In the first place, the Bible shows that when a righteous person calls on God, He delivers such a person. During the raising of Lazarus from death, Jesus also made it clear that God Heard his prayer always. It, therefore, follows that Christ's prayer that he be saved from the torture of crucifixion was answered by God. Also, the Bible claims that a resurrected body is no longer a mortal but a spirit. To demonstrate the fact that he was not dead, Jesus took the pain to prove to his followers that he was not a spirit at all but he was the same Jesus they know.⁵⁶

Ahmed Deedat maintained that the message of Jesus (pbuh) was as simple and straight forward as that of all his predecessors as well as that of his successor Muhammad (pbuh) namely "believe in God and keep His commandments" For the God who inspired His messengers, is an unvarying God and He is consistent. He is not the "author of confusion".⁵⁷

His Criticism about the Bible

It must be mentioned that Ahmed Deedat was more of a Bible scholar than the Qur'ān. This is why he has a problem with what the Christians call the Bible. He believes there are contradictions in the Bible; therefore, it cannot be regarded as the word of God alone. He believes there are three different kinds of witnesses recognizable without any need of specialized training. These are the word of God, words of a prophet of God, words of a Historian. An example of the first type is: "I, I am the Lord, and beside me there is no saviour".⁵⁸ Also, "[t]urn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other".⁵⁹

The second type is: "Jesus answered, "The first is, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One".⁶⁰ "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli,

⁵⁵ A.S. Suleman, *Dilemma of the Faithful Christian* (Lagos: IBRASH Publications, 1997), 46.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ahmed Deedat, *Christ in Islam* (New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2008), 42.

⁵⁸ Isaiah 43:11

⁵⁹ Isaiah 45:22

⁶⁰ Mark 12:29

Eli, Lama sabach- thani? That is, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"⁶¹The third type is: "And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it he found nothing but leaves..."⁶²

According to Deedat, in Islam, all these are recorded in separate books and are guarded jealously apart, in their proper gradations of authority. He further observes that "[a] Christian is forced to concede equal spiritual import and authority to all, and it is unfortunate in this regard".⁶³In support of this, A. Dimashkiah noted:

The book of the religion remains always as proof of the religion. If the book is right then its religion is right, if it is wrong then its religion is wrong. To consider any scripture as a holy Book} it should: Be free of errors, contradictions be free of the low, obscene words; be free of slander of God, God's prophets; be free of racism; describe God in' the best possible way not negatively; be expressed in the most beautiful language, the language of the creator of language; it should not permit what God has forbidden, nor forbid what God has allowed.⁶⁴

How can such a book be accepted as the word of *Allahū taālā*? A book in which there are some words by *Allāhū ta'ālā*, some words by Prophets, and some different narrations by ordinary human beings. This is why it is believed that there are many errors in today's Bibles because a story is related in different ways by narrators, the number reported in a story is not the same. All these points to the fact that today's Bible is the work of human beings.⁶⁵ Ahmed Deedat did not only look at the contradictions and subtractions in the Bibles but what other Christians say about the Bible itself. For instance, he quoted a Seventh Day Adventist prophetess as saying: "The Bible we read today is the work of many copyists who have in most instances done their work with marvellous accuracy. But copyists have not been infallible, and God most evidently has

⁶¹ Matthew 27:46

⁶² Mark 11:13

⁶³ Ahmed Deedat, *Revelation of the Truth, Vol. 1* (Lagos: Imran Memorial Press, n.d.), 78.

⁶⁴ A. Dimashkiah, *Let the Bible Speak* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 1997), n.p.

⁶⁵ H. Kitabevi, *Islam and Christianity* (Istanbul: Waqf Ikhlas Publications, 1990), 30.

