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## Muhammad Hamidullah's Role in Interfaith Dialogue

Syed Iftikhar Ali Gilani - Thameem Ushama

### MUHAMMAD HAMIDULLAH'S ROLE IN INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Syed Iftikhar Ali Gilani\*

&

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#### ABSTRACT

This article explores the contributions of Muhammad Hamidullah, a renowned scholar and diplomat, in advancing interfaith dialogue. His life and multifaceted career are examined to assess his role in promoting tolerance, respect, and meaningful conversation among adherents of different faiths. The study investigates the impact of his efforts on interfaith dialogue in the contemporary era. It evaluates his contributions to interfaith dialogue by analysing his activities, writings, and diplomatic engagements. It sheds light on the broader implications of his work for fostering peace and understanding among different religious communities. He played a pivotal role in countering the negative narratives, thus challenging stereotypes and misconceptions. He made significant contributions to the preparation and dissemination of Islamic literature in Western languages, making Islamic knowledge more accessible to a global audience. He represented Islam in interfaith dialogues, academic sessions, and conferences, contributing to constructive discussions and fostering mutual respect among different faith traditions. His efforts in propagating Islam among new Muslims and overseeing the religious education of Muslims were instrumental in promoting a deeper understanding of the faith. His role as a legal advisor in the United Nations Security Council demonstrated his commitment to preserving international peace and sovereignty through diplomatic means. This study employs a qualitative methodology, relying on an extensive review of his writings, speeches, and biographical accounts. Primary and secondary sources, including academic literature, historical records, and interviews, are used to construct a comprehensive evaluation of his role in interfaith dialogue. This research approach allows for a nuanced understanding of his contributions and their significance in the contemporary context of interfaith dialogue.

**Keywords:** Interfaith Dialogue, Islam and West, Religious Pluralism.

#### INTRODUCTION

In Arabic, the word *hiwār* is used for dialogue, i.e. conversation, as mentioned in the Qur'ān: His companion said to him, In the course of the argument with him<sup>1</sup>. Ibn-e-Manzūr describes *hiwār* in these words: in another sense, dialogue refers to a conversation of a single person, as mentioned in the Qur'ān, when Allah says<sup>2</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> Translation by the Abdullah Yousuf Alī, Sūrah Kahaf: 37, retrieved from <https://Qur'anyusufali.com/18/> assessed on 29-9-2023. (Hereinafter referred to as translation by 'Abdullah Yūsuf' Alī, Sūrah Kahaf: 37)

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Manzūr Muḥammad bin Mukarram, *Lisān-ul- 'Arab*, Dār Ihya' al-Turāth al- 'Arabī, Beirut: 1408/1988, p. 3/383.



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to Moses, God spoke directly.<sup>3</sup> Ibrāhīm Anīs has explained the meaning of this verse with an answer in *al-Mu'jam-ul-Wasīṭ*.<sup>4</sup> He defines dialogue as *The conversation between two people or more people in a work of fiction*.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, dialogue is essentially a process in which individuals with different beliefs and theories engage in conversation to persuade others of the validity of their beliefs and theories, emphasising their truthfulness. It involves respecting each other's dignity and opinions while listening to each other's perspectives. The purpose of interfaith dialogue is not to debate differences in beliefs, nor is it about trying to convert others to one's religion. Instead, interfaith dialogue aims to walk hand in hand, through mutual participation, towards spiritual growth and the establishment and promotion of God's sovereignty. Mustafā Kaylue contributed to it as well:

The aims of true Dialogue are not to give sermons, not to debate, not to accuse and defend and not to evangelise but to understand each other and to have a clear understanding of the faiths of others.<sup>6</sup>

Peace cannot be established until there is peace among religions. The spirit of tolerance for one another, respect for diversity, and reverence for places of worship must prevail. These differences were meant to exist when the Creator granted people different colours, races, thoughts, and beliefs. Embracing all of these aspects and rising above them, the primary goal of dialogue is to create a peaceful atmosphere in the world.

Conversations may include differences and clashes of theories or beliefs. However, dialogue aims to have discussions in a friendly atmosphere, where all forms of disagreement are handled with civility. There should be no pressure on anyone to abandon their religion or beliefs, but rather, the goal is to discuss problem-solving and issues of mutual concern. Interfaith dialogue, in particular, has no specific agenda requiring intense effort. Instead, it brings to light the emotions and influences that form the basis of differences in beliefs and theories. Despite differences, it aims to establish relationships based on mutual understanding so that people can come together, support one another, and contribute to society's well-being and social progress. By keeping religious and theoretical differences in check and promoting equality, tolerance, and a sense of humanity, dialogue can lead to solutions for various issues. This approach is also emphasised in the Qur'ān, which advises avoiding arguments, adopting a soft and gentle tone in conversations, and only engaging in discussions with the Ahl al-Kitāb in the best possible way:

Call the people to your Lord with wisdom and good advice, and argue with them in the best way you like.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Translation by 'Abdullah Yūsuf' Alī, Sūrah An-Nisā': 164.

<sup>4</sup> Ibrāhīm Anīs, *al-Mu'jam-ul-Wasīṭ*, Intishārāt-e-Khusrū, Tehrān, Irān, 1392/1972, P. 205/1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 205/1.

<sup>6</sup> Mustafā Kaylue, Possibilities and Conditions for the Christian Muslim Dialogue: A Muslim, perspective, *Encounter: Journal of Intercultural Perspective*. Vol 5, No 2 Sep 1999. 182.

<sup>7</sup> Qur'an, Sūrat al-Naḥl: 125.



