

Hamka's Concept of Prophets' Infallibility: An Analysis on *Tafsir al-Azhar*

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Abstract

Tafsir al-Azhar is a Koran exegesis by Hamka (Haji Abdul Malik bin Karim Amrullah) in Malay-Indonesian language which is phenomenal in the Malay Archipelago. Hamka in his exegesis, quotes a lot from al-Razi's exegesis. This may have had a profound effect on Hamka's understanding, particularly of the 'ismah al-anbiya' (prophetic infallibility). Moreover, al-Razi is one of the most important figures in discussing the concept of prophetic infallibility and has influenced many later commentators in interpreting any story regarding the mistakes of the prophets. This article debating on Hamka's concept of prophets' infallibility. Firstly, the denotation of infallibility according to lexicology, Koran and Hadith were shown, both of the latter does not have the concept of infallible from sin. The analysis is conducted by searching various prophetic stories on guilt by referring to Tafsir al-Azhar. After the search, there are five aspect of infallibility can be found in Tafsir al-Azhar. Those aspect will be shown with its story. Hamka's model of prophets' infallibility are match with al-Nazzam, a Mutazilites which also a mutakallimun. The results show that Hamka's concept of prophetic infallibility was greatly influenced by the mutakallimun (theologist).

Kata kunci:

Prophet infallibility, Hamka, Tafsir al-Azhar.

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Introduction

Abdul Malik own the title of Haji and Professor of Doctor who is often called as "Hamka" (Haji Abdul Malik bin Karim Amrullah), an acronym of his full name. He is the first recipient of Doctor Honoris Causa (honorary doctor) from al-Azhar University, signed by the President of the Republic of the Arab Association, Jamal Abd al-Nasser and al-Azhar's Rector, Sheikh Mahmud Syaltout. His famous Koran exegesis entitled *Tafsir al-Azhar* is in conjunction with the name of the mosque where he regularly gives Koran lectures after the dawn salat at Kebayoran Baru, Jakarta. Originally mosque's name was the Masjid Agung Kebayoran Baru (Great Mosque of Kebayoran Baru), but it was changed to Masjid Agung al-Azhar (Great

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Mosque of al-Azhar) when Sheikh Mahmud Syaltout gave a new name to the mosque during his visit there.

Tafsir al-Azhar focuses on *al-adabi al-ijtima'i* (social literature) without being preoccupied with the debate of various *qira'ah* i.e. Koranic readings (Munawan, 2018). Hamka was able to finish writing the exegete in two years and four months while in prison because he allegedly wanted to overthrow the Indonesian government at that time (HAMKA, 1985). Tafsir al-Azhar are influenced by two modern exegesis, Tafsir al-Manar and Fi Zhilal al-Quran (Munawan, 2018). Besides that, one of Hamka main reference are al-Razi's book of exegesis (Tasnim & A. Nabil, 2021), entitled *Mafatih al-Ghaib*. This can be seen when he quoted a lot from al-Razi in his exegesis. The question is do the concept of prophets' infallibility that Hamka understood was also influenced by al-Razi's understanding particularly, and the doctrine of the *mutakallimun* (theologist) scholars generally? al-Razi was renowned as one of the theologist who reformed many interpretations of the prophetic stories related to infallibility i.e. mistakes and sins (Khaleel, 2015).

Concept of Infallible Based on Lexicology, Koran and Hadith

Infallible in Arabic is *'ismah*. It comes from the word *'asama* which means *mana'a* which is "prevent" (Murtada, 2001) or *al-imsak* which is "hold" (al-Raghib, 1412H). While *ma'sum* is a person or something that has the *'ismah*.

Regarding the meaning of *'ismah al-anbiya'*, there is disagreement on its definition among traditionist (hadith scholars) and theologist (al-Matrafi, 2005). In fact, there are no clear statement about the infallibility (from sins) of the prophets in Koran nor in authentic hadith (Elamir, 2016). There is a Koran verse that mentions about *'ismah*, Allah said:

يَا أَيُّهَا الرَّسُولُ بَلِّغْ مَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ وَإِنْ لَمْ تَفْعَلْ فَمَا بَلَّغْتَ رِسَالَتَهُ وَاللَّهُ يَعْصِمُكَ مِنَ النَّاسِ ...

