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Religious Moderation

Responding to its problems, misperceptions,
accusations, and challenges

LUKMAN HAKIM SAIFUDDIN

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Preface

Initially, the idea for this book came following the news I was being awarded the honorific title Doctor Honoris Causa from the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (UIN) Jakarta in the field of Religious Studies specialising in Religious Moderation. I first heard about the plan to write this book in late January 2022.

Even though award recipients are not usually requested, let alone required, to produce a written work such as this book, I saw it as pertinent to write down my thoughts which would then be presented to the general public through academia. It was not until later that I decided to write this book on religious moderation, the contents of which would align with the field and specialisation of the awarded degree.

I started a process of reflection and evaluation on how to conceptualise the idea of religious moderation. In the past two years, I had the opportunity to meet

numerous religious mass organisation leaders from various religious communities, from which I acquired the conclusion that there are many challenges that ought to be addressed. There have emerged a variety of problems, misperceptions, and even unfounded accusations concerning religious moderation. Thus, in the four months leading to the awarding of my degree in late May 2022, I started writing this book.

Various groups displayed their interest upon the publication of this book, which was initially intended only for the purpose of the award ceremony. Almost on every occasion that I attended seminars, discussions, training programmes, and workshops on religious moderation, I received requests for the publication of a book on the subject matter. To meet these requests, the book was published.

It is hoped that this book could contribute to safeguarding and cultivating a harmonious interfaith coexistence, as well as protect the diversity and religious spirit of Indonesia.

Jakarta, 10 November 2022

Lukman Hakim Saifuddin

Introduction to English Edition

The concept of “religious moderation” is understood differently in different contexts. In Indonesia, it is related to the relationship between religion, culture, and the state. This book focuses its discussion on religious moderation in the Indonesian context, what the concept refers to, why it is important, and why it needs to be mainstreamed in socio-political life.

Since 2019, global attention on religious moderation policies in Indonesia has continuously increased, caused mainly by the official inclusion of religious moderation in the Ministry of Religious Affairs’ work programmes. Various parties, from international academics, to foreign journalists and foreign embassies, attempt to understand the concept of religious moderation, while the resources available to understand the concept and policy are limited.

Religious moderation in Indonesia matters. It has helped Indonesia withstand divisive forces from both within and without, ranging from the use of identity politics by some political elites to the use of violent acts by some extremist groups. As a country with the largest Muslim population, Indonesia embraces diversity and inclusiveness. Indonesia's experience in managing diversity, supported by the majority of its citizens who have moderate religious views, attitudes, and practices, could be an example for other countries.

The idea of religious moderation ought to be introduced to the international stage so that it can be adopted by other countries which face similar problems and challenges as are faced in Indonesia. Many majority-Muslim countries in the Middle East and North Africa encounter problems related to intolerance and persecution of non-Muslims as well as radicalism, extremism, and terrorism. The current instability in the Middle East illustrates the challenges faced by many Majority-Muslim countries in managing diversity and conflicts in their countries. There is potential for religious moderation to be adopted by other countries in responding to the challenges of the strong relations between the state and religion which impact various aspects of people's lives. The global community can learn from Indonesia's experience in promoting a more inclusive and peaceful world.

Despite the need for it, literature on religious moderation that is accessible and comprehensible to the international community is still insufficient.

To date, literature on the idea and implementation of religious moderation remains largely written in Indonesian. With this problem in mind, we initiated a programme of translating and contextualising books on religious moderation for English-speaking readers. This translated text is the second reference on religious moderation entitled *Moderasi Beragama: Jawaban atas Masalah, Kesalahpahaman, Tuduhan, dan Tantangan yang Dihadapinya* (Religious Moderation: Responding to Its Problems, Misperceptions, Accusations, and Challenges), which was written by Lukman Hakim Saifuddin and published by Saifuddin Zuhri Foundation in 2022. This second book on religious moderation is to complement the preceding book, ‘*Moderasi Beragama*’ (Religious Moderation), that was published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2019.

Nevertheless, this book needs to be contextualised for the English-speaking audience since it has words and terms which are placed in particular contexts making them unclear to readers outside of Indonesia. Contextualisation is based on the belief that words cannot be fully understood without considering the context in which they are used. In the book *Religious Moderation*, there are terms that might appear familiar for scholars with a religious studies background, yet they might be less known for general international readers. Translation with incorrect contextualisation can cause misunderstanding about the book’s substance. Thus, contextualisation takes part in providing specific contexts in which the book *Religious Moderation* is embedded so that the book’s message, aims, and

objectives can be delivered to international readers. Contextualisation aims to provide explanations beyond a translation from Indonesian to English, but also to ensure that the readers can well understand each translated sentence.

Finally, the Ministry of Religious Affairs is the leading sector for religious moderation programmes in Indonesia and religious moderation has been adopted as one of the priority programmes in the 2020–2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan. With the issuance of Presidential Regulation No. 58/2023 on Strengthening Religious Moderation, streamlining efforts of religious moderation have expanded to other ministries and agencies. It is hoped that the publication of the English version of the Religious Moderation book can assist the international community in understanding religious moderation. This translation draft and contextualisation can be used by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs to introduce religious moderation to the international stage or to disseminate the idea of religious moderation to the global community.

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Introduction

The full title of this book is Religious Moderation: Responding to Its Problems, Misperceptions, Accusations, and Challenges. Indeed, this is a long title, yet it is expected to summarise the myriad of subject matters revolving around religious moderation.

Religious moderation is not a new concept at all; it has long been discussed and practised. As a concept, it has been recently subjected to increased scrutiny. It is expected that this ‘rediscovered’ concept births new problems that require more detailed information, clarification, and explanation. It is hoped that this book can eliminate various deviations and distortions that create misunderstandings about religious moderation.

I am not claiming that I am the most well-versed and authoritative person in terms of religious moderation.

But this book represents my duty as a member of the Indonesian nation-state who upholds the belief that religious moderation is very much needed as part of our religious life. Currently, religions, religion practices, and religious communities appear to exist separately and turn their backs on each other. Whereas religions were created for religious communities to practise their belief together, in accordance with their respective religious teachings.

Religion and religious practice are two different concepts. Religion is divine teachings, while religious practice is how human beings understand and observe those teachings. Despite the difference, these two concepts are interconnected. This is where the main challenge for religious communities lies. There are various ways to interpret religious teachings, just as there are various religions and beliefs. Interfaith conflicts erupt when certain religious practices are interpreted as the sole and absolute interpretation of religious teachings. Such an interpretation is often followed by violence, through which one claims that one's interpretation of religious teachings is the only correct interpretation and forces this view on others.

Religious moderation serves as an antidote for such conflicts. It offers a solution which addresses inter-religious challenges. The expected outcome of religious moderation is a more peaceful and harmonious existence of religious communities.

This is why religious moderation has never adopted terms such as 'enemy', 'opponent', 'fight', or 'eradication'

against those considered as religiously excessive or transgressive. This is because the ultimate objective of moderation is to invite, to embrace, and to bring the excessive and the transgressive into more just and moderate religious practices. Further, religious practices should not endorse enmity and hostility. Rather, they call for guidance and protection, even for those adopting extreme views.

The essence of religion is to humanise human beings. Religious challenges must be overcome through measures which do not disregard human values. Those who are deemed excessive and extreme must be approached through moderate ways, rather than counterattacked by equally extreme measures. Fire needs to be put out by water. Fighting fire with fire would only lead to an uncontrollable chaos, harming oneself in the process.

Some may ask, why does religious moderation keep being commended? The answer is that there will always be opportunities for extreme religious practices to flourish. Just like sermons, religious extremism is, and will always be, preached regularly, even though the audience may remain the same for weeks, or even years. Religious leaders will never cease recommending virtue to adherents, because the chance for members of religious communities to slip into mistaken religious teachings and practices always exists.

Religious moderation is a never-ending endeavour. It remains dynamic amidst the lives of religious communities. Religious moderation ought to be

Through religious moderation,
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understood and implemented as a joint movement. It should not be interpreted merely as a programme, let alone a project.

Developing attitudes of religious moderation is a never-ending process. Every issue pertaining to the process of conceptualisation, construction of substantial meanings, implementation of strategies, and even assessment of patterns must always be contextualised within the surrounding environment. The dynamic dialectics of religious moderation should be constructive and result in a positive outcome.

Religious moderation must be interpreted as the living grand conception whose existence in religious communities ought to be continuously preserved. It serves as a cultural strategy for religious states with religious communities, such as Indonesia. Implementing religious moderation means protecting the integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. Religious moderation is not an immobile, rigid, and empty concept. It breathes a soul into a nation. It needs to exist continuously and develop accordingly as time changes.

The implementation of religious moderation requires dialogues and concrete examples, not just programmes and budgets. It needs figures who bring about integration, instead of groups that promote polarisation and segregation. It seeks figures who endorse inclusion instead of exclusion. It seeks role models. It searches for academics who clarify deviations and distortions. It also looks for religious and cultural

leaders who serve as examples for others. Religious moderation aspires to create a nation-state—wherein religious communities live— where a peaceful and harmonious coexistence prevails despite religious diversity.

Religious moderation needs our active participation. It is through us who continuously strive to understand and practise religion in a just and balanced way, by using our soul and feelings while still consulting our reason, that we will achieve the needed religious moderation. We will practise religion not only for ourselves, but also for the betterment of the whole of the Indonesian nation-state. We are the religious communities who faithfully preserve the brotherhood between nations and all human beings.

This book aims to reinvigorate our memories of this country's history, how Indonesia was built by the nation's founding fathers—whose ethnic and religious backgrounds varied—as a nation-state whose constitution is aligned with religious values. Our responsibility is to protect the country's integrity amidst various challenges. Religious moderation will provide us a bridge to our collective memory of the nation's past, from which it is hoped we can achieve a common good.

Through religious moderation, it is hoped that all members of the nation-state can reconcile, following the political polarisation that has occurred. Hopefully, every individual who perpetrated conflicts under a religious banner will reunite in practising religious teachings. Hopefully, those whose religious practices that have

transgressed do not go astray further, but return to the more moderate path. May all of us, particularly the elites of the country, acquire an awareness not to gain power using methods that are contrary to our religious values. May all of us continue to receive the needed guidance to be the best version of ourselves.

I would like to express my endless thanks to everyone who has assisted in the publication of this book, especially to my discussion partners: Oman Fathurahman, Hadi Rahman, Ali Zawawi, Helmi Hidayat, Rosidin Karidi, and Moh. Khoeron. Without their helps, this book, and even the conceptualisation of religious moderation, would never materialise. My thanks as well for the supporters of religious moderation who have always inspired me.

Finally, I hope this book is of value. Happy reading.

○I

The Importance of Religious Moderation

WHAT IS religious moderation?

The general public often asks this question when they hear the term ‘religious moderation’. Similar questions are often raised from the educated as well, or at least they were posed during discussion forums, seminars, training sessions, and webinars which I attended.

I usually start my answer with the short version: religious moderation is religious practices that are not excessive, that do not exceed limitations. In their limited understanding of core religious teachings, which come from religious scriptures, human beings are potentially in a vulnerable position, where they lean towards the extreme end and, thus, easily tip over into deviant teachings. Such a position may result from one’s over reliance on religious texts without contextualising them. This may also result from loose interpretations

without using reason, leading to a complete disregard of the religious texts.

In practising religion, there are other dimensions to consider. This is not only because religion encompasses both the vertical relationship between God and human beings, but also the horizontal relationship between fellow human beings. In reality, people do not exist by themselves. Even upon their deaths, they still owe their fellow human beings a duty to humanity.

This external dimension further expands when individuals live in diverse communities, in which they may bear various roles, duties, and responsibilities bound by social relations. This dimension frames the complete version of my answer to the question regarding religious moderation. Religious moderation is composed of perspective, attitude, and religious practices in harmonious living, in which we practise religious teachings that protect human dignity and general welfare based on the principles of fairness and balance as well as the compliance to the Constitution.

The following questions are also often raised in discussions attended by participants from various religious backgrounds and origins:

1. What is the urgency of religious moderation for each religious community?
2. Is religious moderation important in religious practices, particularly in Indonesia?
3. Does every religious community need to be moderate?

I will explain my answers in the following sections. To sum up, religious moderation is the essence of religion. It is a necessity for those who aspire to a peaceful and enlightened religious practice. It is also a necessity for plural and multicultural nations such as Indonesia in order to achieve intra- and inter-religious harmony.¹ This is related to the relationship between religion, culture, and the state, which are connected in a unique and interesting manner.

Diversity and Religious Practices in Indonesia

According to Quranic teachings, it is Indonesia's *takdir*² to be a diverse nation. It is a gift from the Creator that we ought to accept. It is non-negotiable. It is part and parcel of its beautiful nature. Sheikh Mahmud Syaltut, the Chancellor of Egypt's Al Azhar University from 1958 to 1963, remarked during his visit to Indonesia that, 'Indonesia is a piece of heaven sent down to earth by Allah.'

It is hard to deny that Indonesia has diverse cultures and religions that are almost unmatched in any other

¹ I present similar explanation in a book titled *Religious Moderation*, which was published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (The Ministry of Religious Affairs, *Religious Moderation*, Jakarta: The Ministry of Religious Affairs' Research, Development, and Training Agency, 2019, pp. 1–14).

² The word *takdir* refers to the Divine will and decree. Referring to Quranic verses, this term denotes the belief that everything that has happened or will happen in the world (including human deeds) has been preordained by God. At the same time, Quranic verses also affirms that human beings are responsible for their actions, both the good and the bad. Belief in God's decrees also serves as one of the pillars of Islamic faith. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004).

parts of the world. According to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), in 2013, the number of ethnic and sub-ethnic groups in the country stood at 1,331 in total, or 633 if grouped into major ethnic groups.³ Each of these groups has their respective languages and traditions. In 2017, the Linguistic Department recorded 652 local languages in Indonesia, excluding dialects and sub-dialects. A portion of these local languages have their own script: Javanese, Sundanese, Old Javanese, Pegon, Arabic-Malay (also known as Jawi), Buginese-Makassarese, Lampungic, and so on. Some of the local scripts are shared by two or more local languages. For instance, Javi script is also used in Acehnese, Malay, Minangkabau, and Wolio.

Then, there are the six religions that are most adhered to by Indonesians. These are apart from the hundreds of local beliefs held by communities in various locations across the country. Regardless of where you are in Indonesia, the level of diversity is exceptionally high. There is no issue or concern that we, as Indonesians, encounter in our everyday lives that is not related to religious teachings. The value of religious teachings is inseparable from the lives of Indonesians.

The opinions, views, and interests of Indonesians are numerous and different, living as they are in inter-religious communities where beliefs are varied. Even within one religion or belief, there are various interpretations of its teachings and practices of worship. Generally, each interpretation of religious teachings has

³ Directorate of Statistics Dissemination, *2013 Indonesian Statistics*, Jakarta: Central Statistics Agency, 2013.

its own adherents who believe in the truth of the *tafsir*.⁴ In Islam, for instance, there are different *mahzab*⁵ of *fikih*⁶ that present different *fatwas*⁷ regarding practices of worship such as *shalat*,⁸ fasting,⁹ *zakat*,¹⁰

⁴ A field of knowledge which seeks explanations of the Quran. Etymologically, tafsir refers to in-depth elucidations. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004).

⁵ Intellectual traditions or branches in Islamic studies such as law and theology. In Islam, there are numerous schools of thought. Among Sunni group, there are four major schools of Islamic law named after their ulema (Muslim scholars or religious leaders), namely Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali, and Syafi'i. The Shia group follows the Jafari school of Islamic law, named after the sixth Shia Imam, Ja'far al-Saqid. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004).

⁶ Fikih refers to Islamic jurisprudence, particularly those which are interpreted and practised by legal experts among the ulema. The term fikih also encompasses the commitment of Muslims to understand religious rulings originating from the Quran, hadith (a collection of sayings or traditions of the Prophet Muhammad which account for his daily practice), and traditions practised by the Prophet Muhammad and incorporate them into their everyday lives. Thus, Islamic jurisprudence embodies religious practices as well, compared to the more specific Western interpretation of jurisprudence, which consequently expands its implications from religious affairs to other aspects of our lives. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004).

⁷ Issued by *mufti* (Islamic legal authorities) or other recognised and qualified ulema, the term *fatwa* refers to legal opinion or advisory opinion which provides an answer for specific questions or general problems in the society. In Indonesia, the Indonesian Ulema Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, or MUI) is one of the primary organisations which issue *fatwa* to make a decision on certain issues and to be used as a guideline in the practice of worship of Muslim communities in Indonesia. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004).

⁸ *Shalat* is the second pillar of Islam that is believed to be an obligation for all Muslims to carry out. There are five daily prayers that Muslims must observe. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004).

⁹ For Muslims, fasting, or *puasa* in Indonesian, is a voluntary act of abstaining from food and drink from sunrise to sunset. See Ramadan. In Islam, fasting is mandatory in the whole month of Ramadan, which ends with Eid al-Fitr celebration. Fasting is also performed by Muslims on several other religious events. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004).

¹⁰ *Zakat* refers to obligatory Islamic alms or tithe giving. As one of the five pillars of Islam, *zakat* refers to the portion of wealth of a Muslim or a Muslim-owned business entity that must be expended and given to those entitled to receive it in accordance with Islamic law. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004).

pilgrimage,"¹¹ and so on. Such differences usually arise over time, places, and the contexts faced by Muslims.

Islamic tradition categorises its teachings into several types: the definite (*qath'i*), the fixed (*tsawabit*), and the flexible (*mutaghayyirat*), namely those which undergo changes depending on the changing time and era. Religions other than Islam too certainly have diverse tafsir and traditions. Adherents to any religion ought to understand the diversity of interpretations, so that they can choose one of the available tafsir if the other options are impossible to be practised. Extreme behaviours usually emerge when an adherent does not know, let alone understand, alternative interpretations that they may practise. In this regard, their own tafsir is deemed as the sole interpretation that must be practised; hence, it is easy to blame different tafsir, or even denounce them as blasphemous. In such a circumstance, religious moderation is required to offer a new perspective regarding practising religion.

I believe that Indonesian diversity is God's gift and will. Had God wanted it, it would not have been difficult for him to make His servants homogenous. He has created a variety of human beings instead, males and females, divided into different nation-states and ethnicities so that they can know each other and, thus, lead a dynamic existence. Attempts to homogenise

¹¹ Haji in Indonesian. Hajj pilgrimage is one of the five pillars of Islam. It is believed by Muslims that every adult Muslim whose health and finances permit it is obliged to make the pilgrimage to the city of Mecca at least once in their life. A male Muslim who completes the pilgrimage is called a Hajj or Hajji, while a female Muslim who completes the pilgrimage is called a Hajja. Indonesia is the country which sends the largest number of pilgrims. In 2023, the number of Indonesian pilgrims stood at 229,000 people. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004).

He perceives his own
interpretation as a singular
and the only truth; hence, it
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other interpretations. In such a
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perspective in practising
religion.

diversity are tantamount to denying His will and gift.

In principle, the Indonesian state recognises the importance of the diversity as a means to achieve the nation's collective objective stated in the Constitution. Efforts to optimise the diversity comprise a series of procedures to discover the best practice to achieve maximum and ideal results, by utilising our resources as well as possible. This optimising process does require efforts to unify actions through consolidating our diverse perspectives. These efforts must not be carried out in an extreme manner—by pitting the strongest against the weakest— but rather by finding our shared objectives amidst the differences.

The Indonesian Youth Congress, a group of youth from various backgrounds, declared the Youth Pledge on 28 October 1928—a very elegant appeal consisting of three points. The first point acknowledges Indonesia as the motherland. The second point acknowledges the nation of Indonesia as the nation-state. These two points assert that each and every member of the Indonesian nation-state, regardless their different backgrounds, must bind themselves to the nation's unity. The third point upholds the Indonesian language as a uniting language. This means the Indonesian language should be employed as a communication tool to facilitate the process of moderation in our diverse country where different languages exist across regions.

Indonesia's diversity and religiosity served as the main foundation used by our nation's founding fathers to establish the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.

They did not impose enforced unification through their power, but rather they combined differences and converted them into strength. *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*¹² was adopted as our national motto, that is to reflect the Identity of the Indonesian nation which takes shape through a socio-cultural process that is grounded on diversity. The founding fathers then adopted Pancasila as the state ideology to emphasise the creation of social unity and harmony between interfaith communities.

By bringing together religious practice and statehood, Indonesia has successfully managed its diverse cultural and religious practices. To date, Indonesia remains strong and even serves as an example for other countries in managing diversity. Conflicts and social tensions are inevitable, but they can always be addressed. Not all of them have been completely resolved, yet at least they are quickly de-escalated thanks to public awareness regarding the importance of peaceful co-existence in a large nation-state bequeathed with diversity.

The Indonesian Constitution guarantees the right of each member of the nation-state to embrace and practise their respective religious beliefs. Everyone also has the right to uphold their beliefs and express their thoughts in accordance with their own conscience. Despite these freedoms, everyone must submit to certain restrictions in order to recognise and respect the rights and freedom

¹² The national motto of the Indonesian nation inscribed on the Indonesian state symbol, Garuda Pancasila. This phrase comes from Old Javanese with a meaning of 'unity despite differences'. This motto is employed to illustrate the unity and integrity of the nation which comprises various cultures, customs, languages, races, tribes, religions, and beliefs. This motto is also intended to cultivate a sense of nationalism and appreciation toward existing differences.

of others, as well as to ensure fairness based on moral, religious, and security considerations as well as to achieve public order in a democratic society.

Religious affairs are indeed regulated by the Constitution as a pre-emptive measure against religion-related risks inherent in diverse societies. This is grounded upon an awareness that coexistence in diverse and religious communities is vulnerable to religious conflicts, which are often tinged with violence as well. Conflicts emerge because religions possess an underlying characteristic that is subjective; hence, they create an emotional bond among their adherents.

An individual or a group that has a high religious spirit ought to be complemented with sound knowledge and common sense. Otherwise, an extreme condition would occur: emotions would run high, in which violence, both verbal and physical, would erupt as differences over interpretations across groups arise. A self-righteous attitude which easily denounces other perspectives is a form of extremism that can trigger hostility within a religious community or between different religious communities. In reverse, another form of extremism is neglecting religions' purity and sacrificing one's adopted religious teachings under the name of religious tolerance toward other religions.

In the middle of these two extreme ends is moderate religious practice, which refers to respecting other religious interpretations and avoiding harming others while upholding common sense and harmony amid diversity. Those who adopt this middle path tend to be

at peace both physically and mentally. They will also be able to find the essential truth at the core of their religion, rather than the 'truth' constructed by fellow human beings whose interpretations and opinions differ.

The spirit of religious moderation is to find a meeting point between these two extreme points in religious practice. Religious moderation comes as a solution for problems that emerge from differences in a multi-faith society. Without a solution, conflicts that are born from different religious interpretations and overlapping claims over truth would spread to other aspects of life. It is difficult to measure the potential extent of religious conflicts' destructiveness, as difficult as probing the innermost emotions of religious believers.

Religious moderation does not aim to reduce the essence of religions or to separate adherents from their religion. In contrast, religious moderation aims to increase the quality of one's religious practice through the internalisation of core religious teachings that are well complemented with respect for others so that religions can remain as the spiritual, moral, and ethical foundations in both our private and public lives. Respecting the diversity of religious practices within the context of Indonesia aims to strengthen moderate religious coexistence that is in line with the national commitment. Religious moderation will push religious adherents into a closer relationship with their God and fellow human beings.

Those who adopt moderate religious practices are obliged to master extensive religious knowledge with a

deep understanding of religious interpretations, while maintaining their common sense in doing so. Firstly, this requires sufficient understanding regarding religious moderation. Having technical knowledge does not guarantee that an individual automatically assumes a moderate perspective. To be a moderate, sometimes it is not enough to only possess minimum religious knowledge. This usually results in a disaster. Benefits from religious practice and citizenship can only be reaped once an alignment between one's knowledge and practice is achieved. As for those who have yet to gain in-depth knowledge and practice self-control, they may follow for the meantime the example of moderate religious figures and leaders.

Religion-Culture Relations¹³

Since ancient times, the existence of the Indonesian nation has survived on two things: culture and religion. The primary, secondary, and tertiary needs of the people are met through cultural and religious products. In this context, culture and religion are just like coffee and sugar that complement each other well in a cup of *tubruk* coffee.¹⁴ Without sugar, coffee tastes too 'serious', requiring an acquired taste to really enjoy it. While taking sugar by itself is much too cloying.

Religion often serves as a parameter in measuring

¹³ I presented this topic in a cultural speech titled 'Religious Maturity and Humanitarian Problems in the Present Time' at the Jakarta Arts Council (DKJ), 10 November 2016.

¹⁴ Indonesian-style coffee where hot water is poured directly over coffee grounds without any filtration.

the level of life's success and enjoyment. Some people becomes respected after they use their wealth for religious reasons, such as making a pilgrimage or building places of worship. On the other hand, some people can feel really grateful despite one's poverty. Many resort to prayers when they encounter problems. Some even use the name of God to find prospective romantic partners, such as through *wirid*¹⁵ and *ajian pengasih*.¹⁶ Some others resort to dark magic for material gains.

These constitute cultural proof that religious practices are tightly embedded in our everyday lives in Indonesia. With religion being so strongly intertwined with people's lives, the primary foundation of this country is even shaped by religious consideration. In the preamble of the 1945 Constitution, it is stated that, 'By the blessings of Almighty God...'. In a similar vein, the first point of Pancasila states 'Belief in God Almighty'. There are at least eight provisions which explicitly reassert that divine or religious values are the core of the constitution. Such provisions include a number of articles in the 1945 Constitution. There are also several regulations over religious affairs, starting from the Law on Marriage, the Law on Hajj and Umrah¹⁷ Pilgrimage, the Law on Zakat¹⁸ Management, to the

¹⁵ Praises and prayers to God that are recited after prayers.

¹⁶ Rituals to force a sense of attraction in a specifically targeted individual.

¹⁷ Often touted as minor pilgrimage, umrah in Islamic jurisprudence means carrying out a series of worship outside the Hajj pilgrimage period. This minor pilgrimage is carried out in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. See Richard C. Martin, *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, (Farmington Hills: Gale, 2016).

¹⁸ See note 11.

Law on Halal¹⁹ Product Certification. Several other regulations contain religious aspects as well, such as Law No. 10/2016 on Regional Elections Article 69 which regulates political campaigns using religious narratives.

The incorporation of religious aspects into this country's laws and regulations reflect the religious characteristics of our society. Other than binding themselves into a social system with religious framework, the Indonesian people ardently incorporate cultural aspects into religious celebrations as well. The annual *mudik*²⁰ season, for instance, is not merely a cultural phenomenon, but also part of religious practice. The Mudik ritual involves many institutions as the celebration is widely shared by all Indonesians.

Hence, Indonesia rejects the assumption that cultural and religious affairs cannot work in tandem. For this nation, religion and culture are two 'best friends' that complement each other. In the absence of one of these two components, Indonesia's harmony would meet its demise.

¹⁹ Everything (activities or material objects) that are permissible to be conducted/ consumed according to the Islamic law. This term is often used to indicate foods and beverages which, considering their type and how they are obtained, are permitted to be consumed according to the Islamic law. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004)

²⁰ An Indonesian tradition in which nomads and migrant workers return to their hometown during the celebration of major religious festivities, particularly Eid al Fitr. The tradition of mudik first emerged in the 1970s. The impact of the then-widespread migration of people from rural areas to urban areas fostered a sense of longing among people for their hometowns. The mudik phenomenon then developed into a national annual tradition which is undertaken not only by Muslims. (The Ministry of Religious Affairs, '*Memaknai Mudik Lebaran dan Merayakan Perbedaan*' [Interpreting Eid Exodus and Celebrating Differences], <https://kemenag.go.id/kolom/memaknai-mudik-lebaran-dan-merayakan-perbedaan-SInCh>)

Cultural complexity, which encompasses social, political, and economic factors, strongly impacts the way people express their belief. This is why diversity may take different forms since it is place-specific and based on regional context. In Indonesia, there are at least four methods of religious practice:

First, religion is practised traditionally, namely it is affected by one's tradition. In this regard, adherents follow the traditions and rituals that they inherited from previous generations.

Second, religion is practised formally, in a way that religious practice is in accordance with the 'formal procedures' as practised by religious leaders or prominent leaders. This reflects the popular saying that 'The king's religion is the people's religion'.

Third, religion is practised rationally, in which religious practice prioritises reason. In this regard, religion is understood, internalised, and practised if it can be analysed through reason, measured quantitatively, or proven empirically.

