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Religious Moderation from the Perspective of Islamic Law and Its Application in Education

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ABSTRACT

Religious moderation has become an important discourse in contemporary Islamic studies, particularly in the context of pluralistic societies facing challenges of radicalism, intolerance, and religious polarization. This study aims to analyze the concept of religious moderation from the perspective of Islamic law and examine its application within Islamic education. The study employs a qualitative library research approach by examining various sources related to Islamic teachings, Sharia principles, moderation theory, and educational practices. The findings reveal that religious moderation in Islam is deeply rooted in the concept of *wasathiyah*, which emphasizes balance, justice, tolerance, equality, and consultation. These values are reflected in the principles of *tawassuth*, *tasamuh*, *i'tidal*, *tawazun*, *musawah*, and *syura*, all of which form the foundation of a moderate Islamic worldview. In the perspective of Sharia and Islamic law, moderation is manifested through flexibility, contextual legal reasoning, and the orientation toward public welfare (*maslahah*) and justice. The study also shows that the implementation of moderation in Islamic education can be carried out through curriculum development, dialogical learning methods, character education, and the creation of inclusive educational environments. However, the application of religious moderation continues to face challenges such as radicalism, weak religious literacy, politicization of religion, and misconceptions regarding moderation itself. Therefore, strengthening moderation through education is essential in developing Muslims who are faithful, tolerant, inclusive, and capable of contributing to social harmony and peaceful coexistence in multicultural societies.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of Indonesia's pluralistic and multicultural religious life, religious moderation has become one of the fundamental principles for maintaining social harmony and national stability. Religious moderation refers to a concept that encourages believers to practice their religion in a balanced, tolerant, and non-extreme manner. In Islam, this concept is known as *wasathiyah*, which means the middle path or acting justly. In Surah Al-Baqarah

verse 143, Allah SWT affirms that Muslims are *"ummatan wasathan"* a middle and just community that serves as a witness to humanity. This understanding confirms that Islam essentially teaches the principle of balance in all aspects of life, including religious and social life (Akhmadi, 2019).

In Indonesia, the issue of religious moderation has become increasingly urgent due to the rise of intolerance, radicalism, and religious identity polarization that threaten interreligious harmony. Cases of religion-based violence, hate speech, and accusations of unbelief against certain groups have become social and religious phenomena occurring in public spaces and social media. This indicates that although Indonesia is known as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, the values of tolerance and diversity continue to face serious challenges. Therefore, efforts to strengthen religious moderation are not merely discursive but constitute a national necessity for preserving the unity of the nation (Maimun & Kosim, 2019).

Within the Islamic tradition, moderation is not a new concept. Classical and contemporary Muslim scholars have emphasized the importance of balance (*tawazun*), justice (*i'tidal*), and tolerance (*tasamuh*) in religious life. Al-Ghazali, for instance, in *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, explained that goodness lies in the middle path between two extremes. Similarly, Imam Al-Shatibi in *Al-Muwafaqat* emphasized the concept of *maqasid al-shariah* (the objectives of Islamic law), which aims to achieve public welfare and prevent harm. The concept of moderation is also reflected in the principles of *tawassuth* and *musawah*, which uphold the values of justice and equality amidst diversity (Kamali, 2015).

On the other hand, the development of globalization and the rapid flow of digital information have significantly influenced people's religious understanding, particularly among younger generations. The ease of access to information is not always accompanied by adequate religious literacy. Many religious contents circulating online originate from radical, exclusive, and intolerant narratives that may shape extreme perspectives toward differences. This condition highlights the importance of strengthening moderation values in education, particularly Islamic religious education, in order to equip students with peaceful, tolerant, and inclusive religious understanding (Muchith, 2014).

Islamic religious education plays a strategic role in internalizing the values of moderation. Through educational processes based on the integration of Islamic and national values, students are taught not only about religious obligations but also about the importance of understanding diversity and the ethics of coexistence. The Islamic Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam* / PAI) curriculum is expected not only to be normative and doctrinal but also responsive to contemporary socio-religious issues such as intolerance, radicalism, and sectarian differences (Sutrisno, 2019).

Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System states that the objective of national education is to develop students' potential so that they become individuals who believe in and fear God Almighty and possess noble character. This objective is in line with the values of religious moderation, which emphasize the balance between spirituality and social responsibility. Thus, education serves as an important instrument in shaping moderate character cognitively, affectively, and psychomotorically (National Education System Law No. 20/2003).

