

RELIGIOUS MODERATION AS A FRAMEWORK FOR PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE IN CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC THOUGHT



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Abstract

Amidst growing religious polarization and ideological rigidity, the call for moderation in Islam emerges as a theological and moral necessity. This study examines the concept of religious moderation (*wasatiyyah*) in contemporary Islamic thought, considering it across diverse intellectual traditions and sociocultural contexts. This paper employs a library research approach combined with a descriptive-analytical method. It draws from the works and discourses of eleven scholars: Quraish Shihab, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Muchlis Hanafi, Dainawi, Husain Thabathabai, and Abdurrahman Wahid, Musthofa Bisri, Joachim Wach, Djamaluddin Ahmad, and Afifuddin Muhajir. These scholars' ideas on religious moderation are documented in scholarly articles widely circulated on the Moraref portal and in academic journals affiliated with Islamic higher education institutions (PTKIN). The analysis thematically explores ethical principles such as tolerance, balance, justice, humility, and human dignity. Rather than treating moderation as a passive middle ground, these scholars frame it as an active, intentional ethical-spiritual orientation rooted in Islamic epistemology and responsiveness to plural realities. The findings demonstrate that, as articulated by these contemporary Islamic thought, religious moderation presents a spiritually grounded, intellectually engaged, and socially adaptive framework for constructing peace through transformative education, inclusive dialogue, and inner moral reform in an increasingly fragmented and globalized world.

Abstrak

Di tengah meningkatnya polarisasi keagamaan dan rigiditas ideologi yang kian merebak, moderasi dalam Islam menjadi kebutuhan mendesak secara teologis dan moral. Studi ini mengkaji bagaimana konsep moderasi beragama (*wasatiyyah*) dipahami dalam pemikiran Islam kontemporer, dengan menelusuri keragaman tradisi intelektual dan konteks sosial-budaya yang melingkupinya. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi pustaka dengan metode deskriptif-analitis. Data diambil dari pemikiran sebelas tokoh: Quraish Shihab, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Muchlis Hanafi, Dainawi, Husain Thabathabai, Abdurrahman Wahid, Musthofa Bisri, Joachim Wach, Djamaluddin Ahmad, dan Afifuddin Muhajir. Gagasan para tokoh tentang moderasi beragama ditelusuri melalui artikel ilmiah yang tersebar di portal Moraref dan jurnal-jurnal yang terafiliasi dengan Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam (PTKIN). Analisis dilakukan secara tematik terhadap pemikiran tokoh, seperti toleransi, keseimbangan, keadilan, kerendahan hati, kasih sayang, dan penghormatan terhadap martabat manusia. Para pemikir ini tidak memaknai moderasi sebagai sikap pasif atau netral, melainkan sebagai orientasi etis-spiritual yang aktif dan disengaja, berakar pada epistemologi Islam dan kepekaan terhadap keberagaman. Temuan studi ini menunjukkan bahwa moderasi beragama, sebagaimana dirumuskan oleh para pemikir tersebut, menawarkan kerangka yang berakar pada spiritualitas, terbuka terhadap pemikiran kritis, dan adaptif secara sosial untuk membangun perdamaian melalui pendidikan transformatif, dialog yang inklusif, dan reformasi moral batiniah di tengah dunia yang semakin terfragmentasi dan terglobalisasi.

INTRODUCTION

In today's global landscape, societies are confronted with the growing prevalence of exclusivist ideologies, religious polarization, and extremist narratives (Dawson, 2020). The dissemination of radical ideas, especially through social media, has accelerated the spread of intolerance and dogmatism. This threatens not only the spiritual integrity of individuals, but also the social cohesion of multicultural nations (Hasibuan et al., 2024). Academic discourse has begun to explore that, "Understanding the mechanisms driving radicalism on digital platforms is essential for designing effective counter-narratives that promote religious mineration." (Hadiyanto et al., 2025) In this context, the discourse on religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) has gained renewed urgency—not as a passive stance between two extremes, but as an ethical imperative rooted in Islamic theology. These imperative aims to sustain peace, protect human dignity, and foster social resilience.