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Of course, dialogue is emphasised positively and Ahl al-Kitab are invited to engage in dialogue based on commonalities. The Qur'an says:

Say: O Ahl al-Kitab! Come to common terms as between us and you: that we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not from among ourselves Lords and patrons other than God. If then they turn back say: Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to God's will).<sup>8</sup>

The Qur'an itself encourages dialogue with people of other religions and promotes the idea of building positive relationships. The Prophet (pbuh) exemplified this approach through various actions before the Prophet's announcement. They constantly tried to bring people together and promote peaceful ways. Whether it was the Treaty of Grace or the incident related to the Black Stone during the reconstruction of the Ka'bah, every opportunity was used to advocate peaceful methods. The Prophet's treaties, such as the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah and the Treaty of Madinah, are shining examples of his commitment to establishing peace and cordial relations, which focus on maintaining security. The agreement with the people of Najran is another proof of the importance of dialogue in the life of the Prophet (pbuh).

Pope John Paul II, in *Threshold of Dialogue*, highlights how Muslims maintain deep devotion and worship God in the best possible way despite worldly entanglements and temptations. He urged Christians to respect the beliefs of others and consider Muslims as examples of sticking to their faith in the best way possible.<sup>9</sup>

When discussing interfaith dialogue, it essentially means that various religions are present. Denying the existence of any religion or imposing one's beliefs is unacceptable. It is incumbent upon people of all religions to embrace the principles of tolerance, patience, and respect and promote dialogue and meaningful conversation to create a space of peace in the world. All religions of the world condemn injustice and oppression. Whether one is a Zoroastrian from Iran, a Brahmin following Lord Rama in India, a Buddhist disciple of Gautama Buddha, a follower of Moses, a Christian, or a believer in the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), all reject cruelty and injustice. When the Creator provides sustenance, knowledge, and existence to all, who can we not tolerate one another? The Creator could have made all human beings the same if He wished; instead, He created diversity. He is the Creator; if someone accepts Him differently, it should be respected. He still accepts us all.

## MUHAMMAD HAMIDULLAH'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Muhammad Hamidullah (henceforth Hamidullah, 19 February 1908–17 December 2002) was a famous researcher in the fields of Hadith and Islamic Law. He was a profoundly useful scholarly essayist and capable in an amazing 22 languages, which included Urdu, Persian, Arabic, French, English, German, Italian, Greek,

<sup>8</sup> Qur'an, *Sūrah Āl-Imrān*: 64.

<sup>9</sup> Aliunal Alphonse, *Advocate of Dialogue*, Willame, Fountain Virginia USA, 2000, p. 246.



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Turkish, and Russian; he has written various books and contributed many articles on subjects connected with Islamic science, history, and culture, which were written in different languages.<sup>10</sup>

During his time in Germany and France, both pivotal centres of Orientalism in Europe, Hamidullah honed his research and writing skills, drawing extensively from the wealth of literary sources and manuscripts in their libraries. Upon returning to India, he continued to teach at Osmania University in the Departments of Islamic Studies and Law. Later, Hamidullah served as a legal advisor in the United Nations Security Council, representing India, striving to preserve international peace and sovereignty during a critical period. Afterwards, due to health concerns and his academic pursuits dwindling, he spent his last years with his family in the United States. In his long and illustrious career, Hamidullah made significant contributions to Islamic law, history, and diplomacy, leaving a lasting legacy of scholarship and service.

Hamidullah dedicated approximately forty-eight years of his life in Paris to various scholarly, research-oriented, historical, and missionary activities. He lived a life that truly embodied the essence of Islam, serving as both an ambassador and a passionate advocate for the faith. His diverse efforts in the context of Islamic propagation in the West can be categorised into various facets, which can be described as follows:

1. Counteracting the Poison Spread by Orientalists.
2. Preparation of Islamic Literature in Western Languages.
3. Representation of Islam in Interfaith Dialogues, Academic Sessions, and Conferences.
4. Propagation of Islam Among New Muslims.
5. Oversight of Religious Education and Upbringing of Muslims.

### COUNTERACTING THE POISON SPREAD BY ORIENTALISTS

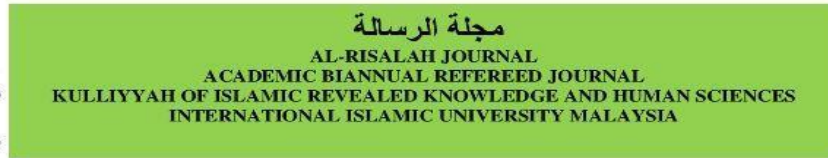
Hamidullah made a substantial religious contribution from a missionary standpoint by effectively countering Orientalists' misconceptions, doubts, and negative impacts about Islam. He focused on key aspects such as the life and character of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), his Traditions and Sunnah, and Islamic jurisprudence and law. In Islamic propagation in the West, Orientalist research and writings posed significant challenges. The following aspects of his work (which is very important both in terms of mass and quality) are very valuable and prominent.

### ORIENTALISTS VIEWS ON COMPILATION OF ḤADĪTH LITERATURE

The question raised about those who falsely claim that Ḥadīths were compiled three hundred years later. Their argument is based on the fact that according to their perspective, the earliest compilation of Ḥadīths, which is *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* from the third century, is considered the oldest book of Ḥadīth. However, from Bukhārī

<sup>10</sup> Samee-Ullah Bhat, *Life and Works of Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah: An Overview*, Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies, Vol. 6, Issue 1, February 2018, Retrieved from <https://journal.iainkudus.ac.id/index.php/QIJS/article/view/3715/2579>.