Fourth, religion is practised contextually, wherein religious practice is grounded upon both one's heart and mind. While still employing reason, this method of religious practice requires the continuity of religious teachings from authoritative sources.

All these methods were able to develop side-by-side since, essentially, our society is open-minded. Religious teachings are easily accepted as they can strengthen solidarity, control morals, filter out impurities, and

instigate changes. Good norms have a strong driving force when they are enshrined in holy scriptures. In the Javanese culture, for instance, the *Molimo*²¹ teaching prohibits five things: gambling, drinking, theft, drug use, and adultery. This teaching is in line with recommendation in holy scriptures.

In a simple analogy, the relationship between religion and culture is like a bottle and its lid. At times when religion needs an additional tool, culture will provide a solution. The obligation for Muslims to cover their *aurat*,²² for instance, requires cultural products in the forms of clothes. Further, cultural products that are used as religious attributes often have the best quality. An example is the temples spread across the country where Hindus and Buddhists meditate. The beauty of Prambanan and Borobudur temples demonstrate this point.

The merging of culture and religion in Indonesia has left physical traces, such as temples, which illustrate a high level of civilisation. Interestingly, since the arrival of Islam, such physical traces still remain, upon which a form of acculturation emerges in new architectures such as the Kudus Mosque, which combines Hindu-Buddhist-Islamic teachings with Javanese-Indian-Arabic cultures. Intangible traces such as death memorials remain largely preserved, while their substance is altered to

²¹ Teachings that were spread by Sunan Ampel. *Molimo* is an abbreviation of *Moh Limo*, which means 'No to five things'. These five things are related to actions prohibited by religions that were widely adhered to at the time of Sunan Ampel.

²² In Islamic law, *aurat* refers to parts of the body that cannot be shown or seen by those other than immediate family members. *Aurat* also refers to body parts that must be covered during *shalat*. In this regard, males and females have different *aurat*.

be more aligned with religious teachings. This includes the recitation of holy verses in death memorials, also known as *Tahlilan*.²³

This means our society is well familiar with interfaith and intercultural coexistence. It is not strange if in some regions mosques and churches are built side-by-side, each having its own architectural characteristics. Such a phenomenon shows that religion does not necessarily polarise the people. It also reasserts that harmony is the essence of our nation. Harmony complements cultural practices such as in the spirit of *gotong royong*,²⁴ *tepa selira*,²⁵ and good deeds. Upon closer examination, religious conflicts in Indonesia are mostly propelled not by contradicting religious teachings, but rather by external factors, starting from conflicts of political and economic interests to personal affairs such as romantic relationships.

In pluralistic societies, religious views are sometimes pitted against cultural practices that are part of local traditions. In spite of this, the relations between religion and culture remain strong as they indeed need each

²³ A tradition carried out by a group of Muslims in Indonesia in which a series of Quranic verses and *dhikir* (praises to Allah) are recited, while the goodness comes from this recitation is awarded to the spirits of certain individuals mentioned by the reciters or the organiser of the tahlilan event. Generally, tahlilan is performed on certain days, such as on seven consecutive days after the death of a Muslim and the 40th, 100th, 1000th day after their death. Tahlilan is widely believed to embody an acculturation of local traditions in Indonesia into religious teachings.

²⁴ The word *gotong* means 'shouldering', while *royong* means 'together'. *Gotong royong*, thus, can be interpreted as the working together (mutual assistance and cooperation) of the members of a community.

²⁵ Or *tenggang rasa* in Indonesian. The quality of being able to empathise (protect) the feelings (thoughts) of others so as to lighten other people's burdens instead of offending their feelings.

Hence, Indonesia rejects the assumption that cultural and religious affairs cannot work in tandem. For this nation, religion and culture are two ‘best friends’ that complement each other. In the absence of one of these two components, Indonesia’s harmony would meet its demise.



other. Religion needs a platform where its teachings can be practised continuously across generations. Culture too needs religious values as its animating spirit. Such cultural spirituality holds a high level of importance for Indonesia that is widely known as religious. Harmonising religious and cultural relations plays a crucial role in overcoming tensions that may ruin social harmony. The harmonising of religious and cultural relations is an integral part in religious moderation.

In fact, culture is a platform where religious teachings materialise. Religious teachings would not take root as well as be realised and implemented without culture. Culture provides a platform for the articulation of people's understanding and interpretations of religious teachings. This is why one of the indicators and parameters in measuring religious moderation is the level of accommodation of local culture. We must appreciate and respect local cultural diversity, as long as it does not deny or deviate from the core or universal religious teachings.

The way religion is understood and practised is largely shaped by local culture. Diversity, and its corresponding impacts on the shaping of the surrounding ecosystem and environment, results in numerous cultural expressions and various religious interpretations and practices. In such a situation, the emergence of extreme or excessive religious interpretations is inevitable. Such extremity denies the core of religious teachings which hold universal

values. In the context of Indonesia where the population is pluralistic and religious, this would destroy social ties, undermine national commitment, and threaten the existence of the nation.

The biggest threat to the existence of traditions and culture is excessive conservatism (purification) of religious teachings. As long as such purification efforts do not lead to the emergence of exclusivism (in which the public is divided and segregated); intolerant and disrespectful practices against differences; and conflicts between members of the society (confrontation), conservatism may bear positive results.

It is a challenge for us to understand and appreciate religious teachings well, to identify which teachings bear the core or universal values, and which ones are specific and particular. Further, we also ought to understand and appreciate cultural values accordingly by identifying which values come from philosophical-substantive teachings from our ancestors and which ones that only represent symbolic cultural expressions in a religious community. Amidst the diversity that has become our nature, differences are often related to particular or derivative religious teachings, as is also the case with cultural symbolic expressions.

In preserving harmony in religious and cultural relations, the role of religion as a guide to spirituality and morals, rather than merely as purely ritual and formal, must be protected. On the other hand, establishing a cultural movement to strengthen collective common sense needs to be further intensified by developing

communication strategies that can translate the essence of our diverse traditions.

Holding sustained dialogues between religious and cultural figures is essential. Finding mutual understanding will prevent the practice of majoritarianism, which has the potential to eradicate the freedom of religious and cultural expression. Law enforcement officials ought to have a deep understanding and serve as good mediators in protecting and nurturing cultural practices that promote spirituality and morality.

Religion-State Relations

Religious moderation becomes increasingly meaningful and beneficial when positioned within the context of religion-state relations. In Indonesia, it is impossible to separate religion from citizenship. Religion is part of the air that Indonesian people breathe. From their birth to their death, Indonesians always encounter religious affairs. Almost every aspect of livelihood in this country is influenced by religious values, including those pertaining to nationhood and statehood.

The highly religious characteristic of the Indonesian nation has significantly shaped the relationship between religion and the state. In this regard, Indonesia is not a country that is founded upon one specific religion; it is not an Islamic country. Indonesia is not a secular country which separates religion from the state either. This is why the fourth Indonesian president, KH Abdurrahman Wahid, also known as Gus Dur, often

made an anecdote that Indonesia is a 'non country', by which he meant that Indonesia is non-Islamic and non-secular as well. If we want to look for an appropriate description, Indonesia may be described as a country with a belief in God Almighty and whose population is highly religious.

Compared to other countries, the quite ambivalent religion-state relations in Indonesia constitutes a unique characteristic in itself. There is no other country that has a similar religion-state relations as Indonesia. Generally, other countries either adopt an official religion or a secular stance. They either incorporate one particular religion into the state or separate religion completely from the state. In the second type of religion-state relations, the government does not employ religious teachings at all as the foundation of their policies, while religious beliefs become the private affairs of their citizens.

A number of Middle Eastern countries choose Islam as their state ideology. In Southeast Asia, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam are two examples of countries adopting Islam as state ideology. There is also the Vatican City which adopts Catholicism as its state foundation. European countries, whose populations are mostly Christians, prefer to separate religion from the state, although in practice the state cannot completely erase the influence of the Church.

Within the Indonesian state, we will encounter numerous precedents, regulations, policies, and symbols related to religion, all of which normally characterise

countries which adopt a state religion. Religious activities are observed and facilitated, particularly those of Islam which is the religion of the majority of the population. At the same time, we also find several instances which indicate secular aspects in Indonesia. In practice, religion is formally separated from state administration. These two aspects are accommodated by the constitution and Indonesia's state administration.

Indeed, religious teachings cannot be separated from all facets of the livelihood of the Indonesian nation. The separation of religion was not part of the formulation by the founding fathers of the first point of Pancasila: 'Belief in God Almighty'. But, such separation had existed for many centuries before the formation of Indonesia as a nation-state.

Since its conception, Indonesia has indeed assumed a religious character, prompting the founding fathers at the time of independence to conceptualise and place the Indonesian nation-state in the middle path between a religious state and secularism. Within the context of Indonesia, with a population that is religious and diverse in nature, the decision to conceptualise the nation-state in such a way, which subsequently became a national consensus, reflects a moderate choice. This prevents one particular religion from becoming the foundation of the nation-state without completely removing the role and function of religion in the constitution.

According to various literatures, it is argued that even prior to the conception of the Indonesian nation-state, the Indonesian communities had shared a long,

collective memory as being part of a communal society which had spiritual symbols and practices that were relevant at that time. These symbols and practices underwent transformations along with the arrival of religions from various parts of the world, which were then institutionalised in sultanates and kingdoms.

Religious and spiritual affairs have long developed across different eras: kingdoms/sultanates, colonial era, pre-independence, independence, post-independence, and contemporary time. In this long journey, religion and spirituality have undergone processes of symbolisation, expression, dynamic interactions, alterations, contestations, tensions, and even wars. These different processes have inevitably involved and pitted religious communities against state authorities, even though the confrontations usually ended in a compromise which mutually strengthened the involved parties.

All of these demonstrate that spirituality and religion have long been ingrained in and have become an inseparable part of Indonesia. Anyone who holds governmental authority cannot disregard, let alone remove, religion from political and public policies. Religious values must always be present in government and state administration.

The Presence of Religion in State Administration

In modern Indonesia, religion shows its presence in the 1945 Constitution and a number of derivative regulations which stipulate religious values and administer religious affairs. This illustrates the particularity of Indonesia as a nation-state with a highly religious population.

According to some perspectives, the birth of state policies pertaining to religious affairs is often perceived as a profane interference. A portion of the educated and activists, for instance, perceive that policies pertaining to religious affairs contradict private rights and religious freedom.

Such a perspective may contradict with Indonesia's religion-state relations. Many regulations were demanded by religious communities themselves, and these cannot be seen as a form of interference. Rather, it demonstrates how the state facilitates the public in creating social harmony and preventing religious conflicts. On one hand, a number of regulations on religious affairs may be understood as a mechanism in which the state administers the diversity of religious communities. On the other hand, these regulations may also be interpreted as a form of acknowledgment and service to religious communities by the state.

In cases such as the case of the Jemaat Ahmadiyah community,²⁶ conflict resolution efforts are based on

²⁶ A religious sect founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in India in 1889 as a revival movement in Islam. The adherents of Ahmadiyah see Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as a

Since its conception, Indonesia has indeed assumed a religious character, prompting the founding fathers at the time of independence to conceptualise and place the Indonesian nation-state in the middle path between a religious state and secularism.

a number of relevant regulations. If this still proves inadequate, new regulations shall be passed. Other than Law No. 1/PNPS/1965 on the Prevention of Religious Misuse and/or Blasphemy (PNPS Law),²⁷ there is also Joint Ministerial Regulation No. 9/2006 and No. 8/2006 issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Home Ministry. This is further complemented by the Joint Decree (SKB) on Ahmadiyyah issued in 2008.

All of these regulations were passed to promote interfaith harmony among Indonesian communities. The Constitutional Court, upon its refusal to re-evaluate the legitimacy of the PNPS Law, implies that the freedom granted in human rights is not absolute in its implementation. Rather, individual freedom is regulated by the laws to ensure common interests. This consideration is in line with Alfred Schutz's theory on religion which emphasises the administration of religious efforts as part of state policies under state authority. Such administration does not mean that the state has the capacity to interfere in religious freedom. Rather, this constitutes an anticipatory measure against

prophet sent after Muhammad SAW. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad also perceived himself as the mahdi (the final leader who appears at the end of time) appointed by God to reform and revamp Islam. This often becomes a point of controversy surrounding the existence of Ahmadiyyah, including in Indonesia. The congregations of Ahmadi Muslims are spread across more than 200 countries, numbering at tens of millions. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004).

²⁷ President Sukarno's Decree No. 1/PNPS/1965 on the Prevention of the Misuse/ Insulting of a Religion established the crime of 'insulting a religion.' It is frequently referred to as the 'Blasphemy Law' or 'UU Penodaan Agama' in Indonesian. This law was passed at the height of fears of Communism in Indonesia (which was home to the largest Communist party aside from China and Russia at that time) just prior to the alleged attempted Communist coup in 1965. See Crouch, Melissa A. (2012) 'Law and Religion in Indonesia: The Constitutional Court and the Blasphemy Law,' *Asian Journal of Comparative Law*: Vol. 7: Iss. 1.

the possibility of blasphemy, which would harm religious freedom as conceptualised in Pancasila.²⁸

Even the most well-formulated regulations would always have a potential gap for contention, often within the context of differing interpretations of the substance of the regulation. The PNPS Law is often deemed as no longer relevant and vulnerable to be misused in curbing religious freedom. The law has also often been implemented excessively, triggering religious conflicts such as the Ahmadiyyah case instead.

Complicating things further is the discrepancy between practices and expectations. The ultimate objective of regulations is to provide protection for the minorities, yet in practice such an objective has not always been achieved due to the dominance of the majority groups, which results in injustice, or even discrimination against the minorities. In several cases, a group of individuals has misused regulations to arbitrarily criminalise certain individuals or groups. In reverse, there are also minority groups which, under the banner of freedom of expression, carry out inconsiderate actions in public and, thus, aggravate the majority groups.

In responding to such problems, upon being appointed as the Minister of Religious Affairs in 2016, I suggested and initiated the Religious Community Protection Bill (RUU PUB). The bill was expected

²⁸ Christianto, Hwian. April 2013. 'Arti Penting UU No. 1/PNPS/ 1965 bagi Kebebasan Beragama: Kajian Putusan Mahkamah Konstitusi Nomor 140/PUU-VII/2009' [The Importance of The Law No. 1/PNPS/1965 for Religious Freedom: Assessing the Constitutional Court's Decree No. 140/PUU-VII/2009]. *Jurnal Yudisial*, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 1–16.

to provide a solution for challenges pertaining to the bullying of religious minorities. The underlying foundation of the bill was that the state ought to protect the freedom of each member of the nation-state to embrace and practise any religion. The state is also obliged to ensure interfaith harmony between religious communities that is based on the values of pluralism, equality, humanity, and fairness for all members of the nation.

The protection of religious communities itself is mandated in the constitution. The 1945 Constitution's Article 29 Paragraph 2 stipulates that the state shall guarantee the freedom of the people to adhere to and practise their respective religious belief. The state, in this context the government, is responsible and obliged to administer, guide, and supervise the implementation of religious practices in order to ensure the freedom of each member of its population as mandated by the constitution.

Among the themes discussed during the drafting of the RUU PUB was the definition of religion. There is a need for the state to conceptualise and define religion as the constitution commands the state to protect religious freedom. Within the context of Indonesia, the state does not hold any authority to pick and adopt one particular religion as the state religion. The state still needs a shared consensus in defining religion for the definition serves as the foundation for the state in carrying out its responsibility for religious freedom protection.

Amidst the variety of religions and beliefs adopted in Indonesia, a number of potential definitions, formulated using theological and sociological approaches, were suggested. A gap caused by differences then emerged and gradually widened. A refined definition which combines theological and sociological perspectives was, thus, presented, with the final formulation as: 'Religion refers to an institution which consists of a system of beliefs and worship and originates from holy scriptures or other sources of teachings, both written and unwritten, that are believed by its adherents to come from God Almighty.' Such a formulation still failed to reach a consensus. To date, the RUU PUB has yet to be passed since certain points in the bill have not been approved by all stakeholders.

If we look at studies on the religion-state relations in contemporary Indonesia, the conceptualisation of the meaning and interpretation of religion is indeed widely discussed. Social science scholars offer a narrow definition of religion as merely the belief and worshipping of God. Beyond this definition, religion is understood as a communal identity, a manifestation of traditions, a source of legitimation, or even a source of commodification.

While an official definition of religion has yet to be stipulated in the constitution, the state must not stand idly by while witnessing religious frictions and conflicts. The state must always be present in every problem pertaining to the religious conduct of its people.

The question is: what is the ideal relationship between

the state and religion? How should the religion-state relations take shape so that the state can participate in administering religious affairs within certain limitations and without curtailing religious freedom? How can religious communities practise their respective religious beliefs without violating the constitution and state regulations?

There has actually been the presence of religion in state administration; religion is incorporated into state ideology and enshrined in laws and derivative regulations. While Indonesia does not have an official state religion, the country still upholds religious values as an inseparable part of its soul and physical embodiment. There is no reason for religious communities to insist on making the religion they adhere to the basis of state ideology.

A good understanding of the relationship between religion and the state is requisite for every citizen of Indonesia. This is to ensure that our nation can position religion in civic affairs in a proportionate, apt, and moderate manner. On the other hand, state officials must also understand and protect the rights of religious communities to practise their respective beliefs.

History shows that negotiations over differing interests have always been part of religion-state relations in Indonesia from our independence to the Reform Era. Nearing independence, debates over the foundation of the Indonesian nation-state erupted between the founding fathers throughout the sessions held by the Investigating Committee for the Preparation of the

Independence (BPUPK). A portion of the committee proposed civic considerations as the foundation of the nation-state, while others urged for the establishment of an Islamic nation-state. As discussed in various literatures, debates between ‘the nationalists’ and ‘the religious’ re-emerged within the Constitutional Assembly.

Thankfully, the debates resulted in an agreement on the adoption of Pancasila as the state ideology. Pancasila consists of five principles: belief in one God, humanitarianism, national unity, representative democracy, and social justice. Pancasila is perceived as a meeting point moderating two poles of aspirations in choosing the basis of the nation-state: while not opting for a secular aspiration which separates religion from the state, Islam is not adopted as a basis for an Islamic state either.

Since its adoption, Pancasila has proven to be widely accepted by all parties, including Islamic groups which had initially insisted on the establishment of Indonesia as an Islamic state. The first point of Pancasila, Belief in one God, is accepted by Islamic groups without having to add the phrase: ‘with the obligation to carry out Islamic law for its adherents’. Most importantly, all of the debating parties reached a consensus that Indonesia is not founded upon one particular religion, while at the same time not separating religion from the state.

The founding fathers, some of whom were religious leaders, could also reach an agreement on the formulation of Pancasila since, in principle, the

five points of Pancasila do not contradict religious values. In fact, the five points of Pancasila encompass universal religious values, not only Islam's. Eventually, opposing groups which insisted on the incorporation of religious values into the state foundation could not present adequate arguments to reject Pancasila.

Muslims believe that the core of belief in God is to become *khalifatullah fil ardl*,²⁹ to become human beings that could shoulder and carry out humanist missions as stipulated in the second point of Pancasila. When religious communities successfully practise religious values to which they adhere, particularly in terms of treating fellow human beings in a just and civilised manner—without any discriminations against particular race, ethnicity, class, or religious belief—then the third point of Pancasila, the unity of Indonesia, can be achieved. Each group in our diverse society can undoubtedly work toward an agreement through deliberation as encapsulated in the fourth point of Pancasila, so that one's belief in God can manifest in collective efforts to promote social justice for all Indonesians, as envisioned in Pancasila's fifth point.

This kind of logic and explanation is perhaps one of the reasons why Muslims could compromise in accepting Pancasila as the state ideology. In spite of this, Indonesia's religion-state relations will remain dynamic and fluctuating—undergoing a period of relative peace that is chequered every once in a while with tensions. The dynamics of Indonesia's religion-state relations will

²⁹ This term is derived from a Quranic verse which states that God created humans to serve as leaders who uphold justice and prosperity on earth.

How should the religion-state relations take shape so that the state can participate in administering religious affairs within certain limitations and without curtailing religious freedom? How can religious communities practice their respective religious belief without violating the constitution and state regulations?

largely involve Islamic groups considering the majority of the populations are Muslims.

The aspiration for Indonesia to become an Islamic country could be understood as part of the dynamics. Likewise, attempts to transform Indonesia into a secular country which evade religious affairs, particularly Islam. Prior to the Reform Era, these two opposing forces seemed to disappear; there were hardly any discussions on the relationship between religion and the state. Upon democratic reform, such aspirations started to emerge and even take extreme forms due to the spread of transnational phenomena and liberalism. If left unchecked, Indonesian will be polarised.

Religious moderation comes to mediate these two opposing aspirations so that destructive impacts on the nation's harmony can be avoided. This is by no means a novel thought. Conceptually, the implementation of religious moderation has long been pursued by the founding fathers, inspired by the long traditions of this country.

Religion and the Constitution

The Indonesian nation should be grateful that the independence fighters and founding fathers had considered religion as one of the sources of values to be incorporated in the state constitution. With regard to my duty as a member of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) work unit tasked with amending the 1945 Constitution during the Reform Era, I had

the opportunity to conduct a comparative study of constitutions adopted in several countries. The finding of this study is that Indonesia's constitution is very particular.

The impacts of religion on our constitution have long been felt. The third paragraph of the preamble of the 1945 Constitution states: By the blessings of Almighty God and motivated by the noble desire to live a free national life, the people of Indonesia hereby declare their independence.

The independence fighters and founding fathers made enormous sacrifices to achieve independence. In doing so, they continued to prioritise the aspect of spirituality, that all efforts to gain independence would not mean anything without God's blessings and will. Then, when state leaders were conceptualising the constitution, spirituality once again had a significant influence.

Religious elements are well reflected in a number of articles within the 1945 Constitution. Article 9 concerning the swearing of the head of the state, for instance, stipulates that the president and vice-president ought to swear an oath in accordance with their respective religion before the MPR prior to taking office. The oath starts with the phrase, 'I swear before God that...' Similar phrases which use the name of God are also used for the appointment of all state officials. This implies that within the Indonesian state, officials must not only take accountability for their actions in their mortal life, but also in the afterlife before God Almighty.

In its judicial system, Indonesia also has particular characteristics. Generally, the constitutions of other countries only assume two types of judiciaries: military court and civilian court. The case is very different in Indonesia. Article 24 of the 1945 Constitution stipulates four different judicial bodies: general judiciary, religious judiciary, military judiciary, and state administrative judiciary. This proves that religious values occupy an important position and enjoy a large portion of roles in solving disputes and legal cases.

Further, several regulations concerning education, too, have religious nuances. Article 31 Paragraph 3 of the 1945 Constitution states that the objective of the national education system is to develop pupils' faith and piety as well as to foster good morals as part of citizenship education. It is also asserted in Article 31 Paragraph 5 that advances in science and technology must heed religious values.

In regard to human rights, our constitution stipulates that the exercise of one's rights and freedoms could be limited. Such restrictions ought to be determined by the laws and taking security, public order, morality, and religious considerations into account. Indonesia adds religion as the fourth consideration in addition to the three other aspects that are based on the universal declaration of human rights. This suggests that within sociological and legal contexts, Indonesia adopts a constitution that is religious in nature. Each member of the nation-state must understand that religious values may serve as a consideration in restraining the exercise

of individuals' rights and freedom.

The strong influence of religion upon our constitution proves to be the best option for Indonesia, considering the characteristics of its population. Even so, not everyone can accept this explanation objectively. There will always be questions tinged with dissatisfaction.

Some may ask, why does the state not just implement religious laws altogether based on the country's major religion? Such questions usually arise from groups that still insist on the complete implementation of Sharia or Islamic laws.

Others may ask, has not the state intervened too much in private affairs? This question is usually raised by groups with a secular tendency in interpreting democracy and human rights. Answers to these two types of questions could be found once we contemplate the state philosophy behind the administration of religious affairs.

I believe there are at least three levels of religious teachings as adhered to and practised by religious communities in our diverse society. In each level, the state assumes a different role. The three different levels are as follows:

The first level refers to religious rules³⁰ upon which are universally agreed by mankind. Despite the diversity of religious beliefs, religious teachings and values hold a universal message so that their implementation is

³⁰ *Syariat agama* in Indonesia. Sharia refers to rules in Islamic teachings pertaining to faith and various laws of good deeds. Look Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004)

not only relevant strictly to their adherents, but rather to the whole of humanity. Examples include religious teachings which champion the protection of human dignity, equality, justice, human rights fulfilment, and common welfare, among others. There are no differences or disputes between religious communities over this objective as all religious beliefs hold similar values concerning this. All religious communities, thus, will not reject the state's presence. Perhaps they even demand for the state's direct participation.

In the implementation of universal religious values, the state's presence is required to protect religious communities and to ensure that the universal religious values are not distorted by any parties. In each religion, there ought to be a multitude of verses in its holy scriptures commanding these universal values.

The second level refers to religious teachings that are only practised by particular religious communities. Let us say that these teachings are only implemented by Muslims, while other religions may not share the same viewpoint and implement similar teachings. An example is Islamic teachings on *zakat*³¹ and the prohibition against gambling and alcohol consumption. All Muslims, despite their various backgrounds in terms of branches and *mahzab*³² of Islamic teachings, must be against gambling, yet non-Muslims may not adopt a similar sentiment regarding gambling as their religious beliefs do not necessarily administer this matter.

³¹ See note 11.

³² See note 6.

At this level of religious teachings, the state may participate in the administration of religious affairs through the drafting of pertinent regulations in governmental institutions or agencies (both legislative and executive) which hold authorities relevant to the subject matter. Most importantly, the drafting process of the regulations must genuinely consider the aspirations of all stakeholders, and their discussions and passing must be grounded upon a collective deliberation in accordance with the existing democratic mechanism. At this level, regulations concerning religious affairs must not stipulate religious practices or worship. Rather, regulations must only be limited to organisational or practical matters which may impact public interests and social order in general.

The third level refers to religious teachings concerning particular values, namely values that are only adhered to by certain individuals within a religious community, while the larger portion of the religious community (and also other religious communities) may not necessarily follow or practise those values. In Islam, for example, there are numerous religious teachings or sharia that are solely adopted by a particular branch of the religion. Fikih³³ governs various subject matters such as the use of hijab, congregational shalat,³⁴ the determination of the start of Ramadan³⁵ and Shawwal

³³ See note 8.

³⁴ See note 9.

³⁵ The lunar month in which Muslims observe fasting and abstain from foods, beverages, and other things that break the fast from sunrise to sunset. This month falls in the ninth month of the Muslim calendar and ends with Eid al Fitr. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004)

observation, the number of rakats³⁶ in Taraweeh prayer, *tahlilan*,³⁷ etc. Provisions regarding these subject matters contain khilafiyah³⁸ among experts of fikih, both within the same and between different mahzab³⁹. Non-Muslims, too, I believe, have particular teachings that are subjected to internal debates.

At the third level of religious teachings, the state must not interfere. The state must not exceed its legal authority by obliging or prohibiting particular branches of religious teachings, especially if the prohibition is further equipped with punishments. At this level, it would be best for the state to allow freedom for religious adherents to adopt religious teachings according to their respective beliefs.

The Indonesian Constitution strongly upholds religious teachings, but this does not mean that government institutions can easily interfere with the administration of religious practices. Public representatives in the legislative branch may champion the aspirations of their constituents so that religious values could be more reflected in certain regulations or other products of the legal system but, laws and regulations must be adjusted accordingly based on their urgency and relevance to people's needs, which

³⁶ Prescribed movements and supplications during prayers.

³⁷ See note 25.

³⁸ Differences of opinions among the ulema. These differences can arise at a narrow scope or may often merely be related to differences in the use of terms. These differences can also arise at a larger scale, namely on what is permissible (halal) and impermissible (haram). Differences of opinions among the ulema are generally caused by different views in interpreting the Quran and hadith.

³⁹ See note 6.

are diverse and multi-levelled as explained above.

For regulations concerning the validity of a particular religious belief, public representatives and the government must thoroughly consider the urgency and the relevance of the said regulations' implementation, taking into account the possibility of forceful imposition in their implementation. There must be a shared consensus that is reached through joint decision-making. The debate over seven words⁴⁰ used in the Jakarta Charter provides the most illustrative example. At that time, a portion of Muslims in the country insisted on the inclusion of these contentious seven words into the constitution. As joint deliberations resulted in the substitution of the seven words with the phrase 'Belief in God Almighty', the proponents then withdrew their insistence, an action which reflected extraordinary magnanimity.

Why can't the state regulate religious teachings that are specific, particular, personal, and open to multiple interpretations?

