

Religious Harmony and Inter-faith Dialogue in the Writings of ḤAMKA

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Abstract: Born into a religious family, Ḥamka traveled extensively to acquire knowledge. Having gained mastery of Arabic, ḤAMKA translated the Qurʾān, commented extensively on its various aspects and used it as a tool for the purification of Islam in Indonesia. Analysing the relevant verses of the Qurʾān as interpreted by ḤAMKA, gives an insight into his idea of religious unity and his promotion of inter-religious dialogue in order to promote peace and harmony in Indonesia in particular and the world in general.

It is generally agreed that religion is better at fostering peace than at fueling war. Religion has rarely been the principal cause of domestic or international conflict. Religion can often be invaluable in promoting understanding and reconciliation. When approached creatively, interfaith dialogue can nurture deep engagements at all levels of the community and society. It has been argued that interfaith dialogue is a necessity and a central activity in today's plural world. Globalisation has accentuated the mingling of cultures and thus heightened the need for understanding and dialogue. Ḥāji ʿAbd al-Malik Karīm Amrullāh, popularly known as Buya ḤAMKA or just ḤAMKA understood the significance of interfaith dialogue and expressed this concern through his commentaries on the Qurʾan and in his various other writings. After a brief introduction to his life and times and the intellectual output he left behind, this paper explores ḤAMKA's contribution to inter-religious harmony by referring specifically to his commentaries on the Qurʾān.

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Life and Works of ḤAMKA

ḤAMKA was born on February 16, 1908 in a well-known ‘*ulamā*’ family of Minangkabau. His father, Dr. ‘Abd al-Karīm Amrullāh (1879-1945) also known as Hāji Rasūl, was a respected ‘*ālim*’ (reformist scholar) who hoped one day to see his son succeeding him as an ‘*ālim*.’¹ ḤAMKA attended *Sekolah Desa* (Village School) and the Arabic evening school, *Diniyah School*, established by Zaynuddīn Lebai al-Junūsy.² This school was an important instrument for the reformist movement in Minangkabau. ḤAMKA studied *al-‘arud* (Arabic Literature) which includes *shi‘r* (Arabic Poetry) and *manṭiq* (logic) in a *Tawālib* School.³ He also spent most of his time in the library of Lebai al-Junūsi, *kutub khānah*, reading foreign novels and popular publications by Kantoor voor de Volkslectuur and the Indonesian magazine “Bintang Hindia,” which contained articles of Dr. Abdul Rivai of Minangkabau.⁵

In 1924, he traveled to Java where he was introduced to *Sarekat Islam* (Islamic Union).⁵ ḤAMKA then came into contact with H.O.S. Chokroaminoto⁶ who taught Islam and Socialism, R.M. Suryopranoto (Raja Mogok) who taught Sociology, H. Fakhr al-Dīn, a Muhammadiyah leader who taught *Agama Islam* (Islamic Sciences), and Ki Bagus Hadikusumo from whom ḤAMKA learned *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān* (the science of Qur’ānic exegesis). There, he also came to know of and participated in the struggle of *Jong Islamieten Bond* (The Young Muslims Union).⁷ ḤAMKA reported that in Yogya he encountered a new brand of Islam: “Islam as something alive which in turn produces the dynamic understandings and activities of Islam.” This “new brand of Islam” was able to address modern social and cultural problems.

In 1925, ḤAMKA proceeded to Perkalongan, where he observed the daily activities of an organisation less rigid and less militant than the group around his father in Minangkabau. Priority was given to social work, welfare activities, and effective solidarity among the Muslims, rather than the “reformist dogmatism” taught by his father.⁸ He went to Makkah in 1927 and perfected his Arabic, returned to Indonesia and accepted a poorly paid job as a religious teacher and a journalist for *Pelita Andalas* and other newspapers.⁹ ḤAMKA received honorary degrees from al-Azhar University in Cairo in 1958 and the National University of Malaysia in 1974. He had a

distinguished career as a journalist, an Islamic preacher, a politician, and above all as an *‘ālim* and a prolific writer.

ḤAMKA’s monumental work is *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, which aimed at the purification of Islam in Indonesia.¹⁰ The *tafsīr* is unique in that it reflects both the local social setting and socio-political and intellectual currents of his time in which at least two concurrent and perhaps interrelated trends were at their zenith, the reformist and independence movements.

ḤAMKA’s career as a writer began very early. In 1925, he edited a magazine, *Khatib al-Ummah*, which had a limited circulation of five hundred copies. In 1929 he wrote *Si Sabariah*, his first novel in the Minang language using jawi letters.¹¹ In 1932 he wrote another novel, *Layla Majnun*, which was modelled after the famous Arabic romance. In 1933 he was sent to Makasar, Sulawesi to consolidate and expand the local Muhammadiyah branch and spread the ideas of Muhammadiyah.¹² On his return from Makasar, he was appointed the director for *Kulliyah Muballighīn*, one of the Muhammadiyah schools in Padang Panjang. In 1935, he became the editor for the weekly Islamic Journal, *Pedoman Masyarakat* (Guidance for the Community), in Medan where his writing career started to blossom as his writings were recognised by the people.¹³ It all began with a series of articles, and serial novels in *Pedoman Masyarakat*. From these emerged such works as *Di Bawah Lindungan Ka‘bah* (In the Shadow of the Ka‘bah, 1936), *Tenggelamnya Kapal van der Wijck* (The Foundering of the Ship van der Wijck, 1938), *Merantau ke Deli* (The Journey to Deli, 1939), and *Tuan Direktur* (The Director, 1939). Religious values and principles were the main characters in all of his novels. This was the kind of reform introduced by ḤAMKA and thus “Islamicised” his novels and literary writings.