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onwards, many scholars passed on Ḥadīths orally, and they did not document them in written form. However, now, most of these Ḥadīths have been compiled in written collections. Therefore, as previously articulated by Goldziher, the old objection no longer holds.

They have provided historical credibility and references to the stored Ḥadīths and Sunnah. They are among the prominent figures in the Islamic world who extensively researched and provided evidence, indications, and proofs to establish that the compilation, recording, and preservation of Ḥadīths began during the blessed era of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and continued among the righteous companions. This extensive collection of Ḥadīth was transmitted both orally and in written form by the companions to the Tābi'īn, and subsequently, this treasure of knowledge reached the later generations. The Ḥadīth collections we have today traced their chains of transmission back to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and include written notes and records from various times and levels of scholarship, forming the foundation of Islamic knowledge. Hamidullah conducted extensive research on the sources of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and particularly highlighted the early sources, notably the well-organised collection of Ḥadīths by Hamam-ibn-e-Munabbah, a prominent disciple of Abū Hurāirah. Hamidullah discovered and organised this compilation of Ḥadīths, known as *Ṣaḥīfah Hamam ibn Munabbah*, and published it in an orderly and documented form.

Muhammad Mustafā Azamī, a later scholar, further substantiated and strengthened the research on the compilation and preservation of Ḥadīth. He meticulously collected historical testimonies and documents, presenting a more comprehensive and well-documented case. His extensive work solidified the argument that the process of compiling and preserving Ḥadīth continued uninterrupted from the time of the Prophet's covenant until the organised compilation of Ḥadīth and Sunnah. Due to the valuable scholarly and research contributions of Hamidullah, no contemporary orientalist or outsider can assert that the foundation of Ḥadīth scholarship is solely reliant on Sunni oral traditions.

## ORIENTALISTS ON THE CHARACTER OF THE PROPHET

Hamidullah's extraordinary scholarly work has played a pivotal role in dispelling doubts and claims made by Western orientalists and authors regarding the prophethood, mission, and noble character of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). He achieved this by adopting the research methodology of these orientalists themselves and shedding light on various aspects of the Prophet's life (religious, social, economic, political, and legislative) in such a way that, alongside the prophets and messengers, he stands out as an exceptionally eminent figure in the world's religious, political, and social history. Hamidullah introduced the people of the West, particularly through his numerous articles and extensive scholarly writings in Western languages like English, French, and German, to the personality of the Prophet (pbuh), his character, and his accomplishments in the fields of religion, society, economics, politics, and law. These books serve as a potent antidote to the poison Western orientalists, and authors spread about the Prophet's biography. Their study is a remedy for a sound and unbiased person whose heart and mind have not been blinded by biases, prejudice, or hostility. It enables such individuals to develop a genuine admiration and reverence for the Prophet (pbuh).



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### Objection by Orientalists regarding the Islamic Law

Hamidullah's significant scholarly achievement lies in his thorough refutation of the claim made by Western orientalists that Islamic law is essentially derived from Roman law. He has convincingly proven with strong evidence, arguments, and references that Islamic and Roman laws have fundamental and substantial differences and distinctions<sup>11</sup>. In this context, his work not only contributes to the advancement of Islamic jurisprudence but also aligns with the methodology of 'Imām 'Abū Ḥanīfah<sup>12</sup>. Another critical aspect of his work is the organisation and codification of international law principles within an Islamic framework, adding to the lines of contemporary international law. In the context of his contributions, his translation into the French language of Sarkhasī's Commentary on Imām Muhammad's *Kitab al-Siyar al-Kabīr*, Commentary on the Book of *Siyar al-Kabir* published in Turkey.

### DISTORTED INTERPRETATIONS BY ORIENTALISTS AND CHRISTIAN AUTHORS

In his writings, Hamidullah skillfully exposes the misleading interpretations found in the works of Western orientalists and Christian authors while conducting an objective and scholarly assessment of their books. He particularly excels in clarifying their errors in understanding and analysing the expressions found in the texts of the Qur' ān and Ḥadīth, as well as in the books of Tafsīr (Qur'ānic exegesis) and Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence). Wherever orientalists have distorted facts to suit their preconceived notions, he has pointed out their misrepresentations. In this regard, Hamidullah's written works, which critique and analyse the books of orientalists and Christian sympathisers, are particularly noteworthy.<sup>13</sup>

Through his research and writings, Hamidullah has rendered an immensely valuable religious service by refuting the misconceptions and doubts spread by Western orientalists and Western authors about Islam, which often pose significant obstacles in propagating Islam in the West. He has achieved this by providing solid evidence and proof, thus employing the orientalists' research and writing methods to present Islam authentically before the Western audience. His notable contributions lie in offering well-documented and reliable information from various Arabic and Islamic sources on diverse topics, followed by his insightful analysis and interpretation. These qualities set his writings apart as they bring out Islam's authenticity, greatness, and virtues. Driven by these distinctive attributes in the field of authorship and composition, he has been rightfully recognised as an eminent orientalist in some scholarly circles within the Islamic world<sup>14</sup>.

### PRODUCTION OF ISLAMIC LITERATURE IN WESTERN LANGUAGES

Hamidullah's work in the West extends beyond his critical examination of the writings and academic research of Western scholars in the context of Islamic propagation. While he conducted meticulous scholarly

<sup>11</sup> Muhammad Hamidullah, *Imām Abū Ḥanīfah's Law of Islam* Karachi: English translation, Urdu Academy Sindh (1983), pp. 54-67.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> Orientalist R. Bell *Introduction to the Qur' ān* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1953), Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah's critique and commentary *A Review of R. Bell's 'Introduction to the Qur' ān* The Islamic Quarterly, 1:3 (October 1954), pages 239-243.

