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## A THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AND ITS RELEVANCE TO PLURALISTIC SOCIETY BASED ON HAMKA'S TAFSIR AL-AZHAR

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**Abstract:** *Contemporary global challenges such as relativism, the fragmentation of meaning, and the increasing escalation of religion-related conflicts demonstrate the urgency of strengthening interfaith dialogue as a means of fostering social harmony, tolerance, and peace within society. In this context, this study analyzes Hamka's interpretation of Qur'anic verses in Tafsir al-Azhar to explore how Islamic theological principles can guide constructive interreligious relations. Using a qualitative philosophical approach and thematic analysis of verses pertaining to interfaith relations, this research systematically identifies the key concepts emphasized by Hamka. The study finds that Hamka affirms three fundamental foundations of interreligious interaction: (a) the principle of universal human dignity, (b) justice and ethical responsibility toward others, and (c) guidance for peaceful coexistence rooted in Qur'anic moral values. The study also finds that Hamka underscores these principles as the basis for interreligious relations. Conceptually, this research contributes to the development of Islamic philosophy of religion; practically, it offers a normative framework to support tolerance, coexistence, and peace among diverse religious communities amid contemporary global challenges.*

**Keywords:** *Hamka; Interfaith Dialogue; Islamic Philosophy; Tafsir al-Azhar; Interreligious Ethics.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the evolving landscape of globalization marked by increasing cases of religious intolerance, intergroup tension, and widening ideological fragmentation strengthening interfaith dialogue has become a pressing social necessity. In Indonesia, a society widely recognised for its plural composition of ethnicities, cultures, languages, and religions (Shalahuddin et al., 2023). A national survey on reviewed in a Katadata data analysis on entitled “Negative Values of Religious Tolerance and Diversity in Indonesia” pluralism and tolerance show that although Indonesian society generally recognizes diversity as part of its national identity, the level of acceptance of different religious groups remains fluctuating and has tended to decline in recent years. The latest journalistic data confirms this situation. Setara Institute reported 175 incidents and 333 violations of freedom of religion belief throughout 2022, an increase from 171 incidents and 318 violations in the previous year (Dihni, 2025). This data shows that Indonesia's plurality does not automatically result in social harmony. On the contrary, various incidents of intolerance ranging from the rejection of houses of worship, discrimination against religious minorities, to identity base conflicts emphasize the urgency of a more substantive interfaith approach. It is this empirical condition that makes the study of Hamka's thought, particularly through Tafsir al-Azhar, relevant for formulating an ethical-theological framework that can strengthen interfaith relations in contemporary Indonesia.

Pluralism originated in the Western world, which the Church once dominated in many aspects of life. The rise of pluralism in Christian Western civilisation stems from internal issues within Christianity (Yunus, 2014). Cultural and religious diversity is no longer confined to specific regions but has become a global phenomenon, including within Muslim societies. Truth is considered to belong to all religions. In this context, postmodernism is built on the spirit of pluralism and often questions religious teachings that are orthodox or traditional (Zarkasyi et al., 2023).

In the postmodern era, pluralism is a direct result of relativistic thinking (Zarkasyi et al., 2023). Has made cultural and religious diversity a global phenomenon, including in Muslim-majority societies. Postmodernism's relativism, which often questions orthodox religious doctrines, contributes to a shifting understanding of truth and coexistence (Anis Malik Thaha, 2021). In such a context, interfaith dialogue becomes essential for promoting understanding, tolerance, and harmonious coexistence among religious communities.

Interfaith dialogue involves communication or interaction between individuals or groups of different religions, aimed at fostering mutual understanding, building harmonious relationships, and respecting existing differences in belief (Abu-Nimer, 2011). Dialogue acts as a bridge in establishing connections among diverse communities (Riza Firdaus, 2024). It plays a vital role in resolving conflicts that emerge from the dynamic changes and developments within contemporary social realities (Titin Wulandari Malau, 2023). In Islam, dialogue is encouraged through wisdom, sound reasoning, and ethical engagement, as emphasised in Qur'anic guidance such as Surah al-*Ankabūt*: 46 (Hamka, 2001a).

Coexistence within plural societies requires more than merely living side by side; it involves acknowledging the presence of other religions and recognising that elements of truth may exist within them while maintaining one's own theological convictions (Arif, 2010). In this context, interpreting the Qur'an holds a crucial role. A reproductive interpretation tends to perpetuate classical traditions, whereas a productive interpretation aims to explore new meanings relevant to modern life, without overlooking the fundamental aims of the Qur'an (Shalahuddin H., 2019).