Moderation (*wasathiyah*) in Islam is more than just behavioral neutrality. It is a holistic framework based on justice (*'adl*), balance (*tawāzun*), equity (*i'tidāl*), restraint (*iqtisād*), and steadfastness (*istiqāmah*) (Ivanyi, 2025). These concepts are deeply embedded in Islamic jurisprudence, ethical thought, and spiritual traditions. The Qur'anic term *ummatan wasaṭan* (Al-Baqarah: 143) encapsulates the ethical calling of the Muslim community to serve as balanced witnesses to humanity, steering clear of extremism and indifference. As Ramadhan affirms implementing *wasathiyah* in *da'wah* encourages flexibility and ethical discernment while steering clear of harsh rhetoric or rigid literalism (Ramdhan, 2018).

A growing number of studies define religious moderation as a set of knowledge, attitudes, and practices that are based on Islamic values. Moreover, youth are particularly vulnerable to radicalization in today's information age due to algorithmic exposure and a lack of ethical grounding. Click or tap here to enter text. As Zulfan Taufik emphasizes that, in today's context, young people, with their cognitive openness, are vulnerable to religious intolerance and radicalism (Taufik, 2022). However, they also play a strategic role in promoting religious moderation. Without a strong foundation in compassion, humility, and mutual respect, the younger generation may become susceptible to ideological manipulation. Thus, religious moderation entails active understanding, plural acceptance, and constructive engagement across differences, not merely tolerance.

Indonesia, the two world's largest Muslim-majority democracy (Wisdom, 2022), offers a compelling context for examining religious moderation. In response to rising radicalism and sectarian tensions, Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kementerian Agama RI) formalized religious moderation (*moderasi beragama*) as a state policy in 2019. *Moderasi Beragama* is officially defined as "the effort to uphold a balanced stance in religious views, attitudes, and behavior," aiming to harmonize exclusive religious commitments with an inclusive appreciation of others' faith traditions (Litbang & Diklat, 2021). This approach is not about diluting faith but rather about navigating diversity with dignity and empathy. Implemented through educational campaigns, digital outreach, and civic engagement, this vision seeks to build a resilient, harmonious civil society. Also, as Ismatu Ropi (2021) affirms, in a diverse society such as Indonesia, embracing religious moderation is not a matter of choice—it is an essential requirement (Ropi, 2019).

This study draws on the works and public discourses of several contemporary Muslim scholars: Quraish Shihab, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Muchlis Hanafi, Dainawi, Husain Thabathabai, Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), Musthofa Bisri (Gus Mus), Joachim Wach, Djamaluddin Ahmad, and Afifuddin Muhajir. Using a library research approach combined

with descriptive – analytical and discourse analysis methods, the research explores how these figures articulate the concept of religious moderation (*wasatiyyah*) across diverse contexts. The selection of these scholars reflects their sustained engagement with themes of moderation and their influence on public religious discourse, especially in Indonesia and the broader Islamic country world.

All data were gathered through thematic mapping of their ideas as published in academic articles disseminated through the Moraref portal and Islamic higher education journals (PTKIN). As of December 15, 2023, Moraref hosts 2,933 journals, 123,725 articles, and 194,938 authors; keyword searches produced 208 articles under “moderasi,” 138 under “moderasi beragama,” and 48 under “religious moderation.” These sources were analyzed to identify key ethical themes and frameworks of peacebuilding—particularly those centered on education, inclusive dialogue, and inner moral – spiritual transformation—as conveyed by the scholars' contributions to contemporary Islamic thought.

This study applies qualitative textual analysis to understand how these Islamic scholars articulate moderation in relation to peacebuilding, interreligious dynamics, and ethical renewal. This analysis reveals three primary ways of constructing peace through religious moderation: (1) educational engagement, (2) inclusive dialogue, and (3) spiritual and ethical reorientation.

This study also redefines *wasathiyah* as a multidimensional ethic integrating theological, sociocultural, and epistemological foundations, rather than as a midpoint of compromise. Religious moderation is examined here as both a living tradition and a strategic framework for building peace in fragmented societies (Humaidi, 2022). The principle of moderation is conceptualized and operationalized through three major frameworks as a pathway to peace. The first framework is the educational and intellectual reform framework. Secondly, the dialogical and cultural inclusion framework emphasizes moderation as a lived social ethic. Lastly, the ethical – spiritual reorientation framework establishes moderation as rooted in spiritual introspection, ethical clarity, and the pursuit of inner purification (*tazkiyah*). By examining how leading contemporary Islamic thinkers shape and promote these paradigms. It presents moderation as a moral commitment that is deliberate and ever – changing. This commitment goes beyond mere rhetoric and can be adapted and shared across different situations and time periods.