In his mystical works, *Tasawuf Moderen* (Modern Mysticism, first published in 1939), *Falsafat Hidup* (The Philosophy of Life, 1939), *Lembaga Budi* (The Principle of Ethics, 1940), and *Dari Perbendaharaan Lama* (From the Old Heritage, 1963), ḤAMKA tried to restore the real meaning of mysticism. He rejected the *ṭarīqah* organisation, especially the practice of *rābiṭah* and *wasīlah*. Other works on mysticism include: *Perkembangan Tasawuf dari Abad ke Abad* (The Development of Mysticism from Decade to Decade, 1952), *Tasawuf: Perkembangan dan Permurniannya* (Mysticism: Its

Development and Its Purification, 1983), aiming to distinguish pure Sufism originating from the practices of the Prophet from extraneous local accretions.¹⁴ Because of these mystical writings, Drs. Slamet Muljono considers ḤAMKA as the “Hamzah Fansuri of our time.”¹⁵ ḤAMKA also composed poetry but not in the mystical style of Hamzah Fansūrī or his contemporaries. ḤAMKA adopted a historical approach in many of his writings including such works as *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup* (The Memories of Life) and *Ayahku* (My Father); and *Sejarah Ummat Islam* (History of the Muslim Community) published in 1949 in four volumes. Another work, *Dari Perbendaharaan Lama* (From the Old Heritage), is a compilation of articles on Islamic history in Indonesia, a work that was originally published in 1955.

ḤAMKA gathers all available data and then gives his own analysis at the end. This was the method employed by Ibn Khaldūn which ḤAMKA admittedly tried to follow.¹⁶ However, ḤAMKA has been criticised for seldom mentioning his sources and for being less than critical about what is narrated.¹⁷ It was the practice of classical writers who used this methodology to mention their sources in the body of writing, instead of using the modern footnote format. ḤAMKA’s historical writings must be understood in the context of his own time, purpose, and his intended audience.¹⁸

It is interesting to observe that ḤAMKA was not called *kiai* (title given to religious scholar), a very highly regarded religious title in Indonesian society. This is for two reasons: first, ḤAMKA never had *pesantren* (traditional Islamic school) education. Second, most of his writings are not concerned with jurisprudence, a matter of importance in the *pesantren* system of education. Rather, his works dealt with literature, novels, mysticism and other pressing religious issues of his time.

Religious Unity of Humankind

In his Qur’ānic commentary, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, ḤAMKA frequently asserts the idea of religious unity of humankind. He was a strong believer in religious unity as expounded by the Qur’ān. ḤAMKA says:

The Human community in reality is one community. Likewise, religions in actuality are one; the *inti* (core) of religion is one.

The contents of the messages of [all] prophets have not changed though change took place in language. The Sharī‘ah and its way of application can be different because of the changes of time and space. Nonetheless, the *intisari* (essence) of the real intention of religion is only one, the recognition of the oneness of God.¹⁹

HAMKA’s discourse on religious unity centers on three Qur’ānic terms: *Islām* (submission), *hanīf* (the pure faith of Abraham) and *fiṭrah* (natural state).

The term *Islām* is derived from the root word *salama* meaning “being safe and secure.” One of its derivatives is *silma* which means “peace or reconciliation.” The word *Islām* signifies self-resignation or submission. *Islām* also signifies the religion of Muslims because it is a religion of self-resignation or submission. A Muslim, therefore, is a person who is resigned or who submits himself to God. A Muslim also means an adherent of the religion of *Islām* brought by the Prophet Muḥammad (SAS).²⁰ The term *hanīf* is derived from the Arabic root word *hanafa* which means “to incline to one side or limp.” *Hanīf* means “inclining to or having a right state or tendency, particularly inclining from one religion to another.” E.W. Lane, quoting Sayyid al-Murtaḍā al-Zābīdī (d. 1205), says that the term refers to one who belongs to the religion of Abraham who makes the *Ka‘bah* his *qiblah* and performs the rite of circumcision. *Hanīfiyyah* also refers to “inclining towards a thing, which is the faith of Abraham which is the religion of al-Islam.”²¹

The term *fiṭrah* originally derives from the Arabic root word *faṭara* meaning “to split open or to create.” *Fāṭir* means “creator or one who causes something to exist.” *Fiṭrah*, therefore, means “creating or originating something for the first time.” According to E.W. Lane, the term refers to the natural constitution with which a child is created in his mother’s womb. A tradition of the Prophet (SAS) is cited to explain this term. The tradition reads:

Every infant is born in the state of conformity to the natural state with which he is created in his mother’s womb. It is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian.²²

Muslim philologists suggest, as implied in the above tradition, that the innate natural constitution of a person is capable of knowing God who has created humankind. By extension, humankind is

capable of accepting the true religion, the religion of self-resignation and submission to God alone.²³ It is evident, therefore, that the meaning of those three terms are intertwined. They connote recognition of the oneness of God and submission to His law, the message that was revealed to His messengers until the last messenger, Muhammad (SAS). This explanation forms the basis for ḤAMKA's subsequent exposition on religious unity.

