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## Religious Moderation in the Context of Understanding Theory and Renewed Social Reality

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### Abstract

The discourse on religious moderation has tended to be normative and separated from the dynamics of interpretation and contemporary social change. This article is raised because there is a gap in the approach to understanding religious moderation which has not integrated many hermeneutical perspectives with new social realities. This research aims to explain religious moderation within the framework of the theory of understanding and the evolving social context. The method used is a descriptive qualitative approach with a literature study technique, which examines the works of Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur, as well as contemporary Muslim thinkers such as Fazlur Rahman and Amina Wadud. The main findings show that religious moderation is not simply a middle-of-the-road attitude, but is the result of a historical, dialogical, and contextual interpretation process of texts and social realities. The novelty of this study lies in integrating the Western hermeneutical framework and Islamic contextual interpretation as an interpretative approach to the values of moderation. The article also presents the real implementation of religious moderation through education, interfaith dialog, and digital da'wah in line with technological developments and state policies. Thus, this article provides theoretical and practical contributions to strengthening religious moderation in response to the challenges of globalization, digitalization, and the plurality of contemporary society.

**Keywords:** Hermeneutics, religious education, religious moderation, social reality, tolerance.

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## Introduction

The concept of religious moderation has become a central discourse in the context of modern plural societies, especially amid increasing global challenges such as intolerance, radicalism, and religious disinformation. Religious moderation is not only understood as a compromising attitude between theological extremes but as a form of balanced, inclusive, and contextualized religious praxis in the face of changing social realities (Kementerian Agama RI, 2021; Wijaya et al., 2024). In this framework, moderation is not just a policy narrative, but part of the process of reinterpreting religious texts and traditions reflectively and adaptively.

However, the discourse of religious moderation often stops at the normative level, without strong methodological support in interpreting sacred texts and the contemporary reality of the people (Senata et al., 2021). Moreover, not many studies have explicitly linked the hermeneutic approach to the practice of religious moderation in a dynamic social context. This gap is the basis for this research, which is to fill the epistemological and practical void in grounding religious moderation through a philosophical hermeneutical approach and its relationship with current social realities.

In the digital era and globalization, religion has experienced a shift in form and space. Digital space has become a new arena for the spread of religious teachings that are not always bound to traditional authorities but are open to plural, even extreme interpretations (Kong & Woods, 2016). Meanwhile, reflective modernity requires humans to review value systems, including religious values, to remain relevant to the rapidly changing social context (Turner, 2011). In this situation, religious moderation is key in building an adaptive religious social ethic that remains rooted in universal religious values.

In this context, the hermeneutic approach becomes an important instrument for rereading religious texts and interpreting them contextually (Rahmat, 2003). Hermeneutics not only reads the text but also bridges the gap between the reader's horizon and the text's horizon - a dialectical process that allows new understandings that are relevant to current realities (Knotts, 2014). This approach becomes very relevant in the discourse of religious moderation because it can prevent people from the trap of literalism and text fundamentalism that often distances religion from its essence as a bearer of mercy and peace.

For example, in Indonesia's plural and multicultural society, the implementation of religious moderation cannot be separated from the history of colonialism, interfaith interactions, and distinctive socio-political dynamics. This is where the importance of integrating understanding theory, built in the tradition of philosophical hermeneutics, with contemporary social realities, continues to evolve (Vilhauer, 2010). Thus, this study is not only important from a conceptual and theoretical perspective but also has praxis urgency in the context of education, public policy, and everyday religious life.

Philosophically, the hermeneutics developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur provide a conceptual framework for understanding texts not rigidly, but through an open process of history, dialogue, and interpretation. Gadamer emphasizes the importance of horizon fusion between the text and the reader, while Ricoeur

introduces the concept of productive distinction in understanding the meaning of the text in depth (Mootz III & Taylor, 2011). These concepts pave the way for religious interpretations that are not static and closed, but progressive and adaptive to the challenges of the times. This provides a new starting point in understanding religion as a source of inspiration for civilization, not as an instrument of domination or exclusivism of identity.

Meanwhile, contemporary social realities show that religion no longer operates in a homogeneous space. The emergence of social media, religious populism, and the increasing spirit of sectarian identity show that understanding of religion needs to be contextualized so that it is not used as a tool of social and political exclusion. In such conditions, religious moderation comes as an alternative approach that rejects extremism but is also not trapped in value relativism (Rahmadi & Hamdan, 2023). Moderation offers a middle way: to ground religious values inclusively in a plural social system, without losing the fundamental truth values believed by each religion.