CONCEPTUAL FUNDAMENTALS OF MODERATION IN CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC THOUGHT

In the complex and diverse landscape of the modern era, Islamic moderation emerges as a normative compass, guiding Muslims in understanding and practicing their faith. It is not merely a label or a reactive stance toward radicalism; rather, it is a substantive, principled pathway that leads to a balanced middle ground—one that steers the ummah away from extremism and excessive liberalism.

Conceptually, Islamic moderation is based on a balance between two principles: the textual principle (*qat'i*), referring to definitive scriptural sources such as the Quran and the Hadith; and the teleological principle (*maqāṣid*) (Aslamiyah et al., 2023), emphasizing wisdom (*ḥikmah*), public interest (*maṣlaḥah*), and the overarching purposes of Islamic law in human life. When this balance is disrupted, Muslims may fall into two opposing extremes.

Extremism arises when the textual principle is rigidly applied without considering context, *maqashid*, or the ethical and humanistic dimensions of Islamic law (Rahman, 2020). This can make religious rulings seem strict and unchanging, and it might even lead to people justifying violence in the name of religion. On the other hand, radicalism emerges when the *maqashid* principle is exaggerated and misappropriated, ignoring scriptural foundations and scholarly authority. This opens the door to the manipulation of religious texts for ideological or political interests.

The term "radicalism" itself originates from the Latin word *radix*, meaning "root." In Ibn Sina views, the pursuit of knowledge that delves into the essence of reality and truth is regarded as a profound and meaningful intellectual endeavour (Sina Ibn, 1898). However, in socio—religious discourse, the term has undergone semantic degradation and now often connotes exclusivist ideologies that justify violence. Religious radicalism is thus an ideology and set of actions demanding radical change through coercive means while rejecting peaceful approaches, such as dialogue, persuasion, and mutual understanding (Widyaningsih et al., 2017). Because blind fanaticism tends to flourish where rationality and wisdom diminish. According to Abd Samad al—Palimbani, "one who lacks reason cannot possess knowledge," and rejecting both reason and knowledge leads to darkness—a metaphor for confusion, ignorance, and a vulnerability to violence (Al—Palimbani, 2009).

In this context, Islamic moderation is not just a principle; it is a conscious, active, transformative ethical and spiritual orientation. It encourages Muslims to deeply engage with sacred texts, consider their ultimate objectives, and apply them with critical reasoning and moral wisdom. Moderation is not static; it is a dynamic, evolving process that requires continuous nurturing through transformative education, inclusive dialogue, and inner ethical reform.

Moderation itself is derived from the Arabic term *al-wasath* and carries profound ethical meanings: *tawazun* (balance), *i'tidal* (equity), *iqtishad* (restraint), and *istiqamah* (steadfastness) (Hadiyanto et al., 2025). These values appear throughout Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and da'wah practices. Implementing *wasathiyah da'wah* provides preachers with the freedom to use methods that avoid extremes and emphasize ethical reasoning (Ermawati et al., 2023).

Moderation in Islam, also known as *wasatiyyah*, is more than just a behavioural midpoint;(Ermawati et al., 2023) it's a deep and complex framework that encompasses both epistemology and ethics. This framework is firmly embedded in the Qur'an and classical Islamic thought, yet it remains strikingly relevant in today's world. *Wasatiyyah* signifies "a justly balanced nature" or "middle—ground excellence"—a deliberate avoidance of excess in worship, behavior, governance, and spiritualit (Yaakub et al., 2019). *Wasatiyyah* entails justice (*'adl*) and obedience to God, positioning the principle as a safeguard against religious rigidity and moral permissiveness. This Qur'anic ideal is epitomized by the concept of *ummatan wasathan* (Q.S. 2:143), in which the Muslim community is entrusted with the ethical responsibility to serve as a balanced and just witness for all humanity (Ashimi, 2020).

Recent scholars have repositioned *wasatiyyah* as an intellectual disposition as well as a behavioral ethic. Bakir and Othman (2017), for example, describe moderation as an "epistemic personality" integral to the Islamic knowledge tradition (Bakir & Othman, 2017). In this perspective, moderation is not passive neutrality, but rather an active cognitive and moral stance manifested through balanced reasoning, critical reflection, and contextual

awareness. As a theological concept, *wasatiyyah* urges Muslims to read religious texts holistically, juxtaposing literal interpretations with historical and societal dynamics, thus framing knowledge as a vehicle for justice, wisdom, and human dignity (Fauziah et al., 2025).