<sup>14</sup> Muḥammad Rafī' -ud-dīn, *The Meaning of Islamic Research*, [and] Method, pp. 9-10.



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assessments and identified facts and errors, his contributions were not confined to this realm. He made substantial positive and constructive contributions. Muhammad Hamidullah possessed linguistic skills and talents that extended to major Western languages, including English, French, Italian, German, and Spanish, alongside Urdu, Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. He effectively harnessed these linguistic abilities for Islamic propagation and outreach. He authored concise yet comprehensive books covering various Islam-related subjects in these diverse languages.

### ISLĀM

Generally, his English works, particularly *Introduction to Islam* and *Islam: A General Picture*, deserve special mention. The book has been translated into French. It has been published many times in France by the Centre Cultural Islamique and in Pakistan by Sheikh Muhammad Ashraf (Lahore). The former caters to the needs of new Muslims, providing guidance and teaching for Muslim converts in the East and West. The latter, *Islam: A General Picture*, presents the message of Islam to those from the Christian faith. It is aimed at elucidating the call to Islam before a Christian audience. Hamidullah's endeavours in the West facilitated the presentation of Islam that resonated with the temperament of the time and the Western people. He addressed the biography of the Prophet (pbuh) and Islamic jurisprudence and compiled brief yet comprehensive books covering Islamic beliefs, worship, and its societal, economic, ethical, and political teachings. His works continue to serve as valuable resources for seekers of knowledge and those engaged in Islamic propagation<sup>15</sup>.

### TRANSLATING THE HOLY QUR'ĀN INTO WESTERN LANGUAGES

As part of this series, Hamidullah's immensely significant work includes translating the Holy Qur'ān into Western languages. He is an exceptional individual in the Islamic world who translated the Qur'ān into three European languages: French, German, and English. His French translation, accompanied by commentaries (Le Saint Coran), achieved extraordinary popularity among French-speaking communities worldwide. This translation has become an authoritative source for disseminating the Qur'ānic message in those countries, serving as an invaluable means of spreading the message of the Qur'ān. The complete French translation of the Qur'ān, along with commentaries, was first published in 1959 in Paris.<sup>16</sup>

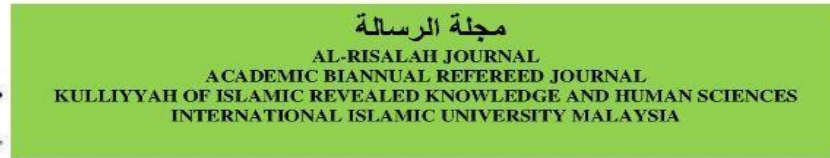
In the German language, Hamidullah also translated from Surah Al-Fatiha to approximately six sections of the Qur'ān, covering *Surat al-An'ām*, Hamidullah's German translation of the Qur'ān is mentioned in his correspondence with Mazhar Muzaḥḥar Qureshī. In one of his letters, he writes, "My German translation of the Qur'ān, up to *Sūrat al-An'ām*, was completed, but I am so deeply engrossed in other tasks that I have not been able to progress further. I have very little time to focus on it."<sup>17</sup> In English, Hamidullah's smooth translation and Commentary (from the end of *Surat al-Baqarah*) continued to be published in the journal *Al-Hadīqah al-Amīn* of Durban, South Africa, from 1960 to 1965.<sup>18</sup> Hamidullah also initiated the publication of translations of *Surat al-Fatihah* in all the world's languages under the title *al-Qur'ān Fi Kullī Lisan*. These

<sup>15</sup> Muhammad Hamidullah, *Introduction to Islam*, Lahore Kazi Publications (nd.): 2-3.

<sup>16</sup> Muhammad Hamidullah's *Arḍ-e-Hāl* Preface to Tafsir Ḥabībī, Muḥammad Ḥabībullah, Deccan, p. 155.

<sup>17</sup> Muhammad Hamidullah to Mazhar Muzaḥḥar Qureshī, 'Izhār Karachi, Vol. 4-5, July-December 1999, pp. 87, 89.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. *Arḍ-e-Hāl* Preface to Tafsir Ḥabībī, p. 155.



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translations continued to be published in the Islamic journal France Islam and some other publications. Hamidullah began compiling titled *al-Qur'ān fī Kul-lil-Lisān*, the author published in the French magazine France Islam.<sup>19</sup>

### ḤADĪTH

In the same vein, Hamidullah's significant contribution includes his elucidatory Commentary of Imām Bukhar's *Al-Jām'ī al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, which he arranged and compiled in the French language, in addition to Arabic. This Commentary, which has not been published yet, will provide French-speaking individuals with a convenient source for the most authentic collection of Ḥadīth, making it easier for them to benefit from it.

### ḤUJJATULLAH AL-BĀLIGHAH

Shah Walī ullah al-Dihlawī, a prominent scholar of the 18th century, authored *Hujjatullah al-Bālighah*, in which he adopted a scholarly and reasoned approach to translating and explaining Islamic legal rulings. Hamidullah found this work highly valuable for enlightening the minds of the people of the West (Northwest Africa) regarding the wisdom and philosophy behind Islamic laws and issues. Consequently, he began translating this book into the French language. He prioritised this endeavour alongside his other scholarly projects.

