



**RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN QURAISH SHIHAB'S TAFSIR
AL-MISBAH: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

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Abstract

Society today faces various phenomena related to the issue of religious diversity. Frequent incidents of violence within religious diversity have penetrated various fields of industry, worship, and education. This phenomenon is related to the nature of radicalism and liberalism between religious communities that have entered the world of education and society. The nature of the lack of respect, understanding, and tolerance between religious communities is also a concern. This research uses a literature study method with the perspective of al-Misbah's interpretation from a sociological approach. This article discusses recent studies on religious moderation by describing the spirit of religious moderation in al-Misbah's interpretation by incorporating a sociological perspective. Al-Misbah's interpretation is one of many contemporary interpretations that discuss social phenomena in society. Al-Misbah's interpretive style uses the talili method with touches of socio-historical interpretation, linguistic interpretation, and systematic interpretation. In sociology, religious moderation is an effort to foster harmony and balance in the diversity of society with different religious beliefs and practices, which encourages people to apply them in their daily lives. The results of this study state that religious moderation is very important for the plurality of Indonesian society. Through the interpretation of al-Misbah with a sociological approach, this study provides new scientific richness that the values of moderation such as justice, balance, and tolerance are not only basic principles in Islamic teachings, but also function as a solution to overcome radicalism and intolerance.

Keywords: Moderation; Tafsir al-Misbah; Society

A. Introduction

In recent years, Indonesia has appeared to be in a state of emergency due to intolerance and radicalism. The phenomenon of "jihadists" who use religion to commit violence in Indonesia can undermine the diversity of the Indonesian nation (Ramadhyas, 2020). This violent movement has even begun to infiltrate the workplace, religious services, and education. Unlike the jihadist phenomenon, which can traumatize victims, the phenomenon of intolerance penetrates the heart of society and causes divisions within it. Intolerance and radicalization are serious challenges for society. The current phenomenon of intolerance and radicalism is often associated with specific religious beliefs. Yet, all religions in Indonesia, believed to be true, carry a mission of reconciliation throughout the universe.

From a sociological perspective, religion is seen as a belief system manifested in social behavior within society (Hamali, 2018). Islam, as a religion that perfects previous religions, carries an important mission of reconciliation and compassion. Many Muslim religious texts discuss the values of humanity and peace. This proves that Islam highly values peace (Jamil, 2014). Interpretations of the Qur'an and hadith related to humanitarian values can be found through the works of Islamic scholars. In this article, we discuss the work of an Indonesian scholar-interpreter. Through his extraordinary work, Quraish Shihab provides relevant interpretations according to current societal conditions. Interpretations of the spirit of religious moderation are easily found in the book *Tafsir al-Misbah*.

Various studies have addressed religious moderation, such as that conducted by Fauziah Nurdin. This study employed a *maudhi'i* interpretation, discussing a single topic and then linking it to verses and hadith related to the moderation of the Muslim Brotherhood. The results show that the Quran and Hadith, as sources of Islamic law, do not encourage Muslims to engage in violence, extremism, or excessive religious practices. Both sources of Islamic law encourage a balanced understanding

and application of religious values, so that religion will be filled with mercy and compassion (Nurdin, 2021).

In his research, Bartolomeus Samho, using a literature study method, stated that religion must be internalized and practiced. When religious values are internalized and practiced, they will bring beauty and peace to society. Religion should not be used as justification for acts of violence. Likewise, religion should be used as a source of inspiration to improve the quality of life (Samho, 2022). Other studies using anthropological and sociological approaches relate to religious moderation. As Fulan wrote in his research, anthropological and sociological studies can help address the issue of religious moderation. Anthropological and sociological approaches can understand social, cultural, and religious factors, thus developing strategies to increase harmony and tolerance within religious communities (Asvin et al., 2023). This study presents the latest research on religious moderation. It uses a literature review model to explain the spirit of religious moderation in the interpretation of al-Misbah, incorporating sociological perspectives.

B. Method

This research method uses a qualitative approach with a library research design that is systematic and interpretative (Sugiyono, 2013). This approach was chosen because the research focuses on the hermeneutic interpretation of M. Quraish Shihab's Tafsir al-Misbah in understanding the values of religious moderation through a sociological perspective of religion. This research is interdisciplinary in nature by integrating the study of Al-Qur'anic interpretation and the theory of sociology of religion to explain the social relevance of the values of religious moderation in pluralistic Indonesian society.

