

Faith, Division and Persecution

Review of The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement: The Truth Will Prevail by Declan Henry

الإيمان والانقسام والاضطهاد

مراجعة لكتاب حركة الأحمديّة في لاهور: الحق سينتصر

لدكلان هنري

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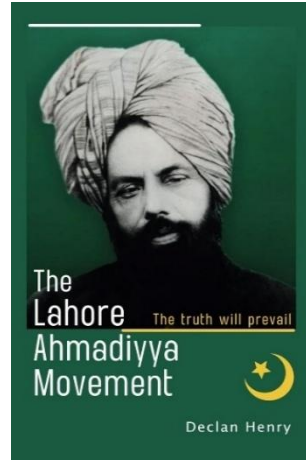
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INTRODUCTION¹

Declan Henry is an Irish author living in the UK. He has published over 10 books on different subjects.² He has an academic background (Goldsmiths and King's College, London) and has written about a wide range of topics, such as mental health, suicide, refugees and trans people.³ He wrote about Islam in his books *Voices of Modern Islam*⁴ and *The Open Mosque*⁵. His book *The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement: The Truth Will Prevail* was published in 2023 and contains xiv + 112 pages.⁶ In this book he discusses the smaller branch of the Ahmadiyya movement; the *Ahmadiyya Anjuman-i-Isha'at-i-Islam Lahore* (Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement for the Propagation of Islam), based in Lahore, Pakistan. He addresses Ahmadiyya theology and the persecution of its adherents, primarily living in Pakistan.



This book makes an important contribution to the literature on the Ahmadiyya movement, into which relatively little research has been done. The limited research there is, generally

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² Henry, Declan. "Declan Henry Author," accessed October 30, 2025, www.declanhenry.co.uk.

³ Henry, Declan. *The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement: The Truth Will Prevail*. Independently Published, 2023, vii.

⁴ Henry, Declan. *Voices of Modern Islam: What It Means to Be Muslim Today*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018.

⁵ Henry, Declan. *The Open Mosque*. Cape Town. N.p., 2025.

⁶ Henry, Declan. *The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement*.

focuses on the larger branch of the movement, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, headquartered in London. For this book Henry has based his research on translations of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's books and on the many interviews he had with Ahmadi Muslims, both living in Great-Britain and in Pakistan. He spent much time with Ahmadi Muslims in Great Britain and in Lahore, Pakistan. Regarding this, the author says:

“I had the immense pleasure of spending time with them at their headquarters in Lahore. This time enabled me to freely associate with members of their community and obtain first-hand accounts of their beliefs, struggles and hopes for the future.”⁷

The writer states that he wishes to inform both Muslims and non-Muslims about this community and its theology, which diverges from mainstream Sunni and Shia Islam.⁸

SUMMARY

In the short introduction of the book, a clear picture is being drawn of the two branches of the Ahmadiyya movement, namely the *Ahmadiyya Anjuman-i-Isha'at-i-Islam Lahore* (AAIIL) and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community (AMC). To both branches belong followers of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. Members of the AAIIL, also known as *Lahori* Ahmadis, “hold steadfast to the belief that the Prophet Muhammad was the last and final prophet and that he sealed prophethood for eternity, as mentioned in the Qur'an (33:40)”⁹. They align themselves with the Hanafi school of thought and consider themselves Sunni Muslims.¹⁰

He then continues with a biographical overview of the founder of the movement's life, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (India, 1835-1908). This biography of 50 pages accounts for nearly half of the book. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was born in Qadian, Punjab, into a noble family. He was homeschooled and studied Urdu, Persian and Arabic. His father wanted him to become a law clerk, but Mirza Ghulam Ahmad preferred to study the Quran.¹¹

⁷ Henry, *The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement*. ix.

⁸ Henry, *The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement*. ix-x.

⁹ Henry, *The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement*. 1.

¹⁰ Henry, *The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement*. 3.

¹¹ Henry, *The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement*. 4-6.