The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, as the institution responsible for guiding religious life, has mainstreamed religious moderation as a national priority program. In the *Religious Moderation Handbook* (2019), the Ministry formulated four main indicators of religious moderation: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and appreciation of local culture. These indicators serve as benchmarks for assessing the extent

to which a person's religious attitude aligns with the spirit of diversity and nationalism. This approach is considered relevant in building a harmonious Indonesian society amid diversity.

However, efforts to mainstream religious moderation also face challenges, both ideologically and practically. Some groups criticize moderation as a compromise with religious teachings and even regard it as a project of secularization. In fact, moderation is not a compromising attitude that weakens religious principles; rather, it is an effort to present Islam as *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy to all creation), as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad SAW through his compassion, tolerance, and justice. Therefore, it is important to correct misconceptions about moderation and affirm that it is an authentic part of Islamic teachings (Yusanto & Adian, 2021).

In the context of Islamic law (*fiqh*), religious moderation also has a strong foundation. *Fiqh* is the product of *ijtihad* and is dynamic and contextual, thereby allowing diversity of opinions as long as they do not contradict the fundamental principles of Islamic law. Muslim scholars throughout history have developed the principle of *ikhtilaf* (difference of opinion) as an intellectual richness that must be respected. This demonstrates that diversity in understanding religion is inevitable rather than deviant. Therefore, the teaching of Islamic law must cultivate openness toward differences and prevent students from adopting attitudes of *takfirism* and sectarian fanaticism (Musawar & Zuhdi, 2018).

Beyond the aspect of *fiqh*, moderation is also essential in the fields of theology (*aqidah*) and morality (*akhlaq*). In matters of faith, Islam teaches firm belief in monotheism without coercing others to embrace the religion. The Qur'an states, "There shall be no compulsion in religion" (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 256). This verse emphasizes that in Islam, preaching is carried out through wisdom and good counsel, not through violence. In terms of morality, Prophet Muhammad SAW serves as an exemplary figure in politeness, honesty, and forgiveness, even toward his enemies. These two aspects further strengthen the moderate character of Islam (Shihab, 1999).

Furthermore, the implementation of moderation in Islamic education requires an integrative and contextual approach. Education is not merely a process of transferring knowledge but also one of transforming values and shaping character. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education teachers bear significant responsibility in conveying Islamic teachings in an inclusive and enlightening manner. Dialogical, value-based, and contextual learning strategies are essential for instilling moderate attitudes. In addition, educational environments must remain conducive to differences of opinion and uphold the values of democracy and human rights (Hasanah, 2022).

Finally, the urgency of religious moderation in Islamic education is not merely a matter of discourse but a real necessity in building the nation's civilization. Amid ideological, social, and globalization challenges, education must function as a fortress that strengthens religious identity while simultaneously opening spaces for encounters across differences. Through education oriented toward the values of moderation, it is hoped that a generation of Muslims will emerge who are faithful, intelligent, tolerant, and prepared to become agents of change for a peaceful and just civilization.

METHOD

This section describes how the research was conducted. The primary materials of this section are (1) research design; (2) population and sample (target of research); (3) data collection techniques and instrument development; (4) and data analysis techniques. For research using tools and materials, it is necessary to write down the specifications of the tools and materials. The tool specifications describe the

sophistication of the tools used, while the material specifications describe the types of materials used. Qualitative research such as classroom action research, ethnography, phenomenology, case studies, and others, it is necessary to add the presence of researchers, research subjects, informants who helped during the research and ways to explore research data, location and duration of research as well as descriptions of checking the validity of research results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Moderation in Islam (*Tawassuth, Tasamuh, I'tidal, Tawazun, Syura,* and *Musawah*)

The concept of moderation in Islam is essentially an integral part of Islamic teachings derived directly from the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Moderation, or *wasathiyah* in the Islamic context, refers to practicing religious life in a just, balanced, non-extreme, and non-exclusive manner. Allah SWT refers to Muslims as *ummatan wasathan* in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 143: *"And thus We have made you a middle nation so that you may be witnesses over humanity and that the Messenger (Muhammad) may be a witness over you."* This verse demonstrates that Islam encourages its followers to take the middle path not leaning toward either extreme right or left, but upholding justice and balance in thought, attitude, and action (Kamali, 2015).