The term *Islām* in the Qur'ān is used in the wider sense of submission to God and the actual religion of *Islām* revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (SAS). For the first set of meanings, the Qur'ān points persistently to a prefiguration of *Islām* in the sense of the faith of Abraham which was believed, in Arabia from ancient times, as *ḥanīf* (the true faith), meaning the faith of submission to the one and only God. *Sūrat al-Rūm*, 30:30, reads:

So set thou thy face truly to the religion being upright, the nature in which Allah has made mankind. No change (there is) in the work (wrought) by Allah that is the true Religion. But most among mankind know not.

This verse confirms that this faith is an immutable pattern according to which God has created humankind. ḤAMKA argues that the true faith is imbedded in human nature. Man in the state of *wujūd 'ilm* (existence in the knowledge of God) recognises the lordship of God.²⁴ Any person or ideology that does not recognize this is against the nature of the creation of humankind.²⁵ ḤAMKA relates the explanation of this verse to his own struggle against the atheistic Communism in Indonesia. Therefore, it may not be an exaggeration to say that the commentary on this verse was directed towards that Communist ideology.

This state of being is again depicted in *Sūrat al-'Arāf*, 7:172, which reads: "Am I not your Lord (Who cherishes and sustains you)?" They say: "Yea! We do testify." ḤAMKA concludes that any religion that does not recognize this true nature of faith and proclaim God's absolute transcendence is a corrupt religion.²⁶

The above idea is also supported by *Sūrat al-Baqarah*, 2:62, which reads:

Those who believe (in the Qur'ān), and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians and the Sabians, any who

believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord. On them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.

HAMKA considers this verse a universal promise from God to all mankind that they will be rewarded, regardless of their religious adherence, provided they are sincere in their faith and perform righteous deeds.²⁷ This verse provides some common characteristics for salvation and consideration for universal faith. Among such characteristics are faith in one God and the hereafter and doing good deeds.²⁸

Considering this verse, one may wonder about the cultural and practical differences among religions. If one claims to believe in God, does one have to follow all religious practices, or are faith in God, and the hereafter and doing good deeds, as required by the above verse, the additional requirements?

HAMKA did not deal with these questions decisively. He, however, seems to contradict his own argument when he asserts that, by implication, believing in God signifies believing in His revelation (i.e., the revealed books) and messengers including Prophet Muhammad (SAS).²⁹ This is a common view held by the modern commentators. This argument may be seen by other religious adherents as offensive. Yet, HAMKA reiterates that this verse teaches “peaceful coexistence among all religious adherents” despite ideological differences.³⁰ They may be different yet they should respect each other. In other words, they should seek unity in diversity.

HAMKA’s commentary on this verse is well articulated, but he takes many things for granted including the need to address the missionary aspect of Islam and Christianity. HAMKA’s experience in Indonesia confirmed this difficulty. Religious fanaticism disrupts inter-religious harmony. HAMKA was well aware of the Christian missionaries in Indonesia who were aggressive in preaching Christianity, sometimes disregarding the sensitivity of Muslims.³¹

To ensure religious harmony in a multi-religious country like Indonesia, religious people are enjoined by the Qur’ān to uphold this universal principle. The differences in worship in different religions are acceptable as long as their followers submit themselves

to the will of God, and that is the real meaning of Islam.³² ḤAMKA argues that the meaning and message of this verse are still valid, and, therefore, the verse has not been abrogated by a later verse.

Some scholars of *‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān* (the sciences of the Qur’ān) have argued that verse 2:62 has been abrogated by verse 3:85 which reads: “If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah) never will it be accepted of him; and in the hereafter he will be in the ranks of losers.”³³ Qur’ān commentators differ as to whether the term Islam used in the above verse refers to the religion of Islam or to the general concept of submission to God.³⁴

According to ḤAMKA, even if one accepts the exclusive meaning of Islam, this verse still does not abrogate verse 2:62, rather it strengthens it. This is because the real meaning of Islam contains submission to God, faith in the hereafter, and the performance of good deeds. In other words, both the inclusive and exclusive meanings of Islam possess the same qualities as mentioned above.³⁵ Therefore, verse 2:62, according to ḤAMKA, preaches the idea of inclusivity and not exclusivity. If this verse is understood in its exclusive meaning as the religion of Islam, ḤAMKA says, the seed of fanaticism will be sown. This verse, therefore, complements verse 3:85. This will keep the meaning of Islam as the religion of *fiṭrah* which is compatible with all human souls. The coming of Prophet Muḥammad (SAS) was not to abrogate Judaism and Christianity, but rather to continue the universal message of submission to the one and only God. Differences of opinions among religious traditions are politically-motivated and do not have much to do with the real message of religion.³⁶

ḤAMKA also criticises Muslims who bear the name but fall short of living up to the real meaning of Islam, just like the Jews and Christians who do not accept the oneness of God or submit to Him. Islamic religious practices, especially folk Islam, are “dead motions” (*gerak-gerak yang mati*), are meaningless, if not coupled with the realisation of God, the most Powerful and Beneficent. The belief in and submission to God should be acted out in the reality of day-to-day life. The relationship between faith and action is that of *īmān* (faith) and Islam.³⁷ ḤAMKA says *Islam yang hidup* (dynamic Islam) can be relevant to the lives of all Indonesians. It is opposed to the ritualistic practices of *‘ādah* that only pay a lip service to Islam.³⁸

The *hanīf* religion and the state of human *fiṭrah* can shed further light on this matter. As stated above, the terms *hanīf*, *fiṭrah*, and *Islām* and their derivations denote the same meaning, the natural and true religion, which is submission only to one God, the *ṣirāt al-mustaqīm* (the straight path, *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah*, 1:5). This message has been revealed to the messengers of God at different points in time. *Sūrat āli-ʿImrān*, 3: 67 asserts that Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian but was true in faith, *hanīf*, a Muslim. *Sūrat al-Baqarah*, 2:135 and *Sūrat al-Nahl*, 16:120 respectively declare that Abraham was true in faith, a *hanīf*, not a polytheist. *Sūrat al-Hajj*, 22:78 affirms to the believers, "... it is the religion of your father Abraham. It is he who has named you (believers) Muslims..."

