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# Harmony in Diversity: Exploring Religious Moderation Perspectives through Interfaith Dialogue

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### Abstract:

Religious moderation becomes a catalyst for building a harmonious life in Indonesia. This research explores religious moderation from the perspective of religions in Indonesia, both theoretically and practically. This research uses a qualitative and comparative study approach to see the esoteric values in each religion related to religious moderation. The methods used for data collection include interviews, focus group discussions, and documentation studies. The analysis focused on verifying data from religious authorities and texts. The results of the study revealed that 1) religious moderation becomes urgent to internalize religious teachings substantively and to address the problem of violence in the name of religion, 2) religious moderation is in line with the universal values of all religions, 3) the term moderation or wasathiyah is found in the scriptures of each religion, 4) Interfaith dialogue is to foster a tolerant, peaceful, and harmonious atmosphere amidst diverse religious beliefs, thereby facilitating cross-religious cooperation.

**Keywords:** Religious Moderation, Interfaith dialogue, Harmony

#### INTRODUCTION

Currently, the phenomenon of religious diversity in Indonesia is confronted with three challenges. Firstly, extremist religious perspectives, attitudes, and practices that disregard human dignity. Secondly, the growth of subjective truth claims, the imposition of religious interpretations, and the potential influence of economic and political interests can trigger conflicts. Thirdly, the growing religious fervor does not align with the love for the nation within the framework of the Republic of Indonesia (Gultom, 2022; Prakosa, 2022; Saifudin, 2019). Religious issues arise due to our negative prejudices and an absolutist attitude, often believing it is the correctness (Gazali et al., 2023). If left unaddressed, these issues may escalate into conflicts and hostilities. Although religious moderation aims for harmony in human relations, particularly within matters of religion



and belief, it requires a comprehensive, balanced, and deeply thorough approach. Genuine religious teachings should serve as a source of virtue for their adherents.

Research on religious moderation has been carried out by many researchers before, at least it can be mapped to several study themes, *first* Examining religious moderation conceptually (Abror, 2020; Agus Akhmadi, 2019; Gunawijaya, 2022; Husna, 2022; Rhythm & Channa AW, 2021; Khoirul, 2021); *second* Examining related to religious moderation in educational institutions (Aziz &; et al, 2019; Habibie et al., 2021; Jamaluddin, 2022; Liando &; Hardiman, 2022; Maryani, 2021; Sutrisno, 2019); *third* Examining Religious Moderation in the Media (Afifi & Abbas, 2023; Agung &; Maulana, 2021; Islam, 2022; Mustakimah &; Waehama, 2023). Of course, there are still several other relevant themes related to the study of religious moderation. This research complements previous studies that discussed religious moderation from the perspective of religions in Indonesia conceptually, and practices carried out through interfaith dialogue. This study also rejects the notion that religious moderation is exclusive to a particular religion.

Maintaining a harmonious life through religious moderation is very important, as it entails adhering to the core principles of other religious teachings and promoting just and balanced behavior among other religious followers. Understanding other religious teachings and acknowledging the principles of other faiths can foster inclusive and moderation attitude. Religious moderation strives to realign religious understanding and practices with their fundamental essence, preserving human dignity, integrity, and civilization rather than deviating from these values.

Religious moderation should be comprehended as a balanced approach to religious conduct, encompassing the practice of own beliefs (exclusive) while respecting the religious practices of others, even if they differ (inclusive). This balance, or *wasathiyah* in religious practices, serves as a safeguard against veering into excessive extremism, intolerance, or radical behavior within religious contexts (Desky, 2022). As argued by Shahirin, a devout follower of religion would acknowledge that their scriptures emphasize interreligious relations (Harahap, 2011). Interfaith dialogue often facilitates initiatives aimed at fostering openness and mutual understanding.

This qualitative research used a comparative study approach (Emzir, 2010). The study aimed to compare various religious figures' perspectives to identify similarities in religious moderation within each faith. Data were collected through interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with religious leaders affiliated with diverse religious organizations, notably the Forum of Religious Harmony (FKUB), particularly in Pekalongan and Semarang. Additionally, FGDs were facilitated through the UIN Gus Dur podcast. The study also involved analyzing documented sources to examine the theoretical underpinnings of religious moderation within each scripture. The data analysis employed qualitative research techniques, focusing on discerning esoteric values in each religion and culminating in conclusions drawn from verifying the opinions of various religious figures.