The main object of this research is Tafsir al-Misbah by M. Quraish Shihab, while secondary data sources were obtained from journal articles, books, and scientific documents related to religious moderation, sociology of religion, radicalism, and social theories. The unit of analysis of this

research is focused on the interpretation of QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:143, QS. Al-Maidah [5]:8, and QS. Al-An'am [6]:108 which contain the concepts of ummatan wasathan, justice, and tolerance.

Data collection was conducted through documentation techniques by in-depth review of relevant primary and secondary texts. Data analysis used content analysis and thematic analysis through several stages, namely: (1) data reduction by selecting interpretations relevant to religious moderation; (2) categorization of moderation themes such as justice, balance, and tolerance; (3) data interpretation using the perspective of the sociology of religion, especially Émile Durkheim's functionalism theory and conflict theory; and (4) drawing conclusions to explain the social relevance of religious moderation values in contemporary Indonesian society. To maintain data validity, this study applies source triangulation by comparing M. Quraish Shihab's interpretation with academic literature, previous research results, and relevant sociological theories of religion. The resulting interpretation not only describes the textual meaning of the verse, but also explains its social function in building harmony in a multicultural society.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Results

a. Interpretation of al-Misbah

The Qur'an is the holy book of Muslims that has been preserved for 1400 years. Etymologically, the Qur'an means reading, which is a masdar form of the word *Qara'a-Yaqra-u-Qur'an* (Yasir & Jamaruddin, 2016). Some other scholars argue that the Qur'an is *the name of nature* (the name of everything) as well as the Torah and the Gospel given to the Prophet before the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an is a special and noble name for the name of the book of the people of the Prophet Muhammad. Meanwhile, according to terminology, the Qur'an is God's revelation to the Prophet Muhammad which was sent down through his chosen angel, Gabriel and serves as a guide to the path of life in this world and the hereafter for mankind (Ajahari, 2018). The Qur'an is a guide to life for all human

activities. The Qur'an was revealed in Arabic. Therefore, knowledge is needed to understand the content and meaning of the verses of the Qur'an. The science that studies the famous Qur'an is called the science of interpretation. The science of exegesis is a set of disciplines for understanding the Quran. Exegesis experts are scholars who have contributed to the discipline of Islamic scholarship.

The development of interpretation in the history of Islamic civilization has a distinctive pattern in each era. Classical interpretations tend to discuss the structure of Arabic grammar, such as the book Tafsir Jalalain. Meanwhile, contemporary editions of classical interpretations often discuss the conditions and problems of society. One such contemporary work is Tafsir al-Misbah by Muhammad Quraish Shihab. Quraish Shihab is a Quranic exegete born in Rappang, Sulawesi (Nazhifah, 2021). Quraish Shihab is the son of Abdurrahman Shihab, a professor of Quranic exegesis. From childhood, Quraish deeply loved the Quran, and his love for it grew into his teenage years. This was inseparable from his family's upbringing .

If the name al-Misbah is interpreted as "lamp," it can be interpreted that the existence of the al-Misbah commentary seems to "illuminate" the lives of its readers. The background of the Quraysh in writing al-Misbah was because at that time there were no scholars of exegesis from Indonesia who devoted their expertise to writing exegesis. The work of the al-Azhar commentary written by Hamka was the last exegesis before the emergence of the al-Misbah commentary (Khartarya et al., 2024). Not only the spirit of renewal brought by the Quraysh. In the al-Misbah commentary, there are also answers to the problem of errors in the arrangement of verses and letters of the Qur'an. In fact, this is a miracle for those who reflect on it.

Tafsir al-Misbah in its presentation form has its own characteristics in each grouping of verses in the surah discussed (Has, 2016). Quraish Shihab provides insights through socio-historical interpretation, linguistic interpretation, and systematic interpretation. Like other scholars of interpretation, Quraish Shihab also uses *Tafsir Bil Ma'stur* and *Tafsir Bil Ra'yu* in compiling *Tafsir al-Misbah*. *Tafsir al-Misbah* uses the Stuttgart

approach by focusing on deepening the meaning of each verse and letter discussed (Rokim, 2017).

b. The concept of *Ummatan Wasathan* in QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:143

There are several verses related to the concept of religious moderation in the perspective of Tafsir al-Misbah by Quraish Shihab, which is explained with an emphasis on balance, justice and tolerance. *Surah Al-Baqarah: 143*

"In the same way, We have made you (Muslims) as a people among people, so that you may be witnesses to people and so that the Messenger (Muhammad) is a witness to you. We did not establish the qiblah (Jerusalem) where you used to live, but to know who followed the Messenger and who turned away. Indeed, this is very difficult, except for those whom Allah has guided. Allah will not allow your faith to waver. Indeed, Allah is Kind and Most Merciful towards humans."

