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Qur’anic Exegesis and Religious Moderation in South Sulawesi: The Law on Blasphemy to Gods of Non-Muslims in Islamic Law Perspective

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Abstract: As a country of various ethnicities, languages, and religions, religious moderation is a particularly crucial issue in Indonesia. This paper aimed to elaborate on the law on blasphemy to Gods of non-Islamic religions. The study included a phenomenological qualitative study using the approach of *tafsir tahlili* (analytical exegesis) and Islamic law. Data were collected by means of in-depth interviews with religious leaders, academicians, and community leaders in South Sulawesi, especially in the cities of Makassar, Barru, and Bone. In addition, literature review was used to refer to books of exegesis, journal articles, and other relevant references. Findings of the study revealed that religious moderation emphasized in the Qur’an is a teaching that promotes tolerant and peaceful relations. *Ummatan wasatan* in the Qur’an could be understood as the people who are always in goodness and justice, show a commendable attitude, and do not easily criticize people nor blame other groups. The opinions of exegetes and field data have also suggested that interpretations of the Qur’an should prioritize a moderate understanding, as conflict might occur due to intolerant attitudes in Indonesia, a country with various religions. Textually understanding the verses of the Qur’an and hadith might also lead to radicalism and even terrorism. In the context of Islamic law, blasphemy towards the Gods of non-Muslims is *haram* (prohibited) because it may result in others insulting Allah and social conflict; avoiding conflict is a behavior that is in line with the aims of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī’ah*). This study thus argues that religious moderation is a crucial attitude, as it can foster tolerance and mutual respect among religious people. Even though other people have different gods from the belief of Muslims, respect for such differences shall exist as directed by the Qur’an.

Keywords: *Tafsir tahlili, religious moderation, Gods, Non-Muslims, Islamic law*

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Abstrak: Sebagai negara yang beragam suku, bahasa dan agama, moderasi beragama merupakan tema yang sangat krusial di Indonesia. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mengelaborasi tentang hukum menghina dan mencela Tuhan agama non-muslim. Kajian tersebut termasuk studi kualitatif fenomenologis dengan menggunakan pendekatan tafsir tahlili dan hukum Islam. Data dikumpulkan dengan cara wawancara mendalam terhadap tokoh agama, akademisi dan tokoh masyarakat di Sulawesi Selatan khususnya Kota Makassar, Barru dan Bone. Sedangkan studi literatur mengacu pada kitab-kitab tafsir, artikel jurnal, buku dan rujukan yang relevan. Kajian ini menemukan bahwa moderasi beragama yang ditegaskan dalam al-Qur'an merupakan ajaran yang mengajarkan hubungan yang toleran dan damai. Ummatan wasatan dalam al-Qur'an dapat dipahami sebagai umat yang senantiasa berada dalam kebaikan dan keadilan, menunjukkan sikap terpuji, tidak mudah mencela orang atau menyalahkan golongan lain. Berdasarkan pendapat para ulama tafsir dan data lapangan bahwa penafsiran terhadap al-Qur'an hendaknya mengedepankan pemahaman yang moderat, sebab Indonesia sebagai negara yang beragam agama konflik dapat terjadi disebabkan sikap yang intoleran. Pemahaman terhadap ayat-ayat al-Qur'an dan hadis secara tekstual dapat menyebabkan pada radikalisme bahkan terorisme. Kemudian, dalam konteks hukum Islam menghina Tuhan non-muslim merupakan sesuatu yang haram karena dapat berakibat penghinaan terhadap Allah, juga dapat menimbulkan konflik social, menghindari konflik merupakan perilaku yang sesuatu dengan tujuan hukum Islam (maqāsid al-sharī'ah). Argumen kajian ini adalah bahwa moderasi beragama merupakan sikap yang sangat penting karena dapat menumbuhkan sikap toleransi dan saling menghargai dan menghormati di antara umat beragama. Betapapun sesembahan itu berbeda menurut keyakinan umat Islam, tetapi penghargaan terhadap perbedaan itu tetap harus diterima sebagaimana petunjuk al Qur'an.

Kata Kunci; Tafsir tahlili, moderasi beragama, Tuhan, Non-Muslim, hukum Islam

Introduction

Interreligious relations in various parts of the world has become a nationwide problem in the midst of the development of post-modern civilization. In almost all continents in the world, e.g., in America, Europe, Asia, and Africa, tension, intolerance, and even religious conflict occur between the majorities and minorities. However, in Indonesia, the relationship between adherents of different religions has not been an issue; the values of tolerance and moderation in religion have been strongly practiced by the government, society, and social

organizations. Although there have been several cases of intolerance, these still have not affected the life of harmony and peace in the country.¹

As a country with a variety of ethnicity, race, culture, language, and religion, Indonesia certainly faces challenges. Further, the emergence of various problems, especially in the field of religion, makes it an interesting study material to resolve. The Qur'an has provided answers to all the problems that people face, be it religious, cultural, or even political problems, all regulated in the Qur'an.²

Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul are the two world's largest religious organizations committed to defending and promoting a peaceful and moderate understanding of Islam. The *kyai* (Javanese Islamic experts on Islam) within NU supported by the state have the authority to promote religious modernism through structural and cultural approaches. However, one of the biggest challenges faced by these organizations is the rise of a conservative understanding of Islam that positions religion as something rigid and exclusive.³⁴

On the other hand, educational institutions in Indonesia have a distinctive pattern of emphasis on moderation in three areas: theoretical, practical and ideological. Higher education institutions have an important role in instilling the values of religious moderation through their curricula and other religious activities. Diverse moderation can be seen through the curricula implemented in these Islamic universities. Such curricula are eclectic and reflect moderation values such as national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and