### COMPARATIVE RELIGION

Considering the Christian perspective prevalent in the West, Hamidullah continued to present a comparative assessment of Islam and other religions, especially Christianity, through his writings. Some publishing institutions in France have released books on religious and theological matters, encompassing writings by scholars of various religions, each presenting their respective religious stance.

### CONTRIBUTION AS CO-AUTHOR

Hamidullah has contributed as a co-author to several such books. One notable example is a book published about Prophet Abraham. It consists of three sections, one authored by Muhammad Hamidullah (Jewish and Christian scholars wrote the remaining two). In his section, he sheds light on the prophethood, message, and teachings of Prophet Abraham within the framework of Islamic sources; Mazhar Mumtaz Quraishi quoted that a new work has been taken, i.e., a biography of Jesus, which confronts the numerous dissenting statements of Christian and the Qur'ān.<sup>20</sup>

In the last years of his life, just before his illness, Muhammad Hamidullah was diligently working on documenting the life and teachings of Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) within the context of Christian and Islamic sources.<sup>21</sup> Undoubtedly, Muhammad Hamidullah's scholarly activities of this nature hold great importance and utility from a missionary perspective within Christian communities. His works provide an

<sup>19</sup> Ibid *Arḍ-e-Hāl* (Preface to Tafsīr Ḥabībī), p. 54).

<sup>20</sup> Muhammad Hamidullah to Mazhar Mumtaz Qureshī Armaghān, pp.133.

<sup>21</sup> Ḥussāin Mard 'Āfāqī Ori Ekal College Magazine (Number Khas Bayād Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah) Vol. 78, No. 3-4, (2003) pp. 81-82.





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opportunity to disseminate the Islamic viewpoint on the previous divine religions and their significant personalities. They assist in dispelling misunderstandings and misconceptions held by Christian communities about the relationship between Islam and other revealed religions .

### HAMIDULLAH'S APPROACH TO INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Hamidullah highly valued the critical study of Christianity within the context of Islamic propagation in the West. However, he also criticised the superficial and inadequate knowledge often brought forward by Muslim scholars about Christian beliefs and teachings. He believed it would be more beneficial to engage with and address Christians directly as Muslims. We can engage in meaningful discussions by engaging with their beliefs and encouraging them to think critically about what they accept unquestionably. For instance, in their scriptures, verses mention that the Prophet Jesus spent three days in hell or that they pray to God to forgive them as they forgive others. These aspects can be presented in literature and distributed in Europe and America, but ensuring that the information we provide is accurate is imperative. Our objections, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, have thus far been presented in a somewhat confrontational manner, which is why readers, especially Christians, often dismiss them with a laugh.<sup>22</sup>

The mentioned excerpts make it abundantly clear that Hamidullah, in his efforts of propagation in the West, emphasised the need for a deep grounding in the foundational principles of Islam alongside a profound understanding of the teachings and beliefs of past divine religions. This approach was essential to convey the realities of Islam to his Christian audience effectively. By doing so, he enabled Muslim missionaries to articulate better Islamic beliefs and teachings in front of their Christian counterparts.

### INTERPRETATION OF ISLAM IN INTERFAITH DIALOGUES, SEMINARS AND CONFERENCES

Hamidullah was recognised in France's scientific and research circles as a prominent interpreter and commentator of Islam due to his knowledge, excellence, and extensive research. His role was particularly valued in interfaith dialogues organised by various non-Muslim (semi) religious associations and institutions<sup>23</sup>. In interfaith dialogues, religious, ethical, and spiritual issues from different religions were discussed, and scholars and experts from various faiths presented their respective viewpoints. He was often invited to represent the Islamic perspective in these discussions. His remarkable skill and eloquence in presenting the Islamic perspective allowed him to effectively convey the teachings of Islam to people of different faiths. His participation in interfaith dialogues helped bridge the gap between different religious leaders who sometimes distanced themselves from their former faith to embrace Islam. Apart from his involvement in interfaith dialogues, In the writings, there are mentions of Hamidullah's observations regarding the intense missionary activities focused on Hazrat 'Īsā (pbuh) in the Reunion Islands. Upon returning from Reunion to Paris, some

<sup>22</sup> Saljūk Dr. Affān. *Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah Some Memories Some Talks*, Dār-e-Majllah-e-'Ilmī, Vol. 2, Is. 2 (April 1919). June 1997, p. 50-51.

<sup>23</sup> *Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah: Some Memories, Some Aspects*, Al-Ma'athir (India), Volume 12, Page 1 (May-June-July 2003), Page 25-122.



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incidents also occurred [Lecture on Haḍrat 'Īsā (pbuh).<sup>24</sup> He also delivered comprehensive lectures on various Islamic topics in France and other countries. He actively contributed to the invitation and propagation of Islam in non-Muslim communities and institutions.<sup>25</sup> His participation in conferences and scholarly discussions became a regular aspect of his life, greatly aiding his mission to reach people of diverse Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds.<sup>26</sup>

Hamidullah actively engaged with the increasing activities of Christian missionaries in France. He participated in various lectures, conferences, and meetings organised by mosques and Islamic associations in different regions. In these sessions, he discussed topics related to Christianity and compared its teachings with Islam. Through his lectures, he aimed to clarify the similarities and virtues of Islam compared to other religions, including Christianity. As Khurshid Ahmad emphasised, these activities' purpose ranged from individual meetings to extensive missionary tours and participation in national and international conferences. Hamidullah's dedication and efforts in spreading the message of Islam were evident everywhere he went.