CULTIVATING PEACE THROUGH EDUCATION AND INTELLECTUAL LITERACY

The notion of religious moderation as a route to peace is not just a moral stance; it's a commitment to teaching and knowing. Contemporary Islamic scholars, particularly Quraish Shihab, Muchlis Hanafi, Dainawi and Yusuf al-Qaradawi, agree that education plays a crucial role in fostering a moderate mindset. In an era where religious literacy is fragmented and often hijacked by ideological excesses, these scholars present moderation (*wasathiyah*) as a value that must be taught, nurtured, and transmitted intergenerationally.

Professor Muhammad Quraish Shihab, an eminent Quranic scholar and former Indonesian Minister of Religious Affairs, is a leading advocate for the concept of Islam as a mercy to all creation (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*). He consistently frames moderation as a purposeful educational stance meant to instill inclusivity, respect, and critical public engagement, rather than as neutrality.

In his *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, Shihab writes:

"The Qur'an must be understood... in a way that fosters empathy for all humanity, while avoiding dogmatic narrowness." Click or tap here to enter text. This reflects his socio-communicative interpretive style, which bridges Qur'anic guidance with everyday moral reasoning and societal dialogue. He emphasizes the balanced interplay of three modes of Islamic education: *bil-lisan* (spoken teaching), *bil-hal* (through example), and *bil-kitabah* (written expression). He argues that true moderation is achieved when teaching is holistic and contextually grounded (Shihab, 2005). One researcher notes that *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, the first complete Qur'anic interpretation in modern Indonesian (Ali & Isnaini, 2024). Another study highlights Shihab's interpretive method. This enables the Qur'anic message to connect with modern life without losing theological consistency (Bakir & Othman, 2017).

Moreover, through television, print, and social media, Shihab's practical outreach targets younger Muslim audiences navigating pluralism (Al Zamzami, 2019). He advocates using public reason and empathy when addressing religious differences, as seen in his discussions about *ummatan wasathan* and minority protection.

Essentially, Shihab's approach positions moderation as an active, intellectually engaged, and spiritually uplifting teaching method that resists both harsh literalism and empty pluralism (Munandar & Amin, 2023). His vision offers a model of Islam that is "peaceful, rational, and dialogical," which is well-suited for democratic and pluralistic societies. This vision can also be implemented in Indonesia through the Merdeka Curriculum, by integrating values of religious moderation, critical thinking, and inclusive citizenship into the national education framework.

More broadly, Yusuf al-Qaradawi has made substantial contributions to the discourse on Islamic moderation, both conceptually and practically. In his influential masterpiece, *Mustaqbal al-Ushuliyah al-Islamiyah*, particularly in the chapter "*Al-Mustaqbal Litayyar al-Wasathiyah*", al-Qaradawi argues that the future of the Muslim umma lies in embracing moderate Islamic thought. For al-Qaradawi, *wasatiyyah* is not merely a rhetorical slogan, but rather a theological and civilizational imperative. He asserts that moderation remains

relevant and resilient across changing times due to its openness, intellectual objectivity, and fidelity to the enduring principles of Islam (Qardhawi, 1998).

Al – Qaradawi explains that the viability of Islamic moderation depends on its ability to synthesize foundational textual commitments with the objectives (*maqasid*) and public interest (*maslahah*) of Islamic law. He presents a structured framework of thirty indicators of moderation, ranging from a comprehensive understanding of Islam to the dynamic balance between constancy and adaptability and the importance of *islah* and *ijtihad*. Key jurisprudential principles he outlines include *Ushul-Furu'*, *Qath'i-Dzanni* and *Maqasid-Wasail* (Mustaqim Hasan, 2019).

Al – Qaradawi's approach is educational in the truest sense; he aims to reorient the Muslim interpretation of religious texts, encouraging a maqasidic (*goal-oriented*) and contextualized reading. Al – Qaradawi criticizes blind imitation (*taqlid*) and overly liberal reinterpretation (Haq & Salahudin, 2022). Instead, he argues for a balanced interpretive tradition that remains faithful to the text while being responsive to contemporary realities. His works, such as *Fiqh al-Awlawiyyat*, serve as guides for cultivating intellectual responsibility, ethical discernment and a practical theology for coexistence (Zulkifli, 2018).