The literature on interfaith dialogue can be grouped into three major clusters. First, studies on the normative foundations of interfaith dialogue in global scholarship such as Hilton (2022) who highlights Hans Küng's contribution through the Global Ethic Project, reviews Hans Kung's contribution to the development of interfaith thinking, particularly through the Global Ethic Project and his theological works on interfaith relations. Hans Kung offers a conceptual foundation for modern interfaith dialogue, but his discussion is more descriptive and biographical than analytical of specific religious texts (Hilton, 2022). Furthermore, Aadil Hussain (2022) who discusses the Islamic normative basis of dialogue through historical precedents like the Medina Charter (Aadil Hussain Wagay, 2022). And Syukur Yanuardi (2024), who analyses Muslim responses to modern initiatives such as the Document on Human Fraternity primarily focus on global theological principles without examining Qur'anic exegesis in specific Muslim contexts (Syukur, 2024). These studies focus on global theological norms and have not analyzed interpretation of the Qur'an as applied by specific muslim scholars in specific contexts.

Second, research on Islamic theological approaches to tolerance and religious moderation, such as Eduwar (2023) emphasizes Hamka's explanation of verses on tolerance in the Qur'an, principles of tolerance in Al-Azhar's interpretation such as compassion and good behavior among religious communities, freedom of religion, and mutual respect among religious communities (Eduwar, 2023). Meanwhile, Iqbal Ansari & Mutaqin Alzamzami (2022) focus on verses of religious moderation in the Al-Azhar Tafsir and explain the religious approach (*wasatiyyah*) in religion, but do not touch on the aspect of interfaith dialogue (Ansari & Alzamzami, 2022). The research by Muhammad Ebin & Amrina (2023) explains Hans Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical approach to reinterpreting the values of religious moderation in *Tafsir Al-Azhar*. Religious moderation not only maintains a good relationship with Allah but also with other people, helping one another, respecting differences, and so on (Sihombing et al., 2023). Namun, studi-studi ini belum secara spesifik menempatkan nilai-nilai tersebut dalam kerangka teologis yang lebih luas terkait dialog antaragama.

Third, existing studies on Hamka's thought in Tafsir al-Azhar generally explore themes of tolerance, moderation, and humanism (Ansari & Alzamzami, 2022; Eduwar, 2023), yet they have not examined Hamka's contribution to interreligious dialogue as a distinctive theological philosophical framework. This gap leaves an academic and social void regarding his Qur'anic approach to interfaith relations. To address this limitation, the present study asks how Hamka's Qur'anic interpretations provide a theological foundation for interreligious dialogue in modern pluralistic societies, and why revisiting these

interpretations remains significant today. The research adopts a philosophical approach to religion by examining the relationship between the Islamic concept of faith (*imān*) and religious diversity. Within this framework, Hamka's thoughts in *Tafsir Al-Azhar* are analysed to understand how Islamic creed (*'aqidah*) fosters harmony and interfaith dialogue without undermining the fundamental principles of *tawhīd* (the oneness of God) (Ansari & Alzamzami, 2022). Using a thematic analytical method, relevant Qur'anic verses such as Surah An-Nahl: 125, which underscores the importance of wisdom in dialogue (Rengga Irfan, 2022). Preaching or inviting others to faith through coercion can never genuinely change a person's belief, because the heart cannot be forced. Instead, a sincere heart will naturally be drawn toward the truth of a religion. Are connected with broader theories of interfaith engagement to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of Hamka's theological thought in addressing pluralistic challenges and in bridging Islamic theology with constructive interreligious dialogue.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative approach uses a library-based, primarily focusing on Hamka's *Tafsir al-Azhar* as the main unit of analysis. This tafsir is selected because it represents Hamka's interpretive framework of the Qur'an and his theological views on interfaith dialogue within a pluralistic society. To enrich the analysis, the study also incorporates various supporting literature related to the topic, including other works by Hamka such as *Pelajaran Agama Islam*, *Tasawuf Modern*, *Lembaga Budi*, *Pribadi*, *Falsafah Hidup*, *Islam: Revolusi Ideologi dan Keagamaan*, *Dari Hati ke Hati*, and *Umat Islam Menghadapi Tantangan Kristenisasi dan Sekularisme*. Furthermore, academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and prior studies on interfaith dialogue are used to establish a solid theoretical foundation.

This study was carried out in five stages, with methods outlined as follows: First, a literature review and identification of key data sources. In this phase, the researcher adopts a descriptive approach, collecting data to explore existing theories and answer questions aligned with the research objectives specifically. Additionally, this stage aims to identify and develop indicators related to the concept of interfaith dialogue within pluralistic societies. Second, the data collection phase involves gathering qualitative data from diverse sources such as books, scholarly journals, and conference proceedings relevant to the research theme. This process includes recording, reviewing, and analysing data to ensure the information is comprehensive and well-articulated (Sugiyono D., 2013). This entails systematic documentation, examination, and analysis to enhance clarity and understanding. Furthermore, this stage includes compiling Qur'anic verses discussing interfaith dialogue as interpreted by Hamka in *Tafsir Al-Azhar*. Third, the data is analysed using a qualitative method to uncover patterns in Hamka's perspectives on interfaith dialogue. Fourth, the analytical findings are synthesised, interpreted, and articulated into a coherent academic narrative. Finally, the completed findings are organised and presented in a scholarly manuscript.