The concept of moderation in Islam can be elaborated through several key principles, namely *tawassuth* (the middle path), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *i'tidal* (justice), *tawazun* (balance), *musawah* (equality), and *syura* (consultation). Each of these principles is not merely normative but also possesses strong theological and philosophical foundations within Islamic teachings, making them highly relevant as fundamental values in social life and education.

a. *Tawassuth* (The Middle Path)

Tawassuth refers to taking a middle position in all matters, whether in worship, social interaction (*muamalah*), or responding to differences. Islam does not teach its followers to adopt extreme attitudes in understanding and practicing religion. In practice, *tawassuth* protects Muslims from both excessive behavior (*ghulun*) and negligence (*tafrith*) toward Islamic teachings. The Prophet Muhammad SAW said: *"Beware of extremism in religion, for those before you were destroyed because of extremism in religion"* (Narrated by Ahmad and An-Nasa'i). This statement indicates that religious extremism contradicts the essence of Islamic teachings themselves (Akhmadi, 2019).

The principle of *tawassuth* is also reflected in Islam's approach to law and social life. Islam provides broad opportunities for *ijtihad*, accommodates differences among schools of thought, and recognizes diversity in interpreting religious texts as long as they do not deviate from the objectives of Islamic law (*maqashid al-shariah*). Therefore, the spirit of *tawassuth* serves as an important foundation for building an inclusive and adaptive Islamic society in response to changing times (Maimun & Kosim, 2019).

b. *Tasamuh* (Tolerance)

Tasamuh refers to mutual respect amid differences, including differences in religion, schools of thought, and culture. Islam emphasizes the importance of maintaining harmonious relationships among human beings, including those of different faiths. The Qur'an states: *"For you is your religion, and for me is my religion"* (Q.S. Al-Kafirun: 6), as recognition of others' existence without coercing belief. In the context of social life, *tasamuh* enables Muslims to coexist peacefully with non-Muslims, respect their places of worship, and cooperate in virtuous matters (Muchith, 2014).

This tolerant attitude reflects the noble character of Prophet Muhammad SAW in conveying Islamic teachings. The Prophet never forced others to embrace Islam; even in the

Constitution of Medina, he guaranteed religious freedom for Jewish and Christian communities living alongside Muslims. Therefore, moderation through *tasamuh* is not a sign of weak faith but rather a manifestation of the noble moral strength of Islam (Shihab, 1999).

c. *I'tidal* (Justice)

I'tidal means acting justly, impartially, and upholding truth in every aspect of life. Islam establishes justice as a universal value that cannot be compromised. In Q.S. An-Nahl: 90, Allah commands believers to act justly: *"Indeed, Allah commands justice and excellence..."* Justice in Islam extends beyond formal legal matters to include social, political, and economic dimensions.

In the context of moderation, justice becomes the benchmark for evaluating actions and policies, including in religious life. Muslims are taught not to be fanatical toward their own groups but to judge matters objectively and based on truth. Even toward enemies, Islam commands justice: *"And do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness"* (Q.S. Al-Ma'idah: 8). The value of *i'tidal* is particularly important in countering radicalism, which is often characterized by exclusivism and injustice in responding to differences (Sutrisno, 2019).

d. *Tawazun* (Balance)

Tawazun signifies balance in life between worldly and spiritual matters, rights and obligations, and individual and social interests. Islam does not justify focusing solely on spiritual aspects while neglecting worldly affairs, nor the opposite. This principle is emphasized in Q.S. Al-Qashash: 77: *"But seek, through that which Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter, and do not forget your share of the world..."* This balance forms an essential foundation for shaping Muslims who are spiritually and socially healthy.

In religious life, *tawazun* serves as a key principle to avoid falling into meaningless ritualism or activism devoid of spirituality. Balance is also necessary in responding to tradition and modernity, text and context, as well as idealism and social reality. In education, this principle may be implemented through curriculum development that equally emphasizes students' intellectual, moral, and emotional dimensions (Hasanah, 2022).

e. *Musawah* (Equality)

Islam places all human beings in an equal position before Allah regardless of race, ethnicity, or social status. The principle of *musawah* or equality was emphasized by Prophet Muhammad SAW in his Farewell Sermon: *"O people, indeed your Lord is One and your father is one. There is no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab except through piety"* (Narrated by Ahmad). Equality in Islam necessitates fair treatment toward men and women, majorities and minorities, and all social groups in both religious and civic life.

