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The Relevance of *Wasathiyah* of the Majelis Tafsir Alquran Surakarta in Building National Unity

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Abstract: This article reveals the relevance of the *wasathiyah* concept of the Majelis Tafsir Alquran (MTA) version with moderation in Indonesia as well as efforts to build community unity in Surakarta. This research utilizes hermeneutic knowledge as an approach, namely as an interpretive tool to gain understanding and applicative experience, besides supported by critical theory as a tool for criticism and suspicion of the pattern of religious life in the Surakarta area in an effort to create unity and strengthen national identity. The study and investigation of this research shows a moderation principle of the Qur'anic Interpretation Council's version in three respects; first, moderation in theological aspects between atheism and polytheism; second, in the aspect of worship, the principle of convenience and consistency with divine provisions by not adding and subtracting or placing individuals above society in the interests of the congregation, unity and integrity under the values of the Qur'an and al-Hadith. The three moderations of the MTA's version are based on dogmatic normative principles and ethics where absolute truth is the transcendent value taught by Islam in the Qur'an and al-Hadith. As a conclusion, this research recommends the moderate vision of the MTA to further emphasize the internal vision of the organization and the need to build the strength of the moderate vision argument to the outside.

Keywords: *relevance; wasathiyah; mta; national unity*

A. INTRODUCTION

Theologically, Islam as a religion of human guidance (huda) has been declared as a religion that does not teach not only excessive attitudes but also absolute freedom and independent from God's control. The statement that Islam teaches moderate, middle, or wasath attitudes as described in the holy Qur'an is because Islam teaches an attitude of

balance, ease, justice, tolerance, compassion, non-violence, harmony, peace, and good qualities for personal and social life. Even though in carrying out these teachings, deviations are still found.

In the contestation of religious politics in Indonesia, the process of instilling or eliminating the influence or power that religion has over society occurs in several religious groups



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positioned on several spectrums. (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 9th edition © Oxford University Press, 2015). There are right-wing groups associated with hard-line, radical, and fundamentalist groups; on the other hand, there are groups on the free, independent and reducing spectrum of religious values. Among these groups, there are groups moving to realize the ideals of a middle ground between extreme and free, namely moderate and near mainstream religious aspires to this choice as a direction and hope that promises a good and advanced religious future (Wahab, 2019).

Efforts to build the ideals of religious moderation require understanding and real application of a religious concept that is applicable, easy to understand (reasonable), and easy to apply (applicable) because religious goals require knowledge and experience that can be directly applied pursuant to local situations and conditions; therefore, a relevant epistemological concept is required. Epistemological concept and building design become very important in understanding the ontology and axiology of religious movements.

Epistemological problems faced by designers of religious structures must be able to adjust future and contemporary designs by looking at linguistic factors and the historical situation of the people (Wijaya, 2014). Therefore, the demands for religious axiology will affect the patterns, attitudes, and actualization of da'wah actors, whether carried out by individuals or socio-religious groups according to their religious model (Sihab, n.d.).

The relevance of an appropriate and correct understanding in terms of realizing moderation is normally marked by the conduciveness of the community in it because the community always wants a

situation which is far from deviations considered as violations (Qardhawi, 2004). The methods carried out that are not in line with the context are considered as thuggery and cultural crimes as well as judgments as if these often led to hatred. (<https://cirebon.tribunnews.com>)

The existence of unbalanced religious norms and practices in the form of rituals and ceremonials is the result of an elementary religious study, which can be seen from excessive, ghuluw, and radical attitudes. Such attitudes will hinder the growth of an understanding based on rationality towards Islam (Lubis, 2020). On the other hand, the forms of deviation from religion in the form of anti-religious ideas or the degradation of religion that distances itself from values and truth are also the other sides of the religious experience of the people who have not received satisfaction.

Dissatisfaction in the way of being religious then brings back the term wasath, moderation, or the middle ground from two sides (extreme and free). This term is a pure word found in the Qur'an, meaning middle, medieval, moderate, middle ground, balanced between two sides, or two extremes (right and left). The word Ummatan washatan means people who are opinionated, think, and behave impartially to the right or left, moderate, fair, and balanced, have the principle of maintaining between physical and spiritual interests, have the principle of divinity (lahut) and humanity (nasut), have a dimensional principle between past, present, and future, act according to reason and revelation, not act individually but collectively, have factual elements between realism and idealism, and are oriented to the world and the hereafter (Taufiq & Rohmadi, 2010).