According to the interpretation of al-Misbah, the middle position allows one to act justly without bias to the left or right. This position allows one to be seen from various perspectives and serve as an example for all. Like all people, Allah has appointed Muslims to be witnesses to the actions of others. However, this can only be achieved if you make the Prophet Muhammad a martyr, who will be a witness to your attitudes and actions and an example for you. The final part of the verse states that the Prophet Muhammad will be a witness to your actions (Shihab, 2002a).

Quraish Shihab explains that the position of Muslims, referred to as "*Ummatan wasatan*" (people of the middle) in the Qur'an, indicates a very noble position. Conceptually, Islam must be on the "middle path," that is, encompassing and transcending all forms of extremes in the process of human life and avoiding excessive attitudes (Kuncoro, 2019). This position encourages Muslims to avoid being trapped in extremism, whether in terms of belief, worship, or social actions. This middle position gives Muslims the ability to be fair witnesses to the actions of others, both within one religious community and other religious communities. Thus, Muslims are positioned as a bridge between various groups, able to see and judge from a broader and more objective perspective.

Being a moderate Muslim is not only about impartiality, but also about upholding justice and truth, defending what is right, and eliminating what is wrong (Munir et al., 2020). The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) for Muslims is a symbol of a good personality that all Muslims must emulate wherever they are (Nasution et al., 2023). In this case, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is a prime example for Muslims in maintaining balance. He is not only a witness for Muslims, but also a good example in all aspects of life. The Prophet (pbuh) upheld justice regardless of social status or personal closeness, and was always wise in making decisions by considering the opinions of his companions and reviewing all aspects, as seen in the decision against the Banu Qurayzah and the Hudaibiyah agreement (Islamiati & Masyitoh, 2024).

In his interpretation, Quraish Shihab invites Muslims to understand that being a moderate community is a significant mandate that must be taken seriously. To be just witnesses for humanity, Muslims must strive to apply moderate Islamic principles in every aspect of their lives. They can serve as an example for others, and in the process, maintain harmony and peace in an increasingly pluralistic world.

c. The Value of Justice in QS. Al-Maidah [5]:8

Surah Al-Maidah: 8 In religious moderation, according to Tafsir Al-Misbah, justice is a core value closely related to piety. Justice reflects the essence of Islamic teachings, which are not solely centered on love. While some religions place love as the highest principle, Islam places greater emphasis on a just balance. This is because excessive love, especially in social life, can have negative consequences. For example, pity for a criminal can hinder the enforcement of appropriate punishment. Justice means putting everything in its place; if someone deserves love, then justice allows them to receive that love. However, if someone commits a serious wrong and deserves punishment, then love should not hinder the implementation of the appropriate punishment. In such situations, what is needed is a just attitude, one that prioritizes firmness in upholding the truth without being influenced by personal feelings (Shihab, 2002b).

Nearly every religion has a fundamental understanding of justice and views it as a source of knowledge taught to its followers. However, there may be differences in how justice is understood, interpreted, and developed, which corresponds to various theological principles. In general, justice means being unemotional, always adhering to the facts, objective, and unaffected. According to Quraish Shihab, the word " *justice* " generally refers to a state of harmony or friendship that leads one to act fairly and without bias, especially in the pursuit of truth (Hermawan, 2020).

Religious moderation encourages each individual to embrace justice as a path to piety, as affirmed in the above verse. Religious belief is deeply personal, individual, exclusive, and hidden within each person, and therefore, no power other than God can compel someone to have religious beliefs (Suhartawan, 2021). Moderation requires Muslims not to impose excessive beliefs or principles on others , but rather to respect the space for each individual to freely practice their beliefs. From Quraish Shihab's perspective, this moderation is a concrete manifestation of justice, as it allows all parties to feel valued, safe, and protected in practicing their respective beliefs.