The principle of *musawah* is essential in Islamic education so that students do not develop a mentality of group superiority. Education that instills equality will produce individuals who respect differences and uphold social justice in both religious practice and citizenship (Yusanto & Adian, 2021).

f. *Syura* (Consultation)

Islam teaches the importance of consultation (*syura*) as a mechanism for fair and participatory decision-making. In Q.S. Ash-Shura: 38, Allah praises those who settle their affairs through consultation: *"…and whose affairs are conducted by mutual consultation among themselves..."* The principle of *syura* aligns with democracy and public participation within modern socio-political systems and serves as a means of preserving diversity of opinions within society.

In the context of religious moderation, *syura* functions as an important mechanism for avoiding unilateral decisions, accommodating differences, and building consensus on public religious matters. Islamic education must instill the value of *syura* from an early age as

part of a culture of dialogue, openness, and respect for the opinions of others (Akhmadi, 2019).

Moderation from the Perspective of Sharia and Islamic Law

The concept of moderation (*wasathiyah*) in Islam is not only grounded in theology but also firmly rooted in the perspective of Sharia and Islamic law. Islamic law, or *fiqh*, is the result of scholarly *ijtihad* in understanding and formulating Islamic legal rulings based on the Qur'an, Hadith, *ijma'* (consensus), and *qiyas* (analogical reasoning). Within the tradition of Islamic jurisprudence, the principle of moderation appears in various forms, including legal methodology, flexibility toward social realities, and the contextual and just implementation of law. This demonstrates that Islam, as a religion of mercy, seeks to maintain balance between ideal norms and the dynamic and complex realities of human life (Kamali, 2015).

In the framework of *maqashid al-shariah* (the objectives of Islamic law), classical scholars such as Imam al-Ghazali, al-Shatibi, and Ibn Ashur emphasized that all Islamic legal rulings aim to preserve five essential values: religion (*al-din*), life (*al-nafs*), intellect (*al-'aql*), lineage (*al-nasl*), and property (*al-mal*). This principle implies that Islamic law is fundamentally oriented toward public welfare (*maslahah*) rather than rigid legal formalism. Here lies the relevance of moderation, namely emphasizing the substantive values of Islamic law as a mercy rather than as an instrument of power or domination. Therefore, a moderate approach to Islamic law always considers public benefit, humanity, and contextual relevance to the times (Hasan, 2020).

One manifestation of moderation in Islamic law can be seen in the principles of *taysir* (facilitation), *raf' al-haraj* (removal of hardship), and *dar' al-mafasid* (prevention of harm). Examples of these principles are found in the jurisprudence of worship, such as the concessions granted to travelers to combine and shorten prayers, or exemptions for the sick from fasting during Ramadan. In the field of *fiqh muamalah* (Islamic social and economic transactions), moderation is reflected in the flexibility of economic contracts such as *murabahah*, *mudharabah*, and *musyarakah*, which allow Sharia principles to be implemented realistically within the modern economic system (Zuhayli, 2001).

Moderation in Islamic law is also evident in the principle of tolerance toward differences of opinion (*ikhtilaf*). Scholars from various schools of thought Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali often differed in legal interpretation and rulings, yet such differences did not lead to hostility or accusations of disbelief. This openness toward diversity of opinion represents a concrete expression of jurisprudential moderation (*fiqhiyyah*). Imam al-Shafi'i himself maintained two different legal opinions (*qawl qadim* and *qawl jadid*) as a reflection of intellectual openness toward changing contexts and evolving arguments (Hallaq, 2009).

Furthermore, Islamic law is contextual and flexible in many respects. Scholars of *usul al-fiqh* distinguish between *tsawabit* (immutable matters) and *mutaghayyirat* (changeable matters influenced by context). This distinction forms the basis of moderation in Islamic law, as it provides room for legal renewal (*tajdid*) according to contemporary needs without compromising the essential principles of Islam. Examples include contemporary fatwas issued by the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) and international fatwa councils in response to modern issues such as financial technology, environmental concerns, and gender justice. These developments illustrate that Islamic jurisprudence is dynamic and contextual rather than rigid and stagnant (Auda, 2008).

Moderation in Islamic law also extends to the enforcement of law by prioritizing substantive justice over rigid legal formalism. In Islamic history, Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab once postponed the implementation of the punishment of hand amputation for theft during a period of widespread famine. This decision demonstrates that the principles of justice and

humanity were prioritized under emergency circumstances, even when explicit legal texts existed. This serves as concrete evidence that Islamic law is not understood merely through textual interpretation, but through *maqashidi* and *ijtihadi* approaches that emphasize broader objectives and contextual reasoning (An-Na'im, 2008).