This study discusses religious moderation as the role in nurturing Indonesia, exploring it from various religious perspectives, examining its foundations within each faith, and emphasizing its manifestation through interfaith dialogue. Essentially, religious moderation aligns with the core teachings of each religion. The primary aim of religious moderation is to foster a tolerant, peaceful, and harmonious environment amidst the diversity of a multi-religious and multicultural society (Kemenag, 2019; Saifudin, 2019).



### **DISCUSSION**

# **Religious Moderation in Caring for Indonesia**

As a multicultural and diverse nation encompassing various religions, Indonesia has the potential to become a robust and unified nation. However, this religious diversity could be a source of conflict if not managed effectively. (Hadi &; Anggraeni, 2021; Muria et al., 2021). Nurcholis Majid highlights that each religion teaches a singular and universal truth, often leading its followers to perceive their faith as the truest. This predisposition creates conflict when adherents claim exclusivity, dismissing other beliefs as false or heretical (Darmaiza, 2005). This conflict occurs because of the inability of every religious believer to understand the message of monotheism, namely the One God. Where the manifestation of monotheism itself under each religion adheres to the same principle of surrendering to the Supreme Being. This essence encourages virtues among adherents and emphasizes respect for other religious beliefs, finding common ground or a shared platform, often referred to in Islamic terms as "kalimatun sawa" (Khoirul, 2021).

The reality of religious diversity in Indonesia portrays it as a mosaic that enhances the richness of the country's religious tapestry. Diversity, or pluralism, is deemed essential as it reflects the divine will, granting humans the wisdom to comprehend and collaborate with one another in goodness. However, it's crucial to acknowledge that diversity within and among religions holds the potential for conflicts (Anggraeni et al., 2023). Therefore, religious moderation serves to preserve equilibrium within the religious sphere, nurturing the social capital of the Indonesian populace. This resonates with a statement made by a Hindu religious leader:

"Religious moderation is a middle ground in the midst of religious diversity in Indonesia. Religious moderation is very necessary to avoid the emergence of "Double-faced Religion," where at one time, religion often shows peace, safety, unity, and fraternity. Still, at another time, it shows a fierce face, causes conflict, and even wars between human beings" (MAA, 2023).

The goal of religious moderation itself is to deeply internalize religious teachings and to counteract violence propagated in the name of religion. Advocating the *wasatiyah* of moderation, a nonviolent approach, involves three key avenues (Khoirul, 2021; Saifudin, 2019): 1) Internally, religious moderation is promoted within each faith (intra-religion) by examining religion's intrinsic aspects. This entails fostering new ethics and spirituality that support nonviolent peace. Achieving this involves interpreting religious texts in ways that emphasize tolerant and inclusive attitudes based on human values. This effort is intertwined with the role of religious leaders in urging their followers to prioritize peace. 2) Interfaith mechanisms play a crucial role in practicing moderate religion. This involves employing strategies like interfaith dialogue to cultivate openness and mutual understanding, fostering harmonious relationships through collaborative community activities. Embracing interfaith openness nurtures a spirit of tolerance, promoting an attitude of respect for other religions (Anggraeni &; Suhartinah, 2018). 3) On a broader scale, moderate religious practices extend to international cooperation aimed at realizing peace. This entails collaborative efforts across borders and nations to foster global peace initiatives.

Recognizing and accepting local traditions as an integral part of religious moderation is imperative. Religion has evolved within cultures and traditions, becoming intertwined with them (Boenga, 2020). For example, the historical interaction between Islam and local cultures/traditions explains the development of an inclusive and tolerant Islam that embraces diversity. Similarly, the



evolution of Hinduism in Indonesia diverges from its manifestation in India due to cultural influences.