Furthermore, the hermeneutic approach to religious moderation is also relevant to be applied in the practice of religious education. Recent studies have shown that religious education based on dialogue, open interpretation, and respect for diversity is more capable of shaping moderate characters than dogmatic and textualistic approaches (Saharayani, 2024). This indicates that moderation is not just a doctrinal product, but the result of a long process of understanding, dialogue, and negotiation of meaning in a particular social context.

Equally important, the hermeneutic approach can also strengthen the position of religious moderation in public policy and national Islamic discourse (Rahmat, 2003). In the Indonesian context, religious moderation is part of a strategic narrative to maintain social harmony and national integration. However, if it is not accompanied by adequate methodological tools, moderation will easily be drawn into the vortex of identity politics or become just empty jargon. Therefore, building a solid epistemological base through hermeneutic theory is an important step to making religious moderation a consistent and applicable paradigm.

This article aims to: 1) Analyse the concept of religious moderation using a hermeneutic approach as a tool to understand religious texts and practices in a changing social context. 2) Explain how contemporary social realities, including the development of digital technology and the dynamics of identity politics, affect the way religious moderation is understood and practiced. 3) Provide theoretical and practical contributions in building religious understanding that is inclusive, contextualized, and adaptive amidst the challenges of the times.

By linking hermeneutic theory and current social conditions, this article is expected to enrich the academic discourse and praxis of religious moderation, especially in the context of Indonesian Muslim society which is looking for a peaceful, just, and relevant religious model. In addition, this integration between the theory of understanding and social reality offers new methodological opportunities in Islamic studies and public policies that uphold the principles of justice, diversity, and social peace.

## Methods

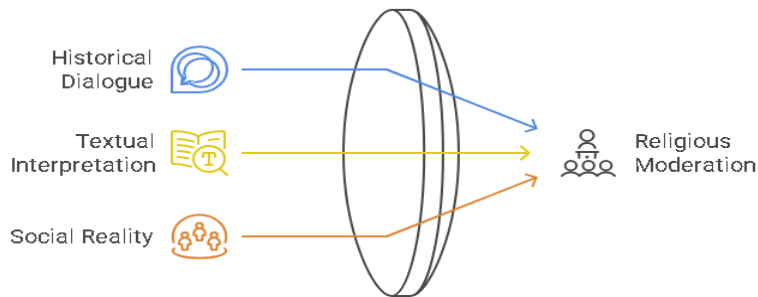
This article uses a qualitative approach based on library research with hermeneutic analysis to understand the concept of religious moderation within the framework of understanding theory and contemporary social dynamics. The hermeneutic approach was chosen because it is able to bridge text and context, allowing a re-reading of religious values in a changing multicultural society (Ismail, 2017).

Data were collected from relevant current academic literature, mainly from Scopus and Google Scholar indexed journals of the last five years. Analyses were descriptive-reflective, focusing on the relationship between religious texts, social interpretations and the realities of the times. Source validation was conducted through rigorous selection of the quality and credibility of references, avoiding plagiarism (Sarie et al., 2023).

## Results and Discussion

### Religious Moderation in the Hermeneutic Perspective of Understanding

In understanding religious moderation, the hermeneutic approach becomes an important tool to interpret religious teachings contextually and historically (Fikriyah, 2024).. Three main hermeneutical approaches are relevant to reading religious texts in contemporary social contexts.



Picture 1. Hermeneutic Pathways Moderation  
*Source: Authors.*

#### 1. Gadamerian Hermeneutics: Historical Dialogue as the Basis of Understanding

Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method* emphasises that understanding is a dialogical and historical process, which cannot be separated from the horizon of understanding between the interpreter and the text (Zaprul Khan, 2016).. In the context of religious moderation, this approach allows the reading of sacred texts to be open to changing times and cross-cultural interactions.

For example, in addressing issues of pluralism and tolerance, understanding is not solely based on the literalness of the verse, but on the openness of dialogue between textual meaning and changing social reality. Religious believers are invited not to be exclusive, but to be open to 'the other' as part of universal humanity.