In Indonesia, the principles of moderation in Islamic law have been widely adopted into national legal products. For instance, the Compilation of Islamic Law (*Kompilasi Hukum Islam* / KHI), which is applied within the Religious Courts, incorporates contextual and progressive approaches in matters concerning women's status, children's rights, and inheritance. Likewise, the fatwas issued by the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) frequently provide legal solutions to societal problems through the approach of *maslahah mursalah* (public interest). This demonstrates that Islamic law in Indonesia is not purely scripturalist, but adaptive to the socio-cultural conditions of Indonesia's pluralistic society (Zarkasyi, 2019).

Thus, moderation from the perspective of Sharia and Islamic law constitutes an inherent characteristic of Islam itself. It does not contradict Sharia; rather, it represents the manifestation of Islam's primary mission as a religion of mercy for all creation (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*). Moderation serves as a bridge between text and reality, between principles and practice, and between revelation and reason. Therefore, Islamic legal education at all educational levels must emphasize the values of moderation so that students do not become trapped in narrow, rigid, or extreme understandings of the law. Such an educational approach will produce a generation of Muslims who are knowledgeable, wise, and capable of responding thoughtfully to the dynamics of law and social life.

The Application of Moderation in Islamic Education

Education serves as a strategic instrument for instilling the values of religious moderation in younger generations. In the Islamic context, education is not merely intended to produce intellectually capable individuals, but also to shape people who possess noble character, tolerance, and the ability to coexist peacefully within a pluralistic society. The concept of moderation in Islamic education constitutes an essential foundation for building a peaceful, just, and civilized society. Therefore, the implementation of moderation values such as *tawassuth* (the middle path), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *i'tidal* (justice), *tawazun* (balance), and *musawah* (equality) must be systematically integrated into formal, non-formal, and informal educational processes (Akhmadi, 2019).

In practice, the application of moderation in Islamic education can be observed through three main dimensions: curriculum, learning methods, and school culture. First, from the curricular perspective, there is a need to strengthen teaching materials that are not only textual and doctrinal but also contextual and humanistic. Islamic Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam* / PAI) should be capable of bridging students' understanding of Islamic teachings with the realities of a pluralistic society. For example, concepts such as *ukhuwah islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood), *ukhuwah wathaniyah* (national brotherhood), and *ukhuwah insaniyah* (human brotherhood) should be integrated into syllabi and teaching modules in order to cultivate a sense of solidarity among all people regardless of religious, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds (Sutrisno, 2019).

Second, in terms of learning approaches and teaching methods, teachers as the primary actors in education play a central role in grounding moderation values within the classroom. Dialogical, participatory, and value-based learning approaches are effective methods for fostering open-mindedness and tolerant attitudes among students. Teachers should encourage students to engage in discussions, express their opinions respectfully, and appreciate differences in perspectives. In this way, students not only understand religion

normatively but also internalize the universal values of Islam, such as justice, compassion, and humanity, in their daily lives (Hasanah, 2022).

Third, the cultural and environmental aspects of education also play an important role in shaping moderate character. Schools and madrasahs must become safe spaces where all members of the educational community can express their religious identities peacefully and inclusively. Efforts such as promoting a culture of tolerance, preventing hate speech, and encouraging cooperation across classes and religious backgrounds are crucial for developing a sustainable culture of moderation. Multicultural-based extracurricular activities, student leadership training that emphasizes moderate Islamic values, and collaboration among educational institutions from diverse backgrounds are concrete examples of this application (Amin, 2021).

The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia has launched the "Strengthening Religious Moderation" program as part of its national policy, including within the educational sector. This program aims to equip teachers and educational personnel with a comprehensive understanding of moderation values so that they can serve as agents of change within schools. Through training programs, strengthening modules, and performance evaluations, Islamic Religious Education teachers are expected to become role models in practicing moderate and inspiring religiosity. One important indicator of this program is the increased awareness of tolerance and the reduction of discriminatory behavior toward students from different groups (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019).

In addition to teachers, Islamic higher education institutions (*Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri* / PTKIN) also bear significant responsibility in mainstreaming religious moderation. As institutions that educate future teachers, preachers, and religious leaders, PTKIN must ensure that their curricula and academic environments reflect the spirit of Islam as *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy to all creation). In this regard, progressive Islamic thought, interfaith dialogue, and interdisciplinary studies are essential to develop. Lecturers must broaden students' perspectives regarding the diversity of thought within Islam and cultivate respect for differences among schools of thought and traditions (Yusanto & Adian, 2021).