¹Matt Sheedy, "Six or Eleven Theses on "Islamic" and "Christian" Terrorism in America," *Implicit Religion* 23, No. 4 (2022). Muhammad Awalluddin and Anisa Safiah Maznorbalia, "A Suggestion That Europe Also a Muslim: A Study from Historical and Contemporary Perspectives," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 9, No. 1 (2019), p. 83. Brian Stanley, "Christians, Muslims and the State in Twentieth-Century Egypt and Indonesia," *Studies in Church History* 51 (2015), p. 412-434. Jeremy Menchik, "Moderate Muslims and Democratic Breakdown in Indonesia," *Asian Studies Review* 43, No. 1 (2019), p. 1-19.

²Andri Sutrisno, et. al., "Qur'anic Insights on Religious Moderation and Its Relevance to Religious Harmony in Indonesia," *Journal of Qur'an and Tafseer Studies* 2, No. 1 (2023). Mega Hidayati and Nelly van Doorn Harder, "'I Love Jesus Because Jesus is Muslim': Inter-and Intra-Faith Debates and Political Dynamics in Indonesia," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relation* 31, No. 2 (2020).

³Hasse Jubba et. al., "The Contestation Between Conservative and Moderate Muslims in Promoting Islamic Moderatism in Indonesia," *Cogent Social Sciences* 8, No. 1 (2022). Ahmad Zainul Hamdi, "Constructing Indonesian Religious Pluralism: The Role of Nahdlatul Ulama in Countering Violent Religious Extremism," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 15, No. 2 (2021).

⁴Ahmad Faisal et. al., "Strengthening Religious Moderatism Through the Traditional Authority of Kiai in Indonesia," *Cogent Social Sciences* 8, No. 1 (2022).

accommodation to local culture.⁵ In addition, cultural approach and local wisdom in society are also used as a mechanism to promote religious moderation.⁶

Nonetheless, in recent years challenges and threats have emerged from Islamic groups that adhere to textual understandings, which are radical and carry ideologies that conflict with national values and universal Islamic values, e.g., Islamic State Iraq and Sham (*Negara Islam Irak dan Syam/ISIS*), Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), Jamaah Anshar Tauhid (JAT), and Salafi-Wahabi.⁷ Textual understandings of the verses of the Qur'an and hadith make it easy for them to disbelieve and mislead Islamic groups outside of their congregations.⁸

Studies on radicalism and terrorism conclude that certain Islamic educational institutions teach students fundamentalism and radicalism. Recently, formal schools have also begun to teach elements of radical Islam, for example, teaching students not to respect Indonesia's Red and White flag during a flag ceremony.⁹ The radical teachings that students gain at junior high school (*Sekolah Menengah Pertama/SMP*) and senior high school (*Sekolah Menengah Atas/SMA*) levels are found in a school organization called *Rohani Islam* (ROHIS), which sometimes becomes a lair for students with puritan and exclusive thoughts.

The law on blasphemy to gods is a topic discussed among Indonesian people, especially among Muslims. This paper discusses in depth the law on blasphemy to the gods of unbelievers in Islam and the consequences for those who commit the act. In the context of society, there are relationships that must be mutually understood between the many religious beliefs. If this is not carried out, then it is feared that there will be mutual conflicts between adherents of

⁵Muhammad Nasir and Muhammad Khairul Rijal, "Keeping the Middle Path: Mainstreaming Religious Moderation Through Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 11, no. 2 (2021), pp. 213-241.

⁶Arbanur Rasyid, et. al., "Local Wisdom Recognition in Inter-Ethnic Religious Conflict Resolution in Indonesia from Islah Perspective," *Juris: Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah* 22, No. 1 (2023).

⁷Saiful Mujani et al., "Islamism and Muslim Support for Islamist Movement Organizations: Evidence from Indonesia", *Studia Islamika* 30, No. 1 (2023). Noorhaidi Hasan, "The Failure of the Wahhabi Campaign: Transnational Islam and the Salafi *Madrasa* in Post-9/11 Indonesia," *South East Asia Research* 18, No. 4 (2010). Akhmad Siddiq, "How to Deal with the Verses of War: Abdullah Saeed's Instructional Values on Reading the Qur'an," *Ulumuna: Journal of Islamic Studies* 25, No. 1 (2021).

⁸Mutawali, "Maqāsid Al-Sharī'a As the Foundation of Islamic Moderation: Theoretical Philosophical Insight against Extreme Religious Ideology," *Ulumuna: Journal of Islamic Studies* 23, No. 1 (2023). Tarmizi M. Jakfar et al., "The Struggle Between Salafi Scholars and Islamic Boarding School Scholars: The Controversy Over the Practice of Fiqh Hadith in Aceh and North Sumatra, Indonesia," *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 23, No. 1 (2023).

⁹Abu Rokhmad, "Radikalisme Islam dan Upaya Deradikalisasi Paham Radikal" *Jurnal Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan* 22, (2012), p. 20.

religions and the entire Indonesian people, and the whole nation will bear the losses.

In line with that, the factors that lead to the formation of radical thoughts are sometimes found through social media and online media. People can watch channels and read information on radical Islamic sites, which will later turn into the seeds of terrorism. Amidst such a phenomenon, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has seen the need for an inclusive and tolerant way of religion that can seize the digital space by strengthening religious moderation in the midst of society, including within the academic community of Islamic religious tertiary institutions throughout Indonesia. In this context, the Ministry of Religious Affairs through the Directorate General of Islamic Education issued a Circular dated October 29, 2019, addressed to all rectors and heads of State Islamic Religious Universities (*Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri/PTKIN*) to establish houses of religious moderation.¹⁰ This circular letter is part of the implementation of the commitment to create religious moderation part of the foundation for thinking, behaving, and formulating policies and programs across all stakeholders of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, including universities.