Meanwhile, the advocacy for religious moderation through education is being championed also by K.H. Dainawi Gerentam Bumi, a respected Islamic scholar. At the Al – Haromain Islamic Boarding School, he cultivates an educational environment based on tolerance, peace, and respect for diversity. As a charismatic kyai, he inspires neutrality and resilience against radicalism in his students, preparing them to reenter society with a balanced and inclusive Islamic worldview (Ferdian, 2021).

The idea that Islamic teachings must remain relevant to contemporary realities is built on by Muchlis Hanafi—a widely recognized Indonesian Muslim scholar—who advocates a contextual and moderate approach to interpreting the Quran and Hadith. He believes that religious moderation is crucial for countering extremism and radicalism. In his book *Moderasi Islam: Menangkal Radikalisme Berbasis Agama* (Moderate Islam: Countering Religious Extremism), Hanafi draws on the Quranic concept of *ummatan wasatan* in Surah Al – Baqarah to argue that moderation must be consciously cultivated through mindset, behavior, and action (Rezi, 2020).

While these scholars work in different contexts—Shihab in Indonesia, Dainawi in His Pesantren, Hanafi in his perspective through his book, and al – Qaradawi in the transnational domain—they share the belief that moderation can be taught. This challenges the idea that moderation is a spontaneous or natural disposition. Rather, it must be intentionally modeled, taught, and embedded into institutions—from pesantren and schools to universities and digital platforms.

From an educational standpoint, promoting peace involves developing thought processes and behaviors that prioritize understanding over confrontation, dialogue over polemics, and humility over arrogance. As ideological rigidity and digital echo chambers increasingly define religious discourse, education's role in moderating faith becomes essential. While more conservative approaches may stress rigid boundaries and emphasize protection from difference, this study highlights a contrasting view: peace is cultivated not only through political negotiations and interfaith declarations, but also in classrooms, sermons, books, social media posts, and everyday conversations, where moderation becomes a shared value and way of life.

EMBRACING PEACE THROUGH CULTURAL DIALOGUE AND PLURALISM

Cultural dialogue and pluralism are vital pathways to peace, offering spaces where differences can be engaged with empathy rather than fear. Yet in today's digital age, these ideals often meet real-world challenges. Online platforms, shaped by speed, algorithms, and polarization, tend to reward outrage over nuance. In such environments, genuine dialogue becomes harder to sustain. Promoting pluralism, then, is not just about fostering openness, it also means building the capacity to listen, to hold space for disagreement, and to resist the pull of digital radicalism. True peace requires not only inclusion, but also intentional efforts to nurture resilience and discernment in how we engage across differences.

If education provides the cognitive and moral foundation for moderation, then dialogue and inclusion provide its social framework. Abdurrahman Wahid, widely revered as the father of Indonesian pluralism, articulated an inclusive theology of Islam grounded in *rahmah* (compassion), *insaniyyah* (humanity), and civil rights. His understanding of Islam was deeply shaped by *teologi kerakyatan* (people's theology) and *Islam kultural* (cultural Islam), which position religious values within the diverse, living cultures of Indonesian society.

Throughout his political and religious career, Gus Dur consistently challenged sectarianism and defended minority groups, including Chinese Indonesians, Christians, Ahmadiyah, and indigenous religious communities, often at great political cost. His theological stance was not merely pragmatic, but ontological (Muzakki & Quthny, 2022). For Gus Dur, engaging in dialogue across religious and cultural boundaries was not merely a method, but rather a fundamental aspect of being Muslim in a pluralistic society. It was believed by him that true religiosity must manifest as empathy, humility, and solidarity (Barton, 2002).

As Akmaliah et al. (2022) explain, Gus Dur's legacy, along with Syafi'i Ma'arif's, played a foundational role in shaping post-reformasi Islamic moderation, especially through institutions such as the Wahid Institute and Maarif Institute (Akmaliah et al., 2022). These organizations have since become vital in promoting deradicalization, peace education, and interfaith understanding, particularly among youth. Noorhaidi Hasan (2017) further affirms this, observing that Gus Dur's interventions laid the cultural groundwork for Indonesia's model of inclusive Islam (Hasan, 2017). His legacy continues to influence national policies on religious moderation.