In *Sūrat al-Baqarah*, 2:128, Abraham and Ishmael pray to God to make their children submit to God (Muslims). In verse 2:133, Prophet Jacob asks his children as to whom they will worship after his death; they replied: we will be Muslims to the one and only God according to the teaching of our father Abraham. In *Sūrat Yūsuf*, 12:101, Prophet Joseph prays to God to let him die as a Muslim and to place him among those He blessed. In *Sūrat al-Anʿām*, 6:163 and in *Sūrat al-Zumar*, 39:15, God commands Prophet Muḥammad (SAS) to be and to declare himself the first Muslim. As is evident, the three terms are synonymous. The verses in 2:135 and 136 somewhat explain the interconnectedness between *hanīf* and *Islām*. Verse 2: 135 reads:

They say: "Become Jews or Christians if ye would be guided (to salvation)." Say thou: "Nay! (I would rather) [follow] the religion of Abraham the true and he joined not gods with Allah."

Verse 2:136 reads:

Say ye: "We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) Prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between them: and we submit to Allah"

According to HAMKA, these verses explain the nature of Abrahamic faith, *hanīf*, the true submission to God alone and the non-association of anything with God.

The verses in 2:136 and *Sūrat āli-ʿImrān* 3:84, further explain the religion of Abraham which was also revealed to other Prophets after

him including, among others, Moses and Jesus. All of them preached the same divine message, which is to become the submitter to God alone. God does not discriminate one Prophet over the other as He teaches them the monotheistic faith (*tawhīd*). That is why the Qurʾān calls them all Muslims.³⁹ The same message is conveyed in verses 131, 132, and 133 of *Sūrat al-Baqarah*, that is, all the progenies of Abraham believed in and submitted to God.⁴⁰ Therefore, all revealed religions affirm a common religious origin in the fatherhood of Abraham. From the Qurʾānic point of view, the general connotation of *Islām* is a “just word” that holds together all religious adherents and makes an attempt to disregard the differences.

Along the same lines, ḤAMKA finds the Qurʾānic call for unity in the concise verse of *Sūrat al-Muʾminūn*, 23:52, which reads:

And verily this Ummah of yours is a single Ummah and I am your Lord and cherisher, therefore fear Me.

This verse signifies that all prophets form one brotherhood. Their messages are one despite the differences in laws and their applications that change in time. They serve the same one true God and they owe their duty to Him and Him alone.⁴¹ This universal message does not, however, disregard human differences, but rather calls for the affirmation of the very essence of every religion which is *tawhīd al-Ilāh* (unity of God) and *Ittiḥād al-Insān* (human unity).⁴²

ḤAMKA argues that the claims of superiority of one religion over another, or one ethnic group over another are, therefore, irrelevant. The only valid claim is the assertion of one’s servitude to one God. ḤAMKA was saddened with the religious disparity among the Muslims. The conflict of *madhhab* (schools of jurisprudence) over non-principal (*furūʿ*) issues caused Indonesian Muslims to be divided. This was the case because of *taqlīd* minded followers for whom Islam is reduced to the principles of *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* (lawful and prohibited) only.⁴³

ḤAMKA’s position in this case echoed the belief of many Muslim scholars. The interconnections of the meanings of those Qurʾānic terms may be the reason that Ismāʿil Ragī al-Fārūqī designated them as the methodology for inter-religious dialogue. Al-Fārūqī proposes that *dīn al-fiṭrah*, or *religio naturalis*, to be the goal for which all religions should strive.⁴⁴ Along with a natural discerning faculty,

human beings are created in perfect form into which God breathed His spirit.⁴⁵

Humankind, with this innate nature, is alone capable of achieving the highest righteousness, the knowledge of God. This very nature entitles him to the membership of the universal brotherhood under God. The adherents of world religions are hence members of one family, and their religious differences are domestic, in reference to a common origin in *dīn al-ḥiṭrah*.⁴⁶ Therefore, instead of seeking to know how far all religious traditions agree with one another, al-Fārūqī proposes that mankind should be concerned with how far these religious traditions agree with *dīn al-ḥiṭrah*. Since all religious traditions, according to al-Fārūqī, are a historical outgrowth of natural religion, the process of getting to the core of each religious tradition is actually the sharing of experience and expertise which determines the real inter-religious dialogue.⁴⁷

Religious Tolerance and Inter-religious Dialogue

In his interpretation of many verses which deal with humanity in general, religious beliefs and the people of the book (Jews and Christians), HAMKA was inclined to polemicize on religious differences in his effort to affirm the validity of Islamic faith, but not to the extent of rejecting other religions. He rather advocated religious tolerance. This is evident from the way he interpreted *Sūrat al-Baqarah*, 2:20, *Sūrat al-Imrān*, 3:64, *Sūrat al-Mumtaḥanah*, 60:7-9, and *Sūrat al-Ikhlās*, 112.