Therefore, society as a social community requires relationship and cooperation with other people to meet their needs.¹¹ Religion and society are two inseparable important components in the order of social life, in the sense that society is a network of relationships between people who are interdependent on one another.¹² The role of religion is massive and significant to the sustainability of social life, including in terms of interreligious harmony, as religion contains belief and belief is an important aspect in human life.

However, a mismatch may exist between these two, which causes friction, conflict, or misunderstanding due to social changes occurred in society.¹³ One of them is the difference in beliefs in expressing the worship to God.

Blasphemy to God can be interpreted as ridiculing, belittling or insulting Allah SWT. Blasphemy is an act taken seriously in Islamic law. In general, blasphemy is regulated by Islamic law and is contained in the Qur'an and hadith of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. In Islamic law, humans are commanded to believe in one God and not associate anything with Him. Therefore, every insult to Allah SWT will be sanctioned by the religion.

¹⁰Wildani Hefni, "Moderasi Beragama dalam Ruang Digital: Studi Pengarusutamaan Moderasi Beragama di PTKIN" *Jurnal Bimas Islam* 13, No. 1 (2020), p. 4.

¹¹Toto Suryana, *Konsep dan Aktualisasi Kerukunan Antar Umat Beragama*, Dalam *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam Ta'lim*, Vol. 9, No. 2, (2011), p. 128.

¹² Wikipedia Bebas, *Masyarakat*, <https://id.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/masyarakat>, accessed on January 30, 2022.

¹³Syahrin Harahap, *Theologi Kerukunan*, (Jakarta: Prenada Media Group, 2011), p. 79-80.

Quoting surah al-Baqarah verses 114-116, disbelievers who insult Allah will receive curses and sufferings forever. This suggests that the punishment for anyone who commits blasphemy against God can be very severe. However, a Muslim must maintain good manners when discussing religion in accordance with the guidance of Sharia. After all, tolerance and diversity of beliefs shall be upheld so that social life becomes harmonious without divisions due to differences in religious views or beliefs.

In line with this, even though the Qur'an states that a person who is not a Muslim is an infidel, this does not mean that a Muslim can arbitrarily call someone an infidel and treat his/her unfairly. Islamic law also calls for being fair to all human beings regardless of their religious backgrounds. Treating unbelievers roughly can in fact create a bad image for Muslims in the eyes of the international community. In establishing interreligious relations, the values of peace and tolerance must always be emphasized in order to create harmony among the creatures of God Almighty.

This paper aimed to elaborate on the view of the Qur'an and religious moderation, which examined the law on blasphemy to the Gods of non-Muslims based on the explanations from Muslim exegetes and the results of interviews. This study is significant because conflict may arise in Indonesia when religious understanding does not lead people to a moderate attitude in their religions.

This qualitative phenomenological study used thematic exegesis and Islamic law approaches.¹⁴ Thematic exegesis became an analytical tool for the verses of the Qur'an on religious moderation, while Islamic law was to analyze the aspects of Islamic law in the narratives of the Qur'an and the results of interviews with the respondents. Data collection techniques consisted of *first*, in-depth interviews with religious leaders, academics, and community leaders, and *second*, literature review on the exegesis books related to the interpretations of *ulama* (Islamic scholars), both classical and contemporary ones.

Theoretical Studies of Moderation

The word moderation comes from the Latin *moderatio*, which means being in the middle (not excessive nor lacking). This word also means self-control from the attitude of being excessive and lacking.¹⁵ In English, the word moderation is often used in the sense of average, core, standard, or non-aligned. The Big Indonesian Dictionary (*Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia/KBBI*) provides two meanings of the word moderation: *first*, reduction of violence, and

¹⁴ Abd. Muin Salim, *Metodologi Ilmu Tafsir* (Yogyakarta: Teras, 2010). Lilik Ummi Kalsum and Abd. Moqsih, *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ahkam* (Jakarta: UIN Press 2015). Irwansyah, *Penelitian Hukum: Pilihan Metode dan Praktik Penulisan Artikel*, Yogyakarta: Mirra Buana Media, 2020).

¹⁵John M. Echols, *Kamus Inggris Indonesia* (Cet. XXV; Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2000), p. 384.

second, avoidance of extremes. Thus, when referring to “that person is being moderate”, it means that the person is being reasonable, mediocre, and not extreme.

In general, being moderate means prioritizing balance in terms of beliefs, morals, and characters, i.e., when treating other people as individuals and when dealing with state institutions. In Arabic, moderation is known as the word *wasath* or *wasathiyah*, which has the equivalent meaning of the word *tawassuth* (in the middle), *i'tidal* (fair), and *tawazun* (balanced). People who apply *wasathiyah* principles can be called *wasith*. In Arabic, the word *wasathiyah* is also defined as “the best choice”. Whichever word is used, all of them show the same meaning, namely fairness.