O Messenger, announce that which has been revealed to you from your Lord, and if you do not, then you have not conveyed His message. And Allah will protect you from the people... [al-Ma'idah (5):67]

However, according to Ibn Qutaibah (1978), *'ismah* in this verse means to avoid being hurt by the enemy. Therefore, it does not mean infallible from committing sin. According to Bravmann (1977), the origin of *'ismah* usage with the meaning of infallible from sin was from the Abu Bakr al-Siddiq's speech. After the death of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), Abu Bakr said to the people:

"...Indeed, Allah has chosen Muhammad over all the worlds, and protected (*'asama*) him from corrupted..." (Source text: إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَى مُحَمَّدًا عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ وَعَصَمَهُ (مِنَ الْأَفَاتِ).

This narration's transmission is rated as weak by al-Barzanji (2007). In general, there are no clear record of Prophet Muhammad's sayings about the concept of prophetic infallibility,

unless he once said that he was shrouded by Allah's forgiveness and mercy (al-Bukhari, no. 6467).

An Analysis of Prophetic Infallibility According to *Tafsir al-Azhar*

This subchapter will discuss five aspect on infallibility according to Hamka.

Errors before prophecy

Hamka stated indirectly, in *Tafsir al-Azhar*, that a prophet may commit error before being appointed as a prophet. When interpreting the story of Prophet Abraham making questions about which one is the true God, Hamka stated (Koran, ch. 6, verse 75-78):

According to some exegete, it was not an interrogative statement, but he was searching for argument and stand. Because at that time, Abraham was still young and not yet appointed as God's messenger, and he still considered a follower of his people's religion. (HAMKA, 1985, v. 7, p. 253) (Source text: Menurut setengah tafsir, bukanlah kata sebagai pertanyaan, melainkan sebagai mencari dalil dan penetapan pendirian. Sebab Ibrahim waktu itu masih anak kecil, belum menjadi Rasul, masih dihitung pengikut agama kaumnya).

That's why after the moon disappeared, the rise of Abraham's realization was greater than the realization when the stars disappeared. If Allah doesn't give him guidance, he will be led astray by his own delusions. (HAMKA, v. 7, p.255) (Source text: Sebab itu setelah bulan hilang, keinsafan yang timbul pada Ibrahim lebih hebat daripada keinsafan tatkala bintang tadi hilang. Kalau Allah tidak menunjukinya, merasalah dia bahwa dia akan sesat dibawa oleh khayalnya sendiri).

Hamka also commented on the verse that mention the pre-prophethood period of Prophet Muhammad (Koran, ch. 93, verse 7):

Since his young age, he already hates his people's doings such as worshipping idols, making profit from usury, enslave people at will, bury their girls alive... But he confused, doesn't know the path to fix all evilness in his people. Then his heart wanted to isolate himself, to find the pure self, asking Allah for guidance, then the revelation come. (HAMKA, v. 30, p. 190) (Source text: Sejak masa muda belianya telah kelihatan beliau tidak menyukai perbuatan-perbuatan kaumnya, menyembah berhala, menternakkan uang dengan riba, memperbudak sesama manusia dengan sesuka hati, menguburkan anak-anak perempuan hidup-hidup... Tetapi beliau bingung, tak tahu jalan, bagaimana memperbaiki segala kebobrokan yang didapatinya dalam masyarakat ini. Lalu tertariklah hatinya

hendak menyisihkan diri, mencari kejernihan pada jiwa, memohonkan petunjuk kepada Allah, maka datanglah wahyu).

This statement is similar to the opinion of theologian scholars such as al-Qadi Abu Bakr (al-Amidi 2004) and al-Razi. The latter mention in *Ma' alim Usul al-Din* about Koranic verses which apparently show that the prophets were sinners:

For every Quranic verse in this matter, we must consider either (the prophets) abandoning of a better course of action (*tark al-afdal*), or if the action committed cannot but be a sin, it is to be understood as to take place only during pre-prophetic life. (al-Razi, n.d., p. 109) (Source text: وَأَمَّا جَمِيعُ الْآيَاتِ الْوَارِدَةِ فِي هَذَا الْبَابِ: (فَمَا أَنْ تَحْمَلَ عَلَى تَرْكِ الْأَفْضَلِ أَوْ إِنْ ثَبِتَ كَوْنُهُ مَعْصِيَةً لَا مَحَالَةَ فَذَلِكَ إِنَّمَا وَقَعَ قَبْلَ النَّبُوَّةِ

The Muslim scholars are disagreeing about this issue. al-Matrafi (2005) after collecting various definitions put forward by the scholars, he concludes that the prophets were infallible from error even before the prophethood. But according to al-Razi (1986), most of the scholars opts that infallibility are not an obligation before prophethood period.