## 2. Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics: The Dialectic of Text and Social World

Paul Ricoeur introduced the concepts of hermeneutics of suspicion and hermeneutics of trust that underline the need for a dialectic between the text and the world (Simon, 2019). In the perspective of moderation, it is not enough for religious texts to be understood literally, but they must be transformed through the context of life (Hilmy, 2013).

The concept of 'distance' between the text and the reader is the key to avoiding the fundamentalism of interpretation. In the pluralistic reality of Indonesia, Ricoeur teaches that a moderate understanding of religion requires a reflective reading of religious values that are compatible with social justice, reconciliation and social cohesion.

## 3. Contextual Interpretation Approach: Grounding the Text in Social Reality

The contextual approach is a model of interpretation developed by many modern Muslim scholars such as Fazlur Rahman and Amina Wadud. According to them, the texts of the Qur'an and Hadith cannot be separated from their historical context and must be reinterpreted in the present social context (Rohmah, 2017).

In the context of religious moderation, this approach encourages the reinterpretation of religious values that are inclusive, gender equal, and responsive to global challenges. For example, issues of interfaith relations, minority rights, and the role of women in Muslim societies are areas of interpretation that demand a contextual approach.

## Religious Moderation in the New Social Reality

Rapid social changes due to globalisation, digitalization, and state policies have reshaped the landscape of religious understanding and practice (Kuswandoro, 2024). Religious moderation is no longer just a normative discourse, but must be translated in the context of evolving social realities.

1. Globalisation and Digital Technology: The digital age has changed the way people access religious information (Andriyana & Adrian, 2024). On the one hand, social media accelerates the spread of religious knowledge widely and openly. But on the other hand, it has also become a space for the development of ideological polarisation and intolerant narratives.

The digital da'wah phenomenon presents both opportunities and challenges. Some da'i and academics utilise online platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and TikTok to spread moderate narratives (Wijaya et al., 2024). They counter the current of digital radicalism through Islamic content that is inclusive and youth-friendly.

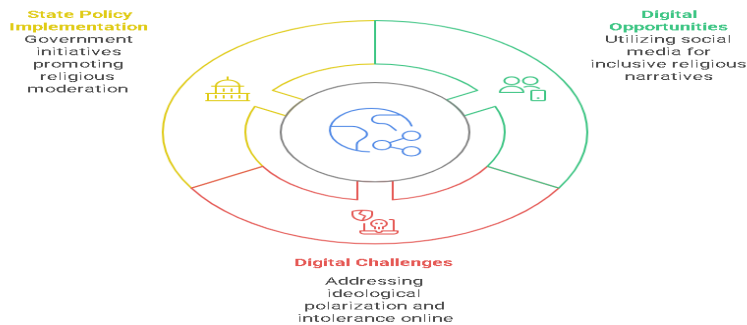
2. State Policy and Religious Regulations: The Indonesian government through the Ministry of Religious Affairs has rolled out the Religious Moderation programme as a national strategic policy. This programme emphasises the values of inclusiveness, tolerance, and balance between religious and national commitments (Rahman, 2024).

This policy is not only symbolic, but also manifested in educational regulations, fostering houses of worship, and training state apparatus. In this framework, religious

moderation is interpreted as a religious attitude that is not extreme, not exclusive, and supports social harmon.

3. **Social Dynamics and Diversity:** Indonesia as a multicultural country requires a religious approach that is able to embrace differences. In this context, education becomes a strategic field to instil moderation values from an early age (Zuliana et al., 2024)..

Character education programs based on religious moderation have been implemented in various schools and madrasas. This curriculum integrates the values of tolerance, peace-loving, and interfaith dialogue as part of the formation of national identity.



Picture 2. Factors Influencing Religious Moderation.  
*Source: Authors.*

## Implementation of Religious Moderation in Social Life

Various programs have been designed and run to implement religious moderation concretely in society. The implementation of these programs shows that religious moderation can not only be used as a doctrine or slogan, but also as a real and measurable social praxis. In this framework, religious moderation becomes an ethical and epistemological response to the challenges of the times (Marjani, 2023).

Based on the hermeneutic theoretical framework and the new social context that has been described, the implementation of religious moderation values does not only depend on understanding religious texts, but also on praxis strategies that touch the reality of society (Becker, 2013). There are several concrete steps that have been and can be taken to make moderation a living and transformative social praxis.