In this context, this means choosing a middle ground position between various extreme choices. The word *wasith* has even been absorbed into the Indonesian language to become the word “*wasit*” (umpire), which contains three meanings: an intermediary (e.g., in business trade), a mediator (i.e., a separator, peacemaker) between the disputants, and a leader in a match.¹⁶

In Arabic, the word *wasathitu* also means everything that is good according to its object, e.g., the word generous, which indicates the attitude between stingy and extravagant, or the word brave, which suggests the attitude between coward and desperate. The opposite of the word moderation is excessiveness, or *tatharruf* in Arabic, which means extreme, radical, and excessive in English. The word extreme can also mean going too far, going from end to end, turning around, and taking the opposite action/path. In the KBBI, the word extreme is defined as “the very end, the highest and the loudest.”¹⁷

The above view is in line with the opinion of Imam al-Qurthubi in giving the meaning of the word *wasatan* in verse 143 of surah al-Baqarah. He describes the word *wasath* as justice on the grounds that the best thing is the fairest,¹⁸ and thus, it can be interpreted that the Islamic *ummah* is the best community since it is the most just. Al-Zamakhsyari states that the word *wasath* in this verse means the best, as the best trait is in the middle and that is the nature of Islam.¹⁹ Wahbah al-Zuhaily in al-Munir’s *tafsir* explains that *wasat* is something that is in the middle or the essence of something, and this meaning is used to refer for a commendable trait, because overall a commendable characteristic is always based on a middle attitude, e.g., courage is a middle attitude from cowardice and

¹⁶Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*, Edisi X (Cet. II; Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2010), p. 751.

¹⁷Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia...*, p. 124.

¹⁸ Abu ‘Abdillah Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Ansari al-Qurthuby, *Al-Jami’ li Ahkam al-Qur’an al-Karim*, Vol. I, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1993), p. 149

¹⁹ Abi al-Qasim Jarallah Mahmud ibn ‘Umar al-Zamakhsyari, *Al-Kasysyaf ‘an Haqa’iq al-Tanzil wa ‘Uyun al-Aqawil fi Wujuh al-Ta’wil*, Vol. I, (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), p. 196.

recklessness.²⁰

Religious moderation is like a movement from the periphery, which always tends towards the center or axis (centeripetal), while extremism is the opposite movement from the center of the axis, towards the outermost and extreme (centrifugal) side. Like the pendulum of a clock, there is a dynamic movement, which does not stop at one extreme, but moves towards the middle.²¹ Therefore, religious moderation is a moderate attitude, which can be a choice to have a perspective of attitude and behavior in the midst of the existing extreme choices. In contrast, religious extremism is a perspective, attitude, and behavior that exceeds the limits of moderation in understanding and practicing religion. Therefore, religious moderation can be understood as a perspective, attitude, and behavior that always takes a position in the middle, always acts fairly, and is not extreme in religion.

Hence, it is necessary to have measurements, limits, and indicators to determine whether a particular religious perspective, attitude, and behavior is classified as moderate or extreme. These measurements can be made based on reliable sources, such as religious texts, state constitution, local wisdom, as well as consensus and mutual agreement.

Religious moderation should be understood as a balanced religious attitude between one's own religious experience (exclusive) and respect for the religious practices of other people who have different beliefs (inclusive). This balance or middle way in religious practice will undoubtedly prevent people from extreme, fanatical, and revolutionary attitudes in religion. As previously indicated, religious moderation is a solution to the presence of two extreme poles in religion, the ultra-conservative or extreme right on the one hand, and the liberal or extreme left on the other.²²

In order to create religious tolerance and harmony at the local, national, and global levels, religious moderation is urgently needed. The choice of moderation by rejecting extremism and liberalism in religion is the key to balance for the sake of civilization and peace. In this way, any religious community can treat others with respect, accept differences, and live together in peace and harmony. In Indonesia, as a country with a heterogeneous society, religious moderation may no longer be an option, but rather a necessity.²³

Moderation itself in Islam uses the term *wasath*, which contains many meanings. If one pays attention to the verses of the Qur'an, the term close to the meaning of religious moderation is *wasatīyah*, which can be found in five verses with different meanings, e.g., middle, as in QS. al-Adiyah (100: 5), and *wasāṭa*

²⁰ Wahbah al-Zuhaily, *Al-Tafsir al-Munir fi al-Aqidah wa al-Syari'ah wa al-Manhaj*, Vol. II (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1991), p. 36

²¹ Kementerian Agama RI, *Moderasi Beragama* (Jakarta: Litbang, 2019), p. 17.

²² Kementerian Agama RI, *Moderasi Beragama ...* p. 18.

²³ Kementerian Agama RI, *Moderasi Beragama ...* p. 18.

in the sense of fairness as in surah QS. al-Baqarah (2:143), with the best meaning.

There are also those who give the view that *ummattan wasatan* is the middle between the life of this world and the life of the hereafter. Humans should not be immersed in a life of materialism or only seek a life of spiritualism, since happiness in the hereafter can also be achieved by good deeds that are carried out in the world. Islam teaches its people to achieve happiness in both realms;²⁴ not for the world alone nor only for the afterlife, but both.

Moderation or *wasatiyah* also means fair. In the KBBI, the word fair is interpreted as: a) impartial, b) in favor of the truth, and c) not arbitrary.²⁵ The point is that Muslims must be fair or uphold justice wherever and whenever regardless of class, not be arbitrary towards groups, and always side with the truth. Al-Ragib al-Ashfani defines fair as giving equal distribution;²⁶ *'adl* puts something in its place, even if it does not please any party.²⁷

Further, Al-Jauhari in his book *al-Futuhat al-Ilahiyah* describes that the meaning of *wasathan* is to practice goodness and justice, and *ummah* is the people of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH.²⁸ Therefore, *ummattan wasatan* can be understood as the community that is always in goodness and justice, shows a commendable attitude, and not easily criticizes other people or blames other groups.