The present study employs a philosophical theological analytical approach, which examines conceptual meanings, ethical values, and the theological framework articulated by Hamka in Tafsir al-Azhar. This method not only analyzes the textual content but also interprets the structure of argumentation, the normative foundations, and the philosophical implications embedded within the tafsir. In ensuring the rigor of the analysis, the study applies several qualitative validity criteria, including internal coherence namely, the consistency among themes, arguments, and interpretations derived from the text; textual triangulation, which involves comparing multiple sections of Hamka's tafsir and other relevant sources to reinforce the interpretive grounding; and conceptual validity, referring to the accuracy of conceptual usage and its alignment with the philosophical theological framework under examination.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Indonesia is a nation rich in diverse ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups. With more than 1,300 ethnicities, each with its own language, customs, and traditions, the country showcases a vibrant tapestry of cultural wealth. From the demographically dominant Javanese to smaller communities such as the Baduy and Asmat, every group adds to the richness of the national cultural identity (Polhaupessy et al., 2025). This diversity also extends to religion as from GoodStats (2024) shows that out of a total population of 285,710,160, 87.2% are Muslims, 6.9% Protestants, 2.9% Catholics, 1.7% Hindus, 0.7% Buddhists, and 0.05% Confucians. With over 245 million followers, Islam is the majority religion, followed by Protestantism and Catholicism, while Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism form smaller communities (Muhammad Sholeh, 2025). Despite this apparent harmony, Indonesia faces significant challenges due to its ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity.

However, demographic plurality, although perceived as a source of social harmony, may also present real challenges in interreligious relations. Differences in belief can develop into tensions when exclusive doctrinal claims or overly inclusive religious attitudes are contested in the public sphere. The outbreaks of conflict and social disharmony that emerge in various contexts often stem from the exclusive attitudes of each group toward their respective religious teachings or ideologies, which subsequently lead to truth claims and the rejection of other groups (Abdillah, 2019).

In addition, identity politics further exacerbates the situation. Religious identity is politicized through the use of religious symbols and doctrines as commodities to mobilize political support, thereby reducing the moral and spiritual values of religion to mere instruments of mass mobilization (Yunus et al., 2023). The politicization of religion presents a challenge in interfaith relations. In Islamic teachings, religion and politics are closely linked. However, using politics solely to gain power is strictly forbidden. When religion becomes a political tool, it often results in division and tension among groups, leading to conflict (Alauddin et al., 2022).

Modernisation not only offers opportunities but also presents challenges, such as the gradual fading of religious values and the rise of various violations of religious norms (Niswi et al., 2024). One of the phenomena that occur is the movement of syncretism, such as the encouragement of joint prayers, joint worship, and joint services among people of different faiths (Hamka & Rusydi, 2002).

In facing this kind of modernity, Muslims encounter changes in values that may conflict with Islamic teachings. If not managed wisely, this can result in misunderstandings or conflicts between Islam and other religions. Therefore, interfaith dialogue promotes a sense of responsibility and mutual respect among diverse communities (Lajnah Pentashihan mushaf Al-Qur'an, n.d.). Islam considers religion as a moral guide that fosters peace, rather than just a means to divide society (Tariq Ramadan, 2001).

Furthermore, rigid interpretations of sacred texts often dominate the public sphere, narrowing the space for dialogue and triggering sensitivities between groups. These factors have historically fueled social friction and communal conflict. By articulating these challenges explicitly, this study establishes a theoretical foundation for examining how Hamka's conceptual framework in *Tafsir al-Azhar* aligns with, expands upon, or even critiques existing models of interfaith dialogue that have developed within Indonesia's pluralistic context.

### **The Concept of Interfaith Dialogue**

In Arabic, dialogue is called (*Al-hiwar*), which means question and answer, response, conversation, or dialogue (Ratnaningtyas et al., 2022). In essence, dialogue is a process where individuals with differing beliefs and perspectives engage in discussion to express and clarify their understanding of truth, often by highlighting the reasoning behind their convictions. Response, response, conversation, or dialogue (Thameem, 2024). Dialogue is also seen as a form of communication aimed at achieving shared goals and fostering unity within communities. At its core, dialogue functions as a way to establish positive, constructive interreligious relationships that promote mutual understanding and cooperation (Wasik & Philips, 2022).

The concept of interfaith dialogue acts as a fundamental framework for exploring interreligious interaction, covering theological, sociological, and humanitarian aspects (Adibah et al., 2025). Interfaith dialogue can take many forms, from casual conversations between individuals to formal settings such as meetings, conferences, and interfaith institutions (Muhammad Sajjad Malik, 2023).