Commenting on *Sūrat al-Mumtaḥanah*, verses 60:7-9, HAMKA argues that Muslims must cultivate respect and friendship with those who are kind and just to them. They are, however, commanded to fight in self-defence against those who establish a clear animosity against them. HAMKA takes these verses as the bases for religious tolerance and coexistence in one nation. The interaction must be honest. HAMKA notes that this verse is often forgotten even in interaction among the Muslims. The harmonious relationship required by Islam is often neglected, and instead stress is placed on the differences of opinion on the matters of *khilāfiyyāt* and *furū'iyāt* (disagreements and branches). This rigidity has often caused Muslims to be fanatical in their sects and beliefs. HAMKA uses Indonesian examples of the *tarāwīḥ* prayer in the month of Ramaḍān, whether

Muslims should pray eleven or twenty-three *rak'āt*, and whether *qunūt* (a special supplication made in the second part of the dawn prayer) should be read in the *ṣalat al-ṣubḥ* (the dawn prayer). These trivial issues were instrumental in dividing the Indonesian Muslims.⁴⁸

Inter-religious tolerance can be present as long as good intentions and mutual respect exist. However, in a situation, for instance, where the colonial government worked closely with Christian missionaries, the tolerance endorsed in this verse cannot be applied. These verses endorse religious tolerance only as it applies to well-mannered and well-intended people of different religions.⁴⁹ Based upon this understanding, ḤAMKA issued a *fatwā* (religious opinion), during his tenure as chairman of the Ulama Council of Indonesia, which prohibited the Indonesian Muslims from celebrating Christmas.⁵⁰ This *fatwā* is construed as a protest against the foreign connection of Christian missionaries and their interference in the internal affairs of Indonesia. A good Christian, in the eyes of ḤAMKA, is the image of Pak Kasimo⁵¹ who was a person of integrity and open-minded and who took part in the struggle against the Dutch for Indonesian independence.⁵²

ḤAMKA interpreted *Sūrat al-Baqarah*, 2:120, to have a message for toning down the religious polemics in Indonesia. In 1967, the relationship between Muslims and Christians reached a dangerous point. A Christian missionary was reported to have “*menhina nabi Muhammad*” (insulted Prophet Muḥammad, SAS). The Muslims responded by burning down some churches. One such incident was in Makasar in October, 1967 when a Christian teacher was reported to have insulted Islam by saying that “Muḥammad (SAS) was only married to nine of his wives and lived in adultery with the others.”⁵³ It is also reported that “a Christian church has been built opposite the great mosque of Makasar, although practically no Christians live in that area.”⁵⁴ These activities were considered aggressive and provocative by the Muslims and often resulted in open conflict. Such strained relations were also reported in Jakarta, Aceh, and other parts of Indonesia.

As a result of these and other similar incidents, on 30 November 1967, President Suharto, in conjunction with the establishment of the *Orde Baru* (the New Order), organised an inter-religious conference of Muslims, Christians (Protestants and Catholics),

Hindus and Buddhists in Indonesia. The Muslim delegation included, among others, Muhammad Natsir, Dr. Rasyidi, K.H. Fakhri Usman, Prawoto Mangkusasmito and HAMKA. The Christian delegates were T.B. Simatupang, Tanbunan, S.H. Kasimo and Harry Chan.⁵⁵ At the end of the dialogue, a charter was prepared for consideration by the delegates. The draft of the charter set principles, *modus vivendi*, and ethical codes for religious tolerance in Indonesia, specifying that one religious community would not allow the targeting of other religious communities for preaching and conversion.⁵⁶ The Christian leaders felt that the article was unfairly drafted and contested that the charter undermined human freedom. They believed that to deliver the message of Christianity to non-Christians was their sacred duty. The Christian delegates, therefore, refused to accept it.⁵⁷ The Muslims, on the other hand, felt secure with that article because it protected the Muslims from the Christian missionaries.

This article, along with two others, was repeatedly stressed by Muslims all these years. The other two articles, that in some ways expanded the basic demands of the above article, were as follows: First, every religious group ought to restrict its activities to its own members. Second, competition may indeed take place between Muslims and Christians to convert those people with no adherence to religion, i.e., the animists.⁵⁸ Due to this disagreement, the meeting was adjourned without any concrete resolutions. The conflict between Muslims and Christians continued and similar violent incidents are reported from time to time in Indonesia.

It must be noted that the clashes were not the result of a one-sided Christian provocation. The Muslims are equally guilty of creating an antagonistic situation through polemical writings defending Islam and denigrating Christianity. Thus, Hasbullah Bakry wrote a tract arguing that “The Qur’ān is a Correction to the Old and New Testaments” and that Islam’s portrayal of Jesus Christ is truer than the one depicted in Christianity. Like wise, O. Hashem wrote “A Complete Answer to Rev. Dr. J. Verkuyl” in response to a pamphlet on Christianity written by Verkuyl, the Dutch theologian, which was seen by Muslims as an attack on the integrity of Islam.⁵⁹ This stream of polemical publications and activities⁶⁰ by both religious communities from 1962 to 1967 was detrimental to inter-religious life in Indonesia.

The aggressive stance of Christianity vis-a-vis Muslims for ḤAMKA was a proof of the truth contained in *al-Baqarah* 2:120, which reads: “the Jews will not be pleased with you, nor will the Christians until you follow their religions.” ḤAMKA adds, “it is not a matter of importance for the Jews and the Christians to convert those who have no religion, but it is of great importance to convert Muslims.”⁶¹ However, it is incorrect to assume that that the Christians and the Jews constitute one monolithic group that preach the same message. In reality, Christians and Jews are two separate groups with divergent opinions, and that even Christians themselves are divided into several sects.