The Law on Blasphemy to Gods of Non-Muslims: A Study of Qur'anic Exegesis

There are several verses of the Qur'an which substantively contain the meaning of blasphemy to God, partly because they contain the meaning of 'underestimating' Allah (QS. al-Ma'idah 5: 64)), considering Allah to be poor (QS. Ali 'Imran (3: 181), and accusing Allah of having a child (QS. al-Ma'idah 5:17). However, the law of blaspheming non-Muslim Gods can only directly refer to surah (QS. Al-An'am 6:108), where Allah says, "Do not insult what they invoke besides Allah or they will insult Allah spitefully out of ignorance. This is how We have made each other people's deeds appealing to them. Then to their Lord is their return, and He will inform them of what they used to do."²⁹

²⁴ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Misbah Pesan*, Jilid I, p. 347-348.

²⁵Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan. *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1989.), p. 8

²⁶Al-Ragib al-Asfahani, *Mufradat Alfaz al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Samiyyah, n.d.), p. 325.

²⁷M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Misbah Pesan*, Vol. I, p. 245.

²⁸ Sulaiman bin Umar al-Ajili al-Syafi'I al-Syahir, *al-Futuhat al-Ilahiyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr 2009 p. 186.

²⁹ Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary* (Madinah al-Munawwarah: Presidency of Islamic Researches, Ifta, 1405/1985), p. 374.

The reason for the revelation of this verse, according to the narration of Qatadah, relates to the behavior of Muslims who often abused and insulted the idols worshiped by the infidels of Mecca.³⁰ The dynamics of social relations between Muslims and Quraysh infidels always experienced ups and downs, both through confrontation and negotiation. This verse is also considered as a response to the negotiations made by Abu Lahab together with Abu Sofyan with the Prophet PBUH through Abu Thalib, the Prophet's uncle, when he was seriously ill before his death. Abu Lahab asked Abu Thalib, as a leader of the Quraysh clan, to persuade Muhammad to stop all kinds of insults that his followers committed against the idols they worshiped. Even though Muhammad refused with a number of conditions, this verse aimed to end acts of defaming each other's gods.³¹ Therefore, the legal implications in the verse above (QS. Al-An'am 6:108) are still applicable to this day.

Imam al-Qurthuby (d. 671 H/1273 M) holds the view that the law against non-Muslim gods is eternally valid. Therefore, if there are non-Muslims who insult Allah and His Messenger, then Muslims should not turn to attack their gods, insult their gods, symbols of their beliefs e.g., crosses, and their priests or religious leaders.³² This opinion should have implications for the burning of the Qur'an, which was carried out by a number of activists and politicians such as Rasmus Paludan in the Swedish Muslim community on April 15, 2022. The protests carried out by the world's Muslims should not attack them by burning their holy books or even crossing out the photos of their religious leaders, but simply by criticizing the Swedish government's policy, which has allowed its people to insult religious symbols. If Muslims strike back at the symbol of belief, it is feared that they will attack Allah with narratives that insult His majesty.

Linguistically, the use of the word *tasubbu* comes from the word *sabba*, which means to insult (*al-syatm*) and hurt feelings (*al-waji'*).³³ The meaning contained in the word *sabba* is a speech, action, or symbol that can hurt someone psychologically in regards to religious beliefs. Thus, religious blasphemy does not only cover blatant acts, but also includes satirical language that intends to insult the gods of other religions.

Related to the linguistic analysis, the verse above (QS. Al-An'am 6: 108) comes as a warning against the effects of religious sentiment that will arise as a

³⁰ 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar ibn Muhammad al-Syirazi al-Baidhawi, *Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta'wil (Tafsir al-Baidhawi)*, Vol. I (Cairo: Maktabah al-Taufiqiyah, 2007), p. 403.

³¹ Isma'il ibn Katsir al-Qurasyi al-Dimasqi, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*, Vol. 2 (Cairo: Maktabah al-Qayyimah, 1414 H./1993 M.), p. 157

³² Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Anshari al-Qurthuby, *al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an*, Vol. 4, Juz 7 (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turats al-'Arabi, 1416/1995), p. 61.

³³ Al-Ragib al-Ashfahani, *Mufradat fi Garib al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Qalam, 1412 H.) p. 391.

result of blasphemy committed by religious adherents. Therefore, a number of *mufasssir* (exegetes) argue that the essence of this verse is preventive law, namely a legal action that prevents damage to the order of social norms even though it leaves acts of kindness. In the theory of *Ushul Fiqh*, followers of Imam Malik call this *sadd al-zara'ih*, as this rule is very popular among followers of Imam Shafi'i, *dar' al-mafasid muqaddam 'ala jalb al-mashalih* (preventing harm takes precedence over bringing benefit).

The legal interpretation then explains that the prohibition of defamation in this verse (QS. Al-Anam 6: 108) is to avoid insults by non-Muslims towards Allah with narratives that are inappropriate and belittle the majesty of Allah SWT. Nevertheless, avoiding the emergence of such blasphemy is to protect the humility of Muslims in carrying out their religion, not only for the sake of Allah, since being insulted or praised does not affect the predicate of the majesty of Allah's substance.³⁴ This analysis is in line with the logic stated by Rasulullah PBUH. Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'Ash narrated that Rasulullah PBUH said, "It is one of the greatest sins that a man should curse his parents." It was asked (by the people), "How does a man curse his parents?" Rasulullah PBUH said, "The man abuses the father of another man and the latter abuses the father of the former and abuses his mother." (Narrated by Bukhari-Muslim).