The Value of Tolerance in QS. Al-An'am [6]:108

QS Al-An'am : 108 According to the Tafsir Al-Misbah in the Qur'an, Surah Al An'am verse 108 explains the attitude of tolerance, namely "the importance of respecting the beliefs of others" according to Shihab Quraisy. He explained that the prohibition of criticizing the worship of others is a form of respect for their existence and beliefs. He stated that although Muslims believe their beliefs are correct, it does not mean they can criticize the beliefs of others. This is a form of tolerance, where each individual is given space to practice their beliefs without having to feel insulted by others. He emphasized that by being careful in speech and behavior, Muslims can demonstrate tolerance in social life (Shihab, 2002c).

Tolerance for diversity is crucial in a pluralistic society like Indonesia, which boasts many different religions, cultures, and ways of life. It is an excellent way to understand and compare different beliefs without mentioning each individual's own religion or beliefs (Fitriani, 2020).

Tolerance creates a conducive atmosphere for living together. Through mutual respect, conflict between religious communities can be avoided, thus creating a safe and peaceful environment. In diversity, tolerance is the glue that unites the nation. Through mutual respect, we can build a strong sense of unity and togetherness. A tolerant atmosphere will encourage people to work together in building the nation. Without division, development will proceed more effectively and efficiently. Tolerance is a form of respect for human rights, namely the right of every individual to practice religion and worship according to their beliefs (Aditya & Al-Fatih, 2017).

In terms of tolerance, it does not mean that we can reject or set aside all forms of religion without clear laws, but rather it must be understood as a response to other forms of religious discrimination, such as worship systems and procedures, and as a way to encourage everyone to carry out their religious obligations in harmony with one another (Devi, 2020). Therefore, religious tolerance creates a calm and harmonious environment where differences in belief do not become a source of conflict, which indicates the fundamental need for mutual understanding and cooperation.

2. Discussion

From a sociological perspective, religious moderation can be understood as a social mechanism that serves to maintain the integration and stability of a pluralistic society (Rasyidi, 2026). Indonesian society, comprised of diverse religions, ethnicities, cultures, and traditions, requires values that can bridge differences to prevent them from escalating into social conflict. Religious moderation is not only related to individual religious attitudes but also serves as a social instrument that enables groups with different religious backgrounds to coexist peacefully. Values such as justice, balance, and tolerance foster inclusive social relationships and prevent society from resorting to extreme attitudes (Arikarani et al., 2024).

The functionalist theory developed by Émile Durkheim explains that religion has an important function in creating social solidarity. (Arif, 2020). Religion is not only related to spiritual aspects, but also functions as

a system of values and norms that regulate communal life (Arbi et al., 2023). Through rituals, symbols, and moral teachings, religion strengthens the collective conscience *that* forms the basis of social order. Religion acts as a social glue that unites members of society. This view is reinforced by Talcott Parsons, who sees religion as a social subsystem that maintains balance and integration of society by instilling moral and cultural values.

In social reality, differences in religious interpretations, claims to truth, and low acceptance of differing views often trigger religious-based social conflict (Muhammad, 2015). Religious moderation is needed as an approach that can bridge these differences so that social life remains harmonious.

The values of moderation found in the Tafsir al-Misbah, particularly justice, balance, and tolerance, can be analyzed through a functionalist approach. The concept of *ummatan wasathan* in QS. Al-Baqarah [2] :143, as explained by M. Quraish Shihab, not only has theological significance but also social function. The term *ummatan wasathan* implies a moderate community that is just, balanced, and avoids extremism. (Putri & Fadlullah, 2022). This moderate attitude allows Muslims to act as bridges between groups and strengthen social integration.

In addition, the values of justice in QS. Al-Maidah [5] : 8 and tolerance in QS. Al-An'am [6] : 108 contribute to the formation of social cohesion, namely a condition when society has a sense of mutual trust, solidarity, and strong ties. In a pluralistic society like Indonesia, social cohesion is an important factor in maintaining unity and preventing social disintegration. Religious moderation not only has a normative religious dimension, but also a significant social function as an integration mechanism to create a peaceful, inclusive, and civilized Indonesian society.