Errors Due to Forgetfulness

Ibn Hazm (n.d.) in *al-Fasl fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Nihal* states, all Muslims agree from various doctrine's sects such as Ahl al-Sunnah, al-Mu'tazilah (Mutazilites), al-Najjariyyah, al-Khawarij dan al-Shi'ah say that the prophets were infallible from having a deliberate intention to commit major or minor sins. However, scholars differ on the possibility for prophets to commit sins unintentionally (al-Razi, 1986). Hamka argues that the prophets were able to err in breaking promises due to negligence or forgetfulness. The following is Hamka's commentary on the story of Prophet Adam eating the forbidden tree:

It's true that Adam has violated the restriction, but because of the devil's persuasion and flattery. He regrets, then ask for forgiveness. Allah the Most Merciful and All-Loving, grant him forgiveness. The true Adam's intention was not to do error, the essence of human self is goodness, not evilness. (HAMKA, v. 1, p. 181) (Source text: Benar Adam telah salah melanggar larangan, tetapi karena rayuan, bujuk dan cumbu iblis. Dan dia menyesal, lalu memohonkan ampun. Oleh Allah Yang Maha Pengampun dan Maha Penyayang telah diberi ampun. Maksud pertama dari Adam bukanlah berbuat salah, dasar isi jiwa manusia adalah baik, bukan jahat).

Because he ate the fruit and consequently violated the promise for not to approach the tree. Violate the promise is an error. That is beyond doubt. If it is not considered as an error, of course there is no justice. But as stated before in verse 115, he *forgets*, and God prove him to be unintentionally. He is honest, persuaded, deceived, flattered by sweet talk and inserted doubt by devil, his enemy. (HAMKA, v. 16, p. 234) (Source text: Dengan sebab memakan buah

yang dalam janji sejak semula dilarang Tuhan mendekatinya, dengan sendirinya Adam melanggar janji dengan Tuhan. Melanggar janji adalah suatu kesalahan. Itu tidak dapat diragui lagi. Kalau itu tidak dapat dipandang salah, tentu tidak ada keadilan. Tetapi sejak semula sudah dikatakan, yaitu pada ayat 115 di atas tadi. Dia lupa, dan Tuhan membuktikan bahwa tidak terdapat padanya kesengajaan buat melanggar. Dia jujur, dia terbujuk, dia tertipu dan dirayu oleh mulut manis dan oleh waswas yang dimasukkan oleh Iblis, musuhnya).

The following is Hamka's commentary on the story of Prophet Solomon asking for forgiveness from Allah for not mentioning Insha'Allah:

"He says: "O God! Forgive me!" (beginning of verse 35). Forgive me upon my carelessness, I understand that something whose power is absolute in Your hands! *"And grant me a kingdom such as will not belong to anyone after me. Indeed, You are the Bestower."* (HAMKA, v. 23, p. 229) (Source text: "Dia berkata: "Ya Tuhanku! Ampunilah aku!" (pangkal ayat 35). Ampuni aku atas kealpaanku, aku pastikan suatu hal yang kekuasaannya adalah mutlak di tangan Engkau! "Dan anugerahkanlah kepadaku suatu Kerajaan yang tidak akan dapat dikuasai oleh seseorang pun sesudahku.")

The permissibility of prophets made mistakes unintentionally such as negligence and forgetfulness is the opinion of most sects, except al-Shi'ah (al-Razi, 1986). In this issue, Hamka agree with the majority of the scholars.

Errors in Ijtihad

According to Hamka, the prophets were able to make mistakes in ijtihad. Ijtihad is the opinion of a person in facing an issue. For example, the story of Allah's rebuke to Prophet Muhammad who made frown face against a blind Muslim for disturbing him to preach to the Quraish dignitaries, then Allah sent down the first verses of surah 'Abasa to rebuke him. Hamka commented on this particular issue:

Furthermore, in this case, Messenger of Allah did not make mistake purposely or eye-catching. (HAMKA, v. 30, p. 44) (Source text: Apatah lagi dalam hal ini Rasulullah tidaklah membuat suatu kesalahan yang disengaja atau yang mencolok mata.)