Comparing the verse (QS. Al-An'am 6: 108) with the hadith above, the stronger the legal implication that the prohibition against insulting gods of non-Muslims is a 'preventive law' that aims to maintain harmonious coexistence with adherents of various religions. This verse explains clearly that every believer of a religion views beautifully the traditions that apply in their religion (*kadzalika zayyanna likulli ummatin 'amalahum*). This means that Allah has confirmed that there can be no uniformity in practicing religion, because every religion has its own way and has been considered true and beautiful by its respective adherents. This interpretation is in line with the idea that all religious teachings are basically based on the teachings of truth, yet only the way of expressing the truth of each religion is different.

As a response to the preventive legal implications in this verse, the presence of the idea of religious moderation in the Indonesian context is increasingly relevant. Moderation of religion as a religious attitude can certainly be a preventive measure against the potential for friction and social conflict between adherents of different religions, such as *maqāsid al-hukm* (purpose of the verse). The conflict cases in Ambon and Poso can be valuable lessons and mirrors for a peaceful and progressive future of Indonesia.

³⁴ Abu al-Qasim al-Zamakhsyari, *al-Kasysyaf 'an Haqaiq Gawamidh al-Tanzil*, Juz 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1407 H.), p. 56.

Blasphemy against the Gods of Non-Muslims and Religious Moderation in the Perspective of Islamic Law

Religious moderation in the Indonesian context includes four interrelated indicators, i.e., national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation to local culture. When associated with the behavior of blasphemy towards the gods of non-Muslims, the four indicators above are somewhat contradictory. The essence of religious moderation in the Indonesian context is a balance between exclusive and inclusive religious practices, between ultra-conservative and liberal.³⁵ As a nation, the noble values of Pancasila, especially in the first precept, strongly oppose defamation of other religions because it will have implications for undermining one of the main foundations of a state, namely a God-based state.

Religious moderation has become one of the important agendas and now becomes part of social capital in national development as confirmed in the 2020-2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (*Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Nasional/ RPJMN*), set forth in the Presidential Regulation (*Peraturan Presiden/Perpres*) Number 18 of 2020 and Ministry of Religious Affairs as the leading sector.³⁶ Still, Indonesia is not a religious country where the system of government is based on a particular religion; however, the Islamic community dominates the population and it is one of the countries with the largest Muslim population in the world.³⁷

This makes the Indonesian nation a multicultural country with a pluralistic pattern because its people are able to live side by side between adherents of one religion and another.³⁸ Therefore, all forms of differences that exist in society should be properly addressed so that it will create harmony between religious communities, as a form of respect for one's belief in religion. These approaches can be created through socio-culture-religion, where the community cannot separate the three of them.³⁹

If it is associated with indicators of tolerance, blasphemy to the gods of non-Muslims is clearly two opposite aspects. Therefore, Muslims who respect and appreciate the existence of the divinity of other religions means that they

³⁵ Ismatu Rofi, "Al-Yahūd fi mu'allafāt al-muslimīn bi Indonesia: Dirāsah awwalīyah", *Studia Islamika* 26, No. 1 (2019).

³⁶ Nella Sumika Putri, *Pelaksanaan Kebebasan Beragama di Indonesia (External Freedom Dhubungkan Ijin Pembangunan Rumah Ibadah, Jurnal Dinamika Hukum* 11, No. 2, (2011), p. 230.

³⁷ See, <https://tirto.id/benarkah-ri-negara-dengan-penduduk-muslim-terbesar-dunia-cuGD>.

³⁸ Rini Fidiyani, *Kerukunan Umat Beragama di Indoensia, (Belajar Keharmonisan dan Toleransi Umat Beragama di Desa Cikakak, Kec. Wangon, Kab. Banyumas), Jurnal Dinamika Hukum* 13, No. 3, (2013), p. 468-469.

³⁹ Roma Ulinuha, *Islam, "Ruang Publik dan Kerukunan Antar Umat Beragama," Jurnal Ilmiah Sosiologi Agama* 9, No. 2 (2015), p. 44

have carried out the principle of tolerance. The indicator of non-violence is also clearly against the blasphemous behavior towards the gods of non-Muslims, as blasphemy includes verbal as well as action blasphemy. In fact, the accommodative indicator of local culture is very much at odds with blasphemous behavior because religious diversity is more complex than cultural diversity.

National commitment in the context of moderation in religion in Indonesia means acceptance of the principles of nation and state as contained in the 1945 Constitution, and all legislative products under it. If someone violates the constitution in the name of religion, then that is considered immoderate in religion.⁴⁰ Since religious moderation was included in the 2020-2024 National Medium Term Development Plan (RPJMN), the Ministry of Religious Affairs as the leading sector continues to campaign to mainstream the idea of religious moderation. According to Mu'ammarr Bakry, Chairperson of the South Sulawesi Terrorism Prevention Coordination Forum (*Forum Koordinasi Pencegahan Terorisme/FKPT*), the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia is a set stone. The founding fathers of this nation had gone through a tough struggle to agree on the ideological basis and form of the state. He states that the implementation of religious moderation in Indonesia is a necessity so that the efforts of groups wishing to change state ideology will have less room for movement.⁴¹

One of the urgencies of religious moderation in Indonesia is due to the current world condition facing a weak understanding of religion that is moderate, inclusive, and tolerant.⁴² The idea of preventive law in this verse (QS. Al-An'am 6: 108) is very relevant in strengthening various moderation as a state policy. The preventive law in this verse is in line with the ideals of a state that hopes to build religious and cultural harmony.⁴³

Indicators of tolerance and non-violence in religious moderation mean respecting differences and providing space for other people to have beliefs as well as express their beliefs. Non-violence is intended as a rejection of people or groups of people who use violent means both verbally and physically in carrying out their desired changes. The prohibition to insult gods of non-Muslims as stated in this verse (QS. Al-An'am 6: 108) is a behavior that avoids verbal violence. In fact, it can be a preventive law against intolerance and verbal and physical violence.