### PREACHING AMONG NON-MUSLIMS

Hamidullah received significant inspiration and guidance during his youth from his uncle and mentor, Qazi Mahmood, who advised him to work diligently to spread and disseminate Islam among non-Muslims, especially in Western countries. Driven by this counsel, he firmly committed himself to the mission. He wholeheartedly dedicated his efforts to this mission during his stay in France. Under his guidance, numerous French men and women, including several Christian priests and nuns, embraced Islam, reflecting the sincere and dedicated work of Hamidullah.<sup>27</sup>

Hamidullah did not adhere to any specific method or belong to any particular missionary group in his efforts to propagate Islam. He did not engage in missionary work as a formal organisation member. His extraordinary success in this field can be attributed to two key factors. Firstly, he presented Islam through his writings, lectures, and religious discussions in an unconventional and impactful manner. Secondly, he conveyed the message of Islam in a way that profoundly impacted people without relying on any structured missionary approach<sup>28</sup>. In this context, another crucial aspect was Hamidullah's ethics and conduct. His exemplary character served as a model for Islamic behaviour and values. He demonstrated good manners, humility, contentment, devotion, fulfilling promises, generosity, piety, trust in Allah, and unwavering determination. His outstanding moral attributes were evident in his interactions with non-Muslims. Instead of harbouring animosity towards them due to their disbelief or polytheism, he approached them with compassion

<sup>24</sup> Muhammad Hamidullah to Mazhar Mumtaz Qureshī Armaghān pp.133-135.

<sup>25</sup> Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah: *A Lifetime Service to Islamic Scholarship*, Islamic Horizons, July-August 1999, pp. 23-25.

<sup>26</sup> Muḥammad Munawar Mirza Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah: *A Paragon of Good Character and Selfless Service* daily Nawa-'e-Waqt (Lahore), April 30, 1992.

<sup>27</sup> Abdul Raḥmān Momin, *A Conversation with the Late Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah* Ma'arif ('A'ẓamgarh), Vol. 171, No. 6, June 2003, p. 460.

<sup>28</sup> S. Siddique *Islam's International Ambassador: The Shining Horizons Scholar Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah 's Sojourn with a Soulful Evening in Damascus*, Urdu Digest, Vol. 43, No. 2, February 2003, p 29.



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and empathy. He guided them in scholarly and research endeavours. His influence on non-Muslims was such that they were deeply affected by his knowledge, virtue, and conduct, ultimately embracing Islam.

A notable example is Myriam Viachet, who lived in Paris in Hamidullah's neighbourhood. She had a keen interest in learning Persian and, under Hamidullah's guidance, converted to Islam over time<sup>29</sup>. Hamidullah believed in establishing connections, friendships, and relationships with non-Muslims as an integral part of his efforts to spread the message of Islam. He remained dedicated to this approach throughout his life<sup>30</sup>.

In France, Muslim missionaries and preachers faced various challenges in Dawah (Islamic propagation). They encountered strong resistance from Christian missionaries, communication channels, and opposition from the government. Christian missionaries were highly critical of the increasing spread of Islam in the country, while communication channels were engaged in a propaganda campaign against Islam and its followers. The government viewed the religious and Dawah activities of the Muslim population with suspicion. During the late 1980s, Algeria, with a significant Muslim population of former French colonial subjects, witnessed political developments in the Islamic movement. This included clashes and conflicts between Islamic militant groups and state institutions, particularly those favouring military action. Tragic events, such as the killing of French citizens and diplomats, further exacerbated the negative perception of Da'wah's efforts. In this challenging environment, Christian missionaries, communication channels, and the government took a strongly oppositional stance against the spread of Islam<sup>31</sup>. Hamidullah could not remain unaffected by the impact of these events. Mizhar Mumtaz Qureshi writes in a letter:

Here in France, anti-Islamic sentiments are on the rise day by day, may Allah have mercy... Those fools in Algeria have killed seven people at the French Embassy, and here we are facing the consequences. Hamidullah, like many others, was deeply concerned about the growing anti-Islamic sentiments and the consequences of violent events, such as the killings at the French Embassy in Algeria.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the challenging environment, they remained actively engaged in the propagation field. They presented the message of Islam with wisdom and insight, and their efforts yielded positive results. In one of their letters, they express:

'Here, Alhamdulillah, people are embracing Islam. It is not due to our ancestral practices; rather, they are becoming Muslims solely through the guidance of Allah.'<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Rashid Messaoudi *Algerian-French Relations: 1830-1991*, which is part of the book *Algeria: Revolution Revisited*, edited by Raḍa Shah Kazmī, 1997.

<sup>30</sup> Muhammad Hamidullah to Mazhar Mumtaz Qureshī *Armaghān* pp. 141 and 153.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Abdul Raḥmān Momin's interview with the Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah, *Ma'ārif 'A'āzamGarh*, Volume 171, Issue 6, June 2003, page 459.

<sup>33</sup> Muhammad Hamidullah, *Khuṭbāt-e-Bahawalpur*, Twelfth Khutbah: Muslims in New Non-Muslim States), pp. 406-417.