MTA is said as one of the agents of cultural change that emerged as an

Islamic da'wah, social, and educational institution in Surakarta aimed at making the surrounding ummah as good Muslims. MTA has tried to put forward the ideals of building humanity based on religious Islamic ethics as teachings that do not conflict with the basic philosophy of the state, namely Pancasila, and that uphold the national unity. (mta.or.id).

The ideals to enforce the pure values of Islamic teachings demand consistency in its movement, the question is whether the da'wah practices carried out so far have been in accordance with the development of tradition in society or vice versa, why there is resistance to the da'wah pattern scarried out by the actors of this institution, whether the resistance groups do not understand the dynamics and patterns of historical change even though the MTA's da'wah actors believe that resistance is a natural because it is a consequence in the da'wah struggle. On the other hand, this has attracted the attention of traditional religious groups because the emergence of MTA as an agent of change will hamper as well as has hampered the traditional religious conduciveness already established, peaceful, tolerant, and united in diversity.

Criticism of the da'wah methods carried out by MTA is more focused on the problem of da'wah methods and materials, namely criticism, correction, and invitations to the public to carry out pure worship, in addition to calls to abandon worship practices not taught in religious law such as tahlilan, shalawatan, yasinan, which according to it, are not taught in the Qur'an and al-Hadith. Resistance to these teachings is caused by the contradiction between the pure teachings of Islam and tolerance with traditions not taught in Islam. Differences in views and attitudes in this da'wah propaganda led to the emergence of criticism, blasphemy, and accusations

of intolerance that led to hatred, dislike, and resistance to the MTA's da'wah institution. Some people do not agree to include the MTA's Qur'an group as a moderate group even though the discourse of Indonesian moderation has not become a fixed price, so the concept of moderation is still an intellectual discussion, including in terms of placing the interpretation council group as a moderate group and has wasathiyah relevance, and the question emerging is whether or not the religion purification, in this case the views and attitudes that always refer to their belief in the Qur'an, has no relevance.

Understanding how moderate fiqh is a cultural product with various characteristics and multi-interpretation, then its contextualization depends on the situation and local socio-cultural conditions, so ijtihad carried out by any group is inseparable from beliefs and thoughts. The application of the Western model of moderation which emphasizes the critical-reflective, pro-democracy, and human rights religious mentality, and supports the ideology of secularism, cannot be equated with the Indonesian model which tends to be tolerant, maintaining harmony and cooperation between religious groups.

Interpretation, understanding, and implementation of the Qur'anic wasathiyah concept is often understood differently, which differences can occur because of the scope and meaning. Therefore, the methodology of thought, belief, and ideology plays an important role in determining the direction and movement of moderation, whether carried out by wider community or in small scope groups.

This article is not intended to defend MTA as a moderate or non-moderate organization, but rather to reveal the

following problems, (1) how to understand the relevance of MTA's wasathiyah in its da'wah mission; (2) are the methods implemented by the MTA in line with moderation in Indonesia, and (3) how to build unity in the Surakarta area.

In previous studies, the issue of MTA has been the object of research by several academics, M. Alfatih Suryadilaga focused his study on the role and position of hadith in the MTA religion, Miswan focused more on MTA da'wah through FM radio. Ahmad Sukino's da'wah rhetoric by Fendi Kurniawan, the relationship between NU and MTA in an ideological perspective has also been studied by M Alfandi(Suryadilaga, 2016), Wakhid Sugiyarto in his research focused on the issue of Social Dynamics of MTA in Surakarta City, Central Java, the focus of which research revolved around historical issues in the development of MTA, the da'wah model, the main teachings developed, and the response of religious and government figures to MTA. Socio-religious unrest and tension due to the emergence of MTA is caused by the immaturity of adult attitudes and horizons of people's thinking, especially the grassroots society.

Another research on MTA as a source of unrest for the people of Surakarta and other areas was written by Wakhid Sugiyarto, in which the author emphasized that the affirmation of MTA's faith in the community was not in accordance with the tolerance norms of the Javanese people, especially the Surakarta people who were known to be very tolerant. The truth of religion seems to be in its monopoly, and others are seen as wrong because they are not in accordance with the Qur'an and as-Sunnah (Sugiyarto, 2012).], from this review, this research focused on the problem of moderation of the MTA version.

B. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research used two sources of data; firstly, literature sources obtained from various sources including reference books, research, articles, documents, journals, and websites, and secondly, data sources from the field in the form of interviews and observations. Both sources of data were collected, reduced, and analyzed by triangulation to obtain a relevant and clear understanding and description of the MTA. The framework for thinking on moderation is based on a normative understanding of Islam and Indonesian history.

1. Moderation in the Normative View of Religion

Normatively, the sources of transcendental Islamic teachings teach the principles of truth, goodness, and beauty in various aspects, the transcendence of belief (aqidah), worship behavior (mahdhah and ghair mahdhah), and morals (akhlak). The emphasized implementation method is realizing the values of goodness, justice, convenience (taysir), eliminating difficulties ('adam al haraj), wisdom and consistency (istiqamah), tolerance (tasamuh), reform (islah), ta'awun, consultation (syura), and emphasizing the position between extreme and liberal (tawasuth) as the principle of realizing the moderation of the Qur'an. (Dawood, et al. 2017: 80-96), the principle of equality in humanity (clan, race, and descent) is another part taught in religion. (Qutb, 1967: 54)

2. Moderation in a Historical Context of Indonesia

The actualization of Islamic norms in Indonesia, according to Azyumardi Azra (Azra, 2020), is not only at the doctrinal level but also at the empirical, historical, sociological, and cultural reality, because in its history, since the 13th century,

Islamic moderation has been practiced through character as understood of Islamic concepts and the results of reflection on the ideology of non-violence in Islamic da'wah, in addition to the use of rational thinking in approaching and understanding Islamic teachings as well as the use of contextual approaches in understanding the sources of Islamic teachings, and *ijtihad* in establishing Islamic law (*istinbat*) become elements of Indonesian moderation.

This representation of the implementation of Islamic moderation in Indonesia can be seen from several Islamic organizations throughout Indonesia, namely from Muhammadiyah, Nahdhatul Ulama (NU), Jam'iyah Washliyah, Persatuan Tarbiyah Islamiyah (PERTI), Persatuan Islam, (PERSIS), Persatuan Umat Islam (PUI), Jami'atul Khoir, Al Irsyad, Nahdhatul Wathan (NW), Yayasan Pendidikan Islam (YAPIS), and so on.

Several Islamic groups as mentioned by Azymardi Azra are representatives of moderate Islam in Indonesia, yet not mentioning MTA in them, that is why through historical tracing and normative analysis and interactive models through three interacting components, namely data reduction, data presentation, data analysis and verification or conclusions, this article will map MTA in another moderation group.

3. Theoretical Foundation

Critical theory in this research is used as a tool to criticize modern society with various cultural components, and its orientation is related to matters considered as moderate and modern traditional societies, namely the cultural conflicts occurring in modern society. (Ritzer, 2012)], while Horkheimer's critical review emphasizes criticism as an emancipatory tool in viewing the

development of traditional societies that tend to be oriented towards suspicious syncretic forms, both critical theories of which must be able to see historical social phenomena and provide awareness to change reality by not separating between theory and praxis (Sindhutama, 2017).

In a context where socio-religious life is constantly changing, the religious beliefs and thoughts of a person or group of people will be tested, and their relevance will be developed, whether those beliefs and thoughts can be contextualized or rejected. To understand the problems, the first thing to do is to understand the way of interpreting the *wasathiyah* view, in this case, the hermeneutic theory is applied to understand the semantic interpretation of the texts related to the term, which concept will be read, understood, and interpreted by the MTA group according to intentions, competence, and interaction of this group in understanding and learning the concept. (Uco, 2019) further, how to understand the relevance of these texts in the millennial context, so they can be understood and applied in empirical reality. Therefore, interpretation can revive what has been said in these texts (Ricoeur, 2021).