The answer is, if the state holds the authority to regulate contentious religious subject matters that spark debates even among their adherents, justice and order would not be achieved. On the contrary, the state would be entrapped in a difficult position where it has to side with one particular religious group/branch while neglecting others, potentially leading to a protracted conflict.

⁴⁰ The seven words being problematised here refer to the phrase '*dengan kewajiban menjalankan syariat Islam bagi pemeluk-pemeluknya*', which translates into 'with the obligation to carry out Islamic law for its adherents'. Those who opposed the inclusion of these seven words argued that it would alienate the non-Muslim section of the country's population.

Valuable lessons can be drawn from numerous historical records where states have assumed religious authority and, thus, become vulnerable to committing crimes in the name of religion. During the rule of Al-Makmun (813–833 AD), the seventh caliph of the Abbasid dynasty, the Mu'tazilah ideology⁴¹ was adopted as the state ideology. Clerics who disapproved of this decision were persecuted and even executed.⁴² Such a one-sided action eventually led to numerous conflicts and political upheavals. Similarly, Europe in the Middle Ages saw the sharp rise of Church's predominance over all aspects of life, where even kings were subject to the interests of Christian leaders. The then-religion-state relations allowed for the manipulation of religious teachings within juridical provisions, while confessions were even commodified.⁴³ Such a situation where rulers were exclusively sided with the bourgeoisie-cum-supporters-of-religious-leaders resulted in a high number of casualties, particularly among the impoverished people. In contrast, the subsequent events which led to widespread protests against the Church affected public policies in various state bodies and even

⁴¹ *Mu'tazilah*, (Arabic for 'Those Who Withdraw' or 'Those Who Stand Apart'), also known as *Ahl al-'Adl wa al-Tawhīd*. In Islam, this refers to political or religious impartial stance. In the 10th century, this term specifically referred to an Islamic school of speculative theology (*kalām*) which flourished in Basra and Baghdad from the 8th to the 10th century. The term first emerged in the early history of Islam of the dispute in Muslim communities (*ummah*) over Ali's leadership following the murder of the third caliph, Utsmān (656). Those who neither condemned nor sanctioned Al or his opposition took the middle ground coined as Mu'tazilah (Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. 'Mu'tazilah'. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 26 Jun. 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mutazilah> Accessed 25 October 2023).

⁴² For more details see *Al-Bidayah wan Nihayah* part 10/298 by Ibnu Katsir.

⁴³ Krisyanto, Eddy. 2005. *'Absolutisme Negara dan Lembaga Agama Pasca Auffilarung di Eropa Barat'* [Absolutism and Religious Bodies Post-Aufklärungs in Western Europe]. *Melintas*. Vol. 21, No. 2, p. 211–230.

**The Indonesian Constitution
strongly upholds religious
teachings, but this does
not mean that government
institutions can easily interfere
with the administration of
religious practices.**

propelled the French Revolution.

In circumstances where the state is forced to take part in the regulation of religious practices, the rationale used must be accepted by all stakeholders. The mechanism of the said regulation must not be intended as an intervention against particular religious practices, but rather as a form of facilitating religious matters which directly impact public affairs: logistics, public transports, security, public order, etc. Once again, the state's involvement in this regard is limited to facilitation, and the state must work together with the representatives of the involved religious community.

An example is the practice of Isbat sessions⁴⁴ by the Ministry of Religious Affairs to determine the start of Ramadan and the date of Eid al-Fitr⁴⁵ celebrations. As a country that does not have an official state religion, the Indonesian government cannot decide by itself how its Muslim population should practise fasting (i.e., when to start and when to celebrate the end of Ramadan⁴⁶).

⁴⁴ *Sidang itsbat* in Indonesian. Sessions that are held to determine or name the beginning of the month in the *Hijri* calendar (Islamic calendar).

⁴⁵ *Idul Fitri* in Indonesian. Feast of Fast-Breaking. Celebrated on the 1st of Shawwal (the tenth month of the lunar-based Islamic calendar), this celebration marks the end of the Ramadan. The sunnah Eid prayer is performed in the morning. This celebration is also called al-Id al-Saghir (the smaller Feast). In celebrating Eid al Fitr, the majority of Indonesian Muslims return to their hometowns. After performing the Eid prayer, people gather with their families and neighbours and seek each other's forgiveness for prior faults. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004)

⁴⁶ Known as *lebaran* in Indonesian. An Islamic celebration which falls on the 1st of Shawwal which marks the completion of the Ramadan fasting month. The word *lebaran* is derived from a local language in Indonesia which means 'completion' or 'abundance'. This may be related to the completion of Ramadan and the hope of Muslims in Indonesia to obtain an abundance of blessings upon the completion. During *lebaran*, the majority of Indonesian population celebrate the holiday by visiting their hometowns (*mudik*). (The Ministry of Religious Affairs, *Memaknai Mudik Lebaran dan Merayakan Perbedaan*'

Considering the large number of Muslims across the country, coupled with the fact that the state is obliged to facilitate its people's religious practices to ensure social harmony and public order, the state still ought to decide the start and the end of Ramadan through the Isbat sessions. Here, the objective of the sessions is to provide guidance or reference for the Muslim population.

The Isbat sessions include representatives from Islamic mass organisations to ensure that the result of the session can be circulated to all Muslim communities. Still, the sessions aims to facilitate, and the result of the sessions is non-binding: there are no penalties for Muslims who differ in opinions and decide not to follow the result of the sessions. To date, fixing the date of the start and the end of Ramadan has proven useful for the government in maintaining public order. At this point, it should be highlighted that the Eid holiday has become an annual festival of religious-cultural celebration that is inclusive and widely celebrated. Its celebration leads to *mudik*,⁴⁷ which subsequently impacts logistic distribution and the economy.

Looking at the example above, there must be a mechanism which administers the relations between religion and the constitution in practice. Technically, the government authorises specific bodies to ensure effective implementation of the constitution that is

[Interpreting Eid Exodus and Celebrating Differences], <https://kemenag.go.id/kolom/memaknai-mudik-lebaran-dan-merayakan-perbedaan-SInCh>)

⁴⁷ See note 22.

interconnected with the administration of religious affairs. Within the government structure, the Ministry of Religious Affairs is primarily charged with providing protection for all religious communities as mandated by Article 29 Paragraph 2 in the 1945 Constitution. Other than translating the role of the state in the three levels of religious teachings as previously explained, the Ministry of Religious Affairs is also tasked with administering religious education and religious practices as part of the national education system.

Such a moderate approach to religious administration is actually beneficial. Religious communities, for one, will benefit as religious teachings and practices are protected and facilitated by the state. The state will find comparative ease in safeguarding public order by implementing regulations that are suitable and relevant to existing social realities. In several other countries, religious communities encounter difficulties in practising their religious beliefs while the state is troubled with religious affairs.

Is Religious Moderation Important?

We shall now return to the question presented at the beginning of this chapter. Questions regarding the urgency of religious moderation emerge from our circumstance wherein the diversity of religious practices is an inevitability. The underlying principle of moderation is an effort to prevent the excessiveness of being on the extreme end of a spectrum and, thus,

vulnerable to stumbling. Further, religious moderation is also an effort to find a common ground amidst diversity, instead of exacerbating differences.

There are at least three main reasons behind religious moderation, which also explain its urgency and relevance in responding to our increasingly complex religious life:

First, religion exists to protect the soul and the dignity of human beings as noble creatures of God. This is why each religious belief always carries a mission of peace and salvation, which then manifests in teachings about humanity in various aspects of human existence. Religion teaches us that human safety is a priority. Taking one's life is equal to eliminating the existence of humanity. Religion commends us that each human being possesses dignity, self-respect, and virtue that must be constantly safeguarded and upheld. This is the core of religious commendation on humanising human beings.

Recently a phenomenon which violates humanist values has steadily emerged. Despite embracing a religious belief, individuals may become increasingly exclusive, even though religions extol the virtues of inclusivity. This leads to a situation where one may embrace and practise a religion but employ a divisive mindset in their everyday life, despite religions' commendation for integration. 'Religious' yet promotes a confrontational stance, despite the religions' praise for cooperation. 'Religious' yet destructive, while religions are constructive in nature. This very concerning

phenomenon not only harms multifaith coexistence in our pluralistic society, but also threatens the unity of Indonesia.

Second, thousands of years after the birth of religions, the number of human beings has speedily increased across the world amidst the diversity of ethnicities and cultures. Along with the progress and spread of humanity across ages and places, the interpretations of holy scriptures as the primary source of reference in understanding and practising religious beliefs has also undergone changes. The original languages of religious texts is no longer sufficient, but rather they have been translated into various languages to meet the needs of the world's multi-lingual religious communities. New types of challenges encountered by humanity keep emerging, becoming increasingly varied and complex that they require interpretations of religious teachings which are contextual but still grounded upon accountable analytical principles and methodologies.

In today's world, numerous unaccountable religious interpretations that are not founded upon analytical principles have been progressively propagated. Those who do not have adequate analytical competence irresponsibly translate and interpret holy scriptures and religious texts. This gives rise to excessive and exaggerated religious interpretations. There are also those who solely rely on texts and completely disregard contexts. On the contrary, some put mind and reason on a pedestal, interpreting contexts too liberally and uprooting them from the texts themselves. Even more

complex is when these two opposite ends stand in opposition and denounce different interpretations, imposing their will even through violence. This gives birth to various social conflicts in the midst of multi-faith communities.

Third, amidst our pluralistic nation where racial, ethnic, tribal, language, cultural, and religious differences thrive, the wisdom of our ancestors and founding fathers has weaved, knitted, and connected such differences by reaching a national consensus that binds our nation. This is built upon Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, the concept of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, and our national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*.⁴⁸ These constitute the foundation of Indonesia that is heterogeneous in nature. The foundation, pillars, and roof of our nationhood are built upon universal values and local wisdoms and traditions which unite all of us.

In spite of this, an increasing number of unpleasant events in the name of religion have unfolded; an individual publicly and explicitly propagated misconception that Pancasila is not aligned with religious values, that saluting our national flag is equivalent to idolatry, and singing the national anthem, *Indonesia Raya*, is considered as haram.⁴⁹ Such a misconception and other similar perspectives clearly damage and tear apart our national bond and destroy the foundation of Indonesian identity. Excessive and transgressive religious practices such as this will also mar the image of the religion itself,

⁴⁸ See note 14.

⁴⁹ Forbidden in Islamic law, such as the consumption of pork and alcohol. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004).

while harming our harmonious coexistence with other religious communities.

Religious moderation champions moral values derived from the essence of religious beliefs, so that it remains relevant in improving the quality of religious practices, both individually and collectively. Religious moderation is against exclusivity; it lauds inclusivity so that a meeting point where all religions congregate and work together to ensure common interests can be achieved.

Similar understanding about religious moderation shared by religious leaders prompted the historic meeting between the world's two major religious figures. On 4 February 2019 in Abu Dhabi, Pope Francis of the Catholic Church met and shook hands with the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, Syekh Ahmad el-Tayyeb.

This meeting resulted in the Document on Human Fraternity, which bears the core message that the biggest threats currently facing humanity are fanatic extremism, destruction, warfare, intolerance, and hateful attitudes, all of which have been carried out under the banner of religions.

A number of violent episodes in several countries demonstrate that extremism and terrorism are not carried out by one particular religion. Threats of terror and violence often emerge due to extreme views, attitudes, and actions that use religious pretexts. At the same time, moderate views endorsing justice and equality can be championed by anyone regardless of their religious affiliation.

Pluralistic and multicultural nations, including Indonesia, are very prone to religious conflicts. Religious moderation is urgently needed to provide room for dialogue and compromise for those who adopt extreme stances without having to denounce each other. From this, a new dynamic equilibrium, which is a necessity for a healthy and enlightening religious coexistence, may emerge.

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Key Aspects of Religious Moderation

WHAT IS the essence of religious moderation, then?

As discussed in the previous chapter, religious moderation refers to a process of understanding and practising religious teachings in a just and equal manner so that excessive, transgressive, and extreme practices can be avoided.

Individuals who practise religious moderation have key characteristics such as: open-mindedness, rationality, and wisdom. Other characteristics include modesty, fairness, and useful for others. These characteristics overlap and complement each other. If some of these characteristics are missing, then the said individuals may not exercise religious moderation. Being open-minded but irrational, for instance, does not constitute a moderate perspective. Likewise, rationality without wisdom does not reflect moderation. Being someone of value but also unjust at the same time is

also not being moderate.

Limited and centred on the understanding and behaviours of religious adherents within the context of their respective religious belief, religious moderation does not aim to moderate religions at all. This is because religions already bear moderate principles such as justice and equality by themselves. I am of the view that it is not a religious belief if it commends tyranny, hatred, and destruction. All religious beliefs ought to propagate wisdom, even though their adherents may not necessarily practise such teachings.

Excessiveness in interpreting and practising religious teachings is not a commendable virtue; this may even cause harm. This is why religious interpretations cannot be carried out arbitrarily. There are authoritative individuals or groups who interpret religious texts in an analytical and accountable manner. In Islam, there is the ulema⁵⁰ who serves as the authoritative figure in interpreting religious texts. Even among the ulema there are still experts with specific qualifications in interpreting the Quran and Hadith⁵¹. Their positions and expertise ensure their interpretations are indeed worthy of being used as references. On the other hand, preachers do not necessarily meet the requirements or standards to be part of the ulema, let alone being experts in interpretation.

⁵⁰ A group of Muslim scholars with an expertise on Islamic teachings.

⁵¹ A collection of sayings or traditions of the Prophet Muhammad which account for his daily practice.

The Core of Religious Moderation

Each religion contains three main aspects, namely the aspect of belief, the aspect of ritual, and the aspect of practice. The aspect of belief constitutes the bedrock of a religion, that is its *akidah*⁵² or conviction that binds religious adherents to their God. The aspect of ritual refers to a series of activities or conduct that is bound to certain religious precepts. Examples include worships and religious celebrations which symbolise the communication between religious adherents and their God in the form of ritual. The aspect of practice refers to individual or collective religious practices which are embodied in the interaction between the adherents and their surrounding environment. Muslims, for instance, base their religious practices on *akhlaq*.⁵³

A moderate religious adherent will not find difficulty in selecting and responding to religious teachings accordingly. The main challenge lies in reaching this moderate stance. Adherents must study religious teachings from authoritative sources to avoid misunderstanding or even mental shock. They must possess a wide breadth of knowledge to be able to identify where the border lies which separates moderation from extremism. They must also protect their soul so that their mind and actions can be guided through moderation.

⁵² The essence or main creeds of Islam. In Islam, *akidah* asserts that Allah is the only God that shall be worshipped, and Prophet Muhammad is the messenger of Allah whose conduct must be emulated by Muslims. According to this view, Muslims must understand, believe, and practice the six beliefs of Islam and the five pillars of Islam. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004).

⁵³ The practice of virtue, morality, and manners.

An extreme religious adherent may have the capacity to explain persuasively and defend their extreme view on these three key aspects through speeches. They may not, however, be able to provide the correct responses when encountering problems in these three aspects. Debates that are guided by narrow-mindedness, in which differences are readily condemned, are a form of extreme mindset. Such a tendency is usually displayed by those who have a high level of intelligence but uncultivated wisdom. Prominent religious leaders and even professors in religious studies can still fall into the trap of extremism.

One should not claim truth and impose their opinion on others. This is because no matter how intelligent human beings are, our knowledge is limited. It is the nature of human beings to have limited understanding pertaining to the essence of God's gospel. Human beings' interpretations are always relative as the absolute truth only belongs to God.

On the other hand, indecisiveness and inconsistency in religious belief, understanding, and interpretation, which results in the absence of religion in a person's life, is incorrect as well. A middle ground, and this is the best option, is to strongly believe in one's interpretation while still leaving room for other possible interpretations. The implementation of the middle ground is very difficult; it comprises a series of stages and requires support. The benefits will be collectively enjoyed in the form of a conducive, peaceful, harmonious, and useful coexistence.

The embodiment of middle ground in religious

moderation, as explained above, is succinctly formulated in the following sentence:

[Religious moderation is] Viewpoints, attitudes, and religious practices in co-existence founded upon the essence of religious teachings which support the protection of humanity and the promotion of collective welfare and are based on the principles of justice, balance, and compliance with the constitution as agreed upon by the national consensus.

In this formulation, there are several phrases/terms which bears the key principles of religious moderation. First, the term ‘co-existence’ indicates that the augmentation of one’s viewpoints, attitudes, and religious practices in religious moderation is related to social and civic affairs. This means that religious moderation must not be intended to intervene in individuals’ private lives and religious practices. An individual’s viewpoints, attitudes, and religious practices would only become a collective concern when they overlap with public affairs.

Then, the phrase ‘founded upon the essence of religious teachings’ indicates that religious moderation puts an emphasis on substantive religious understanding and practices which prioritise the essence of religious values and rituals. The urgency of religious moderation is built upon the awareness that the noblest essence of religious values is human dignity. This explains the following phrases, ‘the protection of human dignity’ and ‘the promotion of collective welfare’.

According to Islamic teachings, religious laws

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derived from the interpretations of Quran and Hadith are intended to ensure collective welfare, both in this mortal life and in the afterlife. Asy-Syathibi (d. 1388) introduced the concept *maqashid syariah*,⁵⁴ which proposes that there is an ultimate objective in the implementation of religious laws; hence, the obligation for its implementation. This ultimate objective is formulated in five general principles (*Kulliyat al-khamsah*), which consists of: the protection of religion (*hifz ad-din*), the protection of the soul (*hifz an-nafs*), the protection of reason (*hifz al-‘aql*), the protection of wealth (*hifz al-mal*), and the protection of lineage (*hifz an-nasl*).

This reasserts that religious practices must always be directed to bring about collective welfare, also often termed as social piety, instead of merely achieving personal gains. Lastly, all aspects explained above must always be grounded upon ‘the principles of justice, equality, and compliance with the constitution as agreed upon by the national consensus.’

The final phrase, ‘compliance with constitution as agreed upon by the national consensus’, affirms that it is frowned upon to promote certain viewpoints, attitudes, and practices which use religious pretexts but lead to the violation of the state ideology (Pancasila) and the 1945 Constitution, which were formulated and adopted

⁵⁴ Generally, *maqashid syariah* can be interpreted as the objective of Islamic law to realise the prosperity of mankind and the universe. From the linguistic perspective, *maqasid* is in Arabic the plural form of *maqshad*, which means ‘intended destination’. Sharia refers to the rules in Islamic teachings which are related to *akidah* and various Islamic laws of good deeds. The interpretation of *maqasid syariah* is not limited to the objective of the sharia, but it also encompasses the reasons why the sharia is enacted in the first place.

as the guidance for our social and civic affairs through a national consensus.

Constitutionally, religious moderation has a strong foundation as the 1945 Constitution itself stresses Indonesia's characteristic as a 'Nation that is based on belief in God Almighty'. The constitution also obliges the state to safeguard the freedom of each member of the nation to embrace and practise their respective religious beliefs. The protection for religious freedom is stipulated in Law No. 39/1999 on Human Rights.

The state's obligation to protect religious freedom is specifically shouldered by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This ministerial body is tasked with performing governmental duties in religious affairs as part of its responsibilities to the president in state administration.⁵⁵ Such a responsibility is, to a certain extent, collectively shared as religious freedom is a human right. In practice, the Ministry of Religious Affairs manages the administration of hajj, for instance, together with other relevant ministries, such as the Health Ministry, the Foreign Affairs Ministry, and the Transportation Ministry. This is because the administration of hajj concerns not only the Muslim population, but also the national economy, diplomatic affairs, etc.

Religious moderation is enshrined in Presidential Regulation No. 18/2020 on the 2020–2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN), which mandates that the strengthening of religious moderation ought to be part of the priority programmes which aim

⁵⁵ Presidential Regulation no. 83/2015 on the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

to bolster tolerance, cooperation, and social harmony. The inclusion of religious moderation in the RPJMN illustrates the presence of the state, in this case the government, at that period to overcome problems pertaining to religious coexistence. After the end of the 2019–2024 administration, the subsequent administration opted to re-insert the issue of religious moderation into the 2025–2029 RPJMN, and even into the 2025–2045 National Long-Term Development Plan (RPJPN). If the state had not had a strong concern over religious moderation, the government would have faced great difficulties in administering the communities across the country which hold particularities as discussed in the preceding chapter.

Apart from matters pertaining to the formulation and foundation of the constitution, religious moderation must be understood in terms of its basic principle, its theoretical and conceptual foundation, its textual groundwork (holy scriptures), and the parameters of its implementation.

Basic Principles of Religious Moderation

Religious moderation has the basic principle of preserving balance between the pairs of two binaries created by God Almighty: reason and revelation, physicality and mentality, body and soul, rights and obligations, past and future, and so on. A balance is also required between these contradictions which surround our existence: ideas and reality, necessity

and volunteerism, personal interests and collective welfare, textuality and contextuality, etc. The core of religious moderation is to exercise fair and balanced deeds in observing, addressing, and practising all of the abovementioned contradictions.

Further, the basic principles of fairness and balance are also expected to address the possibility of religious extremism or transgression. Those who adopt extreme religious interpretations are those who must be moderated, brought back to the middle ground. Occupying the middle ground does not mean casting one's judgement on which one is right, and which one is wrong; which one is good, and which one is bad. Once again, within the context of religious moderation, taking the middle ground refers to adopting a fair and balanced stance in response to two extremes.

The Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language (KBBI) defines 'fair' as: 1. Not biased/impartial; 2. Siding with the truth; and 3. Appropriate/not arbitrary. The word 'referee',⁵⁶ is derived from the words '*wasath*'⁵⁷, '*tawasuth*'⁵⁸, and '*wasathiyah*'⁵⁹, which are Arabic for

⁵⁶ Wasit in Indonesian.

⁵⁷ Arabic for 'middle'. This term is also used to indicate something that is positioned within two bad things.

⁵⁸ *Tawasuth* refers to a middle or moderate stance between two stances; neither too strict nor too lax. *Tawasuth* is grounded upon the principle of life which upholds justice and balance amidst co-existence, to act in a straight and constructive manner while avoiding extreme attitude. See The Ministry of Religious Affairs, *Moderasi Beragama* [Religious Moderation], (2019).

⁵⁹ *Wasathiyah* is derived from the word *wasath* which refers to being in the middle of two extreme ends. In Arabic, the word *wasathiyah* can be interpreted as 'the best option'. As a reference to the concept of religious moderation, *wasathiyah* also refers to just and balanced characteristics. See The Ministry of Religious Affairs, *Moderasi Beragama* [Religious Moderation], (2019).

‘middle way’. This refers to an individual who leads a match who, interpreted in this context, is not partial and arbitrary but rather on the side of truth. In short, being fair means putting everything in its place in an honest and agile manner.

A balanced stance refers to being in the middle of two extremes. In terms of worship, for example, a moderate believes that religious practice is to serve God in the form of implementing His commendations that are intended to advance humanity and promote welfare. Extreme individuals are often entrapped in practices which only focus on their relationship with God while disregarding the aspect of humanity, that is their relationship with other human beings. Those who adopt such practices are willing to murder fellow human beings ‘in the name of God’. In fact, protecting humanity itself is part of the core religious values. On the other hand, religious adherents who are disproportionately oriented toward humanity and collective welfare may disregard, or even deny, the limits of religious norms and worship which embody their obedience to God. This is equally extreme.

A balanced stance demonstrates viewpoints, attitudes, and commitments which propagate justice, humanity, and equality. To be balanced should not be understood as indifference or inconsistency. Adopting a balanced stance indicates assertiveness without being aggressive. The moderate’s actions will always be on the side of justice, but their partiality will not violate others’ rights and cause harm. A balanced stance can

be understood as a perspective according to which all actions must be proportionate, not excessive but also not inadequate, not too conservative⁶⁰ but also not too liberal.

In Islam, the term ‘moderation’ or ‘moderate’ is also known as ‘wasathiyah’. Mohammad Hashim Kamali (2015) argues that the principle of balance and justice within the concept of wasathiyah means that in practising their religious belief, one must not be extreme in view, but rather seek a point of compromise. According to Kamali, wasathiyah is an important aspect in Islam that is often neglected by its adherents. In fact, wasathiyah is essential in Islamic values, which comprise numerous ramifications (branches) in various key aspects of the religion.

Moderation is encourgaed in many religions. Moderation is a wisdom which propels the creation of social harmony and balance in the communities, either at the level of individual, family, or collective, so that a wider spectrum of human relations can be achieved (Azra, 2015).

The values of fairness and balance can only be implemented if one assumes these three characteristics: wisdom, purity, and courage. A moderate stance in religious practice, that is consistently choosing the

⁶⁰ Religious understanding and practices which strictly adhere to holy scriptures or to the teachings, orthodoxies, and traditions which are thought to be the most correct. Generally, conservatism in religious practices opposes interpretations, reforms of thoughts, and religious practices based on certain modern developments. Adherents to religious conservatism believe that by adopting the thoughts and practices of religious conservatism can help them find the true meaning of religion. See Leionard C. Sebastian, Syafiq Hasyim dan Alexander R. Arifianto, *Rising Islamic Conservatism in Indonesia* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

middle path, thus constitutes fairness and balance. This stance shall materialise only when an individual masters the depth of religious knowledge while also possessing a vast heart which allows for wisdom and sincerity to flourish. This means an individual will have the courage to convey their perspective based on the knowledge they have acquired, but at the same time they respect other differing perspectives that are grounded on knowledge as well.

M. Quraish Shihab conceptualised a similar formulation. This leading Indonesian expert on Quran interpretation puts forward three requirements for adopting a moderate stance in practising religious belief: 1. Having extensive knowledge; 2. Having control over emotions so that they do not exceed limitations; and 3. Always being cautious.⁶¹ This formulation illustrates the preconditions for religious moderation as being knowledge, wisdom, and caution.

This means that in responding to religious concerns, a moderate individual must be able to prioritise feelings over emotions, reason over aggression, and benefits over *madarat*.⁶² Such an attitude requires an exercise of great caution in one's speeches and conduct. Perseverance to occupy the middle ground does not translate into silence, but rather it must result in dynamic and careful responses while ensuring that you are in the right position.

⁶¹ Lecture by M. Quraish Shihab during Eid al-Fitr gathering organised by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Jakarta, Friday, 14 June 2019.

⁶² Anything that is unprofitable or useless. *Madarat* comes from Arabic which may be interpreted as 'danger' or 'injury'. In Islam, *madarat* serves as a guiding principle for individuals to recognise and avoid actions that may cause disadvantage or other negative consequences.

If elaborated further, we may identify several other characteristics that serve as the preconditions for religious moderation, which includes comprehensive knowledge of core religious teachings and worship rituals. In Islam, the diversity of perspectives among fikih⁶³ scholars regarding worship rituals can be grouped sequentially into three categories: 1. The weightiest perspectives (*al-arjah*); 2. Weighty perspectives (*al-rajih*); and 3. Less weighty perspectives (*al-marjuh*).

Comprehensive knowledge of religious laws and rules concerning worship will facilitate religious communities to choose an alternative when necessary. As the word suggests, an alternative should only be picked as needed and within the right context, instead of being misused to distort or create new and controversial forms of worship.

Religious moderation enables dialogues about diversity and facilitates interactions across various traditions. This will prevent isolation among religious communities, and inclusive, adaptive, educative, and inventive characteristics will flourish. In this regard, religious communities will respect each other, enforce mutualism and compromise, and work together in overcoming adversities. Such a condition is what makes Indonesia able to stand tall. The principle of religious moderation has united our independence fighters, all of whom had different backgrounds, beliefs, and traditions. They successfully joined forces and took the middle ground in reaching the consensus to establish

⁶³ See note 8.

Indonesia as a unitary state (NKRI).⁶⁴

Muslim scholar Ismail Raji al-Faruqi (d. 1986) further elaborated the meaning of balance (*tawazun*). He coined the term ‘the golden mean’ which refers to a stance that avoids the two detrimental extreme ends of the spectrum, while attempting to seek a common ground. A balanced stance means desisting both absolute individualism and absolute collectivism; pursuing personal gains on one hand, or glorifying collectivist culture on the other hand. Taking a balanced middle path is always recommended (Kamali, 2015: 31).

