



Political Islam Online

‘Amr Khaled Message of Hope



Amr Khaled does not fit the image most people have of a Muslim Cleric, neither in looks, dressing style or preaching style. Writing in *Islam Online* yesterday, Egyptian political thinker and writer ‘Abdelwahab *Elmessiri* discusses the preaching style of *Amr Khaled*, the most famous “Islamic tele-preacher” in the Arab world. While he remains little known in the West, this year *Time* magazine ranked *Khaled* sixty-third in its list of the one hundred most influential people in the World. It is fair to say that *Amr Khaled* has brought about the most striking changes to the methods of preaching Islam. *Elmessiri* considers *Khaled’s* style as a necessary step in the development of today’s Middle Eastern society.

Traditionalists’ Dark Style

Elmessiri describes *Khaled’s* approach as being the most effective tool to confront the predominantly gloom and doom style of other Islamic clerics. *Elmessiri* refers to their approach as “Gothic Islamic messages,” in reference to the gothic horror genre in Western literature. Writing for his Arab audience, he explains that the term is appropriate for this style of preaching because of its dark themes and emotional extremes, with gruesome pictures of blood and horror filtered now through Islamic lenses rather than the windows of medieval gothic cathedrals. *Elmessiri* argues that such messages are not based in reality; they promote worship at the expense of social responsibility by concentrating on threat of fear and suffering in the afterlife rather than the issues of daily life.

Khaled’s Message of Hope and Forgiveness

In contrast to the traditional approach, the author explains that the message of *Amr Khaled* centers around the role of the individual in society. He focuses on the reality of daily life with the goal of improving the conditions of life on earth while maintaining God’s word. This consciousness-raising encompasses all aspects of life, economic, social and political, and *Khaled’s* more important messages are constantly positive, emphasizing hopes and aspirations rather than negative thoughts. As an example, *Elmessiri* recounts how in one of *Khaled’s* sermons in which he describes the opening of Mecca by the prophet *Muhammad*, *Khaled* concentrates on the compassionate attitude of the prophet towards his enemy and the positive relationships which existed between Islam and the conquered countries. *Elmessiri* believes that, in addition to the message itself, *Khaled’s* preaching style is also different from other clerics. He notes that *Khaled* uses modern terms to which young people can better relate and maintains a smiling and cheerful attitude throughout most of his talks, in contrast to the demeanor of traditional preachers.

The author believes that *Khaled* represents a vibrant force needed to maintain a strong civil society. *Elmessiri* maintains that, apart from a central government, the roles in many segments of society should be decentralized but interdependent. He explains that *Khaled*

believes in the role of individuals in maintaining a healthy society and his preaching is geared toward encouraging such behavior for the purpose of reforming society. In contrast, the author explains, traditional preachers emphasize individual salvation at the expense of earthly communal benefit.

Elmessiri's Criticism and Advice

The author does criticize *Khaled* for failing to speak on sensitive political issues in order to avoid confrontation with the government, although he understands the dilemma. He also states that *Khaled* is wrong to blame the unemployment problem on the laziness of individuals rather than the lack of opportunities in general. Also, in an apparent effort to bring the concept of justice and the problem of consumerism to the forefront of the social debate, *Elmessiri* urges *Khaled* to address these issues and advocate moderation in all aspects of society, religious, political and economic.

PI Online notes that the increasing popularity of 'Amr Khaled is a result of a combination of factors, not the least of which is his ability to project the image of a modern Islam. He was able to attract young people with moderate Islamic views from the middle and upper classes of society. Many of the more affluent consider the conservative Islamic approach backward. They see in Khaled's message a way to identify with Islam within a more modern Western-style social context. While *Khaled's* own western dress and manner promote that modern image, he nevertheless advises that Muslim women should wear a head scarf. Some secularists have criticized him for introducing such conservative habits into the educated segments of the society. Their criticism, however, appears to be based on the false premise that such conservative habits do not already exist in this segment of society. Consider that many of *Bin Laden's* followers came from this educated class. *Khaled* seems to have his eye on a more Turkish-style society. His middle ground, between stringent *Salafism* and total secularism, may provide a workable alternative to the two extremes. He is also well aware that it is his message of hope and sensible advice on issues of everyday life, not the political dialogue urged by *Elmessiri* that will continue to fuel his popularity and insure his continuing influence.

Source: Islamonline.net – Author: 'Abdel Wahab Elmessiri – 11/3/2007

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