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In one of their interviews, they remarked:

The government opposes us, the church opposes us, they have resources at their disposal, yet people are embracing Islam. This is a remarkable phenomenon. Other than saying it is Allah's mercy and grace, I cannot attribute it to anything else.<sup>34</sup>

### RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF THE MUSLIM MINORITY

In Western society, the most crucial and fundamental religious requirement for the thriving Muslim minority is an effective Islamic education and upbringing system. Thanks to this system, they were able to maintain their Islamic identity in a secular and religiously indifferent environment and fulfilled the duty of preaching and propagation in this society. It would not be unreasonable to say that the Islamic future of the Muslim generations in the West relies on this necessity, which is effective religious education. Hamidullah, during his time in Paris, was dedicated to establishing this religious and educational system to the fullest extent. In Paris, he served as a teacher and mentor to students who came from Arab and African countries. He instilled in their academic knowledge and a deep understanding of Islamic beliefs and teachings so that they could live as practising Muslim missionaries. In Paris, his residence became a significant centre for religious education. Here, he would educate local and international students and tirelessly contribute to disseminating knowledge through his wisdom and virtue. Students and young people held him in high esteem. An exemplary woman, Mme Eva de Vitray Meyerovitch, who hailed from an affluent family and had embraced Islam, was introduced to me by Hamidullah during my stay in Paris. She significantly influenced many, including individuals from diverse backgrounds like Americans, Europeans, and Africans, who had embraced Islam under her guidance.<sup>35</sup>

Among those who received education at Hamidullah's residence were also French women. Hamidullah had established a strong connection with the al-Markaz al-Islami, located near the mosque built by King Mohammed V in Paris. For several years, he continued to teach Qur'ān and Islam there every Sunday. During these sessions, several French women embraced Islam under his guidance. While there was a period during President De Gaulle's government when restrictions were placed on his lectures and classes, this educational initiative was revived.<sup>36</sup> Teaching and studying in the mosques of Paris remained a significant aspect of Hamidullah's life.

Muhammad Munawar Mirza highlighted Hamidullah's routine in Paris regarding these activities. *"In Paris, I had the privilege of attending. Hamidullah's gatherings at his home. I learned that he would often visit a mosque early in the morning, patiently addressing the questions of eager individuals interested in*

<sup>34</sup> Abdul Qadīr Aḥmed, *Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah ki 'ilmī dosti. Chand Ta'thurāt*, 'Othmāniyyah, Vol. 2, No. 4, (April-June 1997), p 54.

<sup>35</sup> Self-Exile in Dawn- Tuesday Review, Askari, M.H., Scholar in 1996 ,21-15

<sup>36</sup> Ali Nadwi, Syed Rizwan Ali, *'Dr. Hamidullah - Naqoosh o Tasaarat'* Tahqiqat o Tasaarat, page 505.





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*learning about religion. If people embraced Islam during these sessions, they were generously supported by the Islamic community.*"<sup>37</sup>

Hamidullah was actively involved in constructing and developing essential infrastructure for the religious education and upbringing of the Muslim minority in France. He passionately and energetically contributed to establishing and growing mosques, schools, and Islamic centres dedicated to these purposes. He served as the treasurer of the Islamic Association Jamiat al-Sadat al-Islamiyya for these noble objectives.

Below, a portion of a letter he wrote in 1992 in his capacity as the treasurer of the mentioned association to the Prime Minister of Pakistan at the time, Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, sheds light on his dedication and efforts in this regard:

Islam is growing in France, attracting new followers, including non-French Muslims. In Chaville-Larue, a community of devout Muslims existed but lacked a suitable place for group prayers and religious activities. Jamiat al-Sadat al-Islamiyya, one of France's oldest Islamic associations, played a crucial role in addressing this need. Under Muhammad Hamidullah's leadership as treasurer, they worked diligently to find a property in Chaville-Larue. After a lengthy and challenging search, they acquired a property priced at one and a half million francs. An agreement was made with the seller to pay most of the amount in instalments, with minor fees remaining. They were also granted immediate access to part of the property. With this new location, they began holding group prayers and introduced special prayers during Ramadan in 1411 AH (1991 A.D.). They also established a school for Muslim children in the area, where sixty children enthusiastically receive education<sup>38</sup>.

In France, Hamidullah actively supported various Islamic associations' religious and missionary activities. He wholeheartedly participated as a teacher and mentor in the programs and missionary educational gatherings organised by these associations. With great enthusiasm, he contributed to these organisations by delivering sermons and engaging in scholarly discussions, igniting the hearts of his fellow participants. His religious fervour and passion inspired the audiences and listeners, kindling their spiritual zeal.<sup>39</sup> In question-and-answer sessions, Hamidullah provided valuable guidance on various academic and jurisprudential matters. Most importantly, he served as a role model for piety and high Islamic ethics, encouraging others to follow Islamic teachings diligently. During the auspicious months of Ramadan and Rabi' al-Awwal, the events he participated in featuring his

<sup>37</sup> Mirza Muhammad Munawar, in his article titled 'Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah - A Shining Example of Good Ethics and Devotion,' 'Nawai Waqt' (Lahore) on April 30, 1992.

<sup>38</sup> Salāhuddīn Muḥammad, 'Salāhuddīn Muḥammad's Meeting with Prime Minister Muḥammad Nawāz Sharīf in Paris' 'Othmāniyyah' (April-June 1997), 65.

<sup>39</sup> Translator of the Qur'ān, Volume 130, Issue 1 (January 2003), page 88.