Looking at the reality of inter-religious conflicts in the second half of the twentieth century Indonesia, ḤAMKA’s explanations reflect the Muslim sentiments and psychological states in relation to Christianity. Despite the Christian missionaries’ claim that their goal was to civilise and save the people, missionary activities were an intrusion into the internal affairs of Indonesian Muslims. His stand for a dialogue was based upon *Sūrat āli-‘Imrān* 3:64, which reads:

Say: O People of the Book! Come to a common term as between us and you: that we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partner with Him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than Allah.

ḤAMKA argues that this verse invites Muslims, Jews and Christians (the people of the book), to come to a “common word” (*kalimatīn sawā’*) that can be a meeting point between them. What is common between them is the worship of God alone and non-association of partners to Him.

ḤAMKA believes that the reference to the “common word” is found also in the original teachings of Moses and Jesus. Returning to the “common word” will result in theological unity among the communities of the revealed religions, that is, unity in diversity.⁶² However, taking this verse as a basis for dialogue requires of the Jews and Christians, by implication, to return to their original forms, but the question of the original message is itself a thorny issue.

How can one know what is original and what is not? Indeed, the Muslims would say that the original form is what is contained in the Qur’ān, because they believe that all previous Prophets were Muslims

(in the sense of submitting to the one and only God). The insistence on such a position by Muslims is seen as an imposition on the beliefs of others. Therefore, on the premise of this verse, theological dialogue is quite difficult. It is possible, however, to interpret this verse as Boland puts it: “their adherents ... must be involved in the struggle for a just society, both nationally and internationally.”⁶³ In other words, the “common word” is ethical and humanistic in nature, not dogmatic.

If the platform for inter-religious dialogue proposed by the Qurʾān is not materialised and differences between Muslims and the people of the Book prevail, HAMKA adds, Muslims are still required to respect other faiths because there is “no coercion in religion.” Interestingly, HAMKA interprets verse 256 of *Sūrat al-Baqarah* in a novel way. The verse enjoins:

Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from error: whoever rejects Tagut and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold that never breaks...

This verse, according to HAMKA, challenges human beings to use rational faculties to ponder the invitation of Islam.⁶⁴

Coercion is not permitted, according to this verse, because it interferes with the reasoning that human beings are supposed to exercise in knowing and learning about God and Islam. If coercion is allowed in Islam, HAMKA emphasizes, it would result in the state of *taqlīd* (blind imitation). The above interpretation shows exactly what HAMKA and his reformist friends struggled against and attempted to eradicate from the Muslim society in Minangkabau and in Indonesia as a whole.⁶⁵

The message of this verse, in HAMKA’s view, is to propagate intellectual reform that the *taqlīd*-minded Indonesian Muslims so badly needed. In a multi-religious society, the religious freedom propagated by this verse must be upheld. Furthermore, in *Sūrat Yūnus* 10:100, believers are told that “No soul can believe except by the will of Allah,” and warns that the job of *dāʿī* (preacher) is to convey the message of Islam. God’s grace and help will decide the faith of a person. If a person sincerely wishes to understand Islam, God’s help will be with him or her. Otherwise, their doubts and difficulties will multiply.⁶⁶ HAMKA notes rather sadly that religious

freedom is almost non-existent in many Muslim countries.⁶⁷ In earlier times, minorities, under Muslim rule, enjoyed freedom to practice their religions and were prosperous.⁶⁸ In any case, ḤAMKA argues that the Qurʾān in *Sūrat al-Māʾidah* 5:83-85, recognises the harmonious relationship between the Muslims and the neighboring Christian communities. However, *Sūrat al-Taubah* 9:29 asserts:

Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth, from among the people of the Book, until they pay the *Jizyah* with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.

ḤAMKA contends that this verse makes no sense in the light of good relationship between Muslim and Christian communities which was acknowledged by the Qurʾān.

This verse has to be understood in the context of its occasion of revelation. It teaches Muslims how to deal with the people of the book in case they break the treatise and help the enemies of Islam to destroy Islam. ḤAMKA reports that this verse apply to some of the Arab Christian tribes in the north of Madinah who betrayed the Prophet (SAS) and sided with the Roman Empire to fight the Muslims of Madinah. In addition, they disrupted the Muslim trade routes to Syria. As a result of those incidents as well as the killing of the Prophet's emissary to the Arab Christian tribe of Baṣrah (in Iraq) by its king, al Ḥārith bin ʿUmair al-Azdī, the Prophet (SAS) went all out to fight the Christians. In ḤAMKA's words they were *lebih Rum dari Rum sendiri* (more Romans than the Romans themselves).⁶⁹ They were more hostile to Muslims than the strong Roman empire of that time. They acted adversely against their own Arab tribe to please the Roman authorities.

The atrocities and hostilities against the Muslims of Madīnah, according to ḤAMKA, are in some ways similar to those against Indonesian Muslims during the Dutch colonialism. The Dutch puppet officers committed atrocities against their fellow Indonesians to gain favours from their masters.⁷⁰ Therefore, it is clear that the command to fight the people of the book is not due to ideological differences, but due to the threat they pose to Muslims. In other words, the command is rooted in Muslim political interest rather than in ideological conflict.