Following the ethos of Gus Dur, contemporary Nahdlatul Ulama scholar Afifudin Muhajir, also known as Gus Mus, builds a framework of moderation rooted in *fiqh siyasah* and *maqashid syariah*. Click or tap here to enter text. He argues that the Islamic state is interpretive, not normative. According to him, the objectives of sharia (*maqashid al-shariah*) are best realized through context-sensitive jurisprudence that protects life, dignity, and pluralism, rather than through rigid legalism (Syamsuriyanto, 2018). Gus Mus sees the state as an interpretive construction, not a divine mandate, thereby opening space for political diversity. His approach to moderation is deeply institutional, involving the design of a legal-political system that protects differences while maintaining faith. In this model, dialogue is a principle of governance, not mere conversation (Muzakki & Quthny, 2022). Through his poetic *da'wah* and gentle online presence, Gus Mus fosters interreligious affection. He teaches that Islam must be experienced as beautiful before it can be understood as true (Najichatun Nur Zana & Mansur Hidayat, 2023). From his

perspective, religious moderation means ensuring the state acts as a protector, not a religious judge.

From a Western sociological perspective, Joachim Wach offers although not a Muslim scholar, his model of religion emphasizes that religious experience is not isolated from the social context in which it occurs (Saumantri, 2023). He argues that authentic religiosity always involves openness to "the other," particularly in multicultural settings. Wach believes that a moderate faith is one that grows through interaction. Thus, moderation becomes epistemic humility—the recognition that no group holds a monopoly on truth and that peace is found in mutual recognition rather than theological conquest.

The consensus among these thinkers is that peace is not merely the absence of conflict; rather, it is the active creation of inclusive, humane, and dialogical social relations. In contrast to approaches that seek to purify or dominate public spaces with exclusive versions of Islam. Through dialogue, art, policy, and social movements, frame peace not just in treaties or constitutions, but in how we treat those whose prayers, languages, and lives differ from one another. In a nation as multicultural as Indonesia, religious moderation becomes a relational ethic (Subchi et al., 2022)—a practice of peaceful engagement that transforms theological humility into political coexistence and cultural empathy into spiritual solidarity.

INTERNALIZING PEACE THROUGH SPIRITUAL BALANCE AND ETHICAL TRANSFORMATION

Beyond shaping personal piety, spiritual moderation also offers a foundation for institutional reform, particularly in educational environments. By rooting moral development in Sufi ethics, it fosters not only individual transformation but also systemic renewal. While education and dialogue influence outward expression, peace must also be cultivated within. Contemporary Indonesian thinker and Nahdlatul Ulama senior figure Djamaluddin Ahmad offers a profound contribution to the discourse on Islamic moderation. He grounds his vision in the spiritual and ethical principles of *tasawuf*, or Islamic mysticism. In his framework, *wasathiyah sufistik* is a comprehensive spiritual discipline, not merely a legal or sociopolitical category. Djamal identifies *tawassuth* (moderation), *ta'adul* (justice), and *tawazun* (balance) as the core ethical values of a spiritually grounded life. These values are deeply rooted in Sufi ethics and classical Islamic scholarship (Aden et al., 2023).

Furthermore, He cautions against two extremes: *ghuluw* (religious excess or fanaticism) and *tafrif* (apathy or religious negligence). He views these extremes as distortions of the soul that endanger personal well-being and collective harmony. Emphasizing *tazkiyah al-nafs* (soul purification), Ahmad positions spiritual development as essential for building a sustainable moral society (Ridwan & Zain, 2021). This view is supported by recent studies, such as *Tasawwuf Moderation in Higher Education*, which advocate incorporating Sufi values into character education programs to cultivate inclusive, ethically conscious academic communities.

Ahmad also argues that external peace cannot be achieved without internal serenity—a restless, ego-driven soul cannot create a just or peaceful society (Aden et al., 2023). His emphasis on education for inner peace—a spiritually grounded approach to learning that integrates knowledge, reflection, and self-discipline. This model effectively counters extremism by fostering empathy, critical awareness, and ethical restraint.

In the context of Indonesia's growing religious polarization, Djamaluddin Ahmad's shows that Islamic moderation is not just a political or social stance, but a transformative inner process toward peace through self–mastery that manifests as balanced, ethical conduct in public life. Meanwhile, Husain Thabathabai (1903–1981), also known as Allameh Tabatabaei, is a towering figure in modern Shia, esteemed as a philosopher and mufassir, or Qur'anic exegete. His most famous masterpiece, Tafsīr al–Mīzān, showcases his unique interpretive skill, blending rational reasoning (*burhān*) with mystical enlightenment (*mukāṣafah*) in a balanced way (Achmad, 2021). Thabathabai's hermeneutics reflect his belief that genuine religiosity demands a synthesis of intellectual rigor and spiritual depth. His integrative hermeneutics do more than revive classical epistemology; they empower thinkers to address contemporary issues, such as gender ethics, interfaith relations, environmental stewardship, and the dialogue between religion and science, without compromising theological integrity.