In the present era of technological and information disruption, in which every individual faces an onslaught of information, the principle of fairness and balance in religious moderation ought to be used as a guiding value in managing information and dispelling misinformation. Religious moderation teaches us lessons to think and act wisely, to avoid fanaticism or blind obsession with particular religious interpretations that are propagated by specific individual(s) or groups without considering different interpretations offered by others. This, once again, requires not only intelligence but also wisdom. There are some portions of the Indonesian population, including the educated ones, that are more vulnerable to misinformation due to their being content with their assumed intelligence. This creates a tendency where

⁶⁴ Muhammadiyah, during its 47th Congress in 2015 in Makassar, positioned Pancasila as *Dar al-Abdi wa al-Syahada*, that is a nation-state built upon a mutual agreement and witnesses that asserts the nation’s Islamic and Indonesian identities. This serves as a guideline for Indonesian Muslims amidst rapid ideological exchanges that are occurring both nationally and globally and the onslaught of differing religious interpretations that are tinged with extreme right or left tendencies.

Religious moderation enables
dialogues about diversity
and facilitates interactions
across various traditions.

This will prevent isolation
among religious communities;
inclusive, adaptive, educative,
and inventive characteristics will
flourish.

they readily justify a piece of information without checking the truth.

Moderation in Islamic Traditions

The value of moderation is not solely possessed by one particular religion; such a value exists in the traditions of numerous religions and civilisations. There is no religion which advocates injustice or the indoctrination of extremism and transgression.

In Islam, *wasathiyah* is perceived as one of the core Islamic teachings. The term *wasathiyah* itself is derived from the word '*wasath*',⁶⁵ which has at least three meanings: being in the middle, fair, and best. These three meanings are interconnected; taking the middle ground often reflects a fair and the best option. An illustrative example is the word 'referee', a profession where one must arbitrate matches and pick the winners in a just manner.

In a number of his sermons, Quraish Shihab often exemplifies the goodness of generosity because it stands between extravagance and stinginess. Likewise, the goodness of courage lies in its middle position between cowardice and recklessness.

According to several translations, the term '*wasatha*' is understood as 'the chosen one', 'the best', 'fairness', 'modesty', 'moderation', '*istiqamah*'⁶⁶, 'compliance with

⁶⁵ See note 54.

⁶⁶ Derived from Arabic which means 'straight forward'. *Istiqamah* can also be interpreted as a trait of being firm and consistent in one's belief.

Islamic teachings', that is a non-extreme perspective and middle stance on subject matters that are concerning this mortal existence or the afterlife, spirituality or bodily affairs (Quraish Shihab, 1996: 328). When *wasathiyyah* is implemented in everyday lives, individuals should not adopt an extreme mindset.

According to several academic research projects, 'Islamic *wasathiyyat*' is often interpreted as 'justly balanced Islam', 'the middle path', or 'the middle way', as Islam that is mediating and balancing power in its role as a mediator or balancer. These interpretations demonstrate the importance of fairness and balance as well as the middle ground in Islam to avoid excessiveness. To date, the term 'Islamic *wasathiyyat*'⁶⁷ has also often been understood as a reflection of the principles of *tawassuth* (mid-attitude), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance), *itidal* (fair), and *iqtisad* (prudence). The term *Ummatan Wasathan*⁶⁸ is often interpreted as well as 'just people' or 'a just community', that is a community which embodies all of the abovementioned characteristics.

The presence of Islamic *wasathiyyat* is urgently needed both within Islamic communities and between Muslims and other religious communities in the world. The understanding and practice of Islamic *wasathiyyat* becomes a necessity amidst the current challenges in the world, including in Majority-Muslim regions, that

⁶⁷ Islam as a community which stands in the middle, or the best community with just, balanced, and moderate characteristics. See *wasathiyyah*.

⁶⁸ The best community which adopts just, moderate, and the most excellent characteristics. See *wasathiyyah*.

are caused by non-wasathiyyat religious understanding and practices. The lack of balance in world development has occurred in various aspects of life such as politics, economy, socio-culture, science, technology, environment, and so on. These aspects of life must work in tandem and synergise to rebuild a new civilisation. Without religious values which commend spirituality and ethics, a just, fair, and balanced civilisation cannot be achieved.

The word '*wasat*' is often used by Arabs interchangeably with the word '*khiyar*' (choice or chosen). If someone is described as *wasath*, this means the said individual is the chosen one in their community. Islam is said to be a *wasath* religious belief as it is chosen out of other religions. If Muslims are described as *ummatan wasathan*,⁶⁹ it reflects the aspiration for Muslims to become a chosen community which always acts in a balanced and just manner.

Both in personal worship and social interactions, Islam teaches its adherents to always act moderately. This teaching occupies a very central position in two sources of Islamic teachings, the Quran and Hadith. A Quranic verse, for example, states that:

'And it is thus that We appointed you to be the community of the middle way so that you might be witnesses to all mankind and the Messenger might be a witness to you.' (Al-Baqarah, 2:143)

This verse suggests that the characteristic of

⁶⁹ A true and just nation.

wasathiyah that is associated with Muslim communities must be contextualised within their social relations with other communities. A Muslim community or a member of the community could be described as a witness (*syahidan*) when they have the commitment for moderation and noble values.

Within the context of moderation, the term wasath, according to Quraish Shihab, obliges Muslims to be the witnesses as well as examples for other communities, and at the same time they must make the Prophet Muhammad as their role model who emulated the character of a witness in his practices (Drafting Team of Quran Thematic Interpretation, 2017).

Al-Alusi (d. 1812), the author of *Al-Ma'ani Interpretation*, argued that one's level of commitment to moderation actually indicates their commitment to justice as well (Kamali, 2015: 18). The more moderate and balanced an individual is, the higher the possibility of their acting fairly. In reverse, the more extreme and biased an individual is, the more likely they commit injustice.

The Prophet Muhammad strongly encouraged Muslims to always take the middle path, believed to be the best course. According to a Hadith, the Prophet stated: 'The best choice is the middle ground'

In Indonesia, particularly in the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) community,⁷⁰ the discourse of wasatiyyah and moderation is often explained in reference to the three pillars of the implementation of *ahlussunnah*

⁷⁰ Indonesia's largest Muslim organisation.

wal jamaah.⁷¹ These three pillars are the moderation of thoughts (*fikrah*), the moderation of movements (*harakah*), and the moderation of actions (*amaliyah*).⁷²

The first pillar refers to moderate religious thoughts, which are marked by the ability to contextualise texts: to synchronise religious thoughts which rely on the truth of religious texts that subdue social realities by providing contexts into texts. The dynamic incorporation of contexts into texts, coupled with the principle of fairness and balance, can ensure an individual's religious thoughts are not disproportionately grounded upon textual verses or, inversely, on the wider contexts.

The second pillar refers to moderate movements (*harakah*), which means that movements propagating religious commendations for goodness and against evil must be rooted in *da'wah*⁷³ and the principle of grace, and carried out in a good manner as well. This is to avoid the opposite, that is to prevent the spread of evil through an equally evil method.

The third pillar refers to the moderation of religious traditions and actions (*amaliyah diniyah*), namely the alignment of Islamic teachings with the traditions of local communities. In this regard, religions should not diametrically confront local cultures. Rather, they should be open to each other to build a dialogue and

⁷¹ The term refers to the followers of the Prophet's traditions and members of the majority congregation. This refers to the orthodox mainstream, to which all non-sectarian Muslims claim to belong. See Martin Van Bruinessen, (2013).

⁷² For further explanation see Rumadi Ahmad, *Fatwa Hubungan Antaragama di Indonesia* [Explanation of Interfaith Relations in Indonesia]; Gramedia Utama, 2016.

⁷³ Call towards God.

produce a new culture.

These three pillars were explained by the Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest Islamic mass organisation in Indonesia. I believe that discourse on moderation does not exclusively belong to one particular group. It does not solely belong to Islam since the idea of moderation is also embedded in other religious beliefs such as Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and many others. This is because the idea of moderation has long served as one of the guiding principles in human history. In ancient Greek mythology, the principle of moderation is engraved on the statue of Apollo in Delphi, which bears the inscription ‘Meden Agan’, meaning ‘nothing in excess’. At that time, the principle of moderation had already been acknowledged as a commendation for doing everything proportionately, not excessively. For instance, in terms of consumption, a moderate will consume all kinds of food with limited portions so as not to contract disease.

In Islam there is ‘*wasatiyyah*’; in Christianity there is the concept of ‘Golden Mean’. Buddhism has the tradition of ‘*Majjhima Patipada*’, and Hinduism teaches the tradition of ‘*Madyhamika*’. In Confucianism, too, there is the concept of ‘*Zhong Yong*’. In religious traditions, there is always a recommendation for the ‘middle path’.⁷⁴

These different concepts are all directed to the same point, that is the idealised middle path between two

⁷⁴ For further details of these concepts, see The Ministry of Religious Affairs, *Moderasi Beragama* [Religious Moderation], (2019).

extreme ends where religious beliefs are not excessively practised.

Within the context of Indonesia, the characteristics of all religious beliefs also undergo an ‘adjustment’ in accordance with the peculiarities of Indonesian identity. With its various challenges and dynamics, the ideological interpretation of each religion, too, eventually finds its context in Indonesia and becomes entrenched as part of Indonesia’s multicultural society.

‘In upholding the Indonesian principles, we are upholding religious values as well. And vice versa, when we carry out religious teachings earnestly, we are carrying our obligations as a good citizen as well.’ (Drafting Team of Christian Perspective on the Mosaic of Religious Moderation, 2018)

I do not in the capacity comprehensively examine the views of all religious traditions regarding religious moderation within this text. I believe that religious moderation strongly constitutes the foundations of religious traditions in Indonesia. At this point, Indonesia is naturally pluralistic and religious with strong cultural roots. At the same time, the country has strong social capital to serve as the basis for religious moderation.

Moderate Religious Messages

Religious moderation can be understood as a formulation which is intended to organise the religious

lives of the very diverse Indonesian societies. Religious moderation is a continual process or endeavour as it constantly responds to the very dynamic religious lives of the communities. The expected outcome is the realisation of a congenial and peaceful atmosphere as well as a harmony between religious communities and the general public in Indonesia.

In the attempt to realise this objective, it is important to formulate which religious messages constitute the core of religious moderation. This core religious message is designed to promote a general understanding in the public concerning religious moderation without any deviation or distortion, or any misunderstanding over the intention and objective of religious moderation in upholding human dignity.

There are a number of core religious messages embedded in religious moderation. It is central to continue advocating these messages. One of the core messages of religious moderation is the protection of the soul. This means that moderate religious perspectives, conduct, and practices are those which, in implementation, always prioritise the protection of the soul. This message can also be understood in reverse; religious perspectives, conduct, and practices which jeopardise the soul may be perceived as extreme (not moderate). Each religious community must combat harmful deeds which may threaten the protection of the human soul.

Another core message of religious moderation is that of upholding noble civilisation. Each religion

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undoubtedly conveys moral values which shape noble principles among its adherents so that they become God's enlightened servants, both in private and public affairs. Religious moderation emphasises the importance for all religious beliefs to convey religious values which, in essence, contain universal moral values and guidance in regard to interfaith coexistence. Religious moderation also bears a message of respecting human dignity. In embodying the basic principles of fairness and balance, all religious communities must prioritise recognising humanity based on equal rights and civil obligations for the collective welfare of all community members.

Religious moderation is oriented toward the realisation of peace. This core message invites every religious community to exemplify conduct which promotes wisdom and peace, overcomes conflicts, and complies with the constitution. This is related to another core religious message concerning honouring pluralism through freedom of thought, expression, and religion. All religious communities must regard diversity as a gift and, thus, must adopt an open-mindedness to differences.

Another core religious message that is inseparable from the notion of religious moderation is the appeal for compliance with national commitments. A religious adherent is obliged to comply with the teachings enshrined in their belief's holy scripture. At the same time, as a citizen, they must comply with the constitution as well as obey the laws and the national consensus.

These core religious messages may serve as the guidelines in implementing religious moderation. Each of the components of the nation must believe that Indonesia has the social capital to augment religious moderation. By social capital I refer to local cultural values, diverse customs, traditions of collective deliberation, teachings of tolerance, and the culture of *gotong royong*,⁷⁵ all of which have been passed down across generations. All of these must be preserved to realise a harmonious existence amidst our diverse cultures, ethnicities, and religions.

Indonesia ought to serve as an inspiration for other countries in terms of moderate religious practices. This can only be achieved if all involved parties contribute and support each other. Indeed, with all of its authorities, the state must take a bigger role in promoting the creation of a moderate society. Its authorities must not exceed limitations; the state must not intervene too far. State presence is required only within its capacity to facilitate and serve in public spaces to encourage interfaith interactions. The state must not produce and enforce regulations or policies with discriminatory religious sentiments. The presence of the state must facilitate, instead of dividing or even discriminating against, the public.

⁷⁵ See note 26.

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The Boundary Between Extreme and Moderate Actions

Establishing the boundary separating extreme religious perspectives, conduct, and practices from their moderate counterparts is not an easy feat. Instead of promoting peace, a miscalculation in the establishment of the boundary may instead prompt horizontal tensions.

Then, when is a religious perspective, conduct, or practice deemed as extreme or not moderate? The answer is when the religious perspective, conduct, or practice deviates or disavows the universal core religious values.

Put simply, religious teachings can be classified or divided into two categories. In the first category are religious teachings which constitute the ‘core’ of religious values that is universal in nature. Religious teachings in this category are perceived as truth by the whole of humanity regardless of their backgrounds. Irrespective of their race, ethnicity, gender, religious belief (including atheism), they will acknowledge the core value of religious teachings in this category. An example is the universal teaching about upholding justice, humanisation, collective welfare, equality before the law, environmental protection, peace, and love as well as the prohibition of theft, deception, killing, and many others.

The second category comprises ‘derivative’ or particular religious teachings. Religious teachings under this category may convey messages that are not

necessarily believed by all religious beliefs; they may be perceived as truth by one religious community, while other communities deem them aberrant. Hence, they are not universally adhered to. In fact, they might even cause contradictions within a religious community between its members. Examples include dogmatic religious teachings or doctrines, specific practices of a religious *mahzab*⁷⁶ or sect, worship rituals, and so on.

A religious thought or practice is said to be excessive and extreme if it denies or deviates from the universal, core religious teachings. We may and can believe and implement these derivative religious teachings. No matter how striking and vast the differences in this area are, deviance and denial from the universal core religious teachings is not allowed.

Of course, there are several core religious teachings, but within the context of religious moderation in Indonesia, there are three specific parameters in measuring excessiveness and extremity.

The first parameter is when someone uses religious pretexts to promote mindsets or carry out actions that forsake or harm human dignity. Religious moderation posits the preservation and protection of human dignity as a non-negotiable aspect of religious teachings. Hence, the harming of human dignity can be deemed as extreme. An example is when an individual claims *jihad*⁷⁷ to protect

⁷⁶ See note 6.

⁷⁷ Over time, the concept of *jihad* has gradually expanded to encompass the idea of the greater *jihad*, namely individual struggles to become a devout Muslim, as well as the lesser *jihad*, namely the struggles to fight oppressions and defend Muslim communities. In the 18th and the 19th centuries, Asia and Africa witnessed reform movements which sparked *jihad* to reform Muslims communities and fight against colonial administrations.

their religious belief by detonating a bomb in the middle of a busy market and, thus, inflicting harm on casualties.

The second parameter is when an individual uses religious pretexts to break down and violate the national consensus, that is the shared commitment and agreement to ensure harmonious social and civic affairs. Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, whose values are also derived from noble religious teachings, were established as the foundation of Indonesia's statehood through national consensus. The emergence of religious thoughts and practices which harm the substance of this shared consensus through violent means embodies excessiveness and extremity.

The third parameter is when an individual uses religious pretexts to violate regulations and laws which guide the realisation of social order, or even to destroy or erase anything that pertains to collective welfare. An example is when someone runs a red light since they are late to attend a religious event. Another example is when someone damages public facilities in the name of religion. These examples may appear trivial and occur almost on a daily basis, but they can actually be categorised as excessive and extreme religious practices.

These three parameters can also be applied in smaller domains. For example, it can be categorised as an extreme religious practice when an individual continuously performs religious worship and disregards their social obligations at the family and community levels.

In the present time, extreme groups interpret the concept of *jihad* as a fight against non-Muslims. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004)

It is clear that the term ‘moderate’ is against excessive tolerance. A Muslim is not allowed to consume *haram*⁷⁸ food or beverages under the pretext of tolerance toward other religious communities. A Christian must not force themselves to take part in fasting during the month of Ramadan under the pretext of sympathy toward their Muslim brethren. Being moderate is simply respecting and honouring religious differences and not disturbing each other.

No individual should ‘mortgage’ their belief in the name of tolerance. A moderate must be firm in their belief and have a high religious spirit. At the same time, they must also be able to distinguish religious teachings that they ought to uphold wholeheartedly from religious interpretations that they ought to respect despite not necessarily adhering to.

Essentially, there should be no compromise when it comes to core religious values such as *tauhid*.⁷⁹ For religious interpretations where various differences between religious experts prevail, it is enough to simply pick certain interpretations without denouncing others. This is where the boundary between moderate and extreme actions lies.

⁷⁸ See note 49.

⁷⁹ The term *tauhid* is to proclaim God as one, that is monotheism. Monotheism is the belief in one God, or the essential oneness of one God. This is an English term which was first coined in the 17th century to differentiate Christianity, Judaism, and Islam in regard to their beliefs in one God *vis-à-vis* other religious beliefs, particularly the polytheistic ones (belief in more than one God). The idea of God’s (Allah) oneness is inscribed in the first part of Muslim profession of faith, namely the *shahada* (profession) which states ‘There is no god but God’. This sentence is repeated by Muslims throughout their lives and in the *adhan* (calls to prayers). See Juan E. Campo, *Encyclopedia of Islam* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008)

Religious Moderation Programmes

I introduced the term ‘religious moderation’ with a contemporary formulation within the context of managing religious lives in Indonesia back in 2016. I have often employed this term on various occasions. I have also conveyed messages pertaining to religious moderation to the managers of state universities under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. I entrust these universities’ chancellors to establish and cultivate a House of Moderation⁸⁰ as a channel to hold dialogues, evaluate, and strengthen religious moderation as well as provide solutions for socio-religious problems in Indonesia. In this regard, it also serves as a space for actualisation of scholars’ contributions to the realisation of a harmonious Indonesia.

The discourse of religious moderation has continued since then, becoming a major theme in meetings between religious leaders, cultural experts, and academics which resulted in the formulation of *Pemufakatan Yogyakarta*⁸¹ and *Risalah Jakarta*.⁸² The Yogyakarta Consensus conveys

⁸⁰ The term ‘House of Moderation’ is inspired by *To Pareng* and *Tongkonan*, the local intergenerational traditions of Toraja community in South Sulawesi. *To Pareng* refers to the institution which resolves social conflicts and creates peace within the community. In terms of architecture, *Tongkonan* is also known as *Banua Pa’rapuan*, that is a designated place where conflict resolutions are carried out using local traditions which aim to find the middle ground/compromise that can solve relative disputes.

⁸¹ *Pemufakatan Yogyakarta*, or the Yogyakarta Consensus in English, comprises a declaration signed by several figures on 2–3 November 2018 in Bantul. The consensus contains the shared concern over social tensions in the society related to religious and cultural relations in Indonesia.

⁸² *Risalah Jakarta*, or the Jakarta Treaty in English, is an interfaith dialogue forum which consists of religious and cultural figures as well as academicians who met on 28–29 December 2018 in Ancol to discuss three issues: religious conservatism in Indonesia, religious practices amidst the era of disruption, and the religion-state relations. On 1 April 2020, this forum sent an open letter to President Joko Widodo concerning the protection

a call for all parties, both as individuals and members of the nation-state, to re-evaluate and strive for significant reforms in all levels and dimensions (reason as well as physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions) of their thoughts, actions, and conduct in responding to global developments. The Jakarta Treaty invites all religious figures to develop together and contribute ideas to religious and state affairs.

From these ongoing and dynamic moral discourses and advocacies, the concept of religious moderation then develops and is implemented in government programmes. Following this, responses from various groups emerged in profuse number, from religious figures, religious mass organisations, scholars, researchers, to youth groups. Feedback was given in various forms and through various channels.

Of course, not all parties enthusiastically accepted the concept of religious moderation, especially since the concept was introduced amidst a growing polarisation in the country caused by identity politics.⁸³ There were those who offered constructive and critical feedback, but there were also those who misunderstood the concept. Some immediately rejected the concept without first contemplating it. The most direct objection came from those who made ‘viral’ the counter-narratives against

of the citizens in the government’s COVID-19 responses.

⁸³ A political instrument which employs identities to achieve certain political goals by mobilising support from certain portions of the population who share a similar trait (racially, ethnically, culturally, religiously, or other elements). Identity politics may also refer to socio-political activities or movements which are designed to secure votes. In Indonesia, religions and ethnicities are often used to mobilise support from the wider communities. See Burhanuddin Muhtadi, ‘Politik Identitas dan Mitos Pemilih Rasional’ [Identity Politics and the Myth of Rational Voters], *Maarif* Vol 13, No. 2, Desember 2018.

One should not ‘mortgage’ their belief in the name of tolerance. A moderate must be firm in his belief and have a high religious spirit. At the same time, one must also be able to distinguish religious teachings that they ought to uphold wholeheartedly from religious interpretations that ought to respect despite not necessarily adhering to.

religious moderation tinged with anti-government sentiment.

The responses that have surfaced to date remain within reasonable limits. As religious moderation has become institutionalised within government programmes, it is difficult to avoid rejection of the concept that is imbued with politics. Further, there has also been intentional distortions that are designed to provoke negative emotions. There are also deviations by those who carelessly promote religious moderation using thoughtless words. Despite all of these, the truth will always find a way. Gradually, discussions on religious moderation have increasingly carried more substance and expanded in their spectrum. The speakers are also increasingly varied, from traditional religious leaders to retired generals.

Religious moderation was first publicly tested when it was adopted as a government programme in 2019. This public test brought together various relevant parties, consisting of prominent figures from mass organisations, academicians, activists, and many other stakeholders. This resulted in a constructive dialogue which refined the conceptualisation of religious moderation. Interestingly, this public test appeared more like a sort of dialogue space that reconciled the perspectives of the conservatives and the liberals, rather than as a space of debates between differing parties. This implies that religious moderation has been embedded within our nation-state; hence, its dialectics tend to lead to the same point.

The public test was carried out not solely to meet preconditions for policy implementation. More than that, the public test was intended to involve various stakeholders in order to assess their preliminary attitudes and to measure their responses to the proposed notion of religious moderation. In the process, I highlighted the importance of transparency in policy-making activities, from the stage of policy conception, through its deliberation, to its passing, in order to ensure a healthy political communication and ecosystem within the country.

An assertive pattern of communication—open, firm, and honest delivery of one’s thoughts while maintaining respect for the interlocutor—was demonstrated by respondents in the public test. Each respondent possessed religious expertise that could well persuade their interlocutors. The interactions consisted of constructive feedback, rather than persuasions, which resulted in collective enlightenment. Indirectly, the respondents were practising religious moderation. Inevitably, at the end of the public test, all of the involved parties reached an agreement that religious moderation should be promoted. From this decision,⁸⁴ the subsequent discussions further enriched and streamlines the discussions on religious moderation.

Public policy-making activities are naturally coloured with debates and battles of ideas and even clashes of interests. Policies that are formulated

⁸⁴ For this, I would like to express my gratitude to Komaruddin Hidayat, Adian Husaini, Elga Sarapung, Ulil Abshar Abdalla, and other scholars and religious figures who participated in the public test of Religious Moderation at the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Jakarta, 8 October 2019.

carefully and founded upon strong considerations will usually produce credible decisions. They will be further augmented if the policy-makers project first the prospect of public acceptance to the policies.

The problem is that intangible government policies and programmes are generally more difficult for the public to digest, compared to tangible programmes such as infrastructure development which yield immediate impacts. It is even more difficult when it comes to religious subject matters which are highly sensitive and affect non-religious aspects of life as well. One of the main reasons behind the reluctance of investors to invest capital in Indonesia is the country's vulnerability to social issues, including religious issues.

In short, introducing religious moderation is not an easy feat. When it was proposed as one of the national programmes in the RPJMN, the National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas) did not immediately accept the proposal. It required an intense discussion equipped with strong arguments to test the feasibility of religious moderation as a prioritised programme. The incorporation of religious moderation into the 2020–2024 RPJMN was hailed as a historical moment for the Ministry of Religious Affairs as it marked the first time the ministry's proposal for a prioritised national programme was accepted.⁸⁵ Indeed, the Ministry of Religious Affairs had previously succeeded in making the establishment of the Indonesian International Islamic

⁸⁵ Those who played an important role in this respect were Oman Fathurahman, Hadi Rahman, Muhamad Adlin Sila, Ali Rokhmad, Ida Nor Qosim, and Rosidin Karidi of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. There were as well Subandi and Amich ALhumami from the Bappenas.

University (UIII) a strategic national programme. The context of the university's establishment too was part of the campaign for religious moderation. Specifically, the intention was to establish a prestigious university that serves as the 'mecca' for Islamic studies while simultaneously promoting Indonesia globally as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world that can manage cultural diversity, preserve tolerance, and maintain social harmony.

I briefly present this story to ward off the suspicions of numerous parties who claim that religious moderation is a Western ideology that aims to dismantle Indonesia through religious liberalisation.⁸⁶ On the contrary, religious moderation does not provide an entry point for state interventions to curtail and homogenise religious practices.

Personal choices over religious beliefs, understanding, and practices, which are within the domain of individuals' internal affairs (*forum internum*), are beyond the domains of religious moderation. Rather, the realm of religious moderation is confined within the impacts of religious practices upon external domains (*forum externum*) and coexistence. The suspicions that religious moderation is intended to transform Indonesia into a secular country, too, must be dispelled.

Religious moderation is by no means an agenda of

⁸⁶ Religious thoughts which emphasise freedom of thought (rationality) that is independent of religious texts. For more discussion on liberal Islam in Indonesia, please see Bool, Philip John Gill, 'Liberal Islam in Indonesia – From Revelation to Reason and Freedom: the Mu'tazilites, Harun Nasution and the Liberal Islam Network.' Thesis. Faculty of Arts, Asia Institute, Indonesian Program, The University of Melbourne (2010).

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secularisation or a substitute for deradicalisation⁸⁷ or counter-terrorism programmes. Religious moderation actually seeks to invite every religious community to pay more attention to private enterprises, to prioritise the implementation of universal core religious values—namely the protection of human dignity and the realisation of common welfare—in a fair and balanced manner, and to comply with the constitution as a shared consensus. In other words, moderate religious practices are essentially religious commendations and God's will.

For the religious Indonesian nation, who live in a country which upholds the belief in the God Almighty, moderate religious practices—namely avoiding extreme practices in understanding and implementing religious beliefs—constitute an urgent and very important necessity. For societies (such as Indonesia's) which cannot separate themselves from religious teachings in their everyday actions, religious moderation becomes an inevitability. All results from development efforts would be in vain and fail if extreme perspectives, conduct, and practices are adopted. Extreme religious thoughts and practices will destroy our Indonesia. Once again, religious moderation is not a foreign interest or agenda. It is our real need as a nation.

In the end, religious moderation is a continual and endless endeavour. It will remain dynamic amidst our religious communities in order to respond to change. Religious moderation must be understood

⁸⁷ Efforts to rehabilitate actors who adopt radical views by promoting moderate stance. In the context of Indonesia, deradicalisation is a programme implemented by the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT).

and implemented as a Joint Movement, rather than perceived merely as an empty programme or project.

As a never-ending process, every aspect pertaining to religious moderation, particularly its process of conceptualisation, meaning-making, strategic implementation, and evaluation, must be continuously contextualised within its surrounding strategic environment and ecosystem.

Religious moderation is a concept which exists amidst society (the living grand conception) and must be preserved. It is a cultural strategy for countries with religious commitment such as Indonesia. It is not a static, rigid, and soulless conception. It represents the soul of the nation that ought to prevail and develop in accordance with contexts and changes of era.

The movement of religious moderation requires dialogues and examples. It needs actors that can soothe and reconcile, instead of dividing, the people. It seeks figures who are inclusive instead of exclusive, who adopt a cooperative approach instead of a confrontational one. It requires role models, religious and cultural leaders that provide examples, and scholars that clarify distortions.

The movement of religious moderation needs the active participation of all of us, we who understand and implement religious practices based on reason, who practise religious teachings in a fair and balanced manner using our souls, logic, and perception to protect Indonesia and nurture collective harmony.

Religious moderation is a concept which exists amidst society (the living grand conception) and must be preserved. It is a cultural strategy for countries with religious commitment such as Indonesia.

03 Religious Moderation as a Solution

CAN religious moderation be a solution?

This is a critical question which evaluates whether religious moderation is merely an empty concept responding to a new phenomenon or whether it is a formulation that can be employed to overcome social problems.