On the other hand, the challenges in implementing religious moderation within Islamic education are considerable. Exclusive teaching practices, teachers who lack adequate understanding of moderation, and sectarian-biased teaching materials still persist. Some educational institutions have even become targets of radical ideological infiltration through informal religious studies. Therefore, strengthening educational systems and supervision based on national values is essential, without undermining academic freedom and religious expression. Synergy among the government, schools, parents, and civil society must continue to be strengthened in order to make education a solid fortress of moderation (Muchith, 2014).

Moreover, moderation education must address the internalization of values within students. Values are not sufficient merely to be taught; they must also be embodied in practice. The internalization process requires role modeling, habituation, and a conducive learning environment. In this context, character education based on Islamic values such as *siddiq* (honesty), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *tabligh* (communicativeness), and *fathanah* (wisdom and intelligence) can serve as an important foundation for shaping moderate Muslim personalities. Integrating character education into all school activities is therefore a crucial step toward developing future generations who possess integrity and a commitment to peace (Syaiful, 2020).

Ultimately, the application of moderation in Islamic education is neither a temporary effort nor a short-term project. Rather, it constitutes a long-term national development agenda that requires commitment, seriousness, and cross-sector collaboration. By making education the primary arena for instilling the values of *wasathiyah*, Indonesia can continue to preserve its identity as a religious, peaceful, and pluralistic nation. Moderate Islamic education is not only relevant for Muslims but also contributes significantly to maintaining social harmony and global peace.

Challenges and Responses to Religious Moderation

Although the concept of religious moderation has gained theological legitimacy and serious attention from various religious and educational institutions, its implementation in practice continues to face significant challenges. These challenges arise not only from outside the Muslim community but also from within the Muslim community itself, particularly from groups that adopt exclusive, literalist, and intolerant religious perspectives toward differences. Therefore, it is essential to identify these challenges as well as the strategic responses that can be developed to strengthen moderation in religious life.

One of the greatest challenges to religious moderation is the growing influence of radicalism and extremism carried out in the name of religion. Radical groups frequently exploit religious narratives to justify violence, declare fellow Muslims as unbelievers, and promote intolerance toward people of different religions or schools of thought. They propagate *takfiri* ideologies, claiming that only their group represents the truth while others are misguided or even apostates. Such ideologies contradict the spirit of Islam as *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy to all creation) and are highly dangerous within a pluralistic society such as Indonesia. According to reports from the National Counterterrorism Agency (*BNPT*), several educational institutions have even become spaces for the covert dissemination of intolerant ideologies through exclusive study networks (BNPT, 2022).

Another major challenge stems from the low level of religious literacy and digital literacy within society, particularly among younger generations. In the contemporary digital era, social media has become a massive platform for the dissemination of religious information. Unfortunately, much of this content does not originate from credible scholarly authorities but rather from populist figures who often promote confrontational and provocative narratives. Weak religious literacy causes some members of society to become easily influenced by shallow and narrow religious understandings. Likewise, low digital literacy prevents individuals from distinguishing between valid information and disinformation, including hoaxes and misleading religious content (Akhmadi, 2020).

In addition, challenges also arise from certain religious and political elites who politicize religious issues for the sake of power and political interests. The politicization of religion reduces religion to a tool of mass mobilization rather than a source of moral and ethical guidance. When religion becomes politicized, the spirit of moderation is easily eroded by pragmatic interests, leading society to become divided into opposing groups that distrust one another. In many cases, political contestation based on religious identity has left deep social wounds and weakened social cohesion. This condition significantly hinders the strengthening of moderation, which fundamentally relies on the values of nationalism, unity, and social harmony (Zarkasyi, 2019).

Equally important, resistance to religious moderation also comes from certain Muslim groups who perceive moderation as a Western project or a hidden form of secularization. They suspect that the discourse of moderation aims to weaken Islamic law or compromise Islamic values with liberal ideologies. Such perceptions emerge from a limited understanding of Islamic epistemology, which in fact contains rich traditions of balance,

tolerance, and justice. These stigmas complicate the efforts of moderate Muslim scholars and intellectuals to explain that moderation is an authentic part of Islamic teachings rather than an imported external concept (Yusanto & Adian, 2021).