Moderation is not an outcome. This internalized balance, this lived *wasathiyah*, empowers believers to face pluralism with calmness rather than anxiety. Therefore, the spiritual articulation of moderation offers more than tolerance, it proposes a transcendent ethic where peace is pursued not only in institutions or discourse but also in cultivating a just, balanced, and internally peaceful self.

Pillar of Moderation	Key Figures	Distinctive Approaches	Focus of Peace Framing
1. Intellectual and Religious Education	Quraish Shihab, Yusuf al – Qaradawi, Muchlis Hanafi, Dainawi, Husain Thabathabai	Contextual interpretation, <i>manhaj wasathi</i> , pesantren tradition, religious literacy, rational – spiritual tafsir	Cultivating peaceful Islamic understanding through education, interpretation, and scholarly discourse
2. Socio-Cultural and Inclusive Dialogue	Gus Dur, Musthofa Bisri (Gus Mus), Joachim Wach	Pluralism, minority rights, cultural Islam, aesthetics of da'wah, social symbolism	Building coexistence through arts, culture, and interfaith communication
3. Spirituality and Transformative Ethics	Djamaluddin Ahmad, Husain Thabathabai, Afifuddin Muhajir	Practical Sufism, inner – social balance, maqashid sharia, ethical – spiritual harmony	Realizing peace through spiritual cultivation, inner harmony, and moderate public ethics

Table 1. Three Pillars of Religious Moderation Based on Contemporary Islamic Thought

The table above summarizes the three pillars through which key Muslim scholars articulate religious moderation as a framework for peace. The first pillar, intellectual and religious education, illustrates how figures such as Quraish Shihab and Yusuf al – Qaradawi define moderation through interpretation (*tafsir*), institutional learning, and epistemological clarity. This approach promotes peaceful coexistence by nurturing a critical yet compassionate understanding of religion.

Building on this, the second pillar, socio – cultural and inclusive dialogue, reflects how moderation is practiced through pluralism, cultural expression, and symbolic engagement, as seen in the thoughts of Gus Dur and Musthofa Bisri. These scholars use art, humor, and narrative to humanize Islam and build bridges across differences. Lastly, the third pillar, spirituality and transformative ethics, emphasizes inner balance, ethical behavior, and

soul – oriented frameworks. According to Sufi – oriented scholars like Djamaluddin Ahmad and Afifuddin Muhajir, who are maqashid – focused thinkers, peace is not only a result of social harmony; it is also a product of spiritual maturity and moral integrity.

These three pillars together illustrate that religious moderation in contemporary Islamic thought is not one – dimensional but multidimensional, integrating education, dialogue, and spirituality to cultivate sustainable peace in plural societies.

CONCLUSION

In contemporary Islamic thought, religious moderation manifests as a multidimensional construct rooted in education, cultural dialogue, and spiritual ethics. Through the teachings of prominent Islamic scholars, both classical and modern, moderation (wasathiyah) emerges as a theological principle, a lived ethic, and a strategic response to extremism, intolerance, and ideological fragmentation in the digital age.

This study has identified three primary frameworks through which peace is framed and promoted: (1) the intellectual and educational framework focuses on contextual tafsir, Islamic pedagogy, and epistemological balance; (2) the socio – cultural and dialogical framework emphasizes pluralism, inclusivity, and interfaith engagement through artistic and symbolic communication; and (3) the spiritual – ethical framework draws from Sufism and maqashid – based jurisprudence to foster inner peace and social harmony. Despite their different emphases, all three converge on the vision of Islam as a source of compassion, wisdom, and coexistence.

Finally, it is imperative to comprehend religious moderation as a proactive dedication to principles of justice, harmony, and compassion rather than as a passive or accommodating stance. These scholars' contributions serve as a theoretical resource and practical guide for educators, policymakers, and religious leaders to build a peaceful plural society. This commitment must be continuously cultivated, contextualized, and communicated across generations. While the present study focuses on conceptual discourses, future inquiries may be enhanced by exploring the embodiment and practice of these frameworks within educational, social, and policy – based initiatives, thereby facilitating a more integration of thought and lived experience.

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