The theory of interfaith dialogue relates to the ideas of thinkers like Muhammad Abu-Nimer, Hans Kung, and Paul Knitter. Muhammad Abu-Nimer emphasises that interfaith dialogue aims for freedom and respect and seeks to build bridges to reduce tension and hatred between religious communities by prioritising peace and organised cooperation to promote mutual understanding (Abu-Nimer, 2011). Hans Kung points out that interfaith dialogue must examine the theological foundations of each religion to promote peace

(Hans Kung, 1991). Meanwhile, Knitter sees dialogue as a process of self-transformation rather than a way of changing others' beliefs (Paul F. Knitter, 2002).

Having outlined the general theoretical framework of interfaith dialogue and its major contemporary thinkers, this discussion now turns to the position of Hamka. Although Hamka does not explicitly formulate a theory of interfaith dialogue in the modern sense, his writings on interreligious relations offer essential ethical foundations for understanding Muslim engagement with other faiths in the Indonesian context.

Hamka does not explicitly discuss interfaith dialogue as understood in contemporary theological studies. However, Hamka's studies on interfaith relations provide a normative framework that can be positioned as a form of ethical dialogue in the Indonesian context. Hamka participated in an interfaith conference held in Jakarta from November 30 to December 3, 1967 (Hamka & Rusydi, 2002). In that forum, he emphasised an approach to dialogue that remains firmly grounded in the principles of Islamic creed (*'aqidah*) while rejecting any form of syncretism (Hamka, 2001f). Nonetheless, Hamka showed deep respect for religious differences (Hamka, 2001e). In his reflections on interreligious relations, Hamka presented a clear and principled perspective affirming that Islam acknowledges the existence of other religions without compromising the doctrine of *tanwīd*. Hamka advocated for preaching with wisdom, good advice (*al-mau'izhah al-ḥasanah*), and constructive dialogue. In this context, Hamka's ideas in *Tafsir Al-Azhar* provide a unique perspective on interfaith dialogue (Khan et al., 2020).

Hamka's epistemology of dialogue is rooted in the foundations of monotheism and the authority of revelation, which places truth as something that originates from Allah through the Qur'an and is internalized by humans through reason, heart, and moral experience (Hamka, 2023). For Hamka, interfaith dialogue is only possible if it is based on the awareness that humans are seekers of truth who are equipped with nature, reason, and moral freedom to weigh arguments honestly. Truth remains hierarchical Islam contains the most complete teachings of monotheism, but dialogue is necessary to uphold justice, avoid hostility, and convey teachings wisely. Hamka also views reason not as an independent source of truth, but as an instrument for understanding revelation; therefore, dialogue must be conducted with wisdom, ethical argumentation, and self-control (Hamka, 2001d).

Unlike Hamka, Hans Kung's epistemology of dialogue departs from the principle that there can be no global peace without interfaith peace, and there can be no interfaith peace without dialogue that recognizes universal moral truths that transcend the boundaries of dogma. Kung emphasizes epistemic humility, that no religious tradition can claim a complete monopoly on truth, and places global ethics as the basis for interfaith dialogue (Hans Kung, 1991). Meanwhile, Paul Knitter developed a pluralistic-constructive approach, which considers revelation to be present in various religions and that dialogue should not be limited by exclusive theological claims (Paul F. Knitter, 2002).

Thus, Hamka's epistemology of dialogue acknowledges other religions and encourages ethical and reciprocal dialogue, but still maintains Islamic monotheism as the pinnacle of truth. In contrast, Kung emphasizes ethical universalism, and Knitter highlights soteriological pluralism. These differences show that Hamka's epistemology produces a

model of dialogue rooted in revelation, not relativism of truth. And interfaith dialogue is not a negotiation of doctrine, but mutual understanding, maintaining harmony, and preventing social conflict.

### The Objectives and Principles of Interfaith Dialogue

A dialogue between religious understanding (*ulumuddin*) and the humanities is essential for fostering mutual respect aligned with the dynamics of the times (Irfany, 2023). The willingness to develop mutual understanding is crucial for managing diversity, and the capacity of humans to communicate universally forms the core of every interaction and dialogue between groups (Tarrés Vallespi et al., 2025). The Qur'an acknowledges religious diversity and advocates for peaceful coexistence among different faith communities (Rifma Ghulam Dzaljad, 2019). Religion plays a vital role in promoting global peace, with a strong conviction that the teachings of each religion guide followers to uphold the values of peace (Syukur, 2024).

