

THE RIGHT WAY TO PREACH ISLAM: THE CASE OF ALBANIA

PhD. Cand. Hysni Skura

Department of Islamic Sciences/Beder University, Albania

Email: hskura@beder.edu.al

Abstract

This paper explores the topic of preaching Islam in Albania, with a focus on the right way to do so. The study argues that religion is a set of principles sent by God to guide humanity towards happiness in this world and the next, and that a religion which does not produce results that enable man to become smarter leads to the loss of life values. Therefore, the preservation of faith, life, wealth, offspring and mind are the main objectives of religion. The study highlights that in the face of negative portrayals of Islam in the media, it is the duty of Muslim preachers to communicate the truth and inform their congregation about the true principles of Islam. The study uses Imam Ash-Shatibi's work to argue that the basic pillar of religion is the benefit of this life and the next, and therefore the study provides important insights into the role of preaching in contemporary society. The findings of this study have implications for the way in which Islam is practiced and preached in Albania and provide important guidance for those who wish to promote a positive and accurate understanding of Islam in the world today.

Keywords: Islam, Preaching, Albania, Media, Communication

INTRODUCTION

Religion can be defined as the set of rules and principles, which have been sent by God to lead mankind to happiness, both in this world and in the next. Religion makes it possible for people to apply high values, which are hidden in their nature, to experience, in this way, a special enlightenment.

Ideas which, in one way or another, do not conform to religion, obviously remain one-dimensional and reduce the capacity to explain existence as a whole. On the other hand, a religion, which does not lead to results that enable man to become smarter, leads to the loss of the values of life instead of the desired goal, namely the opening and overcoming of people's horizons.

According to the well-known Islamic scholar Imam Ash-Shatibij, the basic pillar of the religion is the benefit of this life and the next. Therefore, the preservation of faith, life, wealth, offspring and mind are the main objectives of religion.

With the advent of mass media and transportation, the world has become a large "village". In such an environment, it is done easy to influence people, relying on the power and importance of the media. Given this fact, unfortunately, in many parts of the world, there have recently been attempts to portray Islam as a religion of terror. So, in the face of such a situation it is the duty of every Muslim preacher to communicate the truth and inform his audience (congregation) about the truths of Islam.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Islam has a rich history in Albania, dating back to the Ottoman era. However, the Albanian society has gone through a period of secularization during the communist regime,

which led to a decline in religious practice. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of Islamic practice in Albania, and the question of the right way to preach Islam has become increasingly relevant.

One approach to preaching Islam in Albania is through a moderate and tolerant interpretation of the religion, which emphasizes the importance of coexistence and respect for other religious beliefs. This approach is exemplified by the work of the Grand Mufti of Albania, Skënder Bruçaj, who has promoted interfaith dialogue and condemned extremism.

Another approach is the Wahhabi/Salafi interpretation, which is considered by some to be more rigid and fundamentalist. This approach has gained some followers in Albania, particularly among young people, but it has also faced criticism and opposition from moderate Islamic leaders.

Some scholars have argued that the best way to preach Islam in Albania is to focus on the country's unique cultural and historical context. This approach emphasizes the similarities between Islam and Albanian traditions, such as hospitality and respect for family values.

Overall, the right way to preach Islam in Albania is a complex issue, and there is no one-size-fits-all solution. It requires a nuanced understanding of the country's history, culture, and social dynamics, as well as a willingness to engage in interfaith dialogue and promote tolerance and coexistence.

METHOD

The methodology for this study on the right way to preach Islam in the Albanian case using a descriptive and analytical approach will involve the collection of primary data from official organizations. The primary data will be gathered through surveys and interviews of representatives from the official organizations involved in the preaching of Islam in Albania.

The descriptive aspect of the methodology will involve the collection of data on the current state of preaching of Islam in Albania. This will be achieved through a review of relevant literature, reports, and statistics on the prevalence and practice of Islam in Albania. The data collected will provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of Islam and the methods used in preaching in Albania.

The analytical aspect of the methodology will involve the examination and interpretation of the collected data to identify the factors that contribute to the success or failure of preaching Islam in Albania. The data collected will be analyzed using statistical methods, and qualitative data will be coded and categorized for thematic analysis. The results of the analysis will be used to draw conclusions on the right way to preach Islam in the Albanian case.

The primary data will be collected from official organizations involved in the preaching of Islam in Albania. This will include representatives from the Muslim Community of Albania, University and High School level of education. The data collected will be analyzed and interpreted to identify the factors that contribute to the success or failure of preaching Islam in Albania. The results will provide valuable insights into the right way to preach Islam in the Albanian case.