Second, critical theory in this case plays a role in responding to the large narrative of existing religious understandings and movements, and is criticized by highlighting different understandings and beliefs from the mainstream. Because of the resistance to the mainstream, resistance occurs. Critical theory is also needed to answer why acceptance or rejection occurs, what are the causes, reasons, and factors that surround it. Therefore, a convincing answer is obtained.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. MTA Surakarta's Profil

a. Background of Establishment

MTA is a da'wah, social, and educational institution established in the form of a foundation on 19 September 1972 by Abdullah Tufail Saputra, a preacher, mubaligh, and activist for the Islamic movement in Surakarta from the 60s to the 90s. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yQYU0x0QtRo>), the time when the people of Surakarta city experienced a situation of a quite strong religious movement supported by a quite sensitive religious situation during the New Order era. At that time, MTA was born as driven by belief in the Qur'an which states,

"Has not the time yet come for those who believe (who wish to reach Allah while they are alive) that their hearts to have reverence with Dhikr (the remembrance) of Allah and what comes down from the Truth (with the glorious lights of Allah)? Let them not be like those who were given the Book before, but after a long time whose hearts became hardened (due to forgetting Dhikr-remembrance of Allah). Most of them are transgressors" (Al Hadid, Qs 57: 16)

This verse inspired Abdullah Tufail Saputra to form an Islamic unity institution as a method of da'wah and the realization of the verse. In his struggle, he traveled to various corners of the archipelago and saw the practices of Muslims who were far from Islamic guidance, performing practices and rituals carried out by their ancestors which caused them not to unite. He tried various ways to unite Islamic groups, but not received a positive response

from leaders in the Islamic ummah. The unification proposal initiated by Abdullah Tufail was rejected by other groups on the grounds that each institution has its own ideology that cannot be unified. For that reason, Abdullah Tufail then established his own foundation with the aim of inviting Muslims back to the Qur'an and as-Sunnah which was later named the Majelis Tafsir Alquran (MTA's Foundation) in Surakarta. (https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Majelis_Tafsir_Al_Quran)

For approximately 20 years, Abdullah Tufail has grown and developed MTA, carrying out da'wah activities, starting from Solo, Delanggu, Klaten, Sragen, Boyolali to several areas outside the Residency of Surakarta. His leadership was replaced by his next generation, Ahmad Sukino, after Abdullah Tufail passed away in 1992. Ahmad Sukino continued the MTA leadership relay for 29 years, helping grow and develop MTA to become large from Solo to Aceh, to Merauke, but due to declining health factors he passed away on 25 February 2021, and is now continued by Nur Kholid Syaifullah.

The MTA's gait as an agent of change is at least proven by the presence of certain community groups who feel in agreement with its vision, mission, goals, and movements. Its compatibility in understanding and movement that in a short time showed rapid growth of membership at the branch and representative level to remote areas in Indonesia, one of the magnet's attractions of this council is the influence of the figure and thoughts of its leaders who are firm, straightforward, and able to influence

their beliefs in the community, namely returning to the Qur'an and the appreciation and application of Islam in accordance with the practice at the time of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. On the other hand, resistance to MTA actually has a positive impact, namely motivation and external challenges that encourage MTA to continue its movement, who feel that resistance, blasphemy, reproach are *sunnatullah* that must be faced and not be abandoned.

b. Activities of Da'wah

Da'wah amar ma'ruf nahi munkar (enjoining good and forbidding wrong) characterizes the MTA da'wah movement, namely returning to the Qur'an and emancipating changes in tradition to these teachings by rejecting methods contrary to or not based on the Qur'an and as-Sunnah. Emancipation as a da'wah movement is carried out through recitations held for a specific purpose and publicly, specifically because the participants are members who are monitored through attendance and special materials, while the public participants are the general public and anyone who wants to attend recitation lectures without presence monitoring.

In accordance with the name of the institution, the materials for the MTA recitations are the interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an from the interpretation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ibn Kathir, Ibn Abbas. The materials given in these special recitations are the interpretation of the Qur'an with reference to the interpretation of the Qur'an issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and other mu'tabar

interpretation books whose validity is legally recognized, both from the work of salafi ulama/scholars and khalaf ulama/scholars (Suryadilaga, 2016).

Aqidah is a principle that must be strengthened in the beliefs of all members of the MTA recitation and all Muslims. Belief in this first pillar of faith must be expressed verbally (*iqrarun bil lisan*), realized in the heart (*tasdiqun bil qalbi*), and manifested in real actions (*'amalun bil arkan*) by imitating the behavior of the life of the Prophet Muhammad SAW (Peace be upon Him).