In Islam, principles such as *ta'aruf* (getting to know one another, *QS. al-Hujurat*: 13), *'adl* (justice), and *la ikraba fi al-din* (no compulsion in religion, *QS. al-Baqarah*: 256) form a theological foundation that aligns with the concept of interfaith dialogue. These values are not a compromise of faith, but rather an application of the teachings of the Qur'an that aim to foster social harmony. (Ramdani et al., 2024) Prophet Muhammad SAW set an example by engaging in dialogue with Jews and Christians in Medina. (Al-Qardawi, 2003) This is explained by Hamka in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 256, that the Banu Nadhir were expelled from Medina because they intended to kill the Prophet Muhammad SAW. However, there was no compulsion for them to convert to Islam. Hamka explains this verse by starting with the *asbabun nuzul* (reason for its revelation). At that time, the people of Medina had not yet embraced Islam. Islam gave them the opportunity to use their pure intellect in seeking the truth and determining it. (Hamka, 2001a).

The challenge of interfaith dialogue emerges when attitudes of fanaticism, exclusivism, and the politicisation of religion are present. (Akmal Sjafril, 2017) Islam states that differences are God's will, and that human dignity is based on piety. As explained in the *Qur'an, Surah Al-Hujurat*:13, humans were created into various tribes and nations to learn from each other, while true honour in the eyes of Allah lies in purity of heart, noble character, and obedience to Him (Hamka, 2001e).

Although the Qur'an does not directly address interfaith dialogue, but its verses related to interactions between Muslims and other communities discuss the importance of interfaith dialogue and the ethics of interfaith dialogue (Lajnah Pentashihan mushaf Al-Qur'an, n.d.). Islam advocates a moderate approach (*wasathiyah*) as an effort to stay open to change while maintaining core religious principles (Hashim Kamali, 2015). This significantly challenges how Muslims practice their faith and interact socially. Globalisation often overlooks spiritual dimensions and focuses on worldly matters, which conflicts with Islamic principles and diminishes the ummah's awareness of their role as caliphs on earth. Secularisation mainly stresses the separation of religion and public life as a private matter and limits religion's influence on social and political affairs (Hamka, 2003).



In facing today's challenges, The Qur'an offers comprehensive guidance for navigating the issues posed by pluralism through principles that stress constructive, respectful, and non-coercive interfaith dialogue while maintaining faith. Although The Qur'an does not directly address interfaith dialogue, its verses concerning interactions between Muslims and other communities highlight the importance of interfaith engagement, the barriers to dialogue, cooperation between faiths, and the ethics involved in interfaith interactions dialogue.(Fadli & Kissiya, 2024; Lajnah Pentashihan mushaf Al-Qur'an, n.d.) This is not only aimed at fostering harmonious and peaceful relations between Muslims and other religions. Hamka distinguishes between religious authority and political authority. Religion in this context serves to regulate morality and spirituality, while religion manages worldly affairs fairly and rationally(Shomad & Mujahidin, n.d.).

### **Biography of the Intellectual Hamka**

Hamka, short for Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, was a prominent scholar, political activist, and writer in the Indonesian archipelago. He was born in Maninjau, West Sumatra, on February 17, 1908/13 Muharram 1326 AH (Hamka, 2016). His father, Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah or Haji Rasul, was a reformist scholar, pioneer of the Young Generation, and Muhammadiyah figure in Minangkabau who had studied in Mecca. His mother was named Siti Shafiyah Tanjung binti Haji Zakaria (Budi Johan, 2022).

Hamka's early education started with learning to read the Qur'an and the fundamentals of Islam under his parents' guidance. His father was recognised as a reformist scholar who strongly opposed kufarat and bid'ah practices that were emerging in society. Hamka's ideas and perspectives were heavily influenced by his father's teachings and example(Ismail et al., 2025). At the age of 7, he went to a village school. Then in 1916, his father enrolled him in a diniyah school founded by Zainuddin Labai El-Yunusi (M Yunan Yusuf, 2016). Additionally, since childhood, Hamka was used to listening to Minangkabau poetry, while his favourite subject at school was Arabic poetry (Muhamad Nurrosyid Huda Setiawan\*, 2023).

In 1918, when he was 10 years old, his father founded an Islamic boarding school in Padang Panjang called Sumatera Thawalib (Hamka, 2016). Hamka grew up in an environment filled with the dynamics of movement and conflict between traditionalists and reformers. Since 1920, Hamka has been active as a journalist for a number of newspapers such as *Pelita Andalas*, *Seruan Islam*, *Bintang Islam*, and *Seruan Muhammadiyah* (Zuhaidi & Lubis, 2021). At 1922, Minangkabau began to be influenced by the communist movement led by Datuk Batuah, a former professor at Sumatera Thawalib, and Natar Zainuddin(Hamka, 2016). The communists launched attacks against influential Islamic figures(Tim majalah historia, 2018).

Given the situation, two years later, at the age of 16, Hamka left for Java and became acquainted with figures of the modern Islamic movement such as H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto, Ki Bagus Hadikusumo, R.M. Soerjopranoto, and Haji Fakhruddin. Through movement courses held at Gedong Abdi Darmo, Pakualaman, Yogyakarta (Al-Fathoni, 2015). Hamka began to absorb ideas of Islamic reform and realized that Islam was a teaching that demanded struggle and was dynamic in nature (Tim majalah historia, 2018).