⁴⁰ Tim Penyusun Kementerian Agama RI., *Tanya Jawab Moderasi Beragama* (Balitbang Kemenag RI.: Jakarta, 2019), p. 12

⁴¹Interview with Mu'ammarr Bakry, Chairperson of the Coordination Forum for the Prevention of Terrorism, South Sulawesi, March 24, 2023.

⁴²<https://kemenag.go.id/nasional/bappenas-urgensi-moderasi-beragama-dalam-rpjmn-2020-2024-f5fyfx> (accessed on May 27, 2023)

⁴³ Syahrin Harahab, *Theologi Kerukunan*, (Jakarta: Prenada Media Group, 2011), p. 17-18.

Regarding the relationship between religion and tradition, Anregurutta Farid Wajedi, head of the *Darud Dakwah wal Irsyad* (DDI) Mangkoso Islamic Boarding School, South Sulawesi, says that religion and tradition cannot be contradicted because the substance of the two is the same: both hope for a harmonious social order. As long as it does not conflict with the basic principles of religion, a tradition can be called *tafa'ul*, a tradition that contains symbols believed to bring goodness.⁴⁴

Related to the explanation above, the principle of preventive law derived from this verse (6:108) can be implemented when dealing with goodness (*mashlahah*) according to religion with behavior that can harm the norms of social life. Preventive law in the context of the prohibition against blasphemy to the gods of non-Muslims can also be applied to other cases where the cause (*illah*) is the same, as of the view of Imam al-Qurtubi. He argues that if Muslims insult the gods of non-Muslims, they will be further away from the truth and they will fall further into disbelief.⁴⁵ Inviting people to build closeness with God and bonding harmonious relationships among human beings are the goals of religion.⁴⁶ Religion is also a social institution, where each part has sub-systems that have certain functions in people's life.⁴⁷

The preventive law in this verse (QS. Al-An'am 6: 108) is also in line with the principle of *al-amru bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*: preventing evil deeds must take precedence in certain conditions rather than calling for goodness. In the modern era, insulting other religions can indeed lead to a bad image for Muslims. Even if the insults of other religions is in accordance with reality, it is still not permissible, as it will cause a negative impact on the image of Islam. According to Prof. M. Ghalib M., deputy chairperson of the Indonesian Ulema Council for South Sulawesi Province, in this verse (QS. Al-An'am 6: 108) the mention of the gods of non-Muslims is unclear. In fact, the objects forbidden to be insulted are people who worship those other than Allah, and not their gods. Thus, this verse addresses religious adherents, and not the gods that are worshiped. The three components that are often the critical targets in building interreligious relations are God, adherents, and religious teachings. Blasphemy has the most potential to create conflict when adherents insult each other.⁴⁸

⁴⁴Interview with Anregurutta Haji (AGH) Faried Wajedi, Leader of Pesantren DDI Mangkoso South Sulawesi, Barru, March 25, 2023.

⁴⁵ Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Anshari al-Qurthubi, *al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an*, Jilid 4, p. 61.

⁴⁶Midday Boty, "Agama dan Perubahan Sosial (Tinjauan Perspektif Sosiologi Agama)," *Jurnal Istinbath* 15, No. 1 (2015). p. 39-40.

⁴⁷Dadang Kahmad, *Sosiologi Agama* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2002). p. 14-15.

⁴⁸ Interview with Prof. Dr. Muhammad Ghalib, Deputy Chairperson of the South Sulawesi MUI and Academician of UIN Alauddin, March 23, 2023.

The law on prohibition to insult other religions is a definite law and cannot be changed for any reason. As long as it is feared that non-Muslims may commit blasphemy to the Islamic religion, Muslims are not allowed to insult other religions such as by insulting their crosses or their churches. Muslims are also not allowed to do things that lead to insulting the religion of Islam because it is counted as doing an act that has the potential to cause harm. Conversely, when an infidel insults Allah, the punishment for them is quite severe. According to Islamic law, if someone is proven to have committed blasphemy to God, the person will receive the death penalty, as it is a grave sin.

Blasphemy can have consequences on the salvation of one's soul because this act is a grave sin in the view of Islam. It can also defame and damage one's image since the surrounding community will view the person negatively. Prof. Dr. Wahyuddin Naro, Chairperson of the South Sulawesi MUI Commission for Interreligious Relations, explains that if Muslims try to insult non-Muslims, including their concept of divinity, social conflict will certainly arise. The issue of religion is very sensitive because it involves one's beliefs. The most disturbing event for the Poso people in Central Sulawesi was the incident of religious conflict in Ambon, Maluku. The trigger for this traumatic incident was insulting each other's gods.⁴⁹

In addition, according to Prof. Dr. Ridhwan, professor of Islamic Law History at IAIN Bone, in the history of Rasulullah PBUH, both theoretically and practically, he has become a reference to this day in terms of life since he had prioritized the value of moderation in religion. Theoretically, in the Qur'an and Sunnah, he had been able to be a mercy to all of nature, including to non-Muslims. Practically, the Prophet made an agreement with the Jews and Christians in Medina, later called the Medina Charter.⁵⁰

In this context, Indonesia as a nation state and a country with the most Muslim population in the world have never treated non-Muslims in a discriminatory manner; instead, they are treated with honor and dignity. Various steps and strategies have been carried out by the government supported by religious mass organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah to realize moderation in religion.⁵¹

Prof. Ridhwan further emphasizes that the spirit of the Medina Charter has a relationship with Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, which protects the

⁴⁹Interview with Prof. Dr. Wahyudin Naro, Chairperson of the South Sulawesi MUI Religious Relations Commission and Academician of UIN Alauddin, March 26, 2023.