1. **Religious Moderation Education:** Education is the most strategic space in sowing the values of diversity and tolerance from an early age. A curriculum that emphasizes an interdisciplinary approach to religion, which integrates an understanding of the text, history, and social context can form open and inclusive learners. In the Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies shows that the integration of pluralism values in religious learning significantly improves students' tolerance towards other religious groups (Husin, 2009).

Programmes such as the development of learning modules based on religious moderation have been implemented by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs

(Muhsin et al., 2024). This module not only teaches dogma, but also universal human values such as justice, brotherhood and mutual respect.

2. **Interfaith Dialogue Forum:** Interfaith dialogue is a form of Gadamer's dialogical hermeneutics applied in the public sphere. Through this forum, there is a process of mutual understanding between different religious communities. Interfaith dialogue can reduce negative stereotypes, create collaborative spaces in solving social problems, and strengthen interfaith solidarity in responding to social and humanitarian crises (Saleem & Milovanovic, 2023).

In many cities in Indonesia, forums such as FKUB (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama) have emerged as effective mediators in religion-based horizontal conflicts (Rofiq, 2023). This forum performs a social hermeneutic function, where each religious group is encouraged to interpret its religious teachings within the framework of social cohesion.

3. **Digital Da'wah and Social Media:** Advances in digital technology have revolutionized the way religious values are disseminated. Digital da'wah has become a new space for preachers to convey religious messages widely. In the context of moderation, digital da'wah that emphasizes peaceful and inclusive narratives has proven effective in countering the flow of online radicalism.

A study by Sikumbang et al. (2024) in *Pharos Journal of Theology* notes that digital da'wah delivered by moderate religious figures can reduce negative perceptions of other religious groups, especially among the younger generation of active social media users (Sikumbang et al., 2024).

However, the biggest challenge of digital da'wah is the proliferation of intolerant content and religious hoaxes that spread quickly on social media. Therefore, strengthening moderation-based digital literacy is a necessity.

4. **The Role of the State and Regulation:** The state has an important role in shaping a moderate religious ecosystem. The Religious Moderation Programme by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, for example, is not just political rhetoric but has been implemented through a series of training, certification of preachers, and the development of a religious moderation index that maps how strong moderate values develop in a region (Kementerian Agama RI, 2021).

In addition, regulations such as the Joint Ministerial Decree (SKB) on the establishment of houses of worship and the supervision of religious education become an arena for policy hermeneutics where legal texts must be interpreted by considering the social context so as not to cause discrimination in the name of the majority.

However, this kind of regulation must also be criticized hermeneutically because it often has an exclusive impact on minority groups. Therefore, policy implementation must consider the principle of social justice, not just security stability.

Table 1. Implementation of Religious Moderation in Social Life

No.	Area of Implementation	Program Format	Narrative Description (Literal Version)
1	Religious Moderation Education	Development of learning modules based on religious moderation by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs	<i>"Education is the most strategic space for sowing the values of diversity and tolerance from an early age. A curriculum that emphasizes an interdisciplinary approach to religion—integrating textual, historical, and social contextual understanding—can foster open-minded and inclusive learners." "Integrating pluralism values into religious education significantly enhances students' tolerance toward other religious groups."</i>
2	Interfaith Dialogue Forums	Inter-Religious Harmony Forums (FKUB) and similar initiatives	<i>"Interfaith dialogue is a form of Gadamer's dialogical hermeneutics applied in the public sphere." "Forums such as FKUB have emerged as effective mediators in horizontal, religion-based conflicts." "These forums perform a social hermeneutic function, encouraging each religious group to interpret its teachings within the framework of social cohesion."</i>
3	Digital Da'wah and Social Media	Peaceful and inclusive religious narratives on digital platforms by moderate figures	<i>"Advances in digital technology have revolutionized the way religious values are disseminated." "Digital da'wah that emphasizes peaceful and inclusive narratives has proven effective in countering online radicalism." "However, the biggest challenge is the proliferation of intolerant content and religious hoaxes that spread rapidly on social media."</i>
4	The Role of the State and Regulation	Religious Moderation Program by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, training, preacher certification, moderation index	<i>"The Religious Moderation Program by the Ministry of Religious Affairs is not mere political rhetoric but has been implemented through training, preacher certification, and the development of a religious moderation index." "Regulations such as the Joint Ministerial Decree (SKB) on the establishment of houses of worship and the supervision of religious education constitute a space for policy hermeneutics, where legal texts must be interpreted in light of social context to prevent discrimination in the name of the majority." "Policy implementation must uphold the principle of social justice, not merely security and stability."</i>

Source: Data Processing.