Of course, religious moderation is not the answer for all problems; it is not a prescription for all social diseases. No community must not expect religious moderation to become a solution for every problem. Further, not all religious conflicts and disputes originate from religious matter; a significant number of religious conflicts are rooted in non-religious clashes such as political contentions, economic struggles, battles of self-interests, or personal affairs.

In giving the best possible answer for this question, several dimensions are considered. Religious moderation has a number of dimensions. First, it is applicable only in external, instead of internal or personal, domains. Second, it yields significant results when implemented in circumstances where conflict resolution strategies without aspects of religious moderation fail to bear fruit. Third, it can serve as an instrument with legal power in resolving conflicts. Fourth, it can be replicated in similar cases.

The following section summarises a number of cases which used the approach of religious moderation in their resolutions.

The Status of Bahá'í Faith⁸⁸

Adherents of the Bahá'í faith have existed in Indonesia since the end of the 19th century and their community started to further develop in the 1950s. The presence of Bahá'í adherents was initially met with opposition. President Soekarno officially prohibited Bahá'í community in Presidential Regulation No.

⁸⁸ A monotheistic religious belief that highlights the spiritual unity of the whole humanity. The Baha'i Faith first appeared in Persia (now Iran) in 1863. Its founder was Mirza Husayn-Ali Nuri who assumed the title of *Baha'ullah* (the glory of God). According to the teachings of the Baha'i Faith, Baha'ullah is perceived as the latest embodiment of God and is believed to be the divine teacher promised to mankind. The mission of baha'ullah is to lay the foundation for world unity as well as to start the era of peace and justice. In the beginning of the 21st century, the adherents to the Baha'i Faith numbered at five to eight million people who were spread across more than 200 countries. In Indonesia, there are at least 500,000 adherents to Baha'i. See Richard C. Martin, *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, (Farmington Hills: Gale, 2016).

264/1962, along with the prohibition of Freemasonry,⁸⁹ Rosicrucianism,⁹⁰ Moral Re-Armament,⁹¹ Lions Club International,⁹² and Rotary International.⁹³ Thirty-eight years later, this prohibition was nullified by President Abdurrahman Wahid through Presidential Regulation No. 69/2000. The Bahá'í community has continued to encounter intimidation and discrimination ever since, particularly from parties which perceive the community as a deviant sect which transgresses Islamic teachings.

In 2014, Home Minister Gamawan Fauzi asked for clarification from the Ministry of Religious Affairs whether the Bahá'í Faith is indeed among the beliefs adhered to in Indonesia. This question was related to the Home Ministry's responsibility for public registration and public administrative service provision.

⁸⁹ A fraternity which focuses on moral and spiritual values that first developed between the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century in Europe. Members of the fraternity often gathered lodges which functioned as its headquarters and hubs for social interactions and discussions between its members. This fraternity continued to develop and spread well into the region of East Indies (now Indonesia) in 1762, The 'La Choisie' Lodge was established in Batavia (now Jakarta) was its first lodge in Asia.

⁹⁰ A German spiritual organisation founded by Christian Rosenkreuz. This organisation is often touted as a secret organisation that first appeared in Europe in the beginning of the 17th century. Rosicrucianism has the symbol of a rose cross, and its members have the belief that they hold secret wisdom which they inherit from the ancient times.

⁹¹ A moral and spiritual movement founded by Frank Buchman in 1938. In 2001, this movement changed its name into the initiatives of Change. This movement has the purpose of improving the condition of the world by uniting mankind from all nations and religions.

⁹² A social organisation which was first established in 1917 in the United States under the name the International Association of Lions Clubs (Lions Clubs International). The word Lions itself is an acronym of Liberty, Intelligence, Our Nation's Safety.

⁹³ The Rotary Club is a humanitarian organisation which comprises professionals with the purpose of voluntarily servicing communities in their respective fields. Members of the Rotary Club are often called Rotarians. They bear the motto of 'Service above Self', that is to prioritise activities which promote collective assistance rather than personal interests.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs then reaffirmed that the Bahá'í faith constitutes a separate religious belief; it is not a branch or part of another religion. According to research on the history, teachings, and practices of the Bahá'í community conducted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, this belief has approximately six million adherents in more than 20 countries. In Indonesia, the number of Bahá'í adherents stands at approximately 5,000 people, spread across Banyuwangi, Jakarta, Medan, Surabaya, Palopo, Bandung, Malang, and several other cities.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs believes that Bahá'í is part of the religious beliefs that must be protected by the 1945 Constitution as stipulated by Article 28E and Article 29. According to the PNPS Law, the Bahá'í faith is a separate belief from Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism and its existence is guaranteed by the state as long as it does not violate the regulations.⁹⁴

Does the state have the authority to acknowledge or, in contrast, deny the existence of faiths? Does the state have the right to determine whether or not a faith could be considered as a religious belief? These questions need to be addressed considering the potential problems that may arise, particularly within the context of state administration.

The government is obliged to protect and serve each religious adherent, to ensure their freedom to believe

⁹⁴ See <https://kemenag.go.id/berita/read/203920/menag-umat-bahai-berhak-peroleh-layanan-kependudukan>

and practise their religion as taught by their religious belief. To carry out this obligation, the government requires a basis or legal foundation in determining whether or not a faith can be considered a religious belief.⁹⁵ With a legal status, the Bahá'í community has the right to exist in Indonesia. Further, they also have the right to enjoy equal civil rights like their fellow Indonesian brethren in terms of education, marriage, etc.

In this case, the government (i.e., the Ministry of Religious Affairs) acknowledges the Bahá'í faith as a religious belief; within the context of statehood, the ministry adopts a neutral and objective stance. Such a conclusion is based on in-depth research, coupled with self-declaration by Bahá'í adherents. The opinions of several Muslim figures that the Bahá'í faith is a splinter of Islamic teachings are automatically denied for the Bahá'í faith has a separate set of teachings and beliefs that are different from Islam. The denunciation of Bahá'í as a heretical group that ought to be discriminated against is equal to imposing certain interpretation based on one's specific religious belief to other religious adherents. Such an imposition contradicts the values of religious moderation.

The statement acknowledging Bahá'í as a religious belief does not mean that the state recognises or officially sanctions this faith. The state does not have the authority to acknowledge or deny, that is whether or not to formalise a religious belief. This includes

⁹⁵ See <https://kemenag.go.id/berita/read/204052/menag-kemenag-kaji-kewenangan-negara-akui-atau-tidak-akui-suatu-agama>

Indonesia's six major religions: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Our constitution does not use terms such as '(un) recognised religions' and '(un)official religions'.

Law No. 1/1965 on Prevention of Religious Abuse and Blasphemy states that these six religions are those adhered to by almost the entire population of Indonesia. This does not automatically correspond to the prohibition of religions other than these six major religions. These other religions also receive a full guarantee of protection as stipulated in the 1945 Constitution's Article 29 Paragraph 2. Their existence is approved if they do not violate the regulations embedded in the existing legal system.

Another constitutional principle that is also in line with the values of religious moderation is that all religious adherents, irrespective of their belief, have equal rights as the citizens of Indonesia. This means that the adherents of beliefs outside the six major religions in Indonesia have the right to live in Indonesia. This is the juncture where the state must ensure the fulfilment of every religious adherent's rights.

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Shia⁹⁶ Conflict in Sampang

A group of Shia adherents under the leadership of Tajul Muluk in Sampang, Madura, was expelled from their own village due to their different religious belief vis-à-vis the dominant Sunni⁹⁷ Madurese local community. They were forced to flee to the neighbouring area of Sidoarjo, near the capital of East Java.

This conflict centred on differences over interpretations of a religion, namely Islam. This case was unique, particular, and specific, yet it was not easy to resolve despite its narrow scope. The conflict was over different interpretations within the same religion between two opposing parties that lived in the same village and shared a sense of kinship.

The local community, most of whom are Sunnis, would not have expressed antagonism had Shia been categorised as a different belief outside Islam. This argument is supported by the fact that there have been no conflicts between the Madurese people and adherents

⁹⁶ One of the two major groups of Muslims (the other one being Sunni). The word Shia comes from Shiat Ali which means the party of Ali. The Shia community believes that the rule of the community (led by an imam) should be through Ali and the descendants of the Prophet through his daughter Fatima (who was married to Ali). Currently, the number of Shia constitutes 15% of the world's Muslim population. Shia predominates or serves as significant minorities in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Bahrain, and other Persian Gulf (Arab) countries. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004)

⁹⁷ A branch of Islam which has the largest group of adherents. Sunni puts an emphasis on sunnah (the Prophet's conduct), hadith (the Prophet's sayings), and the Quran. From these sources, they developed four primary schools of thought, namely Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali, and Syafi'i. Currently, Sunni holds the largest percentage of members in Muslim communities, namely approximately 85% of the total Muslim population. Those who adhere to Sunni Islam prefer to call themselves *ahlussunnah wal-jamā'ah* (people who follow sunnah and are part of the majority). See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004).

of other religions in the region. According to the local community, the problem could only be resolved if their Shia neighbours repented and vowed to return to the teaching of *ahlussunnah wal jamaah*.⁹⁸ In this regard, the repentance and avowal were the preconditions for their return to their hometown in Madura. Local leaders argued that these preconditions were agreed by the local community, ulema, and the government.

Indeed, when the preconditions were met eight years later, it facilitated the return of Tajul Muluk and his followers. Two years after they made the vow, gradually, starting from 29 April 2022, they left refugee camps and returned to their respective homes. The process of their return was attended by officials of the local administration, local figures from Sampang Regency, and representatives of the central government. To support this reconciliation, the government is also providing new houses for the returnees through the Public Works and Housing (PUPR) Ministry.⁹⁹

There are three interesting aspects in this conflict resolution, starting from the resolution pattern, how the events unfolded, to the participation of interested parties. This case provides an important lesson for other similar conflicts.

The first aspect is the solution offered by the involved parties to end the conflict. The fleeing Shia community eventually relented to the whims of the majority group who imposed particular preconditions for their return

⁹⁸ See note 66.

⁹⁹ See <https://kemenag.go.id/read/bertahap-pengungsi-konflik-sampang-dijemput-kembali-ke-kampung-halaman-25ja>

to Sampang. When they appeared to repent and take the vow voluntarily, Tajul Muluk and his followers were actually lowering their egos to avoid harm. The implication is that the resolution of this conflict tended to repeat the pattern of majoritarianism in conflict resolution, in which minority groups do not have any leverage. This conflict actually had the possibility to reach an ideal resolution when a portion of Sunni adherents in Sampang visited their fleeing neighbours and relatives in Sidoarjo during Eid celebration. Social interactions during this celebration could organically build a sense of unity amidst differences. Unfortunately, such dialogues at the grassroot level were lost to the voices of local elites.

The second aspect is the protractedness of the conflict. This conflict could have been resolved in a speedy manner if the involved parties had prioritised tolerance; all parties should have not forcefully imposed their perspectives or exaggerated their differences. This conflict was prolonged as each party was adamant to resolve the conflict using their chosen methods. A tug-of-war between parties then occurred: those who did not want any preconditions for the Shias' return and those who set these preconditions. It takes a vast heart to loosen tensions in such circumstances, so that conflicts can be resolved without wasting much energy while minimising the number of parties who are hurt or disadvantaged.

The third aspect is the involvement of numerous parties. For approximately a decade, efforts to resolve

this conflict involved numerous parties both at the local and national levels. It is difficult to count the number of contributing parties in the conflict resolution. It is interesting to see how the government positioned itself in this process. The government provided refugee camps and monthly compensation, assisted the refugees to get jobs, and prepared shelters in their hometowns. From these examples, it could be seen that both local administration and central government attempted to increase state presence in ensuring that the rights of the refugees as Indonesian citizens were fulfilled. They were not tempted to take sides in addressing the local community's internal religious conflict by, for instance, trying to arbitrate differences between Shia and Sunni religious interpretations. The enthusiasm of government officials to bring refugees back to their hometowns merely illustrated their aspiration to create social harmony within the country.

ISIS Organisation

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), an organisation which aims to establish an Islamic state through violence, has been relatively successful in recruiting sympathisers from a portion of Indonesia's Muslim population. This organisation, which intends to unite Muslim communities under a caliph, carries out terrorist attacks as part of their religious practices. Some of their attacks have been conducted in Indonesia by ISIS sympathisers who received 'training' in Syria. The National Police reported that around 1,000 Indonesians

are part of the terrorist organisation. Some of these ISIS members have returned to Indonesia, bringing along ISIS ideology in their return. Some of these returnees were the perpetrators of terror attacks in various police headquarters and suicide bombing in several public spaces.

The government strongly outlaws ISIS ideology in Indonesia. The government deems ISIS as unrepresentative of Islamic values and extreme organisation which manipulates religious belief for non-religious interests. ISIS obviously contradicts Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, the realisation of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), and our national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*.¹⁰⁰ The Ministry of Religious Affairs is at the forefront in the national campaign against the spread of ISIS ideology through several key initiatives. This encompasses the issuance of warnings pertaining to the dangers of ISIS, organising meetings with Islamic mass organisations, holding a variety of educational and outreach forums, and formulating instructions for civil servants.

A seminar attended by leaders and prominent figures from Islamic mass organisations produced a set of recommendations which are highly aligned with the values of religious moderation. These recommendations include: 1. There must be a solution to world problems arising from international injustice, especially those affecting Islamic communities such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; 2. A consolidation in

¹⁰⁰ See note 14.

Islamic communities must be reached, so that existing sectarian conflicts can be resolved. This includes the problems between Iran and Saudi Arabia; 3. Moderate Islamic perspectives must be prioritised considering that Indonesia is a fertile ground where a ‘religion of peace’ can be nurtured. This is because the history of Islam’s peaceful arrival in Indonesia and the relative harmony in Indonesia, both the harmony with God, the harmony between fellow human beings, and the harmony between human beings and the environment.¹⁰¹

None of the representatives of the Islamic mass organisations attending the seminar supported ISIS ideology. On the contrary, all arguments proposed during the seminar were directed toward the protection of Indonesia as a unitary state based on a national consensus. Alternative models of statehood are not needed as they jeopardise the nation’s existence.

The then Chief of the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), Ansyad Mbai, appreciated the assertiveness and the strategic actions adopted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. In truth, none of the actions taken by the ministry were anything special; all of the ministry’s strategic actions were suitable responses to circumstances that enable the emergence of organisations/movements that threaten Indonesia’s social and civic affairs. The actions taken by ISIS and its adherents are not only extreme, but very extreme. They threaten not only the Indonesian population, but also the world at large. Their movement must be

¹⁰¹ See <https://kemenag.go.id/berita/read/205253/ketum-mui-isis-itu-persoalan-historis>

repressed and prevented. The cruelty performed by ISIS does not represent religious teachings at all and endangers humanity. No common sense can accept ISIS's savagery and the evil conspiracy backing the organisation.

The Tolikara Incident

The Tolikara incident tarnished the sanctity of Eid celebration in Papua in 2015. What began as the destruction of Muslim places of worship during Eid prayers soon became a national debate. This incident was a tough test for the Indonesian nation which was then still highly polarised by identity politics.¹⁰² There were mounting concerns that the incident was intentionally enacted to agitate the public and cause religious clashes. At that time, even a little bit of provocation could trigger a huge conflict.¹⁰³

Fortunately, all involved parties could restrain themselves. At the local level, religious leaders, gathered together with local government officials and formulated strategies. The Ministry of Religious Affairs also took speedy actions together with the involved parties to examine and understand the root causes of the incident.¹⁰⁴ Christian religious agencies also released similar statements, presenting their concerns over the

¹⁰² See note 84.

¹⁰³ See <https://kemenag.go.id/berita/read/274731/menag-kecam-kasus-tolikara-harap-umat-percaya-pada-polri-dan-tidak-terprovokasi>

¹⁰⁴ See <https://kemenag.go.id/berita/read/274716/menag-instruksikan-dirjen-bimas-kristen-dan-kakanwil-tangani-kericuhan-id-di-papua>

Muslim community whose religious practices were disrupted by the incident.

An extraordinary response was shown by Muslims who were then identified as the opposition. On Wednesday, 22 June 2015, a number of prominent figures and activists who were part of the People's Committee for Tolikara (Komat) came to me and expressed their intention to contribute to the re-establishment of peace and tolerance in Tolikara.¹⁰⁵ Using the tagline 'Damai Tolikara Damai Papua',¹⁰⁶ they attempted to restore the condition in Tolikara through physical and non-physical rehabilitation efforts. On the next day, several ulema and interfaith leaders met the President in the State Palace to discuss the best solutions for the incident.

The government implemented three measures to restore the condition and interfaith harmony in Tolikara: speedy rehabilitation, professional and just law enforcement, and increasing interfaith dialogues. These three measures were implemented collectively by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Home Ministry, the Indonesian Military (TNI), and the National Police. In particular, the government organised a public consultation pertaining to interfaith coexistence within the context of pluralistic societies. This event was attended by at least 100 religious leaders from Papua, West Papua, and Maluku.

The Tolikara incident came as a surprise. This is because in the past, Papua was relatively safe from

¹⁰⁵ See <https://kemenag.go.id/berita/read/274888/menag-dukung-komat-bangun-kedamaian-dan-toleransi-di-tolikara>

¹⁰⁶ Indonesian for Peace in Tolikara, Peace in Papua.

religious conflicts. The region's religious leaders hold a high degree of wisdom regarding tolerance and respect for differences. From 1995 to 1997, I worked in Papua, specifically in the Jayawijaya highlands, and I witnessed the peaceful state of the region.

From the Tolikara incident, we can learn that members of the Indonesian nation-state truly love each other. At the time of the incident, religious and public figures were not tempted to assume a partial stance. They remained cool-headed in overcoming the incident. It is difficult to find similar responses in other parts of the world. Such magnanimity shown throughout the incident can only arise from moderate spirits that appear at the exact moment they are needed. All of the involved parties in the rapid conflict resolution in Tolikara represent the elements of the unitary Indonesia.

Church Arson in Aceh Singkil

On Tuesday, 13 October 2015 in Aceh Singkil, a group of individuals who were disappointed with the agreement between the government and the local community regarding the management of unlicensed churches committed church arson, followed by clashes between the locals which inflicted injuries on a number of casualties. It is suspected that the conflict was precipitated by pressure from the Muslim community for the local administration to dismantle unlicensed churches. The Muslim community asserted that they would take unilateral actions if their demand remained

The adoption of regulations concerning houses of worship is urgently needed in Indonesia, in which the population is both religious and pluralistic. There must be a collective agreement regarding the construction of houses of worship. The absence of relevant regulations or agreements would prompt anarchic actions due to the lack of guidelines for local leaders and other authorised parties to administer houses of worship.

unheeded. According to a report by *Tempo*,¹⁰⁷ this was not the first case of church arson in Aceh Singkil.

Following this incident, there were appeals from various parties for the annulment of PBM Joint Regulation No. 8/2006 and No. 9/2006 released by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Home Ministry on Guidelines for Implementing the Duties of Regional Heads/Deputy Regional Heads in Maintaining Religious Harmony, Empowering Religious Harmony Forums, and Establishing Houses of worship.

I questioned these appeals. The passing of the PBM joint regulation was not made without any consideration. The formulation of this regulation was the result of a long process which concluded the regulations were the best compromise. Throughout 2005 and 2006, religious leaders¹⁰⁸ and the government¹⁰⁹ held numerous discussions to find possible solutions for disputes over houses of worship. From these discussions, the agreement on the formulation of the PBM joint regulation was concluded. The PBM joint regulation passed in 2006 was not solely formulated by the government; rather, it was a collective work born from a series of discussions between various religious

¹⁰⁷ See <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/709149/gereja-dibakar-di-aceh-singkil-bukan-kasus-pertama/full&view=ok>

¹⁰⁸ KH Maruf Amin and KH Zaidan Jauhari represented the Islamic community, Dr Maria Farida and Vera Wenny represented the Catholic community, Dr Lodewijk Gultom and Martin Hutabarat represented the Protestant community, Suhadi Sendjaja and Sudjito represented the Buddhist community, and I Nengah Dana and Agusmantik represented the Hindu community.

¹⁰⁹ The government was represented by the then Chief of the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Research and Development Agency (Balitbang), Atho Mudzhar, and the then Director General of the Home Ministry's National and Political Unity Agency (Kesbangpol), Sudarsono.

communities each represented by two figures. This joint regulation has since then served as a guideline in administering licences for houses of worship of all religious beliefs. In my opinion, there has yet to be a better alternative to warrant the annulment of the joint regulation. If annulled, 'the law of the jungle' might arise, enabling practices of majoritarianism which violate human rights due to the absence of a common guideline in administering interfaith coexistence.¹¹⁰

With the enactment of the PBM joint regulation, the construction of houses of worship must be based on the existing regulations. On the other hand, individuals who object to the construction of houses of worship must also base their objection on the existing regulatory framework. Indonesia adopts the rule of law, so each conduct must be legally accountable. The practices of vigilantism can disrupt social order. This means that every house of worship must be licenced according to the regulations.

The adoption of regulations concerning houses of worship is urgently needed in Indonesia, in which the population is both religious and pluralistic. There must be a collective agreement regarding the construction of houses of worship. The absence of relevant regulations or agreements would prompt anarchic actions due to the lack of guidelines for local leaders and other authorised parties to administer houses of worship.

In this regard, the PBM joint regulation also serves

¹¹⁰ See <https://kemenag.go.id/berita/read/301101/menag-pbm-2006-acuan-pendirian-rumah-ibadah>

as a guarantee as well as the legal bedrock for the government to facilitate the construction of houses of worship. The essence of the joint regulation is to embody the guarantee from the state for its citizens' needs for a place to worship.

Article 14 of the PBM joint regulation stipulates that prior to the construction of houses of worship, several administrative and technical requirements must first be satisfied. Further, the construction of a house of worship must also meet specific requirements: 1. The registration of the names and at least 90 identity cards of the projected users of the proposed house of worship that are approved by local officials in accordance with the levels of regional boundaries as stipulated in Article 13 Paragraph 3; 2. Support from at least 60 members of the local community that is authorised by the subdistrict chief/village head; and 3. A written recommendation by the Interfaith Communication Forum (FKUB) at the regency or municipal level.

My personal take on these requirements is that it would be better to remove the requirement for a written recommendation by the FKUB as stipulated in the PBM joint regulation's Article 14 Paragraph 2 Point 2. The FKUB does not have the capacity to issue such a recommendation. In specific circumstances where a conflict or dispute between users of a house of worship and local communities arise, the FKUB should serve as a mediator. Thus, the FKUB cannot be positioned as an agency which decides whether or not to issue a recommendation.

What is often overlooked by the public is the stipulation of Article 14 Paragraph 3, which reasserts that in the event where the support of at least 60 members of the local community cannot be obtained, the local administration is obliged to ensure the availability of another location where the proposed house of worship can be constructed. Such an obligation manifests guaranteed protection by the state for citizens who wish for the construction of houses of worship.

Rather than completely annulling the PBM joint regulation, I believe a revision would be a better solution. In this case, the revision must be intended to improve, rather than erase, the regulation. Requirements for the construction of houses of worship must be regulated because houses of worship is different from places of worship. Places of worships refer to designated areas where individuals from any religious communities can freely practise their beliefs as taught by the religions to which they adhere. In regard to houses of worship, such freedom is curtailed by spatial and urban planning as well as social and community planning, among others, because the worships are carried out en masse, impacting the social order.

The regulation on issuing of Building Permits (IMB) in regard to the construction of houses of worship is intended to ensure that the houses are indeed specifically designated to accommodate religious worships. For instance, shop houses¹¹¹ cannot be categorised as houses of worship, yet a shop house can be temporarily used

¹¹¹ Commonly known as Ruko or Rumah Toko in Indonesian.

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as a house of worship while a permanent designated area for worship is sought. The continuing use of shop houses as houses of worship, however, cannot be justified.

Houses of worship may be registered as private property. In practice, though, houses of worship are used collectively. This will directly and indirectly raise social issues in the area surrounding the houses of worship. In this regard, the approval of the local communities is needed to ensure their readiness for the construction of a house of worship in their neighbourhood and its subsequent consequences. This is what needs to be administered.¹¹²

I have presented this view on a number of occasions. Generally, religious figures agree with, or even desire, raising the status of the PBM joint regulation into a law. Such an aspiration emerged, for instance, during the meeting ‘1,000 Interfaith Leaders for A Peaceful Southeast Sulawesi’ which resulted in five recommendations for the central government.¹¹³ The five recommendations are as follows:

1. Raising the legal status of the PBM joint regulation into a law to ensure a strong legal legitimacy;
2. Formulating a regulation which administers the FKUB even until the regional level to ensure that the forum will receive appropriate budget

¹¹² See <https://kemenag.go.id/berita/read/305038/revisi-pbm-rumah-ibadah-untuk-menyempurnakan-bukan-meniadakan>

¹¹³ See <https://kemenag.go.id/berita/read/307247/tokoh-lintas-agama-sultra-minta-pbm-ditingkatkan-jadi-undang-undang>

- from the state to organise religious events that can protect and maintain interfaith harmony;
3. Calling upon the law enforcers to take strong measures against the perpetrators of violence who employ religious pretexts;
 4. Calling upon the government to appoint teachers of religious studies in all schools as needed; and
 5. Calling upon the FKUB to hold dialogues on spiritual, parliamentary, and political affairs that can soothe the public and create a safe, peaceful, and harmonious interfaith coexistence in the country.

In spite of the ongoing dynamics, it should be highlighted that a wider outreach of the PBM joint agreement which reaches all corners of the country has yet to be successfully instigated. Demands for the annulment of the PBM joint regulation might have arisen from the lack of knowledge in the public of the substance of the regulation. Let alone the general public, even a portion of religious figures, local leaders, and government officials, too, only have limited understanding about the joint regulation. Thus, a team specifically tasked with holding discussions on, reflecting on, evaluating, and projecting the future of the PBM joint regulation was established.

The team found that the public had yet to receive adequate information and explanation regarding the joint regulation. Further, problems in the regulation's implementation (rather than its substance per se) remain. Although there are shortcomings in its

principles, the PBM joint regulation deserves to be accepted as a guiding technical regulation concerning the construction of houses of worship. Most importantly, all religious communities shall be well informed about the substance of the regulation.

Discourses on this matter prevail. An FKUB National Coordinating Meeting that was held in Jakarta in early November 2020 recommended immediately raising the legal status of the PBM joint regulation into a Presidential Regulation.¹¹⁴

According to the perspective of religious moderation, the existence of the PBM joint regulation serves as a good example of implementing religious moderation in public spaces. This regulation, as conveyed in the essence of religious moderation, does not interfere with the religious freedom of individuals within the internal domain. Rather, what is regulated by the joint regulation is the construction of houses of worship (not the rights of worshipers) in pluralistic societies, a subject matter which lies in the external domain. The principles of fairness and balance in religious moderation are well-reflected in this joint regulation, which requires not only the support of religious adherents whose house of worship is about to be constructed, but also the support of local communities who may not necessarily adhere to the same religious belief. Even in the condition where support from local communities cannot be obtained, the PBM joint regulation still offers a solution, that is an obligation for local administrations to seek alternative

¹¹⁴ See <https://kemenag.go.id/berita/read/514532/rakornas-fkub-rekomendasikan-penguatan-pbm-no-9-dan-8-tahun-2006-jadi-perpres>

available locations in other areas where the proposed house of worship can be built.

Extreme Views in School Textbooks

An insult against the companions of the Prophet was found on student worksheets circulated in an Islamic high school¹¹⁵ in Jakarta in early March 2015. The content of these worksheets prompted strong censure from the public as there was an indication that it denounced certain Islamic interpretations and might constitute discrimination against particular tribal affiliations, religion, race, and societal groups.¹¹⁶

A month before, some equally controversial content was found in a religious studies textbook for students in the 11th grade in Jombang, East Java. The textbook contained extreme and intolerant messages. On page 78, in particular, the textbook states that it is admissible to kill non-Muslims.

Such messages cannot be allowed. The root of the problem is that such textbooks are published without verification by an authorised and competent party. To date, the publication of textbooks for religious and character education is under the authority of the

¹¹⁵ Known as *madrasah* in Indonesia. The word *madrasah* has the meaning of 'school'. Historically, *madrasah* referred to Sunni institutes of higher education where sharia and other Islamic knowledge were taught. Currently, *madrasah* refers to any religious schools, both private and public. See Juan E. Campo, *Encyclopedia of Islam* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008).

¹¹⁶ This type of discrimination is widely known as SARA in Indonesia, an acronym of four words: Suku, Agama, Ras, and Antargolongan.

Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Ministry since these textbooks are intended for students. The authority of the Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Ministry encompasses the publication of religious studies textbooks that will be used by students in Islamic schools. The publication of textbooks concerning religious studies should include consultation with the Ministry of Religious Affairs prior to their circulation in schools to prevent the spread of contentious materials which can cause social disturbance.

To ensure that school textbooks are free from any contents that are not aligned with educational purposes, the Ministry of Religious Affairs established task forces¹¹⁷ at the regency and municipal levels. Together with the heads of Islamic schools, these task forces are responsible for researching, examining, and scrutinising school textbooks used in Islamic schools. The task forces are tasked with combing through textbooks to ensure that they do not contain non-educational contents. Examples of non-educational contents are assent for intolerance, insults against the companions of the Prophet, and other subject matters that are not supposedly included in school textbooks. The Ministry of Religious Affairs also published the *Rahmatan Lil Alamin*¹¹⁸ Learning Guidance Module for schools. This module was prepared by selected teachers of religious studies through a series of workshops, including a comparative study with Oxford University.

¹¹⁷ See <https://kemenag.go.id/berita/read/249855/kemenag-bentuk-satgas-telaah-buku-mata-pelajaran>

¹¹⁸ The Islamic principle of promoting mercy to all mankind.

In 2017, the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Directorate General of Religious Studies reviewed and conducted a public assessment of textbooks used in religious studies and Arabic classes in Islamic junior and high schools¹¹⁹ as an anticipatory measure against the spread of extreme ideologies in Islamic schools and religious studies classes. The recommendations produced by this event were then used to improve the quality of textbooks used in Islamic schools. As a follow-up to the Religious Affairs Ministerial Decree No. 183/2019 on the Curriculum of Islamic Religious Studies and Arabic Studies in Islamic Schools, as many as 155 textbooks for Islamic schools were drafted, with the materials designed to meet various educational needs and prepare the students to face present challenges.¹²⁰

These 155 textbooks are also expected to produce lessons which can transform religious studies into an instrument of national development, such as an instrument to strengthen national and civic affairs in an effort to realise a developed Indonesia in the future. One of the measures taken is to position the lessons on the history of the caliphate,¹²¹ jihad,¹²² and religious moderation as correlated with numerous forms of Islamic communities' struggles to build civilisation since the

¹¹⁹ See <https://kemenag.go.id/berita/read/504780/kemenag-review-buku-pai-dan-bahasa-arab-mts-ma>

¹²⁰ See <https://kemenag.go.id/berita/read/512371/155-buku-madrasah-masuk-tahap-penilaian>

¹²¹ Linguistically, khilafah can be interpreted as 'ruler' (leader) or 'substitute' The word khilafah is defined as the general leadership for all Muslims to implement Islamic laws and carry the messages of Islam to every corner of the world. Those who helm this mission is called a caliph. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004).

¹²² See note 74.

time of the Prophet Muhammad to the present time. These lessons are presented within the textbooks in an integrative manner so that students at Islamic schools can develop greater proficiency in the interconnection between the caliphate history, jihad, and religious moderation within the context of the development of Islamic civilisation. Other than physical copies, these 155 textbooks can also be accessed online through Islamic schools' e-learning system.

Nurturing religious literacy through school textbooks can significantly influence students' mindsets. In 2017, research by the Centre for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) of the Syarif Hidayatullah Islamic State University (UIN) Jakarta found that as much as 51.1% of the Muslim school and university student respondents adopted views that were tinged with intolerance and radicalism. The research also reported that 49% of the respondents perceived religious studies as highly impactful in shaping their decision not to socialise with members of different religious communities. A high percentage of Muslim teacher respondents also shared similar views.

Following this, I proposed a role for the Ministry of Religious Affairs to formulate a regulation concerning national publication. This proposal finally yielded a result upon the enactment of Law No. 3/2017 concerning the Publication System which delegates a specific authority for the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Article 6 Paragraph 2 of the law stipulates that 'religious textbooks refer to textbooks which are used

in general education, vocational education, academic education, professional education, religious education, and specialised education'. Paragraph 3 states that 'Textbook materials for religious studies as stipulated in Paragraph 2 are the responsibility of the minister who administers governmental affairs in the field of religion'.¹²³

The strengthening of religious moderation in religious studies classes at schools is strategic given the number of students enrolled in Islamic schools across the country stands at 47 million students. They will eventually take part in determining the country's future direction. For this reason, moderate religious teachings must be taught from an early age so that lessons in religious studies are in line with the educational purposes enshrined in the 1945 Constitution.

Hate Speech and Misuse of Religious Broadcasts

Controversies surrounding religious broadcasts have recurred in the past years. Below are some examples:

In November 2014, social media platforms were flooded with videos of several individuals who publicly promulgated religious views during the Car Free Day event on Jl. MH Thamrin, Central Jakarta. A video

¹²³ Rahman, Hadi, *Kewenangan Kementerian Agama dalam Penilaian Buku Agama, presentasi Diskusi Implementasi Revisi UU No. 3 Tahun 2017* [The authority of Ministry of Religious Affairs in Assessing Religious Textbooks, Presentation of Discussion on the Implementation of the Revised Law No. 3/2017]; Centre for Religious Lectures and Organisational Management of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

of the occurrence was uploaded to YouTube by an account named rtkChannel HD. In the video, it appears as well other activities such as the selling of souvenirs (necklaces, pins, scarves, biscuits, and milk) that were carried out candidly. Many parties suspected the distribution of the souvenirs and foods as a clandestine process of Christianisation of members of other religious communities.

On Saturday, 17 August 2019, Muslim cleric Abdul Shomad (UAS) was reported to the police headquarter in Sikka Regency, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) by the alumni and the then members of the Maumere Branch of the Indonesian Catholic Students Association (PMKRI). The report was based on UAS's sermon which allegedly insulted the cross and Jesus statue which symbolise the religious beliefs of the Catholics and the Protestants. In a video clip widely circulated on social media platforms, UAS claimed that the cross is inhabited by 'jinn¹²⁴ kafir¹²⁵' due to the statue of Jesus attached to the cross. Further, he also denounced the symbol of the red cross on ambulances as a 'pagan symbol' as well.

In October 2020, Sugi Nur Rahardja, also known as Gus Nur, was reported to the police for allegedly slandering Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Gus Nur reportedly likened the organisation with a bus filled with drunk and dancing liberals. Such a statement was made during

¹²⁴ According to Islam, jinn are creatures from a world other than that of mankind which are capable of causing physical and mental harm to human beings.

¹²⁵ The term kafir is the opposite of Muslim. This term is often interpreted as non-Muslims. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004).

Gus Nur's interview with Refly Harun on a YouTube channel. In a clip of their conversation, Gus Nur shared his views on NU. The subsequent controversy was taken to court.

On Thursday, 15 August 2021, the public was shocked by a post made by Muhammad Kace. He candidly carried out actions which insulted Islam. The police then arrested him in Bali and took legal action. Muhammad Kace's actions were considered a threat against religious harmony. His statements could potentially harm interfaith connection that has long been woven by the government through religious moderation programmes.

There were five statements made by Muhammad Kace that were deemed as insults to Islam. These statements were:

1. Claiming the Prophet Muhammad was a follower of *jinn*;
2. Claiming Kitab Kuning¹²⁶ were made by humans, that the stories recounted in the holy scriptures were written by human beings for commercial purposes, and that the writing of the holy scriptures is, thus, political in nature, so are Islamic teachings;
3. Slandering Islamic greetings by substituting the word 'Allah' with 'Jesus'. This included changing

¹²⁶ Literally translates into 'Yellow Book', the term refers to traditional Islamic texts in Arabic or other languages which serve as references on Islamic traditional studies such as *fiqh*, *aqidab*, *akhlāq* (the practice of virtue, morality, and manners), and Arabic grammar. These texts are often taught in Islamic boarding schools. These texts have existed since the first and the second century of the Hijra, developing into its current state. This Islamic literary tradition has been able to survive due to its huge reserve of knowledge.

- the phrase '*Alhamdulillah*'¹²⁷ into 'Alhamduyesus';
4. Encouraging people to abandon the teachings of the Prophet. According to Muhamad Kace, the Prophet could not save Muslims; as there is no verse in the Quran which corroborates the Prophet's capability to save Muslims, so it is acceptable to abandon his teachings;
 5. Claiming the teachings of the Prophet were just myths intended to prompt a sense of love for Arabic traditions, And that his teachings cannot be held accountable.

On 15 April 2021, a video clip of Joseph Paul Zhang claiming to be the 26th prophet in Islam went viral. He even challenged anyone who dared to report him to the police, promising monetary compensation for those who could successfully file a report against him. His exact statement was, 'I will give money to anyone who can report me to the police. I will give you money [if you] can report me to the police [for] blasphemy. I, Joseph Fauzan Chang, the 26th prophet in Islam, [want to] correct the heresy of the 25th prophet's [Muhammad] teachings and his extreme obscenities.'

The National Police named Joseph, whose real name is Shindy Paul Suryomultono, as a suspect for blasphemy. His naming as a suspect was done after the police ensured his status as an Indonesian citizen, which obliged him to take responsibility for his actions in accordance with the Indonesian legal system. Investigators have also put Paul on the wanted list and are working with the

¹²⁷ Praise be to God.

Interpol to track him down.

In March 2022, Pastor Saifuddin Ibrahim was named as suspect in a blasphemy case. On a YouTube video, Saifuddin demanded Religious Affairs Minister Yaquut Cholil Qoumas to erase 300 Quranic verses. This was not the first criminal case which entangled Saifuddin; in December 2017, Saifuddin, who had allegedly reverted from Islam, received a sentence of four-year imprisonment by the Tangerang District Court in a blasphemy case. In that case, he was sentenced for hate speech and insults against the Prophet Muhammad.

In addressing all of these incidents, we must refer back to Religious Affairs Ministerial Decree No. 70/1978 on the Guidelines for Religious Broadcasts. The decree has three points which are aligned with the values of religious moderation.

First, in order to maintain national stability and interfaith harmony, the development and broadcasting of religion must be carried out in a spirit of harmony, tolerance, open-mindedness, and mutual respect between religious communities as commended by Pancasila. Second, religious broadcasts must not be allowed if they: 1. Persuade individuals of different religious beliefs; 2. Promise material (e.g., clothes, foods/beverages, medicines, etc.) and monetary compensation in persuading individuals to adopt a particular religious belief; 3. Persuade individuals by circulating pamphlets, bulletins, magazines, books, etc. in the neighbourhoods/residential areas of different religious communities; and 4. Conduct door-to-door

campaigns targeting adherents of different religious beliefs. Third, in the event where religious broadcasts are carried out in the methods explained in the second point and, subsequently, disrupt interfaith harmony, appropriate legal actions will be taken.

Such an arrangement is designed to prevent religious preachers—in giving sermons and propagating religious teachings—from denouncing, or even insulting, adherents of other religious beliefs. Religious teachings shall not win the heart of the people if they are preached in harmful manner. Surprisingly, numerous parties call this arrangement a form of criminalisation of religious figures. In fact, this arrangement merely serves as a guideline on what is permissible and impermissible in spreading religious teachings. On the other hand, slander, insults, defamation, and hate speech—even without religious embellishments—are clearly criminal acts.

The upsurge of verbal abuse in religious sermons has given rise to discussions on the need for the standardisation of preachers. There are numerous public complaints regarding religious preachers who deliver sermons containing four problematic elements: 1. The tendency to exaggerate insubstantial differences in opinions; 2. The condemnation of other religious communities; 3. The use of religious arguments for political reasons; and 4. Blaming the state ideology and denouncing it as contradicting religious values.

As part of moderating religious perspectives, actions, and practices in public spaces shared by diverse religious

communities, I asked officials of the Ministry of Religious Affairs to draft shared guidelines on what is permissible and impermissible in delivering sermons in houses of worship. Discussed and finalised collectively by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and religious leaders, the guidelines titled ‘The Minister of Religious Affairs’ Call for Sermons in Houses of worship’ are intended to serve as a reference for preachers and managers of houses of worship in maintaining the sanctity of houses of worship as well as ensuring they are safest havens which promote peace—not the other way around where houses of worship become a source of conflicts and disputes among religious communities. Formulated based on agreement between religious leaders, the guidelines are of course implemented for all religious adherents and not limited to particular religious beliefs.

The following is a copy of the guidelines in question, which was originally published on 28 April 2017. I deliberately attach a full copy of the guidelines so that its full substance and context can be understood completely and comprehensively.

Considering that the diversity in Indonesia is a gift from God Almighty that ought to be appreciated, maintaining and cultivating the unity of the Indonesian nation is a necessity.

Stable social affairs and interfaith harmony are the preconditions for Indonesia’s continuing development into a prosperous and dignified nation. In meeting these preconditions, preachers and houses of worship play an integral role.

In order to safeguard our unity and improve the nation's productivity, nurturing interfaith harmony, and preserving the sanctity of houses of worship, the Religious Affairs Minister issues a call for preachers in houses of worship to comply with the following provisions:

1. Sermons ought to be delivered by preachers who possess knowledge and commitment for serving the main purpose of religious revelation, namely preserving human dignity as well as protecting human existence and peace.
2. The delivered sermons ought to be based on adequate religious knowledge and sourced from core religious teachings.
3. Sermons ought to be conveyed in respectable and polite manner with a consideration of decency and propriety, free from curses, insults, or hate speeches that are prohibited by any religious beliefs.
4. Sermons ought to have educational messages and contain spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, and multi-culturally enlightening contents. The prioritised contents of the sermons should concern advice, motivations, and knowledge pertaining to noble deeds, personal improvement, religious community empowerment, environmental protection, national unity, as well as social welfare and justice.
5. The contents of sermons must not contradict the four consensuses of the Indonesian nation, namely Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, the Unitary State

of the Republic of Indonesia, and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*.¹²⁸

6. The contents of sermons must not contain tribal, religious, racial, and/or social discriminations which may cause conflicts and disrupt the harmony and unity of the nation.
7. The contents of sermons must not contain insults, desecrations, and/or condemnations of certain religious perspectives, beliefs, and practices within the same religious belief or between different religious communities. The contents must not comprise incitements to carry out discrimination, intimidation, anarchy, and destruction.
8. The content of sermons must not incorporate political campaigns and/or business promotions.
9. Sermons ought to be in line with the existing regulatory framework pertaining to religious broadcasts and the use of houses of worship.

These guidelines are intended for preachers, managers of houses of worship, and every religious community in Indonesia to understand and heed.

I address the guidelines above to three groups in particular. The first group is the preachers themselves to encourage self-reflection and self-evaluation regarding the contents of their sermons so that they do not contradict the points expounded in the guidelines. The second group is the managers of houses of worship who hold the authority in inviting preachers; managers of

¹²⁸ See note 14.

houses of worship have the capacity to pick preachers which they deem appropriate to deliver sermons. The question is, do the chosen preachers have peaceful and soothing characteristics? Or is it the opposite? The third group is the general public. It is the public who actually know the parameters in measuring the propriety of a sermon, that is the types of sermons that should be supported or rejected. The public also bears the responsibility to protect interfaith harmony and cultivate social harmony and peace. In order to do so, the public must also well understand the contents of sermons.

At the same time, there were once widespread suggestions that the government, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, conduct certification of preachers. These suggestions were motivated by the increasing emergence of sermons containing insults, hate speech, and provocations that are completely inappropriate within the context of sermons. A number of preachers have increasingly misused religious platforms to spread provocations and agitations, entrapped (both intentionally and unintentionally) in the domain of political manoeuvres. Of course, such suggestions raise both support and objection from the public. Mass media outlets and social media platforms have witnessed the upsurge of controversies in the society.

In response to this, I am of the opinion that it would be inappropriate and too interventionist for the government to directly regulate and select preachers through a certification system, to determine which

preachers are allowed or prohibited from delivering sermons. Nevertheless, allowing preachers to violate the values of religions themselves in their sermons by spreading hatred is not a wise decision either. In such a situation, the government cannot just passively observe and disclaim its responsibility. At this juncture, religious moderation is needed. The state (i.e., the government, specifically the Ministry of Religious Affairs) cannot be too interfering but must still maintain its duty.

When I was the Minister of Religious Affairs, I established communications with religious leaders and mass organisations. I held intensive deliberations with the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI). I offered a recommendation for religious mass organisations to hold educational and training programmes designed to improve the quality, capacity, and competence of preachers with the assistance of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Certification can be carried out independently by religious mass organisations or institutions, while the government is only responsible to facilitate its implementation.

Fortunately, with such moderate suggestion, controversies increasingly dissipated by themselves. Formalised in 2017 and revised in 2020, the Ministry of Religious Affairs organised Technical Guidance (Bimtek) as part of its Strengthening Preachers' Competency Programme conducted at the national and regional levels. The data on the alumni participating in the Bimtek has been recorded in 'Ustadzkita' application which was developed by the Directorate General of

Islamic Guidance. To date, no less than 8,000 Muslim preachers across all provinces have participated in the Strengthening Preachers' Competency Programme.

○4 Conveying Religious Moderation

IS religious moderation a novel discovery?

The answer can be both yes and no. The answer is no if religious moderation is understood as a conception and religious practice that is moderate. The answer becomes yes if it refers to the term ‘religious moderation’ and its complete meaning as expounded in the preceding chapters.

The religious moderation movement was first introduced as a discussion topic among intellectual figures in Indonesia in the 1970s and the 1980s. Intellectuals and religious figures such as Harun Nasution, Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid, Gedong Bagus Oka, Eka Darmaputera, Th. Sumartana, Frans Magnis Suseno, Munawir Sadzali, Dawam Rahardjo, as well as Quraish Shihab, Sri Pannyavaro

Mahathera, Moeslim Abdurrahman, Syu'bah Asa, Masdar F. Mas'udi, and many others called the public to practise religion contextually. A number of key thoughts which they presented were aligned with the values of religious moderation.

Having excellent education and a religious background did not automatically guarantee these figures a smooth path. They were often misunderstood and subjected to various accusations in championing renewed Islamic teachings that fit into the context of Indonesian society. Nurcholish Madjid and the Paramadina Foundation, for instance, were labelled as liberal Islamic thinkers that bore the West's secularisation agenda. Likewise, Abdurrahman Wahid, colloquially known as Gus Dur, was suspected of conducting systematic efforts to suppress and reduce religious teachings in order to promote the 'tolerance agenda' between religious communities. Further, the name of the university where Harun Nasution developed his thoughts, IAIN (Institut Agama Islam Negeri, or State Islamic Institute) was parodied into *Inkar Sunnah Inkar Nabi*.¹²⁹

Despite widespread rejection, the religious moderation movement still managed to win supporters. A portion of these supporters even became fanatics. The formation of communities such as Nurcholish

¹²⁹ The word *sunnah* refers to the practices, habits, and conduct of the Prophet Muhammad. *Sunnah*, together with *hadith* and the *Quran*, is the primary source of Islamic laws. *Sunnah* also refers to a legal term which refers to Islamic practices that are recommended but not required. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004). *Inkar sunnah inkar nabi* refers to an ideology or group that rejects the *sunnah* or *hadith* of the Prophet as the sources of Islamic teachings that ought to be obeyed and practised.

Madjid Society or the Gusdurian Network illustrated the militancy among these two figures' supporters. The birth of these two communities was as if to declare that competing narratives pertaining to religious practices which serve as a clarification and balancing force to mounting hard-line Islamic thoughts would be continuously played out.

Indeed, there are free thinkers who take the banner of the religious moderation movement while promoting perspectives that are too liberal rather than moderate. Further, as the hard-line groups grow and increasingly predominate the religious scene, the emergence of moderate voices is often perceived as abnormal, or even a transgression. In truth, in numerous aspects, extreme groups, both the extreme left and the extreme right, can achieve dominance due to their much bolder and more active expression of their views. I urge the moderates, who are actually much larger in number, not to remain silent and let public spaces be controlled by extreme groups.

The presence of moderate voices is much needed to preserve the moderate characteristics of Indonesian society. Our diverse nation that is coloured with a variety of ethnicities, religions, races, and other social groups must be safeguarded and cultivated. Hence, the public must be 'awakened' and continuously assured that non-extreme, non-exaggerating, and non-excessive religious perspectives, actions, and practices are the ones needed by religious and pluralistic societies as Indonesia's.

In short, every element of the nation and the

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society, from those at the highest level to those at the grassroots, shall not hold concern over religious moderation. Adopting a moderate stance does not mean practising one's belief indifferently or heedlessly. It does not also mean the opposite, that is obstructing the religious freedom of others. Rather, religious moderation advocates the internalisation of the values of religions so that they become our spiritual, moral, and ethical foundation in leading our existence.

The Role of Media in Championing Religious Moderation

For a better Indonesia, moderate voices must not be silenced. Dissemination of information which strengthens religious moderation values should be carried out continuously to the wider public. Effective public communication concerning religious issues is important to maintain. In this regard, religious moderation may provide a unique perspective for the field of public communication. This is what several members of *Republika* editorial team did in the first years of this Islamic newspaper in the 1990s.

I want to explain as well as reaffirm that public campaigns disseminating religious moderation had long been carried out before its present resurgence. I use *Republika* as an example since this daily newspaper allocates a large portion of its pages to religious coverage, a highly sensitive topic in the Indonesian public.

Republika was established under the authoritarian

New Order, when the required publishing licences for newspapers were very scarce. Without the valuable assistance of the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI) headed by BJ Habibie, establishing *Republika* would have been impossible. As the then largest newspaper in Indonesia which assumed an Islamic characteristic, *Republika* encountered uncertainties in choosing which variety of Islam it wanted to display. Should it be the hard-line Islam or the moderate Islam?

Former *Republika* editor-in-chief Andi Makmur Makka, in his book titled *Republika 1993– 2000: Koran Islam Dapur Reformasi*,¹³⁰ explains in detail the tug-of-war process in choosing between these two opposing views. In the sub-chapter titled ‘*Pergelutan Pemikiran dari Dalam*’,¹³¹ he elucidates that other than the newspaper company’s official vision and mission, the editorial team must also consider the ongoing internal debates over which Islamic variety or trait the newspaper ought to display.¹³²

The editorial team held intensive debates on formulating the best strategies for *Republika* to attract Muslim readers on one hand, and to capture the general market on the other hand; that is, how to position the newspaper in the wider readership. If *Republika* appears too exclusive and only captures the interest of Muslim readers from lower-middle class, it would find

¹³⁰ 1993–2000 *Republika*: Islamic Newspaper During Reform Era.

¹³¹ Internal Struggle Between Thoughts.

¹³² Makka, Andi Makmur. 2022. *Republika 1993–2000: Koran Islam Dapur Reformasi* [1993–2000 *Republika*: Islamic Newspaper During Reform Era] (Jakarta, Digdaya Dinamika Publik), 2nd Edition. Pg. 129–138.

difficulties in striking major advertisement deals which target those from the upper-middle class. If it targets conservative Muslim readers at the grassroots level, the opposing group of progressive scholars would be lost. Similarly, if the newspaper only considers readers from the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), it might alienate readers from Muhammadiyah and other organisations.

The safest option was to lose an appearance of exclusivity as such a decision would contradict the newspaper's chief purpose 'to educate the nation' and to present balanced information in reporting oppression. In this regard, *Republika* was contemplating the key principle of religious moderation, that is the principle of fairness and balance.

Faced with these options, *Republika* finally considered the suggestion made by *AE Priyono*, former chief of the newspaper's Research and Development Department. *Priyono* argued that *Republika* was born out of the 'political Islam' that had been developed by ICMI, whose members were mostly middle-class Muslims with political awareness and great familiarity with democratic empowerment movements. ICMI, who upheld an inclusive vision in regard to statehood, took on a relatively more progressive stance that was still contextualised with the particularities of Indonesia. Taking this into consideration, *Priyono* proposed that *Republika* opted for a similar inclusive Islamic trait.

Priyono recommended that *Republika* develop the following three-point political agenda:

1. Reinforcing Muslim entrepreneurs who

come from the middle class. This group, while constituting national assets, had been continuously excluded;

2. Promoting certain qualities in Muslim communities as they play an integral part in upholding the country's diversity as conceptualised in the state motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*.¹³³ Two particular qualities are promoted, namely:
 - a. To be a Muslim that is inherently a nationalist. Such quality is deemed valuable in overcoming the growing dichotomy between Islam and nationalism, Soekarnoism¹³⁴ and Marhaenism,¹³⁵ and even populism.
 - b. To be part of a community that is mature in actions, to be part of the majority that protects minority groups.
3. Developing further the contribution of Islam as a source of moral and ethical values in social affairs and as an advocate for justice, freedom, human rights, democracy, human dignity, and other noble values.

¹³³ See note 14.

¹³⁴ An ideology which is grounded on the teachings of Soekarno, the first president of Indonesia.

¹³⁵ An ideology which opposes the oppression of men by men and of nations by nations. This ideology was first formulated by Indonesia's first president, Ir. Soekarno, that was inspired by Marxist thoughts and implemented in accordance with Indonesia's characteristics. The people of Marhaenism as meant by Soekarno are the weak who are oppressed by colonialism.

Priyono admitted that his proposal was in line with the view of Ikhwanul Kiram, another former *Republika* editor-in-chief. He cited Ikhwanul Kiram's statement that a nationalist variety of Islam which cultivates the nation's diversity is the one that must be adopted and demonstrated by *Republika*. Priyono cited Ikhwanul Kiram at length:

Pertaining to the Islamic characteristic of *Republika*, this newspaper is a media that is both Islamic and nationalist. For us, the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) that is founded upon Pancasila is uncompromisable and must be defended and safeguarded. Our Islamic character is *rahmatan lil alamin* and beneficial to the wider public, including the non-Muslims. Our Islamic character respects those who are different from us, either in ethnicity, religious belief, or even views. Our Islamic character nurtures companionship instead of hostility. Our Islamic character recognises diversity and pluralism in the societies, the *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, the unity amidst differences in Indonesia.

The implementation of this view is certainly beneficial for the diverse Indonesia, yet it is not an easy feat. Practising one creed alone, that is the *rahmatan lil alamin Islam*,¹³⁶ is already difficult, let alone implementing other creeds as well. Carrying the name of Islam in protecting non-Muslim communities was, and is, very challenging. Challenges emerge from

¹³⁶ *Rahmatan lil alamin Islam* is a term which refers to Islam as a religious belief that promotes love on earth. This concept has its roots in Quranic verses and hadith which underscore that Islam is a religion full of love, compassion, and brotherhood with both fellow Muslims and non-Muslims. The implementation of this concept requires tolerance, moderation, as well as mutual respect and love between God's creatures. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, *Moderasi Beragama Perspektif Bimas Islam* [The Perspective of Islamic Community Guidance on Religious Moderation], (Jakarta: Sekretariat Ditjen Bimas Islam, 2023)

the popular belief in Muslim communities which perceive non-Muslims as disbelievers that do not deserve any form of protection. This is reflected in the refusal of some Muslims to even utter the phrase 'Merry Christmas'.

This was a problem which entangled *Republika*. When the newspaper ran a headline saying 'Merry Christmas' in December 1996, a number of Muslims stormed the newspaper's headquarter in Warung Buncit, South Jakarta. Coming from eight Islamic organisations, the protesting Muslims shouted their protest that *Republika* had become too cosmopolitan for their liking. In a moment of anger, they waved the newspaper's edition carrying the contentious headline along with another newspaper containing a review of a Christmas film, titled *Jingle All the Way* starring Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Practising the Islamic character which respects differences was not easy as well. Numerous Muslims have adopted strong fanaticism, such as their fanaticism in 'defending Islam' which is translated into unimaginable interpretations of Islamic teachings. According to religious moderation principles, this exemplifies what is called excessiveness in religious practice. For example, Makmur Makka noted that in 1995, dozens of demonstrators came to *Republika*'s headquarters to demand an explanation for the newspaper's article on the accident which resulted in the death of teenage singer Nike Ardilla. The title of the article, which was written by Hamid Basyaib, was 'May Nike lie peacefully by His side'. The demonstrators accused *Republika* of

likening God with human beings.

According to Helmi Hidayat, one of *Republika*'s editors who witnessed the demonstration, the demonstrators claimed that if allowed, the newspaper's anthropocentric view on God might pose a threat; if Allah was characterised with a human-like trait, that is falling asleep, and He supposedly fell asleep with Nike Ardilla, then what would be the implications? 'From such accusation, you can guess what their insinuation was in this imagined scenario where God is lying down with a beautiful celebrity,' recalled Helmi Hidayat when explaining the incident during a religious moderation training programme for public relations held by the Centre for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) of the Syarif Hidayatullah Islamic State University (UIN) in Jakarta, November 2021.