Given the arguments adduced above, it is easy to see the link between HAMKA's ideas of inter-religious relation and Muslims animosity against the Christians in Indonesia. This antagonism is reflected in *MUI* position on the celebration of Christmas. HAMKA, who was the chairman of *MUI* issued a *fatwā* (legal judgment) prohibiting the Indonesian Muslims to celebrate Christmas in order to protect Muslims from mixing Islamic truth (*al-haqq*) with what the *fatwā* considered as Christian falsehood (*al-bāṭil*).⁷¹

However, the underlying reason is actually more far-reaching than it appears to be. It is undoubtedly rooted in the Muslim response to the process of Christianisation in Indonesia. Under the pretext of inter-religious harmony, encouraged by the Indonesian government, Christian missionaries appeared to have taken the opportunity to preach Christianity to Muslims. The *fatwā* is one of the strategic Muslim responses to the process of Christianisation in Indonesia. The *fatwā*, it must be noted, does not prohibit the attendance of Christmas celebrations, but rather prohibits Muslims to attend rituals in Christmas ceremonies. It clearly states that Muslims are allowed to work together and befriend the adherents of other religions on matters related to worldly affairs.⁷² This pronouncement opens up a new horizon for inter-religious dialogue in Indonesia.

The term "worldly affairs" is vague and may include anything that is not religious or lies outside the scope of faith. It may be implied that areas such as ethics or any other common human interests can ensure peaceful co-existence of all Indonesians. It is, therefore, a new avenue for dialogue which lies beyond the scope of sensitive areas such as dogma and faith, which can be an effective foundation for inter-religious dialogue in Indonesia.

Conclusion

HAMKA was a prolific writer and all his writings are about Islam or related to Islam and contain Islamic messages for application in daily life. His monumental *Tafsīr al-Azhar* is considered by many, including HAMKA himself, as a tool for the purification of Islam in Indonesia and the Muslim world in general. HAMKA's writings convey the idea of the religious unity of mankind. He believed that the human community in reality is one community and the religions in actuality are one. The contents of the messages of all prophets

have been the same though changes have taken place in their languages. Given such an understanding, it was but natural for ḤAMKA to advocate religious tolerance and promote inter-religious dialogue. He was of the opinion that inter-religious tolerance can be present as long as good intentions and mutual respect exist. In the absence of the platform for inter-religious dialogue as proposed by the Qur'ān, ḤAMKA argues, Muslims are still required to respect other faiths because there is “no coercion in religion.”

Notes

1. The title of Doctor of Philosophy (Dr.) used for ‘Abd al-Karīm Amrullāh is not supported by any evidence except that ḤAMKA used it in his book, *Ayahku: Riwayat Hidup Dr. Abd Karim Amrullah dan Perjuangannya Kaum Agama di Sumatra* (Jakarta: Djajamurni, 1967).
2. ḤAMKA, *Ayahku*, 21. *Diniyah School* was established by Zainuddin Lebai in 1915, in which students were taught History, Geography, Arithmetic, Language and the like in addition to religious sciences. In 1922, fifteen similar schools were established with the same name in different parts of Minangkabau. See Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900-1942* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1973), 52-56.
3. *Ibid.*, 30.
4. *Ibid.*, 32-33. Dr. Rivai, a Minangkabau, was regarded by many in Sumatra as the first Indonesian in the modern period who fought against the injustices of Dutch colonial government. He was Western-educated and married to a Christian Dutch woman. See Parada Harahap, *Riwayat Dr. A. Rivai* (Medan: Indische Drukkerij, 1939).
5. *Sarekat Islam* was established on November 11, 1911 by Haji Samanhoeddi to promote common welfare, prosperity and greatness of Indonesia. See Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement*, 104.
6. H.O.S. Chokroaminoto was considered by many as the father of reformatory thought in Indonesia.
7. ḤAMKA, *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Pustaka Antara, 1982), 54-55. *Jong Islamieten Bond* (JIB) was an organisation, established in 1925, of Western-educated intellectuals who were sympathetic to Islam and generally tolerant toward other religions. JIB published a periodical, *al-Nūr* (The Light) to counter Christian missionaries. The JIB served as a training ground for the leaders of *Masyumi*. Among its members were Kasman Singoimedjo, Muhammad Roem, A.R. Baswedan, and Haji Agus Salim. See Muhammad Roem, “Jong Islamieten Bond Yang Saya Alami,” *Panji*

Masyarakat, vol. 23, no. 348 (1982): 208-222; K. Steenbrink, *Dutch Colonialism and Indonesian Islam, Contacts and Conflicts 1596-1950*. Translated by by Jan Steenbrink & Henry Jansen. Amsterdam (Atlanta: Rodopi B.V., 1993), 111, 136-138.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., 85.

10. For a complete list of HAMKA's works, see Mohamed bin Abas, HAMKA: *A Bibliography of the Works of Prof. Dr. Haji 'Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah*, Sydney: BISA [Bibliographic Information on Southeast Asia], 1983. Microfiche. For the bibliography of HAMKA arranged according to field of study, see H. Yunus Amirhamzah, *HAMKA Sebagai Pengarang Roman*, 2nd ed. (Jakarta: Pustaka Sari Indah, 1993), 55-59.

11. This first novel is a love story based on the experience of a young couple in Sungai Batang (part of Minangkabau). See HAMKA, *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup*, 93, 137. See also Rusydi HAMKA, *Pribadi dan Martabat Buya Prof. Dr. HAMKA*, 2nd ed. (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1983), 40.