Respecting and accepting local traditions signify an essential facet of religious moderation. These local traditions, originating independently of specific religious teachings, form the bedrock of people's virtues. Due to their neutral essence, local wisdom acts as fertile ground to nurture various religious teachings. This fertile ground of local wisdom has fostered an inclusive religious fabric across the archipelago, often serving as a cohesive force during religious conflict (Nifasri et al., 2021). The strategic significance of local wisdom is closely linked to its position within the cultural domain. Local wisdom epitomizes cultural knowledge, encapsulating noble values inherent in the local sphere and serving as the foundational roots of a community. Frequently, these local values precede the establishment of major religions.

Religious moderation is critical to Indonesia, a vast nation encompassing diverse tribes, religions, languages, and customs. According to the 2010 Central Statistics Agency Census, Indonesia comprises 1,340 ethnic groups and recognizes six religions, with more than 781 languages spoken across its regions. Religious moderation is also an endeavor to preserve Indonesian cultural values. The diversity of the Indonesians contains a very high potential for national disintegration. The diversity of cultures and religions will have potential if properly maintained and managed. However, it can also be a threat and source of conflict if not accompanied by a strong cultural understanding and commitment to maintaining diversity. Indonesian people have a lot of local wisdom (local wisdom), showing that maintaining the nation's integrity is a valuable social capital to view moderate religious attitudes and mindsets (Agama, 2019). The moderation extends beyond the nation's borders, resonating globally and aiming to create a platform for dialogue among religious communities spread across the globe. Embracing the reality of differences, the imperative lies in effectively managing and nurturing these distinctions, making it a global priority.

### **Religious Moderation in the Perspective of Religions**

Every religion underscores the principle of complete surrender to the Almighty. This essence embeds the value of justice among individuals, recognizing them as fellow beings under the divine creator. Human beings are designated as stewards entrusted with the task of responsibly managing the Earth, guided by ethical principles to foster mutual benefit. This fundamental vision encapsulates one of the most pivotal teachings across religions. Religious moderation is one of the values and practices that helps Indonesia realize its benefits with its diversity. A moderate, fair, and balanced mental attitude is needed to manage diversity. Moderate teachings and behavior do not belong solely to one religion but exist in the traditions of various religions. Fair and balanced, highly upheld by all religious teachings. There is no religious teaching that advocates tyranny, or exaggeration (Saifudin, 2019). Lukman further explained that the teachings *Wasatiyah*, is one of the characteristics and essence of religious teachings. *Wasatiyah*, at least, has three meanings: *first* means middle, *second* means fair, and *third* means the best. *Wasathyah* means something good and is in a position between two extreme poles. The concept of *Wasatiyah* is also understood by reflecting on the principles of moderation (*Tawassuth*), tolerance (*Tasamuh*), balance (*Tawazun*), and fairness (*I'tidal*). Thus, the term *ummatan wasathan* is also referred to as A Just People or A Just Community.



Religious moderation promotes a tolerant attitude towards differences; openness is realized through accepting religion (inclusivism), including religious differences. Religious moderation does not only belong to Islamic teachings; in the context of Christianity, religious moderation becomes a way of looking to mediate the extremities of the interpretation of Christian teachings that some of its people understand. In the Bible, as is the belief of Christians, it has been widely said that Jesus is the peacemaker. Informants of Christian religious figures revealed that:

"There is not a single verse in the Bible that commands and invites people to do mischief, violence or even war. It teaches to bring about peace on this earth" (ABR, 2023)

Religious moderation is found in Catholic teaching. The universal church has devised a new perspective in building relations with other religions through the momentum of the Second Vatican Council. The Second Vatican Council became one of the important moments for awakening the inclusive religious spirit in building universal brotherhood in the modern century. Important decrees in the Second Vatican Council that marked the Church's attitude towards other religions in the world were: *Nostrae Aetate*. In his presentation session, Catholic religious leaders revealed that:

"Nostra Aetate affirms that the Catholic church does not reject anything true and holy in religions. In Catholic teaching, there is a fellowship of faith, hope, and love. All three are the attitudes of believers" (PDA, 2023)

In Catholic doctrine, dialogue stands as the key to comprehending interreligious disparities. Through dialogue, efforts are made to comprehend and embrace all facets of differences while shedding biases against others, particularly those of differing faiths. Interreligious dialogue not only resolves prevalent conflicts but also prompts introspection among religious adherents regarding the essence of their religious identity. This principle finds affirmation in the Second Vatican Council, which emphasizes that Catholics should, with wisdom and compassion, engage in dialogue and collaboration with followers of diverse faiths. The aim is to acknowledge, uphold, and nurture their spiritual and moral treasures along with socio-cultural values (NA 2).