⁵⁰Interview with Prof. Ridhwan, Professor of the History of Islamic Law at the Bone State Institute of Islamic Studies, March 28, 2023.

⁵¹Mursyid Djawas et al., "The Position of Non-Muslims in the Implementation of Islamic Law in Aceh, Indonesia," *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 23, No. 1 (2023). Arifinsyah et al., "The Urgency of Religious Moderation in Preventing Radicalism in Indonesia," *Jurnal Esensia* 21, No. 1 (2020).

entire Indonesian nation and all religious communities. Even though the Medina charter was more than fourteen hundred years old, the spirit of moderation and tolerance towards people of other religions is highly relevant to the Indonesian context, which is diverse and plural in terms of religion and ethnicity, as is the case with the city of Medina. In practice, the Prophet PBUH also interacted, treated, and lived with non-Muslim religious communities in harmony and peace.⁵²

Thus, it is important to always maintain a polite attitude and mutual understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims so that there are no conflicts between religions or between fellow human beings, and in the future, they can live peacefully with one another without any discrimination and uphold the human values.

Apart from appreciating and not criticizing other people's beliefs, it has a lot to do with moderation. One of the meanings of moderation is being in the middle, and so Muslims should view the Gods of the beliefs that are different from them in a middle standard; therefore, they can understand the beliefs of other people who are different. M. Quraish Shihab explains that the middle position makes humans not take sides with a group, or side to the left or right, so that it leads to a just attitude, and they can be a role model for any group. Hence, the verse suggests that Allah has made Muslims in a middle position so that Muslims could become witnesses of human actions, or other people. However, that cannot be done unless people make Rasulullah PBUH become a witness who witnesses the truth of their attitudes and actions and they also make Rasulullah as a role model in life.⁵³

Even though the life of Rasulullah PBUH was in the midst of adherents of other religions and various ethnic groups, he was still a blessing for them. Rasulullah PBUH never created enmity against them, and even though the Prophet repeatedly took up arms against them, he only did those to defend the religion of Allah and the honor of Muslims.

Besides the meaning of being in the middle, moderation also means fairness, implying that judging the beliefs and actions of other people who have different beliefs from theirs with the parameters of justice. This suggests that if one hopes to be treated well, then he/she should also treat other people who have different beliefs in a fair manner.⁵⁴

By applying a sense of justice, any believers of a religion will avoid criticizing the beliefs of people who are different from them, because they will

⁵² Interview with Prof. Ridhwan, Professor of the History of Islamic Law at the Bone State Institute of Islamic Studies, March 28, 2023.

⁵³ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Misbah Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian al-Qur'an*. Vol. I (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), p. 347

⁵⁴ Abi al-Husain Ahmad ibn Faris ibn Zakariyah, *Mu'jam Maqayis al-Lughah*, Juz IV. (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1971), p. 246.

also feel angry if other people treat them in the same way, i.e., denouncing their beliefs. The attitude of moderation should be developed and practiced by every citizen so that it becomes an important issue in the life of the state. Religious moderation that has become a program of the Ministry of Religious Affairs still needs support from all parties because of the increasing understanding of conservatism, fundamentalism, and radicalism, which can lead to religious extremism. Involvement by all parties in dealing with religious radicalism is necessary, not only by preachers, religious leaders, universities, academics, but also by all parties to limit the space for radicalism, which can lead to terrorism.

Textually understanding the verses of the Qur'an and hadith can lead to radicalism and even terrorism. Then, in the context of Islamic law, blasphemy to the Gods of non-Muslims is strictly prohibited because it can have repercussions for the Muslims themselves. Therefore, religious moderation is a very important attitude, as it can foster an attitude of tolerance and mutual respect among religious people.

Conclusion

The Qur'an expressly forbids blasphemy to Gods of non-Muslims or to followers of non-Islamic religions as a preventive law. This preventive law is a very serious law and should not be ignored. In the views of the exegetes and of the religious and community leaders, the Qur'anic exegesis should prioritize a moderate understanding, considering Indonesia is a country with various religions; otherwise, conflict may arise due to intolerant attitudes. Muslims must be firm in upholding their religious beliefs while upholding the values of justice and tolerance. In addition, Muslims must be fully aware that Allah SWT creates all human beings equal without exception. Therefore, it is not permissible to insult any God or any non-Muslim community. The *ummah* shall respect the rights of non-Muslims and provide protection to them as is given to fellow Muslims. Protection is not only from the state through the constitution, but also from fellow adherents of religions. Religious moderation, as a strategic government program, should be able to act as a social safety valve and as a preventive measure against any potential conflict between adherents of religions and cultures in the Nusantara archipelago. As a government program, religious moderation shall be implemented based on the principles of justice and equality. If Islam prohibits blasphemy to religion, then the state shall enforce the law against such violations. In the context of Islamic law, blasphemy towards the gods of non-Muslims is *haram* (unlawful), as it can result in blasphemy to Allah and can lead to social conflict. Avoiding conflict is a behavior that is in accordance with the aims of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*).

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