Knowledge of the religious, social, and political context of India at the time is important to better understand the early history of the movement. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad wanted to defend Islam against attacks from Hindus and Christian missionaries. He started to attract followers and was called the *muğadid*¹² (reformer) of that age.¹³

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad started having an abundance of revelations from 1876 onwards. In 1890 he re-interpreted the story of Jesus in the Quran and declared himself to be the promised Messiah and Mahdi. Most Muslims believe Jesus was saved from crucifixion and bodily ascended to heaven, from where he will return. According to Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, Jesus was crucified but survived this. After recovering, Jesus travelled towards Persia and India and died in Kashmir. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad claimed that all messianic and eschatological expectations of different religions were combined in one person, i.e. himself. After this claim, he received considerable opposition from the traditional '*ulemā*', some of them declaring him a *kāfir*.¹⁴

Henry explains that AAIIIL-members read and interpret the Quran and Hadith in a more metaphorical sense, as opposed to the literal reading of most Sunni Muslims.¹⁵ The founder's claim to be the Promised Messiah sparked controversy over his status as a prophet. The theological debate on this resulted in the split of the Ahmadiyya movement in 1914. The author discusses a number of arguments in general and understandable terms.¹⁶

From the 1880's onwards, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad wrote several books, of which *Barahin-e-Ahmadiyya*¹⁷ is the most famous. In 1889 he founded the Ahmadiyya movement and accepted *bay'a* (oath of allegiance) from his followers.¹⁸

¹² All transliterations follow Pim Rietbroek, "Brill's Simple Arabic Transliteration System," Brill, 2010, https://brill.com/fileasset/downloads_static/static_fonts_simple_arabic_transliteration.pdf.

¹³ Henry, *The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement*, 8–11; 16–17.

¹⁴ Henry, *The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement*, 20–28.

¹⁵ Henry, *The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement*. 26.

¹⁶ Henry, *The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement*. 28–32.

¹⁷ Ahmad, Mirza Ghulam. *Barahin-e-Ahmadiyya: Arguments in Support of the Divine Origin of the Holy Quran & the Prophethood of the Holy Prophet Muhammad*. Vols. 1–2, Islam International Publications, 2014.

¹⁸ Henry, *The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement*, 32–33.

In the next chapter Henry describes the split within the movement. Since the passing away of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the movement was led by Maulana Hakim Nur-ud-Din, known by both branches as the *ḥalīfat al-masīḥ* (caliph or successor of the Messiah). Nur-ud-Din then passed away in 1914. At that time, two opposing groups had emerged. On one hand, the group led by Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmood Ahmad believed the founder of the movement to be a (subordinate) prophet. The other group, on the other hand, led by Muhammad Ali, remained closer to mainstream Islam and believed Mirza Ghulam Ahmad to be the promised Messiah and Mahdi, but not a prophet in his own right. In 1914 Mahmood Ahmad was elected to become the second caliph of the movement. After this Muhammad Ali left for Lahore and founded the AAIIIL and became its first *'amīr*.¹⁹

The prophetic status of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was not the only point of contention between both branches. The question of *kufṛ* was raised for all those who denied the Promised Messiah. For the AAIIIL it was clear that all who declared the *kalima* are Muslims and cannot be called *kāfir*. Another issue was the way the movement should be led: by a caliph or by an elected body. In general, the AAIIIL has a negative view of its counterpart, the AMC.²⁰

The persecution of Ahmadi Muslims is present throughout the book and is also the focus of the next chapter. In 1974 a law was approved in Pakistan declaring Ahmadi Muslims *kāfir*, based on the belief that all Ahmadi Muslims deny the finality of prophethood. Since 1984 it has become illegal for Ahmadi Muslims to “pose as Muslims”, e.g. greeting each other with *al-salāmu 'alaykum* or celebrating *ʿīd*. State sponsored persecution and harassment doesn't differentiate between members of the AAIIIL and the AMC.²¹ This resulted in the diaspora of Ahmadi Muslims into the West.

Henry visited the AAIIIL headquarters in Lahore, Pakistan. He describes his travels and impressions and on the final pages lets several members of the movement speak. These testimonies evoke compassion and understanding for the dire situation in which many Ahmadi Muslims find themselves.²²

¹⁹ Henry, *The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement*. 55–56.

²⁰ Henry, *The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement*. 56–66.

²¹ Henry, *The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement*. 71–75.