Did the prophet's act by showing frown face was a big mistake, or a sin? No! This is an ijtihad... (HAMKA, p. 45) (Source text: Apakah perbuatan Nabi s.a.w bermuka masam itu satu kesalahan yang besar, atau satu dosa? Tidak! Ini adalah satu ijtihad...)

That was a false ijtihad, even though with good intention! (HAMKA, p. 46) (Source text: Itulah suatu ijtihad yang salah, meskipun maksud baik!).

In these commentaries of Hamka, we can see that he permits the error of *ijtihad* in a prophet. Apart from that, he also did not use the term *sin* at all, instead labelling it as a form of offense. al-Razi (1986) cites the issue of the infallibility of the prophet regarding giving fatwa (a legal opinion or ruling on shariah law), all Muslim scholars agree that a prophet did not make mistakes in fatwa intentionally. But scholars disagree on whether a prophet could make mistake in issuing a fatwa due to carelessness or forgetfulness.

Infallible from minor sins

Hamka seems to have chosen the opinion that the prophets were infallible from minor sins. He quoted Ibn al-Munayyir's opinion on this matter when interpreting the story of Prophet David:

An-Naashir in his exegete entitled "al-Intishaaf" wrote that: "Researchers and our imams had studied deeply, come into conclusion that the prophets peace be upon to them, like David and others, were pure from any minor sins, not to mention major sins as like that (adultery)." (HAMKA, v. 23, p. 210) (Source text: An-Naashir dalam tafsirnya: "al-Intishaaf" menulis pula: "Penyelidik-penyelidik yang mendalam "Imam-imam kita yang telah menyelidiki secara mendalam telah mendapat kesimpulan bahwa Nabi-nabi 'alaihimush-shalatu wassalamu, seumpama Daud dan lain-lain, adalah bersih dari akan jatuh kepada dosa yang kecil-kecil, apatah lagi dosa besar semacam itu.")

al-Nasir meant here is Ibn al-Munayyir, a scholar from Alexandria, his creed is not stated in the history books. However, it is mentioned that he made commentary on the hadith regarding Isra' (Prophet Muhammad ascension to meet Allah) not based on the understanding of the *salaf* (pious predecessor i.e. traditionalist), but according to the methodology of the theologian. (al-Dhahabi, 2003)

According to al-Ghazzali (2004), there are differences of opinion regarding the prophet's infallibility of minor sins. Some scholars argue that the prophets were infallible from both major and minor sins. For example, Abu Hanifah in a book attributed to him entitled al-Fiqh al-Akbar take this view, but he still not denies that the prophets were able to make mistakes (al-Qari 1998).

In general, the majority of scholars argue that the prophets were only infallible for major sins, but not for minor sins. Ibn Taimiyyah (1995) stated, this is also agreed by the al-Ash'ariyyah and theologian such as al-Amidi, also agreed by the traditionalist and jurist. In this case, Hamka does not agree with the majority of scholars. His opinion are same as Abu Ishaq al-Nazzam, al-Shi'ah sect (al-Razi, 1986) and Abu Hanifah.

No Term for "Sin"

By observing Hamka's interpretations, he did not use the term *dosa* i.e. "sin" for the prophets, instead by using words like "mistake." For example, his commentary on the story of Prophet

Jonah who fled from preaching to his people because he thought they would be punished (Koran, ch. 37, v. 142):

“*While he was regretted.*” (end of verse 142). Meaning that the situation he ran away from his obligations because he was annoyed to see the nature of his people, was an act that was deeply regretted, either by God or by society, or by himself. (HAMKA, v. 23, p. 164) (Source text: “Sedang dia adalah orang yang disesali.” (ujung ayat 142). Artinya bahwasanya keadaan dia lari meninggalkan kewajiban karena jengkel melihat perangai bangsanya itu adalah perbuatan yang sangat disesali, baik oleh Tuhan ataupun oleh masyarakat, ataupun oleh dirinya sendiri).