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In July 1925, he returned to Padang Panjang and helped establish Tabligh Muhammadiyah at his father's house in Gantangan (Hamka, 2016). That same year, he registered as a member of Sarekat Islam, and after independence, he was also active in the Indonesian Muslim Council (Masyumi) party (Zuhaidi & Lubis, 2021). A year later, A.R. Sultan Mansur returned to West Sumatra to spread the Muhammadiyah ideology. In February 1927, Hamka left for Mecca and stayed there for several months before finally returning to Medan in July 1927 (Rifma Ghulam Dzaljad, 2019). On April 29, 1929, Hamka married Siti Raham binti Endah Sutan (Ansari & Alzamzami, 2022).

Hamka actively attended Muhammadiyah congresses, including the 18<sup>th</sup> Muhammadiyah Congress held in Solo. Afterwards, he played a key role in the Muhammadiyah administration in Padang Panjang (Hamka, 2016). He frequently attended various other congresses as well. In 1931, he was a speaker at the Muhammadiyah congresses in Bukittinggi and Yogyakarta. Subsequently, in 1933, he spoke in Semarang, and in 1934, he served as a preacher at the congress in Makassar and as the chairman of Muhammadiyah Central Sumatra (Hidayatullah et al., 2022). In 1950, Hamka began working at the Ministry of Religious Affairs, teaching at several Islamic universities. (Hamka, 2016) In 1952, the government appointed him to the cultural advisory division at the Indonesian Ministry of Community and Culture. Additionally, he served as a professor at the Islamic University of Makassar and was an advisor to the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Muhamad Nurrosyid Huda Setiawan\*, 2023). In 1959, Hamka was awarded an honorary doctorate from Al- Azhar University in Cairo.

Apart from his involvement in politics, Hamka was also recognised as a prolific writer who produced numerous works on Islam, social thought, and literature. Some of his notable works include Islam and Customs (1929), Islamic State (1946), Islam and Democracy (1946), The Relationship between Religion and State According to Islam (1970), Islam and Spirituality (1972), The Development of Spirituality in Indonesia (1976), Several Challenges Facing Muslims Today (1973), Philosophy of Life (1950), The Development of Sufism from Century to Century (1957), Institutions of Life (1962), Institutions of Wisdom (1966), Sufism: Its Development and Purification (1980), Institutions of Virtue (1983), Modern Sufism (1983), Reflections on Sufism (1983), *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, and his other work (Rifma Ghulam Dzaljad, 2019).

### **Interfaith Dialogue in *Tafsir Al-Azhar***

Hamka's discussion of interfaith dialogue is not systematically organized as a separate doctrine, but his ideas are scattered throughout various interpretations of verses related to religious freedom, social ethics, and the principles of da'wah. In his interpretation, Hamka emphasizes that da'wah is an invitation for people to believe in the true religion (Hamka, 1996).

According to Hamka, Tawhid is not only the inner strength of Muslims but also the ethical foundation for fostering interfaith relations that uphold freedom of belief and respect for differences. This verse was revealed to highlight that there can be no compromise in matters of faith, but tolerance of beliefs must still be maintained upheld. (Hamka, 1996) This principle aligns with the words of Allah SWT in Surah Al-

Baqarah: 256, “There is no compulsion in religion.” According to Hamka, faith is born out of consciousness, not coercion.(Hamka, 2001a) During interfaith discussions, Hamka suggested creating a code of ethics in religion. Without such rules, disagreements between believers could occur. For instance, Muslims might preach to non- Muslims, and likewise, non-Muslims could practice their religious beliefs missions.(Hamka, 2003) Therefore, interfaith relations should not target people who already follow a religion with religious proselytizing.

Everyone has the right to choose and follow the religion they believe in. Islam teaches that differences in religion are not a reason to force faith or cause conflict (Hamka, 1996). Tolerance of these differences does not mean mixing beliefs, but rather giving everyone the space to practise their religion according to their own beliefs, without coercion (Hamka, 2001d). This verse also forms an important basis for interfaith dialogue, in which each party can interact freely, equally, and with mutual respect for different beliefs(Muhammad Asad, 1980). This view is in line with that of Surahman Hidayat. Islam, as the original and true religion, always acts honestly towards itself in its interactions with other religions. In this case, it does not mean that Islam acknowledges that every religion is true and equal (Hidayat, 2008).