Nevertheless, these challenges have been addressed through various systematic and collaborative efforts involving the government, educational institutions, religious organizations, and civil society. The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, for example, launched the "Strengthening Religious Moderation" program as a national strategic initiative in 2019. This program includes teacher training, the development of educational modules, the involvement of religious leaders, and the strengthening of regulations related to religious education. Its primary objective is to create a religious ecosystem that is peaceful, tolerant, and appreciative of diversity (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019).

Positive responses have also emerged from major Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, both of which have consistently promoted the principles of *Islam wasathiyah* (moderate Islam). Through the concept of *Islam Nusantara*, NU emphasizes an understanding of Islam that is harmonious with local culture and traditions, while Muhammadiyah, through its concept of *Islam Berkemajuan* (Progressive Islam), seeks to present Islam as responsive to contemporary challenges. These two organizations play a crucial role in developing moderate Islamic discourse and strengthening the role of education in disseminating the values of tolerance, dialogue, and humanitarian brotherhood (Asyari, 2019).

The educational sector has also become a primary arena for strengthening religious moderation. The current Islamic Religious Education curriculum has increasingly been directed toward fostering inclusive and non-dogmatic religious attitudes. Islamic educational institutions such as pesantren, madrasahs, and Islamic universities have begun developing programs centered on nationalism, interreligious tolerance, and character education grounded in moderate Islamic values. In several regions, initiatives such as "peace schools" and child-friendly madrasahs have become examples of best practices that support moderation within educational settings (Muchith, 2014).

Responses from civil society, particularly youth communities and student organizations, have also shown promising developments. Many communities are actively involved in digital campaigns promoting tolerance and diversity, producing educational content about moderate Islam, and organizing interfaith dialogues. Their role is highly significant in shaping healthy public opinion and countering radical narratives circulating on social media. Cross-faith and intercommunity collaborations further demonstrate that moderation is not merely a doctrinal concept but also a social movement capable of generating tangible change at the grassroots level (Amin, 2021).

Thus, although the challenges facing religious moderation are complex and multidimensional, the various responses undertaken so far provide grounds for optimism. Nevertheless, the strengthening of moderation must not remain limited to discourse or formal programs alone. Instead, it must be manifested in everyday practices across educational, social, political, and cultural spheres. Religious moderation is not solely the responsibility of elites; rather, it is a collective responsibility shared by all elements of society to ensure that religion truly becomes a source of peace rather than conflict.

The Boundaries of Moderation in Islam

Although religious moderation constitutes a fundamental concept within Islamic teachings aimed at promoting balance, tolerance, and justice, it is important to emphasize that this concept has clear boundaries that must not be violated. Moderation in Islam does

not imply moral relativism, religious syncretism, or compromise regarding the fundamental principles of Islamic teachings. Nor does it represent a hidden form of secularization that obscures religious identity. Therefore, it is essential to understand that moderation in Islam is principled in nature, rooted in divine revelation, and firmly situated within the framework of Sharia (Kamali, 2015).

One of the primary boundaries of moderation is that it must never transcend the principles of *tauhid* (Islamic monotheism) and Sharia. Islam places *tauhid* at the core of faith, and in this matter there is no room for compromise. Moderation does not mean equating all religions as possessing equal absolute truth, nor does it imply weakening belief in the oneness of Allah. In Q.S. Ali Imran: 19, it is stated: *"Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam."* This verse indicates that tolerance toward followers of other religions does not diminish Muslims' conviction regarding the truth of Islam. Consequently, moderation must be distinguished from theological relativism, which views all religions as equally and absolutely true (Shihab, 1999).

Another important boundary is that moderation must not tolerate deviations from the essential values of Islam such as justice, humanity, and truth. Moderation does not mean allowing injustice, oppression, or violations of human rights to continue without criticism or correction. In this regard, Islam teaches the principle of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil) as a moral responsibility to uphold virtue and prevent wrongdoing. However, this obligation must be carried out wisely and without anarchic behavior. Moderation should never become a justification for apathy toward social injustice, since Islam consistently demands strong social concern and responsibility from its followers (Auda, 2008).

Moderation also has limitations concerning morality and ethics. Values such as modesty, honesty, responsibility, and moral purity remain highly upheld within Islamic teachings. In this context, moderation must not be misunderstood as justification for permissive lifestyles, moral liberalization, or sexual deviance that contradicts human nature and religious teachings. Likewise, freedom of expression and opinion must always be balanced with moral responsibility. Islam recognizes freedom, but not freedom without ethical limits (Yusanto & Adian, 2021).