²² Henry, *The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement*. 76–100.

In his conclusion Henry pleads for thorough research into the writings of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, hoping this may shed a new light on the diverging interpretations of both branches.²³

ANALYSIS

Henry doesn't speak any Urdu, hence he had to base his research on translated literature. Many of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's books, as well as numerous early articles and pamphlets of the movement, have not been translated into English. Additionally, the author doesn't cite academic literature on the Ahmadiyya movement in his book. His research is primarily based on literature published by the AAIIIL itself, on interviews and on informal contacts with members of the AAIIIL.

These interviews and informal interactions also form the strength of this book. More significantly, Henry's personal visit to the community in Lahore provides an insight into a frequently misunderstood community.

Henry's research does not offer any new insights into the theological complexities of the movement. For readers new to these theological issues, Henry explains them understandable terms. He doesn't expect his readers to be theologians or religious scholars.

Henry consistently calls the members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community *Qadiani* Muslims, to distinguish them from the *Lahori* Ahmadis of the *Ahmadiyya Anjuman-i-Isha'at-i-Islam Lahore*. *Qadiani* refers to the birthplace of the founder and the first headquarters of the movement, i.e. Qadian, in Punjab, India. Since the 1940's this name has carried a pejorative meaning among the members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.²⁴ The author should have known this fact and he should have avoided the use of pejoratives.

In a book on the AAIIIL, it makes sense that its members often speak. They criticize the viewpoints of the opposing AMC on many occasions. Because of this, the book seems to pick the side for one branch over the other. Moreover,

²³ Henry, *The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement*. 103.

²⁴ Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. "Ahmadiyya." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition Online (EI-2 English)*, edited by Peri Bearman, Brill, 2012; Khan, Adil Hussain. *From Sufism to Ahmadiyya: A Muslim Minority Movement in South Asia*. Indiana University Press, 2015, 201.

I had the impression that the author wasn't always impartial. However, Henry did clarify his Roman Catholic background and that the opinions he describes are not necessarily his own.²⁵ In 2024 he was invited by the AMC to discuss some of the criticisms in his book, which resulted in a 55-minute podcast on YouTube.²⁶ This podcast, along with the previously noted clarification, balances my view of the author's impartiality.

Nevertheless, the contribution of Henry is important, especially since so little research has been done on the AAII. The community counts approximately 30,000 members, making it by far the smallest branch of the movement.²⁷ According to Henry the AAII has approximately 100,000 members.²⁸ This is still a small number compared to the AMC, which is thought to have approximately 12 million members.²⁹

There's a lot of ignorance on this subject among Muslims who are not Ahmadi. It was the author's aim to inform Muslims and non-Muslims alike and in this he succeeded. He draws a positive picture of the community, hoping to create an atmosphere of understanding and dialogue.

CONCLUSION

This book is easy to read. The author uses clear terms and is able to summarize very complex issues into understandable language. It offers an insight into the lives and beliefs of the members of the *Ahmadiyya Anjuman-i-Isha'at-i-Islam Lahore*.

Regarding the research into the Ahmadiyya movement, people who do not master Urdu often face a language barrier. Moreover, not all sources have been translated into English. The book does not add substantially to the academic debate on Ahmadiyya theology and history, and doesn't always offer a neutral point of view.

²⁵ Henry, *The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement*, x.

²⁶ MKA UK, director. *Exclusive Podcast: Islam Ahmadiyya Questioned*. YouTube, 2024, www.youtube.com/watch?v=id_gweRtpHE.

²⁷ Valentine, Simon Ross. *Islam and the Ahmadiyya Jama'at: History, Belief, Practice*. Columbia University Press, 2008, 60.

²⁸ Henry, *The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement*, 3.

²⁹ Gregory, Shaun R., and Simon R. Valentine. "Pakistan: The Situation of Religious Minorities." *Writenet/UNHCR*, 2009, 25, www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/writenet/2009/en/70321.

Among mainstream Muslims, there are a lot of misconceptions about the Ahmadiyya movement. There is also a great deal of animosity and misunderstanding between both branches of the Ahmadiyya movement. Therefore, this book is a valuable contribution to a field of research into which little research has been done so far.

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