Religious moderation within Hinduism finds resonance in the concept of Tri Kaya Parisudha, emphasizing the paramount importance of aligning human thoughts, words, and actions for a harmonious life. This equilibrium necessitates stability, ensuring these aspects stay within the boundaries set by religious tenets, regulations, and equitable societal values (Adisastra &; Kristina, 2022). Conceptually, Hindu teachings manifest across three dimensions: Tattwa, Susila, and Ceremony, providing Hindus with a framework to engage in their religious practices (Gunawijaya, 2022). The Tattwa dimension particularly emphasizes religious moderation, guiding Hindus to refrain from exclusive beliefs while respecting and not negating other belief systems, a principle echoed throughout Hindu literature.

Religious moderation is in line with the Dharma teachings in the Vedic scriptures. If people who are steeped in religious teachings can show moderation, then people will make them role models. Therefore, it is important for people steeped in religious teachings to keep their thoughts, words, and actions in public. Religious moderation among Hindus strengthens individual awareness in practicing religious teachings. So far, Hindus have mostly practiced religious teachings communally (togetherness). Hindu religious informants revealed:



"The most important teaching of Hinduism is morality, that is, how to maintain harmonious relations between human beings, which is one of the three causes of well-being".

Religious moderation is also found in Buddhism, which teaches moderate religious practice, avoiding extreme left and extreme right, and choosing the middle path (Majjhima Pattipada) as a guideline for life. During his teaching of the Dharma, Buddha never influenced anyone to follow His teachings, even giving people the freedom to choose the spiritual teacher they wanted without any coercion. One illustrative incident involves Buddha's encounter with the Kalamas, a group uncertain about which spiritual teacher to follow amid conflicting claims of superiority among various teachings. Sensing their dilemma, Buddha responded wisely:

"O Kalama, do not simply believe and follow oral traditions, hereditary teachings, people's words, book collections, logical reasoning, reasoning by inference, contemplation of reason, acceptance of views after thinking about them, speakers who seem convincing, or because you think, 'That ascetic is our teacher'. But after you know for yourself, 'these things are useless, these things can be reproached; these things are avoided by the wise; if carried out and practiced, will cause harm and suffering', you must abandon them."

The Buddha's discourse on the Kalama tribe resonates profoundly, showcasing remarkable moderation, democratic values, and rationality. His teachings eschewed coercion, emphasizing the importance of withholding belief in any teaching without prior evidence. The Kalama Sutta, found in Angutara Nikaya 3.65, encapsulates the essence of religious moderation by refraining from proclaiming absolute truth and denying other teachings.

Buddhist scriptures also teach that the spirit of religion is *Metta*, a teaching that holds fast to love without favoritism based on human values: tolerance, solidarity, equality, and nonviolence. Buddhists' lives run on human values translated into compassion, tolerance, and equality. Informants from Buddhist religious figures revealed that:

Buddhist scriptures also emphasize the core of Metta, the spirit of love devoid of

"Buddhadharma is a middle way that is an important aspect of Buddhist spirituality that strongly avoids two extremes: self-torture (attakilamathanuyoga) and indulgence (kamalusukhalikanuyoga). Buddhadharma is the path of spirituality to holiness that leads to true happiness and wisdom" (MGL, 2023).

Junzi (faithful and noble) Confucians always look at the life of this world in the eyes of this world *Yin Yang*. Yin-Yang can be understood as a middle attitude, not an extreme attitude. The middle attitude does not mean it has no principles, but it is fixed in principle. The code favors love – humanity (ren) and justice – truth (yi) and nothing else. In alignment with this principle, a man of faith and nobility will always act moral (li) and wise (zhi) so that with it will become a trustworthy (xin) and courageous (yong) man(Kemenag, 2019; Khoirul, 2021). Confucians are obliged to interpret faith and always animate all efforts in fostering and building religious life. In a text, it is revealed that:

"A Junzi glorifies three things: glorifies the Word of God Almighty, glorifies the great men (Saints) and glorifies the Word of the Prophets". (Lun Yu XVI:8). It turns out that both the Ancient Prophet and the Prophet later, the direction is similar" (Mengzi IV B: 1).