In Surah *An-Nahl*:125, the Qur'an instructs that da'wah be conducted wisely, gently, and based on sound arguments(Hamka, 2001b).This principle is a vital foundation for interfaith dialogue, where a wise and peaceful approach is necessary to prevent conflict and promote social cohesion in society.(Al-Ryahneh, 2024; Hamka, 2001c) This verse was revealed at the end of the Prophet's life in Mecca, when he and his followers were enduring severe suffering and pressure. Unlike the Bedouin tradition of responding to injustice with equal force, the Qur'an teaches us to answer the Quraish's harsh treatment with gentleness, wisdom, and soothing advice, similar to bees responding with honey. This approach is vital not only in dealings with non-Muslims but also greatly influences internal relations among Muslims by fostering unity and prosperity people.(Abu-Nimer, 2011)

Classical interpretations also explain this principle. Al-Tabari, in his interpretation of *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, explains that this verse commands the Prophet Muhammad to invite people to the religion of Allah with wisdom, that is, with words that are true, appropriate, and logical. *Al-man'izah al-ḥasanah* is understood as good and gentle advice that can soften the heart. Meanwhile, *al-jidal bi-allatī hiya aḥsan* is interpreted as a debate conducted in the best manner without violence, insults, or humiliation, but based on honesty, justice, and broad-mindedness (al-Ṭabarī, 2001).

This idea is also in line with Sayyid Qutb in *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*, which explains this verse by saying that in preaching, one should have good ethics and attitude, wisdom, good advice, and debate in the best possible way. Wisdom is the ability to understand the psychological condition of the person being spoken to and to understand how to speak and convey the message in a good way so as not to cause religious jealousy. Advice should be given gently, because a gentle approach is more likely to touch the heart. Similarly, debates must be conducted in the best possible way, without belittling or disparaging the

other party, so that they feel safe and comfortable accepting the invitation to truth (Qutub, 1980).

Thus, the essence of da'wah in the Qur'anic perspective of classical and modern interpretations lies in wisdom, gentleness, and noble dialogue ethics. It encourages Muslims to consistently seek wisdom and learn valuable lessons. It encourages Muslims to consistently seek wisdom and learn valuable lessons. Wisdom and good manners foster constructive dialogue, enabling differences of opinion to be discussed peacefully and productively (Hamka & Rusydi, 2002). A polite attitude plays an important role in influencing others to accept the truth. With good character, people will be encouraged to respect you and consider your opinions. Even if they do not fully accept your views, at least they will open their hearts to listen to other ideas calmly, with an open mind, and more objectively (Zamrahī, n.d.).

Furthermore, *Surah Al-Ankabut*: 46 provides guidance on speaking kindly with the *Ahli kitab*, unless they commit injustice or display hostility (Hamka, 2001e). In Hamka's opinion, this command demonstrates respect for the People of the Book and the prophets of old, emphasising the importance of justice and honesty in religious discussions (Hamka, 2003). This is also reflected in *Surah Ali Imran*: 64, which serves as a universal call to find common ground among religious communities. If individuals use common sense, then they will come to Islam (Hamka, 2001a). The Qur'an commands Muslims to coexist peacefully and positively with all other nations by treating them kindly and fairly. If Muslims are attacked, they must defend themselves, and during war, they must avoid committing acts that are contrary to morality. Dialogue based on tolerance and understanding with followers of other religions is an obligation for Muslims. In addition, it allows them to better understand Allah's plan in His creation and to worship Him (Zaqzuq, 2002).

*Surah Al-Mumtahanah*: 8 highlights that Muslims are commanded to do good and treat everyone fairly, even those who do not oppose Islam (Hamka, 2001e, p. 09). Social interaction should be rooted in justice and kindness, not discrimination. This underpins the development of healthy dialogue, where justice and respect for the rights of followers of other faiths are upheld (Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, 1994). With this foundation, interfaith dialogue can serve as a platform for fostering fair and harmonious social relations with other religious communities, stressing that differences in belief should not be a reason to ignore justice or to withhold doing good.

This principle was also reflected in Hamka's personal attitude. Although he was harsh towards Christianization practices, he did not show violence towards Christians themselves. His words remained calm and respectful of the dignity of other religions. This can be seen, for example, when a speech by Hamka that was actually intended for Muslims was eagerly awaited by the Catholic community in Ende because of its calmness and wisdom. (Akmal Sjafril, 2017). This is the manifestation of the principle of *al-man'iqah al-hasanah* in Hamka's attitude and preaching.

In *Surah Al-Hujurat*: 13, Allah affirms human equality as the foundation for understanding one another (Hamka, 2001e). This verse emphasises the idea of diversity as God's decree (*sunnatullah*) in creation. Hamka explains that differences in religion, ethnicity,

and culture are not reasons to see these variations as barriers but as opportunities to engage in dialogue and expand understanding. In the context of interfaith dialogue, such differences actually encourage honest and open communication, fostering harmonious and mutually respectful social relationships (Shomad & Mujahidin, n.d.). The Qur'an shows us that the measure of difference between people in the sight of Allah SWT is their level of piety (Zaqzuq, 2002).