Besides being understood through a functionalist approach, religious moderation can also be analyzed using a conflict theory perspective. According to Susan (2009), conflict theory views society as an arena for competing interests characterized by differences in power, identity, and social values (Susan, 2009). In the context of religious life, conflict often arises from differences in interpretation of religious teachings,

claims to truth, and low acceptance of differing beliefs. Conflict theory helps explain that social life is not always in a harmonious condition, but also contains the potential for conflict that can disrupt social integration.

One source of religious conflict is the emergence of exclusive truth claims. *Each* religion fundamentally believes in the truth of its own teachings (Setiawan et al., 2026). However, when these beliefs develop into attitudes that reject the existence of other groups or consider them completely wrong, the potential for social conflict increases. Excessive truth claims can give rise to prejudice, stereotypes, and even discrimination against other religious groups. In a pluralistic society like Indonesia, this situation has the potential to cause social tensions that threaten unity and harmony between religious communities.

Religious-based conflicts are also often linked to the emergence of intolerance and radicalism. Intolerance is characterized by an unwillingness to accept differences in beliefs, restrictions on religious rights, and rejection of the existence of other groups (Rustandi, 2022). Meanwhile, radicalism refers to extreme attitudes that seek to impose certain religious views, often even resorting to violence to achieve ideological goals. The phenomenon of rejection of the construction of houses of worship, religious-based hate speech on social media, and acts of violence in the name of religion demonstrates that intolerance and radicalism remain serious challenges in Indonesian society.

From a conflict theory perspective, religious differences are not the primary cause of conflict, but rather how these differences are interpreted and utilized in social and political relations. Religious identity is sometimes exploited to legitimize power or strengthen the interests of particular groups. As a result, religion, which should be a source of peace, can actually turn into a tool for mobilizing conflict. An approach is needed that is able to manage differences constructively so that they do not develop into broader social conflict.

Religious moderation serves as an instrument for conflict resolution. Religious moderation emphasizes fairness, balance, and tolerance in understanding and practicing religious teachings (Nurlaili et

al., 2024). These values align with the concept of *ummatan wasathan* (the just and balanced) in QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:143, which places Muslims in a middle position and avoids extreme attitudes. Furthermore, QS. Al-Maidah [5]:8 emphasizes the importance of acting fairly even among different groups, while QS. Al-An'am [6]:108 teaches respect for others' beliefs.

Furthermore, strengthening religious moderation is a strategic agenda for maintaining social stability and national unity. The values of justice, balance, and tolerance contained in Tafsir al-Misbah can serve as a conceptual foundation for educational institutions, religious leaders, and policymakers in developing a culture of peace in society. Tafsir al-Misbah not only has a theological dimension but also offers relevant social solutions for contemporary Indonesian society in facing the challenges of diversity and maintaining harmony within the nation.

D. Conclusion

This study shows that the concept of religious moderation in M. Quraish Shihab's Tafsir al-Misbah not only has a theological dimension, but also contains sociological meanings that are relevant to the reality of Indonesia's pluralistic society. Through the interpretation of QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:143, QS. Al-Maidah [5]:8, and QS. Al-An'am [6]:108, it is found that the values of *ummatan wasathan*, justice, and tolerance are the main principles of religious moderation that function as a mechanism of social integration in strengthening community cohesion, reducing prejudice between groups, and encouraging inclusive living. From a functionalist perspective, these values contribute to the creation of social order and stability, while from a conflict theory perspective, religious moderation can be understood as a social negotiation instrument to manage potential conflicts arising from differences in religious interpretation, religious identity, and socio-political interests. These findings confirm that religious moderation is not only a normative teaching of Islam, but also has an important social function in the life of a multicultural society.

This research's novel contribution lies in the integration of the study of Tafsir al-Misbah with the perspective of the sociology of religion in

explaining the relevance of the values of religious moderation in the contemporary social context of Indonesia. Theoretically, this research enriches the development of interpretation studies, the sociology of religion, and religious moderation through an interdisciplinary approach between religious texts and social reality, while practically it can serve as a conceptual reference for educational institutions, religious leaders, and policymakers in developing strengthening religious moderation.

However, this research still has limitations because it uses a library study method, so the resulting findings are conceptual and not supported by empirical verification regarding the implementation of the values of religious moderation in community life. Further research is needed to use a field approach to test the actualization and relevance of the values of religious moderation in various social contexts in Indonesia.

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