## A Hermeneutical Reading of the Challenges and Prospects of Religious Moderation

Applying hermeneutics in a socio-religious context is not free from challenges. On the one hand, the hermeneutic approach provides a dynamic and open space for interpretation (Udeani, 2021).; but on the other hand, this approach is often rejected by groups that uphold a literal interpretation of sacred texts.

Another challenge is the development of religious populism narratives that make religious symbols a political commodity. This populist narrative tends to simplify religious texts to support short-term political agendas, which is contrary to the spirit of contextualized and inclusive moderation.

Nevertheless, there are great prospects in integrating hermeneutics in religious discourse. For example, Ricoeur's approach can be used to establish a dialogue between texts and contemporary social realities, opening space for reinterpretations of religious teachings that are responsive to issues of poverty, inequality, environmental crises, and gender injustice (Kim, 2023).

In this context, progressive Islamic scholars and thinkers play an important role as bridge interpreters - bridging between the classical heritage of Islam and contemporary challenges through contextual and empirical approaches (Fakhrurrozi et al., 2024).

In this context, progressive Islamic scholars and thinkers play an important role as bridge interpreters - bridging between Islam's classical heritage and contemporary challenges through a contextualised and empathetic approach.

Religious moderation is not a static concept, but a product of the dialectic between the text, the interpreter, and the changing social reality (Soedrajad & Tohir, 2022).. Hermeneutical approaches, whether Gadamerian, Ricoeurian, or contextual, provide an adequate framework for understanding how religious communities can respond to the challenges of the times without losing the integrity of their teachings.

Challenging global realities, such as extremism, the crisis of multiculturalism, and political manipulation of religion, demand intelligent, dialogical and reflective responses (Pratt, 2017). Therefore, acculturation of religious moderation must be done through various lines: education, media, state policies, and digital public spaces.

In the future, it is important to continue building a new epistemology that integrates theological and social values in one scientific frame, namely through Islamic Educational Hermeneutics, which not only interprets texts but also forms social praxis based on the ethics of diversity and justice.

## Conclusion

This study asserts that religious moderation is a dynamic concept that is formed through a dialectic between religious texts, interpreters' understanding, and changing social conditions. The hermeneutic approach - both in classical perspectives such as Gadamer and Ricoeur, as well as in the contextual hermeneutic framework - provides a strong conceptual tool to understand that religious texts are never presented neutrally, but are always read through the horizon of history, culture, and the existence of the interpreter.

In the context of contemporary social realities marked by plurality, digital disruption, and identity polarisation, religious moderation emerges as a hermeneutical response as well as a social praxis to maintain community cohesion, ensure justice, and prevent violence in the name of religion. The results of the study show that the implementation of religious moderation is most effective when done systemically through multicultural education, interfaith dialogue forums, inclusive digital da'wah, and fair and contextual regulations.

Religious moderation is not just a moral call, but also an epistemological and sociological project that requires the involvement of various actors: academics, scholars, the state, civil society, and the media. This concept will only be sustainable if accompanied by critical reflection and social transformation that makes diversity a gift, not a threat.

As a final note, the future of religious moderation depends on the ability of religious people to continue to interpret their religious texts with historical awareness and a bias toward humanity. Thus, moderation becomes not just a religious slogan, but a transformative movement to realize peace that is removed from spiritual values and social justice.

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### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article. All contributions were made objectively without any personal, financial, or institutional influence that could compromise the integrity of the work.

### Author's Contribution Statement

All authors have contributed significantly to the work and approved the final version of the manuscript. We believe that the findings of this study will contribute to the advancement of knowledge in Islamic thought and will be of interest to the readership of your journal.

1. **Syamsul Rijal:** conceptualized the research idea, designed the study, performed data analysis and interpreted the findings.
2. **Syatria Adymas Pranajaya & Firdaus M. Yunus:** conducted the literature review, collected the data, and revised the manuscript critically for intellectual content, provided final editing, and coordinated the submission process.

## Ethics Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles and academic integrity. All procedures were carried out responsibly, with informed consent obtained from participants (when applicable) and strict confidentiality maintained.

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