In his interpretation, Quraish Shihab explains this verse as a command for Muslims to engage in dialogue and present arguments to the People of the Book in the best possible way, namely wisely, gently, and firmly. The term *tujādili* comes from the root *jādala*, which means to engage in dialogue or debate with the aim of convincing each other of the truth of their respective opinions through the presentation of arguments. In this verse, the form of the word used is plural, so the command is directed more generally to Muslims. This indicates that the potential for debates that are not conducted in the best manner is more likely to arise from their side, not from the Prophet Muhammad SAW (Shihab, 2002).

### **Universal Values from Hamka's Viewpoint**

Hamka consistently around core values such as tolerance, moderation, and positive thinking inclusiveness (Afif Hamka, 2022). He emphasized the importance of dialogue that adheres to Islamic beliefs and rejects syncretism (Hamka, 2001e). In his *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, Hamka highlights the importance of being open, tolerant, and ethical in responding to differences, while still maintaining the integrity of Islamic beliefs (Hamka, 1992). In *Surah Al- An'am*: 108, it also explains that Islam strictly prohibits criticising the idols of polytheists because it can cause hostility and distance a person from the truth. This principle is also part of the ethics of preaching, which emphasises manners and politeness rather than provocation or insults (Hamka, 2001c).

Islam encourages tolerance and open mindedness towards followers of other religions. For example, Muslims can form social connections, such as trading or neighbourly ties, with them freely, as long as it does not conflict with their faith principles (Hamka & Rusydi, 2002). Tolerance (*tasamuh*) is allowable as long as it does not harm one's religion (Hamka, 1992). Buya Hamka maintained good relationships with figures from other faiths, yet he was clear and steadfast in his stance. For instance, examining the verses in Buya Hamka's *Al-Azhar tafsir* demonstrates his strong commitment to his faith and his warnings about the dangers posed by visionaries and evangelists. Buya Hamka clearly describes in *Tafsir Al-Azhar* how visionaries and orientalist try to weaken Muslims by presenting a distorted history (Hamka, 2001b). However, on social, community, and state issues, he was direct and upheld the spirit of unity. Regarding faith and worship, Buya Hamka remained firm and did not compromise his principles.

Freedom of religion is also one of the important principles in Hamka's view. In *Surah Al- Kafirun*: 6, "To you your religion, and to me my religion" (Hamka, 2001f). Hamka interprets this verse as a recognition of the existence of other religions without mixing beliefs. Hamka is firm on the issue of worship, such as when the Eid al-Fitr celebration was close to Christmas, and there were suggestions to hold the two celebrations together

in the name of tolerance. According to Buya Hamka, such actions do not create harmony but rather foster division hypocrisy (Hamka & Rusydi, 2002).

This firmness was not only evident in his rejection of joint Christmas celebrations, but also in his attitude toward interfaith prayer practices at the beginning of the New Order era (Hamka & Rusydi, 2002). For Hamka, true tolerance should not blur the boundaries of faith. Therefore, during joint prayer activities, when Muslims pray, other faiths are asked to leave the area, and conversely, when Christians pray, Muslims should also leave the area temporarily (Hamka & Rusydi, 2002). This attitude shows that Hamka's version of tolerance is firm, honest, and sincere towards his own religion.

Despite his firmness in guarding the boundaries of faith, Hamka's approach to interfaith relations was not harsh or hostile. Instead, it was grounded in wisdom and ethical communication. Nevertheless, Hamka still respects differences in beliefs. Hamka continues to respect religious diversity and emphasizes the importance of preaching with wisdom, good advice (*al-mau'izhah al-hasanah*), and engaging in dialogue in a good manner (Hamka, 2001d). In this context, Hamka's thoughts in *Tafsir Al-Azhar* offer a unique perspective on interfaith dialogue (Khan et al., 2020). Hamka emphasized that the Qur'an teaches the principle of peaceful and fair coexistence without sacrificing Islamic identity (Hamka, 2001e).

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that Hamka's thinking in *Tafsir al-Azhar* offers an interfaith dialogue paradigm based on tawhid, Qur'anic ethics, and commitment to the integrity of Islamic teachings. Unlike the theological pluralism approach, which tends to be relativistic, Hamka emphasizes that dialogue is not intended to mix beliefs, but rather as an ethical mechanism to maintain justice, preserve social relations, and prevent conflict. Hamka combines openness with firmness. He rejects syncretism and remains steadfast in his beliefs. Hamka also emphasizes wisdom, *al-mauizhah al-hasanah*, and polite interaction as guided by the Qur'an. Principles such as *ta'aruf*, *'adl*, and *lā ikrāha fī al-dīn* become the normative foundation for peaceful interfaith relations without sacrificing theological identity.

This study also highlights gaps in previous studies that focused more on Hamka's moderation and humanism but did not position his thinking as a philosophical framework for interfaith dialogue. By highlighting epistemological and ethical aspects, this study shows Hamka's significant contribution to building a model of dialogue that is socially inclusive yet theologically robust. This paradigm is relevant to the contemporary Indonesian context, which faces the challenges of pluralism, intolerance, and the politicization of religion.

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