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not seen fit to preserve them altogether from error in transcribing".⁶⁶ She also stated further that:

I saw that God had especially guarded the Bible, yet when copies of it were few, learned men had in some instances changed the words, thinking that they were making it plain, when in reality they were mystifying that which was plain, by causing it to learn to their established views, which were governed by tradition.⁶⁷

From the old and the New Testament, there is abundant evidence that indicates the voice of third-person writing from hearsay. Looking at the New Testament, every Gospel begins with the introduction "According to" because not a single one of the vaunted twenty-four thousand copies extant carries its authors' autograph. Ahmed Deedat also observes various contradictions in the Bible. For instance, 1 Kings 7 vs 26. It reads: "And it was a handbreadth thick, and the brain thereof was wrought like the brain of a cup, with flowers of lilies. It contained two thousand baths". Also, in 11 Chronicles 4 vs 5: "And the thickness of it was a handbreadth, and the brim of it like the work of the brim of a cup, with flowers of lilies, and it received and held three thousand baths".

Ahmed Deedat noted that whether it is witting or unwitting the inspired writers' singular inability to grasp the difference between 2,000 and 3,000 is unforgivable. No miracle, however numerous, could remove a contradiction which lies in the surface of the teachings and records of Christianity. He also observed that the Bible contains pornography which is not befitting for the word of God and gave the example of Genesis 19 vs 30. All these are some of the various criticisms Deedat raised against the Bible.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Ahmed Deedat quoted Mrs. Ellen Gould White, a prophetess of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, in her Bible commentary. She was an author and American Christian innovator. Along with other Adventist leaders such as Joseph Bates and her husband James White, she was instrumental within a small group of early Adventists who formed what became known as the Seventh-day Adventist Church. See Ahmed Deedat, *Revelation of the Truth, Vol. 1* (Lagos: Imran Memorial Press, n.d.), 99.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Socio-Religious Influence and Effect of His *Da‘wāh* Activities in Nigeria

From the beginning of Ahmed Deedat’s Islamic propagation message, he has been able to raise eyebrows just as it has been able to strengthen hearts. One of the effects of his *propagation* activities is that he succeeded in arousing the consciousness of the adherents of other religions especially the Jews and Christians about the religion which they profess and looking critically at their doctrines in comparison with their actual practices.

Secondly, Ahmed Deedat has been able to win souls into Islam. There have been many conversions from other religions to Islam after listening to his lectures and reading his books. One of these converts is Mr. Dawood Ngwane, a trustee of the Islamic Propagation Centre International (IPCI). Thirdly, through his propagation activities from the early 1940s to 1996, there has been an increase in the quest for comparative studies. This bug also spread to Nigeria, with people like Jamiu Adegunwa(1970*-) and the Late Lateef Adebawale (1961-1998) of the Izhārūl-Hāq Propagation Movement of Nigeria (1985*-) whose mode of preaching on comparative analysis has been having a great impact and have been able to convert many into Islam especially in Lagos State. It is important to note that the Islamic Propagation Centre International (IPCI),⁶⁹ an organization established by Ahmed Deedat with some close friends, also take courses on comparative study.

Another effect of his propagation activities is that he has been able to explain some controversial concepts like Fatherhood of God to Christ, Crucifixion of Christ, Authenticity of the Bible (as it is today), Trinity among others. In addition, he also proved the comprehensiveness of Islam. That is, Islam is a realistic and practicable religion for all mankind for him to have as peace of mind in this world and the Hereafter.

⁶⁹The Islamic Propagation Centre International (IPCI) was founded in 1957 by the Late Shaikh Ahmed Deedat. Among the objectives of IPCI are: Empower and strengthen communities through the promotion of moral values and principles; Build bridges across faiths for greater understanding and social cohesion; Present Islam in its pristine and original form to people of all faiths. The core activities of IPCI include interfaith programmes, educational programmes, social concern for moral regeneration of communities, projects & initiatives to enhance projection of Islam.

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Furthermore, through his propagation activities, Ahmed Deedat was able to show that all prophets preached the same message of Islam i.e. there is no God except Allah, thereby, raising the morale of the Muslims against the hard-line missionary activities of the Christians and empowered them to counter some of the claims of the Christians.

Also, due to the comparative nature of his religious propagation, he was able to reach a wider range of people and present Islam to them. In other words, because he was not only talking about Islam, people of other views wanted to know what he has to say about their religion. However, some Muslims felt that he was too aggressive and his missionary work would bring friction by creating more enemies and hatred than the love between the Muslims and other religions.