From this expression, it is clear that the universal view of Kongziism, which respects and upholds the teachings of other religions, as well as the orientation of Confucianism towards world peace (Kusmanto &; Wakhudin, 2023).

# Foundations of Religious Moderation in Every Religion

Religious moderation, as stated by religious leaders, is not something new; in essence, all religious teachings teach its adherents to be fair and balanced in living life. *Wasatiyah*, or religious moderation manifests distinctively within each faith, yet each shares principles that steer adherents toward a balanced and middle path (Sutrisno, 2019). These teachings are prevalent across the scriptures of various religions. As taught in the scriptures of each religion.

Table 1. Foundations of Religious Moderation in Every Religion

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No	Religion	Theological Foundation	Religious Texts			
1	Islam	The concept of <i>wasatiyah</i> teaches to maintain balance in various aspects of life, such as justice, worship, and behavior.	The Qur'an (Surah Al-Baqarah verse 143):  "And so, We have made you believers an upright community so that you may be witnesses over humanity and that the Messenger may be a witness over you".			
2	Catholic	The Catholic Church stresses the importance of balance in spiritual and moral life. This view is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ and the church's teaching on justice, love, and faithfulness to the doctrine of faith.	Catechism of the Catholic Church (Article 1807): "The maintenance of a balance between goodness and error is a wisdom called 'moderation' or 'midst'.			
3	Christian	The principles of moderation or balance can be identified in Jesus Christ's teachings on love, love, and forgiveness. Maintain a loving attitude toward God and others and avoid extremism in views and actions.	The Bible (Matthew 22:37-39): "Jesus said to him, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind'. This is the greatest commandment and the second, similar, 'Love your neighbor as yourself."			
4	Hindu	In the Bhagavad Gita, there is a teaching about "karma yoga" or actions performed without being tied to the result. This concept emphasizes the importance of carrying out actions with awareness and balance without getting caught up in extremism or worldly desires.	Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 2, Verse 47): "You have a right to perform your prescribed duties, but you are not entitled to the fruits of your actions. Never consider yourself to be the cause of the results of your activities, nor be attached to inaction".			
5	Buddhist	In Buddhism, the concept of moderation is reflected in the teachings of the Middle Way. It teaches Buddhists to stay away	Dhammapada (verse 183): "Balance in everything is key. When you experience joy or sadness, stay calm and don't get too attached to			



		from extremism, both in worldly desires and in spiritual life.	those emotions." Not to do evil, to cultivate merit, to purify one's mind - this is the Teaching of the Buddhas".
6	Confucianism	importance of balanced and ethical action in daily life. The	"Balance in everything is the key to wisdom. Harmony among men is the result of paying attention to the

# **Interfaith Dialogue: Forms of Religious Moderation**

To counter radical movements and terrorism, an inclusive approach to religion is essential. This inclusive concept is often referred to as religious moderation. Therefore, advocating for this movement toward religious moderation within the larger community is highly valuable. This idea of religious moderation has emerged as a tangible strategy to combat radicalism and intolerance. Discussing religious moderation within the interfaith dialogue in the Indonesian context holds significant importance. According to Azyumardi Azra, to build harmonious relations between religious communities and create an inclusive atmosphere in the religious (Azra, 2015). Then, it takes the ability of each religious group to deepen its understanding of other denominations' doctrines and practices as a priority. The mutual relationship in question is how each religion understands its teachings without blaming each other between different groups so that the atmosphere of relations between religions can run well and create an atmosphere that is tolerant and harmonious (Dodego & Witro, 2020).

Interfaith Dialogue refers to the positive and cooperative interaction between people of different religions, faiths, or spiritual beliefs to promote understanding between different religions to increase acceptance and tolerance. Constructing dialogue between religions means understanding, through cooperation, the different religious principles and teachings that should benefit all of humanity by promoting mutual respect and tolerance. It means coming together and sharing aspects of their respective faiths and striving to understand that which is a foreign (Cultural, n.d.).