The Meaning and Characteristics Of Islam

The word "Islam" is derived from the word "silm", which means reconciliation, peace, submission and salvation. Islam is a religion of unity. It should be noted that Islam is a religion based on belief only in God Almighty and All-Merciful. Unity, as a term based on the worldview in the perspective of life and in the social system, presupposes the union of people brothers and sisters, equality in fundamental rights and the elimination of discrimination on the basis of language, color, race or family and kinship. Islam has abolished everything that belonged to the period of ignorance, all its characteristics in the pre-Islamic periods such as: selfishness, brutality, oppression and injustice, it uprooted them widely. In accordance with Islam, the principle "the big fish eats the small" was replaced by "love your neighbor"; "Life is not a war, but a process of cooperation"; the principle "others should work while I stay" with the word "help", "oppression" was replaced by "justice", "lack of humanity" gave way to "mercy"; the principle that people are born free and equal and that people have the right to integrate into society was established; the principle of injustice according to which "right is with the strong" was uprooted and the principle "power is with the right", "the righteous is the strongest" was gradually established and society believed in the truth and justice that belong to it. Creators and not in the random and personal laws of a victorious minority or of temporary dictators.

Islam has always stated that people enjoy respect without being subjected to socio-political, material-spiritual, cultural-racial discrimination of any other kind and has honored them with such a status above all creatures. The Qur'an states: "*And certainly We have honored the children of Adam.*"¹

Therefore, according to Islam, even if one is an unbeliever, his / her wealth, life and honor cannot be violated. Physical and mental health, as well as the right to form a family are the undeniable rights of every individual. In the same way, no other right can be violated. Even in a state of war, women, children and the elderly, who are unable to fight, are not affected. In accordance with the Holy Qur'an and the justice that comes from it, it is made known that the killer of a single man is a hated killer, as if he were the killer of all mankind. "*Therefore, we commanded the children of Israel, 'Whoever kills a person who has not killed anyone or caused any disorder on the earth, it is as if he had killed all the people.' And if one saves a life, it is as if he has saved the lives of all people*"²

From the Islamic point of view, human rights cannot be violated even if it is in the best interest of the community. A person's rights are as sacred as the rights of other people.

Islamic Representation and Communication

Islam regards man as the most revered creature, who is endowed with conscience and will, and calls freedom of belief as an undeniable right. Islam works to eliminate the barriers that stand between God and human intellect, conscience and will as fundamental principles. It should be noted that when Islam is properly understood, anyone can follow the line called "representation and communication", the line of Islamic practice and communication in the

¹ Quran; Surah el- Isra, 17/76.

² Quran; Surah Maide, 5/32.

best possible way. For example, many Qur'anic verses state that there is no duty other than what is entrusted to the Prophet of Islam and other prophets, which is the clear communication of the religion.³ Furthermore, GOD addresses the Prophet by warning him to be careful, reminding him that he was not sent to exert pressure on people: *Therefore advise (people o Muhammad), that you are only a counselor; and you are not obliged to force them!* ”⁴ *There is no violence in religion.*”⁵

Guaranteeing freedom of religion and conscience, possessing the right to live as one wishes, and institutionalizing justice in such a way that everyone can benefit, are norms that can benefit not only Muslims, but also non-Muslims. As a basic principle, the existence of more than one belief and living defines the general framework of pluralism. God does not want all people to be exactly the same in terms of faith and living, as if they had come out of the same mold. There are mental differences between people which allow us to discern which community is better than the others.

Legitimate goals, legitimate methods and soft words

Islam lays down the need to achieve a legitimate goal through lawful methods and means. He therefore does not in any way accept violence, torture, anarchy, or terror as methods. Moreover, he calls for people to address the tyrants with gentle words, like Pharaoh when it comes to communicating religion. The Qur'an narrates the command given to Moses and Aaron as follows: *“Go to Pharaoh! He, indeed, has transgressed all bounds! Speak soft words to him, that he may remember or be afraid!*”⁶

In two of the verses, which define how relations should be with Christians and Jews, it is stated:

“Discuss with the followers of the Book only the best way, but not with the other wrongdoers. And say: We believe in what has been revealed to us and in what has been revealed to you. Our Lord and your Lord is One - and we submit to Him as Muslims.”⁷

*Say: O followers of the Book, let us come to a common word between you and us: that we will worship Allah alone, that we will not associate anything with Him (in worship), and that we will not worship Him. we hold each other as gods, instead of Allah! ...”*⁸

It would be appropriate to mention another verse, which is used to determine the way religion communicates to all people, including the followers of the Book (Christians and Jews). *“Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice, and discuss with them in the best way!”*⁹

Another verse, which speaks of the gentle behavior that the Prophet and his followers should have towards people as a "mercy from God" and reminds them that they should be

³ Quran; Surah Nahl 16/35, 82; Surah Ali Imran 3/20; Surah Maide 5/92, 99; Surah Rra'd 13/40; Surah Ibrahim 14/52.