Ahmed Deedat influence on Nigerian Muslims came majorly from watching video & record of his lectures and reading of his books, people became more enlightened on comparative analysis, have more access to the Bible and ways and manners of reading the Bible.⁷⁰ Admiration for his knowledge and scholarship made him receive an endless number of mails from Nigeria in the 1980s. This made him embarked on a trip to Kano from Khartoum in 1989 (Aisha, 2005).⁷¹ Also, before Ahmed Deedat became an internationally known scholar there have been scholars dealing with comparative analysis in Nigeria such as Aragboshana (1940s*-1990s*) and Bolaji Akewukewe (1940s*-1990s*) both of Lagos in the 1970s.⁷²

Unfortunately, he was turned back from Aminu Kano International Airport on the orders of the Federal Government. The letter given to him by the State Security Service (SSS) said he was turned back because he was from apartheid South Africa which at that time had international sanctions on it. But Ahmed Deedat didn't miss the irony that President F.W De Klerk, the head of the apartheid regime had been received in Nigeria a little earlier. Disappointed, Deedat and his son Yusuf made their way out of Nigeria on the next available flight. They were detained for 18 hours at the airport.⁷³

Despite this unfortunate incident Ahmed Deedat still had a great influence on Nigerian Muslims. He meets quite a number of his Nigerian brothers and sisters when lots and lots of them made a point of visiting him at the end of apartheid rule. Students,

⁷⁰Jamiu Adegunwa, interview by author, Tape recording, Lagos, October 4, 2005.

⁷¹ U. Y. Aisha, "Ahmed Deedat: Inspiration to One and All", *Weekly Trust*, August (2005): 88.

⁷²Jamiu Adegunwa, interview by author, Tape recording, Lagos, October 4, 2005.

⁷³ Aisha, "Ahmed Deedat: Inspiration to One and All", *Weekly Trust*, August (2005): 88

diplomats, journalists, and politicians from Nigeria all found their way to his bedside after news of his illness became known.⁷⁴

Other groups and personalities sprang up in Nigeria in the early 90's such as Izhārūl Hāq Propagation Movement of Nigeria, Izhārūl Hāq Movement of Nigeria, Abdullahi Olorunoje (1940s*-1990s*) of Sango, Jesu Okola (1940s*-1990s*) leading to different books being written on comparative analysis of religions especially between Islam and Christianity such as *Kaleje Okunrin*, the *Truth Bearer Magazine*, among others.

Conclusion

This paper investigates the *Da'wāh* themes in the works of Ahmed Deedat. It shows that just as he has been able to raise a lot of critical points on religion especially Christianity, he has also been able to strengthen the hearts of Muslims about their faith. The paper highlights various themes from his *Da'wāh* to adherents of different faiths and was able to deduce points on the personality of Jesus and Muhammad, the Bible and the Qur'ān, God as well as Islam. The paper also explains how his *Da'wāh messages* were centred on who has got the good news right. Moreover, the paper demonstrates the effectiveness of his *Da'wāh* activities in raising the consciousness of followers of other religions especially the Jews and Christians about the religion which they profess and looking critically at their doctrines in comparison with Islamic teachings. Finally, the paper suggests that Ahmed Deedat's *Da'wāh* methodology's great impact is that it has been able to convert many into Islam. The findings of this paper have implications for Islamic propagation and open the way for further dialogue among adherents of different religions.

Recommendations

Based on the discussion above the following recommendations may be considered:

1. Adequate attention should be paid to comparative religious studies as a way of promoting *Da'wāh*.
2. *Da'wāh* institutes should be erected in different parts of the Muslim world to train contemporary *da'ī*.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

3. Any *dā'ī* should be well-grounded in the spirit and teachings of Islam to reflect the correct teaching of the religion.
4. One of the main functions of Muslim parents is to ensure they provide their children and wards proper Islamic training alongside Western education.
5. Muslims should also try to intensify their *Da'wāh* effort by calling to Islam and reach out to people of other faiths.

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