12. Ibid.

13. See M. Yunan Nasution, "HAMKA Sebagai Pengarang dan Pujangga," in *Kenang-Kenangan 70 Tahun*, 43.

14. This book is actually a combination of two books on mysticism that he wrote in the 1950's. Those two books are *Perkembangan Tasauf dari Abad ke Abad* (Jakarta: Pamjimas publication, 1952) and *Mengembalikan Tasauf ke Pangkalnya* which was originally an inaugural address delivered at The State Teacher Training College of Yogyakarta in 1958.

15. HAMKA, *Tasauf Moderen* (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1990), xix.

16. HAMKA, *Antara Fakta dan Khayal Tuanku Rao* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1974), 99.

17. Karel Steenbrink, "HAMKA (1908-1981) and the Integration of the Islamic Ummah of Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 1, no. 3 (1994): 12.

18. For a study of HAMKA's approach to history, see Deliar Noer, "HAMKA dan Sejarah" (HAMKA and History) in Panitia Peringatan, *Kenang-Kenangan 70 Tahun*, 169-188.

19. HAMKA, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, vol. 2 (Singapore: Pustaka Nasional, 1992), 1275. See also vol. 6, 4800.

20. See E.W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1984), 1412, 1414.

21. Ibid., 658.
22. Ibid., vol. 2, 2415-16.
23. Ibid., vol. 2, 2416.
24. ḤAMKA, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, vol. 7, 5516.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., vol. 1, 203.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid, 205.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., 206.
32. Ibid., 208. See also ḤAMKA's interpretations of 2: 112, vol. 1, 268-69.
33. The argument against the idea of abrogation of 2:62 by 3:85 would be that verse 2:62 was revealed again in 5:69 which was much later than verse 3:85. Verse 5:69, therefore, reinforced the message in 2:62.
34. See Jane I. Smith, *An Historical and Semantic Study of the Term "Islam" as Seen in a Sequence of Qur'ān Commentaries*, ed. Caroline Bynum and George Rupp, (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1975). See also Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Qur'ān and Its Interpreters* (New York: The SUNY Press, 1992), vol. 2, 241-43.
35. ḤAMKA, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, vol. 1, 208.
36. Ibid., 210.
37. Ibid., vol. 1, 207; see also vol. 2, 733; 828-29.
38. Ibid., vol. 1, 207.
39. Ibid., 312-14; vol. 2, 827.
40. Ibid., vol. 1, 306-10.
41. Ibid., vol. 6, 4800; vol. 2, 733.
42. Ibid., vol. 6, 4801.
43. Ibid., 4802.
44. Ismā'īl Rāgī al-Farūqī, "Islam and Other Faiths, the World's Need for Humane Universalism" in Altaf Gauhar, ed. *The Challenge of Islam* (London: Islamic Council of Europe, 1978), 92.

45. See *Sūrat al-Sajdah*, 32: 9.
46. Al-Farūqī, “Islam and Other Faiths,” 93.
47. *Ibid.*, 94.
48. HAMKA, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, vol. 9, 7300-4.
49. *Ibid.*, 7303.
50. See Majelis Ulama Indonesia, *Kumpulan Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1984), 81-89.
51. Pak Kasimo was a member of GAPI (*Gabungan Politik Indonesia* [Federation of Indonesian Political Parties]), founded in 1930. He was respected, among others, for his struggle against Dutch domination.
52. Rusydi HAMKA, *Pribadi dan Martabat Buya Prof. Dr. HAMKA*, 2nd ed. (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1983), i and Appendix iii, 293.
53. *Panji Masyarakat*, no. 19 (October 1967): 25.
54. *Ibid.*
55. Rusydi, *Pribadi*, 175. See also HAMKA, *Ghirah dan Tentangan Terhadap Islam* (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1982), 15, 17.
56. Rusydi, *Pribadi*, 175.
57. *Ibid.*, 175. See also B.J. Boland, *The Struggle of Islam in Indonesia* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), 231.
58. Boland, *The Struggle of Islam*, 231.
59. *Ibid.*, 226, 228.
60. In a conference of Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches in 1962 in East Java, a plan was drawn to Christianise Java in 20 years and the whole of Indonesia in 50 years through various means. See *Ibid.*, 227.
61. HAMKA, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, vol. i, 287.
62. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 798.
63. Boland, *The Struggle of Indonesia*, 242.
64. This verse was revealed in response to the permission sought from Prophet Muhammad (SAS) by the *Anṣār*, the people of Madinah. They wanted to convert their children to Islam, who having lived with the Jews adopted the Jewish religion. The children were granted the freedom to renounce or retain their religion. See HAMKA, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, vol. 1, 623-624.
65. *Ibid.*

66. Ibid., vol. 5, 3401. See also Yusof Alieq, *The Holy Qur'ān*, 577, note 1481. Using the same tone of argument, ḤAMKA interprets *Sūrat al-An'ām* (6): 112. See ḤAMKA, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, vol. 3, 2150.

67. ḤAMKA, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, vol. 1, 627.

68. Ibid., vol. 2, 799.

69. Ibid., vol. 4, 2913-14.

70. Ibid., 2915.

71. For the original text of the *fatwa* see Majelis Ulama Indonesia, *Kumpulan Fatwa*, 81-89. See also Mudzhar, Mohamad Atho, "Fatwa's of the Council of Indonesian Ulama: A Study of Islamic Legal Thought in Indonesia, 1975-1988," (Ph.D. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 1990), 112.

72. Majelis Ulama Indonesia, *Kumpulan Fatwa*, 81.