⁴ Quran; Surah Ghashiyah, 88 / 21-22.

⁵ Qur'an, Surah Bekare, 2/256

⁶ Quran; Surah Taha, 43-44.

⁷ Quran; Surah Ankabut, 29:46

⁸ Quran; Surah Al Imran, 3:64

⁹ Quran; Surah Nahl, 16: 125

patient even if their closest people abandon them, says: "*By the mercy of Allah, be kind to them (O Muhammad). 'If you were harsh and rude, they would leave you.'*"¹⁰

The meanings of the word "irhab" in the Qur'an

As is known by Muslims, words of praise in the Qur'an occupy a considerable place. Especially the words, which are used only in the context of praise and reverence have a very special meaning. The word irhab is an example of such words is the following:

*You do not know them, but Allah knows them. Whatever you spend in the way of Allah, you will be rewarded and you will not be wronged.*¹¹

Therefore, those who believe in the Qur'an and have it as a point of reference, should adhere to this word with the respect and dignity it requires. The literary meaning of the word irhab mentioned in the verses is "intimidation". Yet this is a natural fear, which manifests itself against the possibility of harm and which causes a form of restraint and it is not self-harm.¹²

The commentators of the Qur'an have interpreted the word "*irhab*" emphasized in the above verse in the sense of being equipped with the necessary weapons (such as war horses) against the enemy in order to create a restraining force in according to the circumstances of the case.¹³

Rashid Rida emphasizes that the word irhab does not mean to declare war, but rather, to prevent war; therefore, it means the protection of society and not its destruction. He also interprets the above verse as "*preparing the weapons of war to the highest degree possible in order to prevent enemies (known or not) from declaring war or attacking.*"¹⁴

In the hadiths, irhab means *restraint*¹⁵, content and in the commentaries of the hadiths it is interpreted as such¹⁶. Scholars of Islamic Legislation also use the word irhab in the sense of restraint.¹⁷

As a result, when we study the structure of the word irhab, its use as well as the meaning given to it in the books of hadith, in the commentaries in the books of Islamic Legislation and in various dictionaries, the following facts come to light:

1. The word irhab which is mentioned in the Qur'an is related to the issue of *idad*; it is a word that means being ready to defend one's sacred values. It is based on preventing transgressions, tackling tyranny and warning those who have criminal tendencies. This issue is recognized and accepted by societies and does not conflict with human values.
2. Muslim scholars use the word irhab in their works to mean "discouraging the enemy before or during war" to demoralize them spiritually and psychologically.

¹⁰ Quran; Surah Al Imran, 3: 159

¹¹ Quran; Surah Anfal, 8:60

¹² Ibn el Mendhur, Lisan el arab, *rhb*: Ragib, Mufredat, *rhb*: Zabidi, Taxh el Arus, *rhb*.

¹³ Taberi, Xhami el Bejan, 6/42; Razi, Mefatih, 15/192; Alusi. 10/26; Yazir, Hak Dini Quran Qur'an.

¹⁴ Rashid Ridha, *Tafsir el Mener*, 10/66.

¹⁵ Bazzar, Mesned, 6/30; Ahmed bin , 3/493

¹⁶ Azim Abadi, *Aun el Me'bud*, 8/159

¹⁷ Sarahsi, *mehsut*, 10/42; Ibn el Kudama, el Kafi; Bahuti, *Kesh'shaf el Gina*, 3/65; Abu Ishaq, ash Shirazi, *Muhedh-dheb*, 2/231; Ibn el Abidin, 6/305.

Apart from these two forms quoted in the Qur'an, there is no other meaning of the word *irhab* in both the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and no one can be found in other written works, which originate from the Qur'an and Sunnah. Therefore, it would not be correct for the word *irhab* mentioned in the Qur'an to be interpreted as the killing of innocent people in public places, in planting bombs on the body, in bloodshed, in arson, causing damage to homes or property, in spreading fear in order to establish chaos in a certain society. It would not be correct, either, to use the Qur'an as an argument in support of these acts.

Adding here a significant fact, which must be taken into account: All classical Arabic dictionaries contain only the word *ihafa* (intimidation) as a definition of the word *irhab*. However, it has been noticed that in some dictionaries compiled in the second half of the century. XX, definition of the word *irhab* has been changed and modified. Intentionally or not, especially in dictionaries prepared by non-Muslims, the word *irhab* has been defined as "terrorism".¹⁸

The issue of extremism and radicalism is more current than ever. The picture of the world today clearly dictates the need to treat this topic from different angles and with all its dimensions, proposing practical solutions, which maintain compatibility with reality.