In the legal dimension, the boundaries of moderation are also connected to the principle of *la ikraha fid din* ("there is no compulsion in religion"), which must be understood comprehensively. Not every form of legal adjustment can be justified in the name of moderation. For instance, neglecting religious obligations that are clearly established by Islamic texts, such as prayer or fasting, under the pretext of tolerance constitutes a violation of the boundaries of moderation. In this regard, the principle of moderation remains subject to the guidelines of Sharia and is not intended to replace religious teachings with values that contradict them (Zuhayli, 2001).

The boundaries of moderation are also related to attitudes toward *bid'ah* (religious innovation) and *khurafat* (superstition). In Islamic tradition, innovation in worldly affairs such as technology and administration is permissible and even encouraged. However, innovations in acts of worship that deviate from the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad SAW must be approached with caution. Therefore, moderation does not mean granting unrestricted acceptance to all forms of religious practices without standards or criteria. In this aspect, moderation continues to emphasize prudence, commitment to the Sunnah, and rejection of misleading deviations (Hallaq, 2009).

Furthermore, the boundaries of moderation also emerge in relation to modern ideologies such as secularism, liberalism, and pluralism. Although certain values within these ideologies such as justice, freedom, and equality may align with Islamic principles, not all

aspects can be fully adopted. For example, religious pluralism that claims all religions are absolutely true is incompatible with Islamic theology. Therefore, a critical and selective attitude is necessary to ensure that moderation does not shift into syncretism or lead to the loss of Islamic identity (Zarkasyi, 2019).

Ultimately, the boundaries of moderation in Islam must be preserved so that the values of moderation continue to function as a means of strengthening faith, safeguarding Sharia, and building civilization. Moderation must not become a pretext for neglecting religious obligations or obscuring Islamic identity. Rather, by understanding these boundaries, Muslims can position moderation as a noble middle path between extremism and liberalism, between blind fanaticism and unrestricted freedom. In this way, religious moderation becomes a principle that strengthens faith while fostering social harmony within national and societal life.

CONCLUSION

Religious moderation in Islam represents an integral part of Islamic teachings rooted in the principles of *wasathiyah*, which emphasize balance, justice, tolerance, and harmony in religious and social life. From the perspective of Islamic law and Sharia, moderation is reflected in principles such as *tawassuth* (the middle path), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *i'tidal* (justice), *tawazun* (balance), *musawah* (equality), and *syura* (consultation). These principles demonstrate that Islam upholds a balanced approach between textual authority and contextual realities, between individual rights and social responsibilities, and between religious commitment and peaceful coexistence within a pluralistic society.

The study also shows that moderation in Islam does not contradict Sharia; rather, it constitutes a manifestation of Islam as *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy to all creation). Islamic law provides flexibility through concepts such as *maqashid al-shariah*, *ijtihad*, *maslahah*, and contextual legal reasoning, all of which support the realization of justice, public welfare, and humanity. At the same time, moderation possesses clear boundaries and must not be interpreted as moral relativism, theological pluralism, or compromise regarding the essential principles of Islamic faith and worship. Therefore, moderation remains firmly grounded within the framework of Islamic theology and ethics.

In the context of education, the application of moderation plays a strategic role in shaping students who are intellectually capable, morally grounded, tolerant, and socially responsible. The integration of moderation values into curricula, learning methods, and educational culture is essential for fostering inclusive and peaceful religious attitudes. Teachers, Islamic educational institutions, and the broader educational system serve as key actors in internalizing these values through dialogical learning, character education, and the cultivation of democratic and respectful school environments.

Nevertheless, the implementation of religious moderation continues to face significant challenges, including the spread of radicalism and extremism, weak religious and digital literacy, the politicization of religion, and misconceptions that portray moderation as a foreign or secular agenda. Despite these obstacles, various responses from the government, Islamic organizations, educational institutions, and civil society demonstrate strong collective efforts to strengthen moderation through educational programs, interfaith dialogue, digital literacy campaigns, and the promotion of inclusive Islamic discourse.

Ultimately, religious moderation should not remain merely a theoretical discourse or formal policy agenda. It must be translated into concrete practices within educational, social, political, and cultural life. Through the strengthening of moderation values grounded in Islamic teachings, education can become a transformative force in producing a generation of

Muslims who are faithful, knowledgeable, tolerant, and capable of contributing to social harmony, national unity, and global peace.

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