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speeches were a source of great attraction and interest for both specific audiences and the general public.<sup>40</sup>

Hamidullah paid special attention to Muslim men and women's religious education and upbringing. He not only instilled the fundamental teachings of Islam in their minds but also often personally conducted Qur'anic study sessions to deepen their understanding<sup>41</sup>. They maintained regular and continuous contact with them. They encouraged them to study Islam by selecting appropriate books according to their level and arranging for the supply of these books from abroad. So, they had such enthusiasm and dedication to the education and upbringing of Muslims that they could not tolerate any shortcomings. Consequently, most of them refrained from participating in or accepting invitations to academic discussions (seminars) and conferences from abroad (various societies and other institutions) or expanding their outreach through extensive lectures.<sup>42</sup>

Hamidullah was undoubtedly among the distinguished and highly esteemed individuals in Islam who played a significant role in crucial periods of history. Particularly, when Islam faced contemporary challenges from various ideologies and systems, he emerged as a beacon of support and affirmation for the faith. His dedication and commitment to the education and upbringing of Muslims, especially those who had newly embraced Islam, were exemplary. He provided guidance and solutions to emerging issues, ensuring that fundamental Islamic teachings were firmly rooted in their minds. Hamidullah's interactions with these new Muslims were marked by kindness, empathy, and genuine interest in their concerns, helping to instil a strong attachment to Islam in their hearts. Hamidullah's name stands alongside those resolute and esteemed personalities who achieved remarkable success during critical phases in Islamic history in defending and promoting the faith. His efforts carried out over five decades of educational and missionary service, are a testament to his unparalleled dedication and influence. Even in the face of financial constraints and without government backing, he accomplished a unique feat that may be hard to replicate in modern Islamic history.

Hamidullah was not just a scholar and biographer but also a true leader in Islamic propagation. His approach to spreading the message of Islam in non-Muslim Moroccan society was innovative and accommodated the study of comparative religions and, more importantly, acknowledged and addressed the religious psyche of the Moroccan population. His propagation approach has proven highly successful, making him an invaluable guide for active missionaries and preachers. In truth, Hamidullah can be rightfully hailed as a revivalist and leader in Da'wah and propagation. His unique approach has been incredibly successful, incorporating the study of comparative religions and, importantly,

<sup>40</sup> Askari, M.H, A Scholar in Self Exile, p 45

<sup>41</sup> Translation of the Qur'ān, Volume 130, Issue 1 (January 2003), page 8;

See: Ansari, Zafar Ishaq, *Great Encounters: Karachi, Paris and Dahrar, in Impact*, 33:1-3 (Jan. March 2003): 26 -

<sup>42</sup> *Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah Name and Work* 'Haftrozah Takbīr' (Karachi), Volume 23, Issue 54, dated December 26, 2002; 'Omer bin 'Abdullah, 'Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah: A Lifetime Service to Islamic Scholarship,' page 25.



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considering the religious inclinations of the Moroccan population. His legacy continues to serve as a valuable resource and guidance for missionaries and preachers working in non-Muslim societies.<sup>43</sup>

### CONCLUSION

In the contemporary era, marked by increasing religious diversity and global interconnectedness, interfaith dialogue has emerged as a critical avenue for promoting peace, understanding, and mutual respect among different religious communities. This article has delved into the life and contributions of Hamidullah, a distinguished scholar and diplomat whose multifaceted career exemplifies the profound impact one individual can have on fostering interfaith dialogue. Hamidullah's journey is a testament to the power of knowledge and diplomacy in bridging the gaps between faith traditions. His contributions can be summarised in five key facets, each of which has far-reaching implications for contemporary discussions on interfaith dialogue.

Firstly, Hamidullah's unwavering commitment to countering the negative narratives perpetuated by Orientalists was instrumental in challenging stereotypes and misconceptions about Islam. By engaging in rigorous scholarship and providing well-researched responses to critiques of the faith, he paved the way for more informed and balanced conversations about Islam.

Secondly, his efforts in preparing and disseminating Islamic literature in Western languages significantly increased access to Islamic knowledge for a global audience. This accessibility not only empowered Muslims in non-Muslim-majority countries but also facilitated a better understanding and appreciation of Islamic teachings among non-Muslims.

Thirdly, Hamidullah actively participated in interfaith dialogues, academic sessions, and conferences, where he represented Islam with eloquence and sincerity. His willingness to engage in constructive discussions and his ability to foster mutual respect among different faith traditions contributed to the enrichment of global interfaith dialogue.

Fourthly, his dedication to propagating Islam among new Muslims and overseeing the religious education of Muslims was a crucial aspect of his work. By nurturing a deeper understanding of the faith and helping new generations of Muslims navigate the challenges of the modern world, he ensured the continuity of a peaceful and enlightened Muslim community.

Lastly, Hamidullah's role as a legal advisor in the United Nations Security Council was a remarkable display of his commitment to preserving international peace and sovereignty through diplomatic means. His contributions in this capacity not only safeguarded the interests of his country but also demonstrated the compatibility of Islamic values with the principles of global diplomacy.

In conclusion, Hamidullah's life and work serve as an inspirational model for individuals and organisations engaged in interfaith dialogue in the contemporary era. His legacy reminds us that genuine dialogue is not merely an exchange of words but an embodiment of the principles of tolerance, patience, and respect. It underscores the importance of informed scholarship in dispelling ignorance and fostering

<sup>43</sup> Maḥmūd Aḥmed Ghāzi Introduction (The Field of Battle in Prophetic Era by Muhammad Hamidullah), page 13.



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understanding among diverse religious communities. As we navigate the complexities of our increasingly interconnected world, Hamidullah's contributions provide a timeless blueprint for building bridges of harmony and cooperation among adherents of different faiths. In an era where differences can lead to conflicts, his life serves as a beacon of hope, reminding us that by embracing diversity and engaging in meaningful dialogue, we can collectively work towards a more peaceful and harmonious world where the values of justice, compassion, and respect for all are upheld.

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