An important role in preventing extremism and radicalism is played by religious leaders with their sermons on shrines and the various activities woven around the messages conveyed in the various religious teachings.

Relevant institutions have played an important role in creating such an atmosphere between different members of society. But, as the activity of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) dictates to us, the ideal solution is reached when every member of the various communities has a very clear attitude towards the social phenomena that compel him to react.

In the Islamic community, it is here that the imam and the mosque play a key role, because through them believers are nourished with various religious and social information.

Thus, it is necessary that the Friday sermon, the vase (lecture) in front of it on the same day as Friday, or other religious lessons during the week, be among the activities of every mosque. This is because the mosque is not only a place of worship and prayer, but also a place of education and socialization. Among the points to be considered during the sermons we single out:

- 1) Lecturing is an art in itself and, in order to achieve a result, it is required that the lecturer be clear on some points. It is necessary for the preacher to be attentive and clear, because if there is no nourishing message, then his audience fails to get a sound formation.
- 2) Another point that draws the audience's attention and often makes them feel proud of certain people or factions, is the discourse that has criticism as its purpose. Contrary to what might be thought, critical language is not a primary feature in religious sermons because it always leaves room for misunderstanding, especially if it is persistent. Even according to religious doctrine, constant criticism is positive, but only if we address it to ourselves.

¹⁸ Oxford Wordpower, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999; Hans Wehr, A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, Beirut, 1960; English Arabic Glossary, Encyclopedia Britannica, 11 / 650-651.

- 3) Attached to this point we can bring to attention the avoidance of issues, which open up unnecessary discussions, or even worse, the treatment of political issues. Nowadays, mosques are multifunctional objects, which, in addition to the function of the place of worship, also serve as centers for the benefit of moral and religious education. This is also the purpose for which all of us as believers gather in them. The inclusion of mosque premises in activities or debates outside of their current features would not be the only cause of disruption.
- 4) Lectures should be of a congratulatory and encouraging nature. The Imam should convey to his audience a positive approach for all those who have a different opinion from ours. We support this with the hadith of the Prophet of God, where he says: “*Facilitate and do not make difficult, praise and do not turn away / rebuke.*”¹⁹
- 5) The lecturer must know very well the sources of the Islamic religion. Classical literature, which constitutes the culture of knowledge of Islamic civilization, should definitely be well known. But, on the other hand, if we were to exclude faith and worship, civil relations issues always need a fair and contemporary interpretation. In this view, Islam is not static and especially the science of Islamic jurisprudence, by nature, is very dynamic. It remains static at the moment it is not treated accordingly and time. Classic cases constitute fatwas given by great scholars, but which are in completely different circumstances and outside the reality of the country where we preach. Sometimes, instead of solving, they open up more problems. Therefore, the preachers of the religion, in this case the imams of the mosques, have a very heavy burden on their shoulders, which requires maximum responsibility and seriousness. In addition to maintaining the criteria set by the highest institution of religion, if necessary, the lecturer should consult with more informed persons to properly perform the high task of transmitting religion.
- 6) In addition, the imam of the mosque has the duty to control the condition of the congregation of the mosque where he exercises his duty, in order to anticipate possible conflicts. He should educate his congregation with such a spirit and worldview that they are willing to accept dissent and respect others, thus strengthening the spirit of cooperation and understanding.
- 7) The mosque is most effective in carrying out its mission at the moment it organizes various social activities. The active involvement of the members of the mosque congregation, makes everyone feel that he is giving his contribution and this increases the positive feelings towards others, bringing stability and harmony.

In conclusion, it can be said that everyone is at risk of extremism and radicalism. Therefore, this issue should never be underestimated. The causes leading to it are:

1. Lack of proper knowledge of matters of religion.
Superficiality in understanding texts without delving into knowing the purposes, causes and wisdom behind them.
2. Preoccupation with secondary issues and bypassing primary and major issues.
3. Following obscure texts and skipping clear texts.

¹⁹ Sahih Buhari, 3:72.

4. Lack of education and training near preachers, qualified imams and approved by the highest institution of religion.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion we say that Islam considers man as the most honorable creature, which is endowed with conscience and will, and calls freedom of religion as an undeniable right. Islam works to eliminate the barriers that stand between God and human intellect, conscience and will as fundamental principles. And this is certainly achieved through a multidimensional education and training on religious principles and provisions. It should be noted that when Islam is properly understood, anyone can follow the line called "representation and communication", the line of Islamic practice and communication in the best possible way, which would consequently lead to a living in harmony and peace with everyone around us.

It is the professional and moral responsibility of every preacher of Islam (mufti, imam, waiz, muezzin, etc.) to explain the religion to the people around him in the best possible way without being detached from the two main sources which are the Qur'an and Prophetic tradition and of course combining these teachings with a methodology appropriate to his audience.

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