Similar difficulties were encountered by *Republika* in implementing the abovementioned second point of the political agenda, that is to cultivate great integrity within Muslim communities that play an integral part in upholding the country's diversity as conceptualised in the state motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, to be part of a community that is mature in actions, and to be part of the majority that protects minority groups as recommended by AE Priyono. In the mid-1990s, Makmur Makka recorded that *Republika* received a letter of protest from the Indonesian Committee for Solidarity with the Islamic World (KISDI) following the publication of an opinion piece written by Anand Kresna. Makmur noted that not a single sentence in

the article insulted Muslim communities. He concluded that KISDI, which came to the newspaper's article in delivering the protest, actually problematised the decision of *Republika*, an Islamic newspaper, to publish an article written by a non-Muslim.

Of course, KISDI's perspective is very much not in line with the principles of religious moderation, and the editorial team of *Republika* who aspired to realise the values of *rahmatan lil alamin* Islam, in which Islam promotes love and protection for all mankind, was well aware of this. In addressing such sociological challenges, the top officials of the newspaper resorted to creative measures in conveying religious moderation principles in the news outlet without prompting clashes.

Amidst the enthusiasm to broadcast peaceful and moderate Islamic teachings, Makmur Makka 'went too far'. In his book, specifically in the 'Caught in an "Intelligence Operation"' sub-chapter, he recalled how one day *Republika* received a draft of an opinion piece submitted by Abdul Qadir Djaelani, the then chancellor of the Islamic Da'wah College (PTDI). Makmur Makka was well aware of Abdul Qadir Djaelani's reputation as a figure that was highly critical against the New Order regime. He often submitted drafts of his writing, most of which were rejected as their contents were too harsh.

Nevertheless, the draft of opinion which *Republika* received on that day was slightly different, bearing a title 'Revolutionary Islamic Ideology: Destroying Many Islamic Countries'. Makmur Makka immediately read the article and found the message of the article to be

very positive. The writer noted how Revolutionary Islamic Ideology (IIR) expounded in the article had failed to spread influence in the Middle East. The writer urged hard-line groups in Indonesia to take lessons from this failure, that the IIR would only hamper the resurgence of Islam in the country and erase all of its progress. The article concluded with a question, 'Could Indonesian Muslim intellectuals become pioneers of Islamic revivalism to fight against itself?'

Upon reading the article, Makmur asked the editorial team to 'immediately' publish the article. He saw the article in a positive light since it actually opposed the perspective which he had championed. He perceived the article as a drastic transformation of thought and ideology, especially since the article bore the signature of its author. Indeed, the draft was not sent together with a copy of the author's ID, which was a requirement for article publication. For well-known individuals or writers whose articles had been frequently published, such a requirement was often discounted.

A day after the article's publication, the newspaper's editorial team received a letter of complaint from Abdul Qadir Djaelani. He rebuked Republika for spreading misinformation regarding the authorship of the published opinion piece which damaged his public image. After holding an internal meeting, Makmur Makka decided to make a direct apology in writing to Abdul Qadir Djaelani and promise to issue a clarification in the newspaper that he was not the author of the published opinion piece. The editorial

team also met Hartono Mardjono SH, the attorney of Abdul Qadir Djaelani, and reached an agreement in solving the dispute. Who, then, had written the article? Makmur Makka suspected that the article was part of an intelligence operation of the New Order regime which targeted Republika.

Indonesia Encroached by Hoaxes

I deliberately included the internal problems encountered by Republika in this chapter to make a comparison between past conditions and the present time. At that time, the press experienced numerous ideological and political challenges both in their internal and external environments. Nevertheless, this did not cause the reporters and journalists to falter in defending themselves for the benefit of the nation and the state. Currently, while the journalists of mass media enjoy greater freedom, they, particularly the online ones, contribute to the spread of hoaxes in the public instead of reporting balanced information.

The Communication and Information Ministry recorded around 800,000 websites in Indonesia which have spread misinformation. Meanwhile, the number of internet users in Indonesia reaches 132.7 million people. A survey by Mastel (2019) reported that out of its 1,116 respondents, 14.7% of them received hoaxes more than once per day, while 34.6% of them received hoaxes every day, 23.5% received hoaxes once in a week, and 18.2% received hoaxes once in a month.

Even more concerning is that hoaxes are not solely spread through online media platforms, but also through mainstream media which has been contaminated. The percentage of media platforms which spread hoaxes include radio (1.20%), print media (5%), and television (8.70%). Further, the means of hoax dissemination have become increasingly varied, including chatting applications such as WhatsApp, Line, and Telegram (62.80%), websites (34.90%), and social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter (92.40%). The contents of hoaxes are, of course, varied including religious issues that are sensitive in nature and easily spur emotional responses.

All of the data above draws one conclusion: Indonesia is being inundated by hoaxes. The current era of the internet is indeed a disappointing double-edged sword. On one side, technology has introduced numerous conveniences in communication, yet, on the other, it has also increased the opportunities for misinformation and hoaxes that could provoke public disruption, including religious issues.

There is no other option for the government except to implement strict law enforcement. Every individual who spreads misinformation must be punished severely as their actions threaten the unity and integrity of the nation. However, law enforcement alone is not sufficient, considering the high number of hoaxes circulating in the public. Processing one criminal case alone takes months and during this legal proceeding, thousands more hoaxes are disseminated to the public.

It is time for the government to develop effective, efficient, and well-formulated counternarratives. This can be done by utilising public spaces to facilitate dialogues and discussions on counterarguments. Amidst the onslaught of information in this era of disruption, the government needs to develop messages of religious moderation by disseminating high-quality information. Public spaces must become the hubs which cultivate noble values, considering that religious moderation is indeed designed to administer religious perspectives, actions, and practices within the context of collective existences in public spaces, rather than regulating individual religious practices in private domains.

The government has great potential to cultivate healthy and high-quality public communication by optimising the functions of governmental institutions. To begin with, the capacity of the government's communication officers must be increased. This encompasses public relations officers in governmental institutions related to religious issues, including the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Coordinating Human Development and Culture Ministry, the National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas), the Finance Ministry, the Coordinating Political, Legal and Security Affairs Ministry, the Office of the Presidential Staff, the Home Ministry, the Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Ministry, the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), the Indonesian Military (TNI), the National Police, and the Communication and Information Ministry. Their works at the national level must be supported by regional officials, such as those who are

involved in the National and Political Unity Agency (Kesbangpol) at the provincial level.

To ensure that the works of public relations officers are not limited to technical aspects, journalists who work in state-owned media platforms such as Antara National News Agency (LKBN Antara), Television of the Republic of Indonesia (TVRI), and Radio of the Republic of Indonesia (RRI), both at the national and regional levels, must be involved. The role of state reporters is very important in shaping media settings and framing the messages. Their influence in encouraging constructive debates on religious issues in mass media platforms is very significant since press releases circulated by the government's public relations offices on their news websites are often cited and/or re-reported by other media outlets, facilitating public discussions. A number of journalists working in state-owned media outlets do actually have the responsibility of disseminating government programmes. Their leading role in building the government's credibility, trustworthiness, reputation, and legitimacy is an important factor in the promulgation of religious moderation values.

Infrastructures and supra-structures alone would be insufficient if human resources are not improved, including their knowledge about religious moderation. In this regard, the right conceptualisation of religious moderation must be introduced through intensive training programmes, from national to regional levels. Shared guideline on the dissemination of religious moderation values must be distributed among the

government's public relations officers and journalists. The implementation of these guidelines is expected to contribute to improving the capacity of the government's public relations officers and journalists so that they can take part in shaping the national reporting of religious issues.

At the national level, there are at least four objectives in holding intensive public communication training programmes. First, the training programmes are designed as a guideline for those reporting issues pertaining to religious moderation. Second, the training programmes aim to standardise the perspectives of the government's communication officers in conveying religious moderation values in mass media. Third, the training programmes aim to build communications which are assertive, constructive, and educational in regard to religious moderation issues in public spaces. Fourth, the training programmes are to minimise misperceptions of religious moderation caused by misleading reporting in mass media.

Moderate Religious Study Groups¹³⁷ on YouTube

Tom Nichols, in his book titled *The Death of Expertise*, explains how the digital revolution, social media, and the internet have actually enabled people's inner narcissism. According to Nichols, who is a professor

¹³⁷ Colloquially known as *pengajian* in Indonesian.

at the Harvard Extension School, expertise seems to be no longer needed in the current age of the internet. Easy access to information has instead weakened the ability of the public, including the intellectuals, to conduct basic research. People increasingly employ search engines as their main source of information. Now, experts, who previously occupied the top of the pyramid of expertise, are considered equal to laypeople. This leads to the emergence of irrational belief that everyone is equally knowledgeable.

This phenomenon explained by Nichols is pertinent as well within the context of the dissemination of religious teachings. People increasingly seek ‘instant’ religious knowledge from online sources with questionable credibility and authority, instead of learning from trusted religious figures. It has now become a common occurrence where novices in religious studies give sermons which denounce prominent religious figures and religious practices that have long been accepted and implemented in the public. There are also those who recklessly interpret holy verses, despite the fact that they cannot even pronounce these verses correctly.

I often use the term ‘digital community’, which refers to the current digital era where all religious beliefs and adherents are equally subjected to digital technology—communities who are inseparable from digital devices. Technological development has brought about an evolution in religious expression. Muslims now employ digital devices in making tasbih¹³⁸ and

¹³⁸ A form of recitation that glorifies Allah.

use digital Quran in reciting holy verses. Their fikih¹³⁹ comes from Syekh Google and their assemblies are Al-Fesbukiyah (Facebook). They make sermons on Twitter, their muhasabah¹⁴⁰ is carried out on Instagram, and their learning is through YouTube.

Mass media and social media platforms, which are barely regulated in the present time, embody an arena of free battles as well as a stage of drama. Character assassination, intellectual property theft, and bullying are all mixed with deception and theatrics—in the name of religion. Guidance turns into public spectacle, while public spectacle is treated as a guidance. Information is distorted, messages are glorified, and public contents become complete chaos. Consequently, people are not able to digest news properly. Online religious information is thus swallowed whole, making people vulnerable to disorientation, blasphemy, and misunderstanding over the notion of jihad.¹⁴¹

Fortunately, moderates have increasingly taken part in digital discussions. More balanced information has started to emerge so that netizens now have a more diverse and better selection of sources of religious information. Ulema, as authoritative sources of religious teachings, has also increased their online presence. Religious studies based on turats—studies of holy scriptures that are often conducted in Islamic boarding schools—are gaining popularity in online channels.

¹³⁹ See note 8.

¹⁴⁰ Practice of religious self-examination in Islam.

¹⁴¹ See note 74.

An example is Gus Baha' whose sermons are available on YouTube and Facebook. The prudent cleric's sermons attract keen interests due to their in-depth and accessible explanations, which allow laypeople to better understand religious teachings. His sermons give the impression that religious studies are fun and not complicated. Another example is Ulil Abshar Abdla who organises virtual *tasawwuf*¹⁴² religious study groups, specifically on the works of Imam al-Ghazali, so that people can easily study in their respective home. There is also a study group focusing on religious literature manuscripts that are particularly pertinent to burning issues and other important topics concerning worship and social affairs in general. This study group is organised by Oman Fathurahman, a cleric from Al Hamidiyah Islamic Boarding School in Depok and also a professor of philology at the Faculty of Culture and Humanities of the Syarif Hidayatullah Islamic State University (UIN) Jakarta. Through his Ngariksa (Ngaji Manuskrip Kuno Nusantara, or Reciting Ancient Manuscripts of the Archipelago) channel, he regularly livestreams the study group's activities on Facebook and Twitter every two weeks.

YouTube contents, which are often re-posted on chat applications such as WhatsApp, have become increasingly more creative as well. I will mention just a few examples of content that is circulating, particularly those which convey Islamic information and religious moderation values. The first example is a video documenting the great scholar Habib Ali

¹⁴² The process of acquiring ethical and spiritual ideals.

Fortunately, moderates have increasingly taken part in digital discussions. More balanced information has started to emerge so that netizens now have a more diverse and better selection of sources of religious information.

Al Jufri in answering questions regarding heresy in a seminar. Using his vast religious knowledge, the Jeddah-born cleric explains how to address differences in views pertaining to religious worship. He provides a strong argument for the importance of avoiding self-righteousness and the assumption that opinions different from ours are automatically incorrect.

On Facebook, footage which depict the behaviour of the Prophet's companions are circulating as well. One of the footages recounts the story of Umar bin Khattab when he encountered a problem. In this story, Umar was visited by two people, let's call them A and B, who were at odds. A revealed that they had a garden and they wanted to irrigate it, but B opposed A's plan as the irrigation would pass through B's garden. A then explained that the construction of the irrigation would not harm B, who could even use the irrigation as a source for drinking water. B remained adamant on refusing A's plan on the grounds that they had full rights to their own garden and, thus, to decide whether or not it could be passed by A's irrigation. In responding to this predicament, Umar decided that B should allow A to irrigate their garden. He emphasised that they ought to collectively cultivate their gardens and benefit each other. Umar concluded the conversation by saying, 'Do you choose harm over benefit? We are responsible for Allah's commands, and He commands us to benefit the whole humankind with the purpose of enriching the earth.'

Contents such as these are aligned with religious

messages championed by religious moderation. Everything has become much more accessible in the current age due to the limitless information brought by the internet. The challenges, however, are to determine the quantity of moderate religious information available on digital platforms and how attractive they are to gain audiences. At the same time, there are also parties who actively produce contents with contrasting messages. In the present era where the freedom of information is upheld, the general public has the freedom to pick whichever content that they prefer.

This is different from the previous era where access to information was very limited. Back then, stories brimming with wisdom could only be obtained through oral traditions with narratives passed down through generations. This limited means of information dissemination was still further censored by a ‘filter’, that is the credibility of the narrator. At times, information could only be obtained from rare books as well, such as the history of Indonesia’s two largest mass organisations, NU and Muhammadiyah, in practising religious teachings.

Syahdan, KH Idham Chalid of NU, and Buya Hamka of Muhammadiyah boarded a ship on their way to make a pilgrimage in Mecca. When the congregation was about to do the dawn prayer, KH Idham Chalid was invited to lead the *shalat*.¹⁴³ During the second *rak’ah*,¹⁴⁴ Idham did not recite the *qunut*¹⁴⁵ prayer even though the prayer

¹⁴³ See note 9.

¹⁴⁴ Prescribed movements in Islamic prayers.

¹⁴⁵ A specific supplication which, according to sunnah, is read during prayers, particularly

is a must according to NU members. In spite of this, the whole congregation followed Idham's lead without any protests. After performing shalat, Buya Hamka questioned Idham, to which the latter responded as follows: 'I did not recite the qunut prayer because I had you as part of the congregation. I did not want to force those who do not usually recite qunut prayer to recite it.' On the following day, it was Buya Hamka's turn to lead the dawn shalat. On the second rak'ah, he recited the lengthy qunut prayer, which he had almost never done while performing the shalat. For members of the Muhammdiyah, reciting qunut during the dawn prayer is not a necessity. After that, it was Idham's turn to question Buya Hamka, which was answered as follows: 'I led the prayer with you as part of the congregation, and it is your belief to recite the qunut prayer. I did not want to force those who recite the prayer to stop their practice.'

The abovementioned examples merely serve as a reminder that the spirit of religious moderation has actually had a strong foundation in Indonesia, having numerous examples in its teachings and practices.

the morning prayers and witir prayers that are performed at the end of Ramadan. This supplication, which is read in a standing position, aims to ask for blessings, forgiveness, and protection from Allah. Imam Syafi'i recommends the reading of qunut in morning prayers. In Indonesia, qunut is widely practiced by the Nahdlatul Ulama.

Various Perspectives on Religious Moderation

COULD religious moderation be understood through more than one perspective?

The answer is that religious moderation can be understood from numerous perspectives, depending on the context and dimensions employed. Religious moderation can also be a perspective in itself.

When religious moderation was first proposed for inclusion in the 2020–2024 National Medium Term Development Plan (RPJMN) in 2019, the conceptualisation of religious moderation was only partially carried out using the perspective of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, even though several religious leaders had already been involved at that time. More specifically, the conceptualisation of religious

moderation was only partially achieved through a book titled *Religious Moderation* and a pocketbook titled *Questions and Answers on Religious Moderation* that were published on 8 October 2019.

These books were an accumulation of ideas about religious moderation, a term which I have actively used since 2016. On various occasions, I often conveyed the perspective of religious moderation when encountering religious issues emerging in society. I also turned this perspective into an approach for ministerial task forces responsible for providing public services for religious communities.

Following this, the Directorate General of Christian Community Guidance (Bimas) of the Ministry of Religious Affairs published a book bearing the title *Christian Perspective on the Mosaic of Religious Moderation*. Published in 2018, this book presents an eclectic mix of research outcomes. The contributing authors come from various backgrounds, ranging from religious leaders, to community heads, to scholars. They carried out a thorough study about religious moderation which was then adapted into the basis for the formulation of policies and public services for the Christian community. Prior to the publication of this book, discussions on religious moderation had predominantly come from Islamic perspectives.

In the following year, the Directorate General of Islamic Education of the Ministry of Religious Affairs published several books pertaining to religious moderation. Among these was a book titled ‘he

Implementation of Religious Moderation in Islamic Education which presented comprehensive materials. The book, prepared by the Religious Moderation Working Group of the Directorate General of Education, expounds the basic concepts and principles of moderation in Islam, religious moderation policies conducted by the Directorate General of Islamic Education, and the implementation of religious moderation in Islamic education.

The chancellors of State Islamic Religious Universities (PTKIN), too, published a number of books covering the topic of religious moderation, one of which was Religious Moderation: From Indonesia to the World that was edited by Babun Suharto (Yogyakarta: LkiS, 2019). The book consists of a collection of writings based on research about religious moderation carried out by PTKIN leaders.

Former Minister of Religious Affairs M. Quraish Shihab wrote a book with the title Wasatiyyah: Islamic Insights on Religious Moderation (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2019). In line with his expertise in the field of interpretation, Quraish, one of the country's leading teachings, explains the concept of moderation from an Islamic perspective. He connects religious moderation with the term 'wasatiyyah' by highlighting the 'what', 'why', and 'how' questions in the implementation of moderation. Explanations from this authoritative expert essentially reasserts that religious moderation is an inseparable element of the teachings of religions themselves, particularly Islam.

In July 2022, the Directorate General of Islamic Community Guidance of the Ministry of Religious Affairs also launched a book titled *Religious Moderation from the Perspective of Islamic Community Guidance* in a limited number. The preparation of the book's manuscript was quite lengthy. A series of discussions on the book's paradigm and approach was conducted. It appears that the book manuscript still needs a little more time to realign its entire contents before it can be published to the wider public.

Data-Based Policies

Presidential Regulation No. 18/2000 enacts religious moderation as one of the state's policy directions in managing interfaith relations. This enactment is expected to strengthen the legal framework of religious moderation. A number of parties with interests in religious moderation became more enthusiastic in presenting their respective views on this subject matter.

Research projects using religious moderation perspectives have increasingly emerged both in universities and off-campus research institutions. Within the Ministry of Religious Affairs itself, four senior researchers at the ministry's Research, Development, and Training Agency were promoted into research professors in the field of religious moderation. These researchers are Muhammad Adlin Sila, Idham Kholik Budi, Muhammad Murtadlo, dan Abdul Kadir Massoweang. Their promotion illustrates the significance

of religious moderation and how the subject matter deserves a separate field in the world of research.

In their professorial inaugural lectures, they employed different perspectives in understanding religious moderation. Muhammad Adlin Sila, who received two doctoral degrees from the University of Indonesia and the Australian National University, prescribed religious moderation as an antidote to mounting religious zeal to prevent its transformation into extreme thoughts and practices which harm other people's lives. Idham Kolik Budi recommended using local traditions in South Sulawesi to further develop religious moderation values. Muhammad Murtadlo studied the role of education as a platform to cultivate religious moderation among students. Finally, Abdul Kadir Massoweang explicated how the values of religious moderation had long been recorded in ancient Lontara¹⁴⁶ manuscripts, such as the teaching of Sipakatau (mutual care for humanity) and Sipakalebbi (respect for each other).

Religious moderation has also gained traction at the international level. Several researchers in Japan initiated joint research under the theme 'Moderate Islam's Challenge to Compete with Islamism: with special reference to "Religious Moderation" Policy in Indonesia.' This research involved a partnership between Japan and Indonesia. Representing Japan were Yasushi Tonaga and Masaaki Okamoto from the Kyoto University as well as Kazuhiro Arai from the Keio University. Oman Fathurahman of the Syarif

¹⁴⁶ Ancient script primarily used to write Buginese, Makassarese, and Mandar languages.

To facilitate a better understanding of religious moderation in the international audience, the book Religious Moderation published by the Research, Development, and Training Agency of the Ministry of Religious Affairs has been translated into English, Arabic, and Mandarin, among others.

Hidayatullah Islamic State University (UIN) Jakarta represented Indonesia.

To facilitate a better understanding of religious moderation in the international audience, the book *Religious Moderation* published by the Research, Development, and Training Agency of the Ministry of Religious Affairs has been translated into English, Arabic, and Mandarin, among others. The translation of the book is to follow numerous requests made by foreign ambassadors who wish to learn about religious moderation.

Discussions about religious moderation have been indeed circulating in universities and with policy makers, both within and outside the country. There are several reasons why religious moderation makes an interesting discussion topic. First, religious moderation has become a distinct topic in numerous regions within the context of developing a better world civilisation. Second, interfaith harmony is very valuable, and religious moderation bears an integral role in maintaining such harmony. Third, the government has enacted religious moderation as one of the national priorities, which compels parties of interests to take actions. Fourth, there are numerous aspects and angles of religious moderation that can be analysed. The deeper the analysis, the more attractive the topic is for discussion. Fifth, religious moderation has developed into a policy from merely a conceptualisation, into a blueprint from merely a formulation, and into a research topic that may trigger social movement.

The Centre for the Study of Islam and Society

(PPIM) of the Syarif Hidayatullah Islamic State University (UIN) Jakarta observed the shift of religious moderation from conceptual ideas to contextual references in its collaborative work with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Initiated by Jamhari Ma'ruf, a professor of anthropology who works at the Indonesian International Islamic University (UIII) at the time of writing, these two institutions established a movement called Countering Violent Extremism for Youth (CONVEY). Targeting the younger generation, this movement is designed to promote a peaceful, harmonious, and inclusive society. Its activities include research, training, capacity-building, policy advocacy, and public campaigns.

Based on research, CONVEY develops data-based religious moderation programmes and policies. Various data gathered from surveys, focused studies, and public discussions have been submitted to the government as policy briefs. The movement has also carried out thematic training programmes that are effectively employed as a platform for increasing the capacity of the youth to suppress extremism and violence using religious pretexts.

Data-based policies become an important consideration for the government as a country's progress is reflected in the quality of its policies. The use of data and factual evidence in policy formulation, or, in other words, the production of evidence-based or knowledge-based policies, will offer lessons and improve government accountability. Transparency is

the best method to convince the taxpayers that their money is not going to waste. Further, the availability of data will facilitate the government in formulating effective strategies in policy implementation.

Data-based inputs from civil society groups and academics are also urgently needed by the government. This will increase the value of knowledge and be of public benefit. In practice, the implementation of data-based policies is not as easy as turning one's hand. Generally, this policy model is difficult to implement in developing countries, particularly due to political circumstances. Often, policy-makers prioritise political interests or, at the very least, have political considerations which disregard accurate data.

On the other hand, academics tend to preoccupy themselves in their ivory tower, writing articles with indecipherable words rather than communicating the findings of their research in an accessible manner for the national interests. Nur Syam Centre is an exception. Founded by the 2014–2019 Secretary General of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Nur Syam, and several other academics, this institution enthusiastically advocates religious moderation values through their communication channels. One of its products, the website www.nursyamcentre.com, is filled with articles which discuss religious moderation from various angles: tolerance, harmony, solidarity, diplomacy, conflict resolution, and many others.

The work of CONVEY and the other groups who never cease providing feedback for the government

should be supported. Likewise, institutions such as the Nur Syam Centre which present high-quality references amidst the proliferation of partial religious information due to incessant cyber-attacks from extreme groups must be lauded as well.

Religious Moderation Research

The conceptualisation of religious moderation has generated productive dialogue and formulated solutions to current socio-religious problems. This further bolsters the prospect of religious moderation. From the start, I have come with the realisation that religious moderation is not a simple concept that is easily eroded by the changes of time. Rather, this concept prevails, grows, and can be re-actualised as needed so that it can produce new knowledge that is relevant to the needs of the times.

In universities, religious moderation has become a distinct topic to study, research, and critically interrogate in an analytical manner. It is not only discussed in academic forums; religious moderation has also become a theme for the analytical work requirement for the award of a higher degree. Muhimatun, for instance, graduated from the Faculty of *Tarbiyah*¹⁴⁷ and Education of the Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University with a thesis titled 'The Concept of Religious Moderation in the Koran and its Relevance to Islamic Education'. She conducted

¹⁴⁷ A form of child education in Islam.

an analytical study of *Tasfir Al-Misbah*¹⁴⁸ by M. Quraish Shihab. Another thesis titled ‘Religious Moderation and its Application in Pegantungan Community and Surrounding Areas’ was written by Muhamad Arsudin from the Faculty of *Ushuluddin*¹⁴⁹ and Culture of the Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin State Islamic University Banten in 2021. He employed the perspective of religious moderation in analysing the religious practices of the local community in Serang Municipality. The findings of his research is that religious moderation can be adapted in everyday lives and would not have negative impacts on the municipality’s inhabitants.

At postgraduate level, Ulfatul Husna graduated from Sunan Ampel State Islamic University Surabaya with a thesis titled ‘Religious Moderation at SMAN¹⁵⁰ Krembung, Sidoarjo (An Approach to Religious Studies Education in Encountering the Challenges of Extremism)’. This research aims to present descriptive, explorative, and explanatory analyses pertaining to the implementation of religious moderation within a school environment and its subsequent implications. In this study, the researcher underscores the difference between religious moderation and deradicalisation.¹⁵¹ Citing Haedar Nashir, the chairman of Muhammadiyah, the researcher argues that radicalism is often touted as aligning with particular group(s), while religious moderation refers to a strategy to address increasing violence prompted by misunderstandings and

¹⁴⁸ Al Misbah Interpretation.

¹⁴⁹ Islamic studies.

¹⁵⁰ Public high school.

¹⁵¹ See note 85.

misinterpretations of religious teachings. She conducted this research because the school in which the research was carried out had shown indications of extremism among the students and the teachers. One of the findings is that religious extremism in the school environment is propelled by an unfinished learning process, teachers who are unreliable in leading the learning process, approaches that are inappropriate in religious studies, and self-righteousness which fosters a sense of absolute truth in oneself.

At the doctoral level, Nawawi was awarded his doctorate from Sunan Ampel State Islamic University Surabaya with a dissertation titled 'Religious Moderation in Batu Municipality's Inclusive Society'. In his research, he analyses the culture and traditions practised by the Batu community in Malang, East Java, within the context of the social construction of religious moderation. The social construction theory was developed by Berger and Luckmann (1966) from the theory of phenomenology which was formulated as a synthesis of Emile Durkheim's thoughts. This theory is employed in Nawawi's research to understand the practice of religious moderation at the societal level and its contribution to the creation of a harmonious social order.

Using the methodology of participant observation and in-depth interviews, the research explains the processes of externalisation, objectivation, and internalisation of religious moderation values in the Batu community. He argues that the Batu community has long implemented religious practices that correspond

with religious moderation values as defined by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Such practices have long permeated the Batu community before the increasing popularity of the discourse of religious moderation. The community was not aware of the concept of religious moderation despite practising its values. 'This is because the concept of religious moderation is fairly new, and it is indeed derived from the teachings of all religious beliefs that are not at the either end of the political spectrum and have long been practised by the community,' says Nawawi.

Nawawi is a civil servant at the Ministry of Religious Affairs. He became interested in conducting research after he frequently attended lectures on religious moderation programmes and policies. In doing his research, Nawawi did not position himself as a civil servant, but rather as an objective outsider. He attempted to further improve Nur Syam's study on the interconnection between religion and culture. Nevertheless, what distinguishes his research is his perspective on culture and traditions as a channel where religious moderation values can materialise. In this regard, culture refers to traditions of kindness, brotherhood, politeness, good manners, respect, and so on.

This form of religious moderation cannot be taken for granted as it resembles a social process which shapes the community's moderate religious practices. 'Despite the mounting external challenges, both in the form of modernity and radicalism, the Batu community

still strongly holds the basic principle of tolerance and diversity,' concludes Nawawi. The findings of this research assert that religious moderation must be promoted for the protection of peaceful Indonesia.