Interfaith dialogue is often misunderstood and viewed with suspicion. This suspicion arises from the assumption that interfaith dialogue may lead to religious conversions. Another suspicion is that dialogue is seen as an effort to create a blending of religious beliefs. The actual purpose of collective activities in interfaith dialogue is to assist fragmented and compartmentalized communities to understand and respect each other. One form of religious moderation practice that has been carried out between religions is by conducting interfaith dialogue. As one informant said that,

"Interfaith dialogue is one of the right ways to cultivate harmonious and harmonious life among all religious communities who are now in the era of globalization and plurality civilization" (ABR, 2023)



Other informants suggested that interfaith dialogue has been exemplified in fighting for Indonesian independence, with deliberation between religious leaders in formulating this diverse Indonesian state to remain harmonious.

"Dialogue is a very decisive capital for the realization of a nation that is Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, which is united in plurality, and plural in unity. So is dialogue between religious leaders" (AM, 2023)

Interreligious dialogue, particularly in Indonesia, nurtures mutual understanding, tolerance, and peace among diverse religious communities. Its primary aim is to foster a harmonious coexistence, nurturing tolerance, openness, mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation among followers of different faiths. The key objectives involve uniting hearts and minds among diverse religious groups to mitigate suspicions of religious intervention or expansion from one community to another. It strategically endeavors to establish interreligious cooperation (Tibi, 1996). Strengthening religious moderation through interfaith dialogue can bridge the harmonization of inter-religious harmony (Sukri, 2009). This is in line with what Hans Kung said, giving a very impressive thesis: no ordering of the world without a world ethic; no peace among the nations without peace among the religions; no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions (Küng, 1991).

Interreligious dialogue must be recognized as one of the important ways to cultivate harmonious and harmonious life among all religious people. Every religion is responsible for solving the various problems of human life and nation. The importance of interreligious dialogue cannot be separated from various conflicts that occur based on religion. According to Hayat three factors cause Religious conflict: 1) endogenous (a narrow level of religious understanding, 2) religious formalism, 3) exogenous (global issues, economic inequality and sociopolitical injustice, discriminatory treatment, majority-minority terminology, and interference with interests) and relational (ethnic exclusivism) and relational (ethnic exclusivism)(Hayat, 2013).

As a multireligious nation, interreligious dialogue can be participatory cooperation in all matters. Here, an attitude of honesty, openness, maturity, inclusive global thinking, and awareness of togetherness is needed. Interreligious dialogue doesn't solely focus on creed-specific issues from each religion. Instead, it centers on communal concerns of shared importance, fostering discussions on societal matters that unite religions. This approach allows each faith to offer encouragement and motivation to their respective followers for contributing to developmental successes or shaping ethical codes for interfaith relations. Consequently, interfaith dialogue and collaboration serve as a strategic avenue to fortify religious moderation in Indonesia.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the analysis and discussion of data collected through research, it can be concluded that all religions teach to be moderate. Religious moderation does not belong to just one religion. The construction of religious moderation can be seen in the scriptural teachings of each religion. Religious moderation is in line with universal values within each religion.

The concept of *wasatiyah*, moderation is found in Islamic teachings with the principle of justice and balance, Catholic teachings with love as a form of apostolic faith, Christian teachings with love, love, and forgiveness, Hindu teachings with Tri Kaya Parisudha, karma yoga, Buddhism with Majjhima Pattipada and Confucian teachings through the principle of Yin and Yang balance.



The projection of religious moderation in Indonesia hopes to build an inclusive religious attitude. Religious moderation is one way to achieve the goal of living in peace and harmony in Indonesia, which can be done with interfaith dialogue and dialogue as a strengthening of religious moderation to avoid conflicts and violence in the name of religion and build tolerance towards other religions.

The limitations in this study can be complemented through subsequent research related to various kinds of religious moderation practices carried out through interfaith cooperation and assessing the impact of interfaith dialogue on social cohesion in the digital era.

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