In verse 142, Hamka translates the word *mulim* as regret. While according to the commentary of al-Tabari (2001), a traditionalist, he quotes from Mujahid and Ibn Zaid that *mulim* means *mudhnib* which is “sinful.” Hamka use the word “regret” may due to the influence of al-Razi interpretation. Hamka also stated:

“*And his Lord chose him.*” (beginning of verse 50). Meaning, the blessings of his repentance and realising of his wrongdoing, included him into God’s chosen people, those whose dignity has been elevated, are purer than before. “*And made him of the righteous.*” (end of verse 50). The ordeal he experienced caused him not to despair and repent from his mistake, makes him elevated towards righteous people. For Prophet Jonah that one-time mistake was very beneficial to him, because with that he regained his personality. (HAMKA, v. 29, p. 72) (Source text: “Maka dipilihlah dia oleh Tuhannya.” (pangkal ayat 50). Artinya, bahwa berkat taubatnya dan insafnya akan kesalahannya, termasuklah dia orang pilihan Tuhan, orang yang dinaikkan tingkat martabatnya, lebih bersih daripada masanya yang lalu; “Dan dijadikan Nyalah dia termasuk orang-orang yang shalih.” (ujung ayat 50). Percobaan yang begitu pahit yang dia alami yang menyebabkan dia tidak putus asa dan insaf di mana terletak kesalahan dirinya telah dinaikkan pula tingkatnya jadi termasuk orang-orang yang shalih. Bagi Nabi Yunus kesalahan yang satu kali itu sangat berfaedah bagi dirinya, karena dengan itu dia mendapat keperibadiannya kembali).

In this commentary also, he keeps using the word *salah* (wrongdoing/ mistake), even though the word *insaf* (repent) are related to sinful act. This raises a question of whether the word *khata*’ (mistake) is different from *dhanb* (sin). According to al-Raghib (1412H), one of the meanings of *khata*’ is to intend to do good, but the result is not so, even harm. While another meaning of *khata*’ is the intention to commit a wrongdoing, this is similar to the meaning of *dhanb*. Certainly, no Muslim scholar claims that the prophets were able to do the latter.

Conclusion

Based on all the observations that have been made, it can be concluded that most of Hamka's opinions on the prophets' infallibility are based on the views of the traditionalist, except for the issue of minor sins.

The traditionalists are of the opinion that the prophets were able to commit minor sins unintentionally, this includes before the period of prophethood as well as in the issue of *ijtihad*. Whereas the most of the theologian believe that minor sins are impossible for the prophets. However, they all do not deny that the prophets were able to make "mistakes" by accident. It is a little difficult to determine what is the difference between sin and mistake as they did not define it. The model of the prophets' infallibility used by Hamka is quite difficult to match with any figure. But the closest to this Hamka model is the Abu Ishaq al-Nazzam's model. al-Razi mentions: That it should not be upon them (the prophets) to commit major and minor sins intentionally, even if they are justified or by mistake. As for the negligence or forgetfulness, then this is a could happen. Then they are warned against their forgetfulness and negligence because their knowledge is perfect, it is obligatory to have excessive warnings upon them. This is the opinion of Abu Ishaq Ibrahim bin Sayyar al-Nazzam. (al-Razi, 1986, p. 40) (Source text: أنه لا يجوز عليهم تعمد الكبيرة ولا الصغيرة، لا بالعمد ولا بالتأويل والخطأ. أما السهو والنسيان فجازز ثم إنهم يعاتبون على ذلك السهو والنسيان، لما أن علومهم أكمل، فكان الواجب عليهم المبالغة في التيقظ، وهو قول أبي إسحاق إبراهيم بن سيار (النظام).

The custom of Hamka stating that the prophets did not commit minor sins, but could make mistakes due to forgetfulness or neglect, is similar to this model of al-Nazzam here. According to al-Dhahabi (1985), Abu Ishaq Ibrahim bin Sayyar al-Nazzam was a sheikh (master) of the Mutazilites sect, embracing al-Qadariyyah doctrine, and is said to have practiced the Brahman (Hindu) religion which denied prophethood as well as the day of resurrection, but he conceals it.

However, there is no clear evidence that Hamka supports this understanding. In general, he was heavily influenced by the interpretations of theologian such as al-Razi and Ibn al-Munayyir as explained earlier. Besides that, Hamka has quoted the interpretation of Mutazilites scholars such as Abu Muslim al-Asfahani, he even said that the interpretation of Abu Muslim in surah al-Baqarah verse 260 are more suitable with "our understanding in this age" (HAMKA, v. 2, p. 39).

In conclusion, the concept of infallibility of the prophets that Hamka understood was the result of the theologian's way of thinking.

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