Another research project on religious moderation was conducted by Yudi Kawanugng. In a research paper titled 'Religious Moderation Discourse in Plurality of Social Harmony in Indonesia' that was published by the International Journal of Social Science and Humanities in 2019, he carried out a textual analysis on discussions of the meaning of religious moderation. Kawangung found that the concept of religious moderation is leaning more towards the perspective that religions are the manifestations of God's love to those who champion human dignity, which, in itself, embodies divine value. When a person loves their God, they must also cherish His creations. According to this perspective, all religious communities ought to respect each other and safeguard human dignity.

In September 2021, the Research and Development Centre for Religious Literature, Heritage, and Organisational Management of the Ministry of Religious Affairs Agency for Research, Development, Education, and Training published the results of a survey of civil servants across 34 regional offices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs on their views on religious moderation. The level of survey respondents' understandings of religious moderation was measured by using four indicators, namely their national commitment, view on tolerance, view on non-violence, and level of

adaptiveness to local traditions. 576 respondents were assessed and sorted by province. On the indicators of non-violence and national commitment, the average score ranged between 84.9–85.4. For the indicators of tolerance and adaptation to local traditions, the average score fell to between 76.0–77.4.

The Research and Development Centre for Religious Guidance and Services of the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Agency for Research, Development, Education, and Training carried out another research project in December 2021 titled 'The Function of Mosques as Hubs of Religious Moderation Education during Pandemic'. The research proposes that differences in religious interpretations and mahzab¹⁵² in Muslim communities are very likely to impact mosque management which, if not addressed wisely, will lead to horizontal conflicts between mosque congregations. The research recommends, among other things, designing and implementing mosque-based religious moderation which directly involves local religious mass organisations.

The Prospect of Religious Moderation Research

According to Nur Syam, professor of sociology at Surabaya State Islamic University, epistemologically and methodologically, religious moderation research may be carried out with the guiding query: What is the meaning of religious moderation, and what can it

¹⁵² See note 6.

do to other aspects of life? Analysing the meaning of religious moderation refers to contemplating the nature of religious moderation, how the meaning of religious moderation is produced within religious communities, and the actions of prominent actors (religious and civil leaders) in responding to religious moderation. The objects of the research are the social actions or any other aspects which underlie one's decision to adopt moderate religious views and practices. The research method can be qualitative, with an assumption that the essence of religious moderation encompasses social harmony, tolerance, traditions, national insights, and so on.

What can religious moderation do in other aspects of life? This question essentially examines the function and role of religious moderation at the societal and community level. The objective is to answer questions on how religious moderation influences the lives of a society or community as well as the correlation between religious moderation and community life. The method employed might be quantitative, such as measuring the impacts of religious moderation on behaviours exhibiting tolerance and harmony in interfaith communities. Another example is analysing the influence of social media content conveying religious moderation values on the adoption of mutual respect in interfaith communities.

One of the requirements for academic research is originality in analysing factual social phenomena in society, either in the present time or in the past.

In regard to originality, religious moderation is an interesting social reality to observe. It meets the precondition of originality considering the limited research which has specifically looked at religious moderation vis-à-vis other topics. The area of study is also broad. An example is the connection between harmonious interfaith relations and the thousands of local traditions in the archipelago such as *Kitorang Basodara*¹⁵³ from Ambon and the Javanese tradition of *Gugur Gunung*,¹⁵⁴ both of which contain religious moderation values.

In terms of discipline, religious moderation can be categorised into the fields of religious studies, social studies, and humanities. For religious studies, a researcher at an Islamic university may conduct a textual analysis that compares the views of ulema in the present time and those in the past on religious moderation. This can be done by the way interpretations of religious texts such as Quran verses and *matn* hadith¹⁵⁵ are articulated by the ulema. If the research is empirical, then it may be carried out by building a dialogue between religious texts and the empirical realities.

Nur Syam sees religious moderation as highly productive for analytical research. He predicts that religious moderation will mark the new era in religious and social studies. He proposes the incorporation of religious moderation into the 2018–2028 National Research Agenda on Religious Studies (ARKAN). If

¹⁵³ We are all family.

¹⁵⁴ Mutual assistance.

¹⁵⁵ The text of hadith.

necessary, this agenda may be revised to accommodate religious moderation research. This is because religious moderation is urgently needed in Indonesia, both presently and in the future. Religious moderation can be examined from various academic disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, cultural studies, and political science.

‘Within the context of promoting religious moderation in the society and community, the Institute for Research and Community Service (LPM) will work together with the House of Moderation in conducting methodological conceptual or empirical studies. It is expected that new and more enriched perspectives on religious moderation will emerge,’ said Nur Syam in his reflective writing with the title ‘Religious Moderation in Indonesia: Basis, Area of Study, and Methodology’ which he sent to me on 15 May 2021.

Misunderstandings About Religious Moderation

WHAT DOES religious moderation actually mean?

It is very understandable to raise such a question due to the proliferation of statements regarding religious moderation, not all of which are the same or are in line with its original conceptualisation. Different interpretations often emerge during discussions on religious moderation in public spaces. Those who are not familiar with the concept may be plunged into confusion when learning about religious moderation.

It is not difficult to seek information about religious moderation on the internet. Unfortunately, the term ‘religious moderation’ is also often found in negative narratives. When mapped, these negative narratives consist of two variants. The first variant encompasses misperception, misinterpretation, miscommunication,

and other forms of unintentional misinformation. The second variant encompasses intentional misinformation such as distortion, disinformation, and slander.

Misunderstanding can still be acceptable as it might be caused by a lack of comprehensive information or an individual's recklessness in giving responses. Indeed, proper references for the subject of religious moderation are still largely limited in academic circles. The general public usually obtains information from more accessible, but sloppy, sources rather than the more trusted academic journals or textbooks. Those who misunderstand usually find it easier to learn about the objective truth once receiving more comprehensive information.

This is different from intentional misinformation which aims to distort the meaning of religious moderation and discredit the concept as a deliberate form of objection. The availability of references does not necessarily lead them to objectivity as their purpose is not to find the truth, but rather to project something else as the truth. Those who feel self-righteous tend to be emotional in responding to religious moderation. Emotional responses often take the form of counter-narratives with forced arguments, insistence to discredit the concept by citing irrelevant arguments, or making insinuations targeting personal attributes.

There are also misguided articulations of religious moderation. These usually emerge in groups who are too enthusiastic in promoting religious moderation despite their incomplete grasp of its meaning. This

also encompasses those who misuse the term ‘religious moderation’ in their content for their own personal gain. There are also the ‘free riders’ who display a level of interest just because the theme of religious moderation is gaining traction.

Having become a popular subject of public discussions, it is expected that religious moderation will generate a wide range of responses. Irrespective of the driving force, I see the increasing number of discussions in a positive light. I assume that this embodies the love for, or at least attention to, religious moderation. This should be appreciated since the various insights that have been given prompt positive and constructive dialogues which enrich the discourse of religious moderation.

Critiques of Religious Moderation

As with any other concepts or policies intended for the public, religious moderation has been subjected to a variety of critiques. These critiques of religious moderation, which emerge from the public, can be sorted into at least three categories.

The first category encompasses constructive critiques which contain substantial insights founded upon a shared aspiration to safeguard the continuity of religious moderation. This type of critique is intended to protect religious moderation from misunderstanding and misperception in the general public. An example of this is the critique targeting the supporters of

An example of this is the critique targeting the supporters of religious moderation who adopt immoderate religious perspectives, actions, and practices themselves.



religious moderation who adopt immoderate religious perspectives, actions, and practices themselves. More specifically, this critique scrutinises state officials and religious leaders who conduct religious campaigns using excessive measures which lean toward extremism.

The second type of critique emerges due to misconception of religious moderation itself. This might be caused by a understanding of expressions, terms, or concepts related to religious moderation. This might also be caused by ignorance or limited access to information. This type of critique usually argues that religious moderation is a state instrument to control and dictate its population's religious practices.

According to the national insight test which is based on the index of national insight, moderation can be seen as a recruitment tool. This type of critique argues that religious moderation can also be employed by the state to sort and categorise the wider population depending on the whims of the rulers. Further, religious moderation is deemed as the state's attempt to interfere with individuals' private affairs in practising their religious belief, jeopardising or even removing religious freedom.

The third category refers to criticisms, rather than critiques, which encompass hostility or objection against religious moderation. The critics who belong to this category usually have long adopted certain religious teachings which encourage perspectives, actions, and practices that contradict religious moderation. Among these critics, there are those who presume that religious

moderation is a threat against the belief and faith of religious communities. There are also those who oppose religious moderation as they deem the concept an effort to reduce religious teachings, a process of liberalisation, and foreign conspiracy intended to harm Indonesia's religious population.

This last category is named by Ahmad Syahid as a negative response which damages public spaces. This is because this type of criticism is often conveyed aggressively and is often accompanied by slander which then widely circulates on social media platforms. A professor of psychology at the State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta stated that those who reject religious moderation tend to be entrapped in the fallacy of *argumentum ad ignorantiam*. Translated as 'appeal to ignorance' in English, this fallacy is often used in debates to divert attention from the need for concrete proof. Those who use this fallacy assert that a proposition is true merely because it has not been proven as false. They are lost in the sea of information provided by search engines as they do not employ reason in processing this information. For example, they accuse the supporters of religious moderation of spreading liberalism and denying God.

The abovementioned accusation is a form of logical fallacy, an error in thinking due to language distortions and the subsequent consequences. The detractors criticise religious moderation not because of its substance, but rather because of issues they have with supporters of the concept as individuals. This

is the equivalent of the denouncement of Islam of the Archipelago as a transgression, and its followers as automatically *murtad*.¹⁵⁶ Another example is the accusation that President Jokowi is a non-believer since he does not support Islamic caliphate.¹⁵⁷

Once again, I am not against critiques as long as they are intended for positive outcomes and to complement each other. Room will always be available for discussion so that different views can together find a meeting point. We can further examine religious moderation and enrich its perspective, producing new valuable insights. If the intention of the critiques is to pit one perspective against another, all parties will remain close-minded, and no good deeds will materialise. Don't we all want to embody Jalaludin Rumi's words from his book *Fihi Ma Fihi*,¹⁵⁸ where he states, "The truth was a mirror in the hands of God. It fell and broke into pieces. Everybody took a piece of it, and they looked at it and thought they had the truth?"

Responding to Accusations

I took note of several accusations against religious moderation that have developed in the public sphere.

¹⁵⁶ A Muslim who becomes a non-believer after their conversion to Islam. Linguistically, the word *murtad* comes from an Arabic word which means returning to the path from which one originated. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004).

¹⁵⁷ A concept which refers to a governmental system that is founded upon Islamic law. In this system, the leader of the government is called the Caliph who is appointed through *bai'at* (pledge).

¹⁵⁸ Translates into It Is What It Is.

Religious moderation is understood as follows: a new current in religion; distancing adherents from their religious beliefs; homogenising religious practices and, thus, jeopardising religious freedom; too excessive in regulating private affairs; protecting religious adherents from fanaticism, and; a form of tolerance that has long been practised by the Indonesian population, which then negates the need for the conceptualisation of religious moderation. There are still many other perspectives which require further clarification to make clear their stance.

In responding to these perspectives and accusations, first and foremost, I want all of us to re-examine the meaning of religious moderation. It has been repeatedly stated that religious moderation is essentially: Religious perspectives, actions, and practices that are implemented in our coexistence by embodying the essence of religious teachings—which ultimately aim to protect human dignity and promote collective welfare—based on the principle of fairness and balance and the compliance with the constitution as a shared consensus.

In this formulation of religious moderation, there are at least four aspects that must be underscored:

First, religious moderation is an effort to shape and cultivate religious perspectives, actions, and practices of all religious communities. This constitutes a process, not an instant outcome, which requires continual efforts.

‘Religion’ and ‘religious practices’ are two different things. Religious teachings undoubtedly comprise truth and perfection since they come from the Truest

and the Most Perfect. However, how human beings understand (and implement) His teachings are open to question. Are our understandings and implementations of religious teachings aligned with His will? At this point, our religious perspectives, actions, and practices ought not to exceed His will.

Second, religious moderation focuses on coexistence. The first step of shaping and cultivating religious perspectives, actions, and practices is to observe the social impacts of religious teachings and practices in public spaces. Religious moderation does not concern itself with individual religious practices which take place in private domains. Religious moderation, as in line with one of the core religious teachings of promoting collective welfare, is directed toward religious practices that generate positive social impacts on public domains. Religious moderation does not intervene in individuals' private religious affairs at all. In terms of faith (*akidah*),¹⁵⁹ fixed religious worship, and other religious aspects that are personal and private, that is the relations between individuals and their God, which are not the concern of religious moderation.

The phrase 'embodying the essence of religious teachings' in the abovementioned formulation of religious moderation constitutes the third aspect. In simple words, religious teachings can be divided into two categories: teachings with universal values (core, primary, essential) and particular teachings (unique, specific, derivative). Religious moderation focuses on

¹⁵⁹ See note 49.

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the process of understanding and practising religious teachings under the first category, namely teachings that are core, primary, and universal. This includes the protection of human dignity, law enforcement, the fulfilment of basic human rights, equality before the law, the promotion of collective welfare, the protection of shared commitment, and so on.

In this context, embodying the essence of religious teachings refers to the embodiment of core and universal teachings in public spaces, which encompass non-excessive religious perspectives, actions, and practices. In particular, the phrases ‘protecting human dignity’ and ‘promoting collective welfare’ are explicitly stated in the formulation to ensure specific attention. These principles are among the various core religious teachings that have recently experienced extraordinary denial, precisely from among the religious community itself and in the name of religion.

Fourth, is “the principle of fairness, balance, and obeying the Constitution as a collective agreement”. The definition and meaning of the words “fair” and “balanced” as principles of religious moderation have been explained in the second chapter of this book ‘Key Aspects of Religious Moderation’. In this regard, what particularly needs to be explained is the urgency and relevance of the phrase ‘compliance with the constitution as a shared consensus’. As expected, in religious countries where the populations are equally religious such as Indonesia, religious teachings and values cannot be separated from social, national, and state affairs.

In the case of Indonesia, our shared consensus is Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution whose substance embodies religious teachings and values. This shared consensus represents a compromise between various aspirations, formulated by the wisdom of our founding fathers in responding to the diversity of our nation. The shared consensus does not only serve as a bond that knits and weaves our colourful national fabric, but they also work to strengthen the identity of this religious nation.

In the context of Indonesia, civic and religious affairs are inseparable but can be differentiated. Fulfilling our civic responsibilities as citizens of Indonesia is essentially fulfilling our religious obligations as adherents as well. This means being an Indonesian who always safeguards religious values, norms, and practices that are founded upon and oriented to our shared national consensus. For Indonesians, civil and religious duties are two sides of the same coin; they can be distinguished but not separated. This is why compliance with the constitution plays an integral part in religious moderation.

A better understanding of the four aspects explained above can address the responses to and false accusations of religious moderation.

The Politicisation of Religion

Taking into account the national context of Indonesia as well as its particularities as explained in detail in the 'Religion-State Relations' and 'The Presence of Religion

in State Administration' sub-sections in the first chapter, the phenomenon of the politicisation of religion needs a balanced explanation. This oft-misunderstood and controversial concept urgently needs to be contextualised so a moderate interpretation can be achieved.

We often hear statements such as 'do not politicise religion' or, in reverse, 'do not separate religion from politics'. What do these two statements mean? Do they contradict each other? If yes, which one, then, should be adhered to?

All religions convey universal (core, essential) and particular (derivative) teachings. Universal religious teachings are believed by all religious adherents irrespective of their different backgrounds and religious beliefs. Individuals, no matter of which race, ethnicity, gender, and religious belief (including atheists), accept these teachings as truth. Universal religious teachings include, among others, upholding justice, respecting the humanity of human beings, promoting collective welfare, preserving the environment, championing equality before the law, respecting elders and caring for the young, protecting the weak, forbidding theft and deception, and so on.

Particular religious teachings are only adhered to by a portion of a religious community, while the others, both within and without that religious community, do not necessarily acknowledge these teachings as truth. Religious teachings under this category usually concern worship rituals and procedures. They are also often contextualised (in time and location), in accordance

with the circumstances where and when the teachings are implemented. The diversity of religious sects and branches manifests in different religious streams, schools of thoughts, or orders.

According to the view of religious moderation, the discouragement of politicising religion must refer to the politicisation of particular religious teachings. This must be prevented and avoided. If the diverse, particular religious teachings are debated through political channels in pluralistic societies, it will only result in public disputes. An example of the politicisation of religion in this context is launching a public campaign in a diverse society against electing political candidates who have different religious beliefs, come from different religious sects, or adopt different religious schools of thoughts.

On the contrary, the perspective of religious moderation argues that religion must not be separated from politics when it comes to universal religious teachings. Universal religious teachings are certainly believed and agreed upon by every individual; thus, their implementation must be defended collectively. As a religious adherent living in a religious country, it is undoubtedly difficult to avoid these universal teachings in our everyday lives. This is why statements such as ‘do not separate religion from politics’ must be contextualised using a moderate perspective.

To understand and practise religious teachings in a moderate and non-excessive manner is a religious commendation in itself. Why do religions commend us

to do so? This is due to all of our weaknesses as human beings, namely our limited perspective (mindset) and knowledge in reading and interpreting God's holy verses which puts human beings in a vulnerable position in responding to holy texts, that is the primary references for religious practices. The constant possibility for extremism and excessiveness in interpreting His holy words—as a consequence of our limited perspective and knowledge—is what necessitates the adoption of religious moderation. Religious moderation is a concrete need of religious communities.

Does Religious Moderation Uproot Religious Communities and Prevent Religious Fanaticism?

The rise of questions such as this is driven by improper use of words such as 'radical' and 'fanatic' as well as words such as 'conservative' and 'fundamental'. According to the Indonesian language, the word 'radical' means 'fundamental' and 'rooted'. The meaning of this word becomes very important within the context of religious practices as religious practices indeed ought to be fundamental and rooted in nature; religious practices must not be superficial, carried out merely at the surface level. The word 'radical', however, has been associated with negative connotations in religious contexts. Messages such as 'do not practise religion in a radical way' are often propagated by religious and community leaders. This what might have sown

suspensions among a portion of religious communities that ‘deradicalisation’ refers to attempts to weaken faith and religious spirit. This leads to several consequences for religious moderation. The word ‘radical’ is now associated with religious practices which tolerate violence, practices that are discouraged by religious moderation. This is surely a huge error. Similar things have happened with the words ‘fanatic’, ‘fundamental’, and ‘conservative’. These words, which essentially bear positive connotation within religious contexts, have been reduced, or even completely distorted, in their meanings.

This is why since the very start, within discussions of religious moderation, we do not use these particular four words which have suffered from meaning distortion. What really needs to be avoided is not radicalism, fanaticism, fundamentalism, or conservatism in itself, but rather the negative connotations attached to these words. Etymologically speaking, religious moderation understands the literal meaning of these words in a positive light. It should not be a problem if someone practises their religion in a fundamental and radical (understood in its original meaning as deeply rooted) way, strongly believes in their religion, and safeguards the sanctity of their religious teachings. In fact, people ought to practise their religion in this way. The main concern lies in preventing and avoiding the negative connotations attached to the words ‘fundamentalism’ and ‘radicalism’, encompassing characteristics such as self-righteousness, intolerance, and violence in imposing one’s will.

Within the concept of religious moderation, the terms that are used to describe anything that must be prevented or avoided are ‘excessive’, ‘beyond limits’, and ‘extreme’. The use of these words is preferred not only because they are often employed in religious contexts, but also to avoid the never-ending debates over other words whose meanings have been distorted.

Is Religious Moderation a Foreign Agenda That Spreads Liberalism and Secularism?

As explained in the previous sub-section, the concept of religious moderation avoids the use of the word ‘radical’ in religious discussions. On several occasions, I have had the opportunity to talk with officials from the Indonesian Military (TNI), the National Police, the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), and the Coordinating Political, Legal, Security Affairs Ministry to clarify the meaning of the word ‘radical’ within religious contexts so that the wrong direction in deradicalisation programmes can be avoided. I strongly oppose the association of terrorism with religions. The root cause of terrorism is not related to religious spirit, but rather to other problems arising from economic, political, and social injustices. These aspects easily trigger an individual’s emotions, who may then employ (misunderstood) religious teachings to justify their acts of violence.

Further, in regard to accusations that religious moderation encapsulates foreign agendas that will be

propagated in Indonesia, the reality shows the opposite. Religious moderation serves to boost the ‘immunity’ of the Indonesian citizens against the onslaught of foreign thoughts, practices, and ideologies, both from the West (e.g., liberalism and secularism) and the East (e.g., transnationalism). Religious moderation is Indonesia’s domestic agenda since moderate religious practices are a concrete need of our religious nation.

The concept of religious moderation is derived from the ways of life practised by the communities and societies across the Archipelago, far before the independence of the Republic of Indonesia. In more than one aspect, religious moderation is in line with the cultural practices in several regions. An example is the well-known philosophy of *satu tungku tiga batu*¹⁶⁰ in Fak Fak, Papua. According to this philosophy, it should not be a problem if there are people with different religious beliefs in one household; religious differences must not prevent people from living collectively and harmoniously. Likewise, the local community in Raja Ampat, West Papua, has a similar philosophy expressed as *satu rumah empat pintu*.¹⁶¹ It is the tradition of the local communities in these regions to pay a visit to their relatives with different religious beliefs during their respective religious celebrations. A similar tradition also exists in Maluku, namely the customary tradition of *Pela Gandong*, or brotherly ties, which cultivates the practice of mutual assistance across religious communities.

¹⁶⁰ The literal translation is ‘one stove for three stones’, the philosophy symbolises the importance of maintaining social harmony amidst differences.

¹⁶¹ The literal translation is ‘one house with four doors’.

The second chapter of this book, specifically in the 'Religious Moderation Programme' sub-section, mentions the House of Religious Moderation Programme which is inspired by the conflict resolution model employed by the Toraja local community. In Kudus, Central Java, it is considered taboo for the Muslim community to slaughter cows as part of the sacrifice¹⁶² for Eid al-Adha¹⁶³ commemoration. Such a taboo is a local tradition that originally came from the teaching of Sunan Kudus hundreds of years ago to honour the Hindus who consider cows as sacred animals. This tradition embodies the value of tolerance, that is to empathise and respect other people's feelings.

The second chapter also briefly explains the development of the conceptualisation of religious moderation. The development process was not once influenced by foreign entities. The position of religious moderation vis-à-vis secularism is clearly explained in the previous sub-section on the relations between the state and religion in the constitution of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. Instead of promoting foreign agendas, the practice of religious moderation in Indonesia could instead serve as an example for

¹⁶² Colloquially known as *kurban*. A form of worship carried out by Muslims during Eid al-Adha by offering sacrifices of certain animals (e.g., goats, sheep, cows, buffaloes, and camels). Etymologically, the word *kurban* comes from the Arabic word *gariba*, which means 'close'. Thus, this worship is implemented with the purpose of getting closer to Allah by carrying out some of His commands. The history of *kurban* in Islam is intertwined with the story of the Prophet Abraham and his son, the Prophet Ishmael. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004)

¹⁶³ Eid al-Adha means 'Feast of Sacrifice'. This Islamic celebration marks the end of Hajj pilgrimage as pilgrims sacrifice animals as part of their Hajj rituals. Muslims throughout the world also sacrifice these animals and donate a portion of the meat to the poor. This celebration falls on the 10th of the month of Dzulhijjah. See Gordon Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004)

other countries in cultivating diversity and realising world peace.

Does Religious Moderation Support LGBT?

Religious moderation does not disregard or overlook religious teachings at all. Every religious belief has their respective view on the behaviour of the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) community. Many religions oppose such behaviour. Religious moderation, too, strictly rejects the actions, behaviours, and campaigns of the LGBT community.

It is precisely because of such awareness that religious communities are obliged to prevent the spread of LGBT behaviours in the public. This must be done wisely and in line with religious teachings, namely by giving empathetic guidance and assistance to those with a homosexual or bisexual orientation as well as those who are transgender so that they cease carrying out LGBT behaviours.

The importance of empathy here is highlighted since we still have to maintain the humanity of all human beings, as conveyed in one of the universal religious teachings. Members of the LGBT community are still God's creations who also have human rights like any other human beings. Their basic human rights cannot be violated. So, denouncing, excluding, or even erasing their existence must not be done. The purpose of religion is to spread noble deeds. If one action is deemed as deviant from the religious perspective,

religious teachings (through its leaders and adherents) ought to assist the individuals, to facilitate and guide their return to the right way.

Religious teachings acknowledge numerous factors which influence deviant actions. By understanding these factors, we can address these actions in a more systematic approach. This approach includes giving opportunities for the individuals to return to the right path in accordance with their true essence of humanity.

Such is a moderate stance which can be used as a guideline. The human rights of the LGBT community must not be violated, but LGBT behaviours that are religiously prohibited must not be carried out or promoted in the public. Unfortunately, many find difficulties in differentiating the permissible from the impermissible so that efforts to protect the basic rights of the LGBT community (as commended by universal religious teachings) are equated with supporting LGBT behaviours.

Highlighting Substance

Numerous misperceptions regarding religious moderation as discussed in the preceding sections present challenges in themselves. There is no need to find scapegoats for prevailing misperceptions; these misperceptions may arise from insufficient relevant references on religious moderation or the lack of supporting environment which facilitates public communication of religious issues. Religious issues in Indonesia are highly

sensitive and always attract public attention.

Other than misarticulation, religious moderation is often misconed as ‘moderate religion’, whose explanation has already been provided at the beginning of this book. There is even a serious error of distorting religious moderation into ‘the modernisation of religion’.¹⁶⁴ Mistakes, accusations, and mislabelling of religious moderation are difficult to avoid since there are numerous contributing factors. These would not completely remove the correct meaning of religious moderation as long as its proponents diligently, patiently, and painstakingly balance out these challenges with recommendations to return to the substance.

To clarify distortions, one must not cease voicing that religious moderation covers religious perspectives, actions, and practices that are moderate. Moderate, in this context, refers to being non-extreme, non-excessive, and staying within limits. Moderate does not mean indifference and disregard toward religious teachings, but rather to practise religion in a fair and balanced manner based on the essences of religious texts.

Religious moderation is a process of internalising religious values so that they can become the spiritual, moral, and ethical foundation in our everyday lives. The values in question are religious norms that are substantive, essential, and directed toward the objective of protecting human dignity. This process is expected to balance out our religious zeal so that we do not fall into

¹⁶⁴ Efforts to modernise religious institutions, beliefs, and practices due to the assumption that religions are obsolete (outdated).

extremism, intolerance, and violence. Strong religious commitment ought to promote tolerance for different religious beliefs and interpretations among religious adherents.

A substantive explanation of religious moderation will be more accepted compared to explanations using jargon that is not necessarily in line with the values of religious moderation. A substantive explanation that is easy to digest in all segments of religious communities will also receive more positive responses compared to fierce campaigns deploying “political buzzers” (information brokers) that readily denounce others. Good examples of the implementation of religious moderation values are urgently needed to further introduce and promote religious moderation in the public with a clear mind and open heart.

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LUKMAN HAKIM SAIFUDDIN is the current Chairman of the Advisory Board at the Al-Quran Science Institute Foundation (IIQ), Jakarta, and the Ngariksa Budaya Indonesia Foundation. He also serves as Mustasyar (Advisory Board) for the Al-Hamidiyah Islamic Boarding School in Depok, West Java. Lukman is the Founder of the Indonesian Citizenship Institute (IKI) and a member of the Expert Council of the Al-Quran Study Center (PSQ) as well as the Indonesian Community Association for Amnesty International (PMIAI).

He has received numerous accolades, including the honorary Bintang Mahaputera Adipradana from President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in 2014, the 2018 National Moderation Figure Award from the

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A graduate of Pondok Modern Gontor (1983), Lukman is also active on social media, where he can be followed on X (@lukmansaifuddin) and Instagram (@lukmanhsaifuddin).

Religious Moderation

Responding to its problems, misperceptions,
accusations, and challenges

Religious moderation has never adopted terms such as ‘enemy’, ‘opponent’, ‘fight’, or ‘eradication’ against those considered as religiously excessive or transgressive. This is because the ultimate objective of moderation is to invite, to embrace, and to bring the excessive and the transgressive into more just and moderate religious practices. Further, religious practices should not endorse enmity and hostility. Rather, they call for guidance and protection, even for those adopting extreme views.

Lukman Hakim Saifuddin

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