In addition to the doctrine of faith that is implanted in the recitation forum, the *akhlaq* (morals) exemplified by the Prophet and the traits contained in *Asma'ul Husna* become the moral basis as a form and integral part of faith in Allah. Between Allah and His Messenger are inseparable in the behavior and faith of the Muslims.

The method used in the recitation is lecture and question and answer, either performed directly between the lecturer and the recitation participants or indirectly, in which the lecturer answers questions read by the team of lecturers broadcast through the media of da'wah radio or MTA TV and is answered by the lecturer at in front of the audience.

c. Activities in Education

Education is one of the media manifested by MTA and is a means of forming ideals with a group segment of educated young people both formally and informally, education is one of the sectors of MTA activity in the process of practicing the Qur'an in forming a common life based on the

Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. This common life requires various institutionalized activities to meet the needs of members.

Education organized by MTA includes formal and non-formal education, formal education is intended to prepare the next generation of intelligent and noble character in addition to obtaining general knowledge based on the national curriculum issued by the government, MTA junior and senior high school students also receive diniyah lessons.

To achieve the objectives of the diniyah lessons, MTA junior and senior high school students are also given guidance in worship and mu'amalah. For this reason, MTA junior and senior high school students who need a dormitory are required to live in a dormitory provided by the school. By living in a dormitory managed by schools and foundation, they can be guided and supervised, so they can practice their diniyah lessons in a good manner.

d. Social, Economic, Health, and Communication Activities

The social activities developed by MTA are aimed at the interests of various audiences, both internal and external to MTA in order to build strong social cohesion. The forms of efforts carried out such as blood donations, community service involving the local government and the Indonesian National Army (TNI) in the form of providing foods, clothing, and medical supplies to Muslims and general public who are affected by disasters which have become a social priority as well as da'wah that continues to be carried out as a form

of worship, as well as efforts to maintain social power.

In the economic field, the development of economic resources for the MTA community is empowered through microfinance institutions, savings and loan units to develop MTA's internal residents' businesses that require business capital, in addition to providing business skills training for members who are not or less independent. Microeconomic development was initiated and developed through the MTA's Koperasi Jasa Keuangan Syariah Service (KJKS) Dirgantara, a financial institution that becomes a forum for developing internal economic strengths such as the availability of Dirgantara shops and Air Minum Kafur business to meet the economic needs of the community.

As a form of anticipation and consequence of the development of MTA institution, attention in the health sector is also a priority and demands of citizens, so as a realization in the health sector is the establishment of an Islamic hospital although still limited in delivery and treatment services for students or residents of MTA, which step is evidence of the growing development of MTA in facing the demands of the times and the actualization of Islamic values.

Another aspect that is also a priority for MTA is the provision of communication and information facilities as an inseparable part of the development of the global information world. Realizing the importance of this aspect, MTA actually has an information system, printing (Al-Abrar) magazine publications, brochures, and religious books,

however, these facilities are still being developed but to anticipate the progress of the digital era, MTA has started to develop a television channel called MTA TV, a communication system through the use of electronic digital communication systems such as the web at the address: <http://www.mta.or.id> with E-mail address: humas_mta@yahoo.com

The fields of da'wah, education, economics, health, and communication that exist within the MTA body along with the many new members of the MTA, who are interested in it for two reasons; firstly, the strong will and desire to join, learn, understand, and practice Islam more intensively. Second, because they want their life needs to be fulfilled; third, dissatisfaction in obtaining religious knowledge and experience with the old community. Fourth, the strong influence of the ability of the MTA preacher in conveying the messages of da'wah and the pattern of indoctrination. Fifth, fostering and fraternal ties between MTA residents that can reassure the citizens; and sixth, the allure of pragmatization in studying and practicing Islamic messages for its followers.

External factors that also affect the development of the MTA community are first, the strengthening of the community's response, which is supported by the wider openness of the da'wah space for anyone who wants to study Islam, who are no longer ashamed, afraid, or lazy in fulfilling their spiritual needs. Second, the existence of political and democratization policies that open up space for expression in interpreting the truth of religious values. Third, the development of education and

teaching patterns, which are not limited to formal education. (Baskoro, jogya.tribunnews.com)

2. Resistance against the Moderation of MTA Surakarta

Problems that are often faced by individuals and religious groups with the existence of MTA are often associated with da'wah issues, a problem concerns with the da'wah market and political hegemony, where religious politics is always trying to gain power, sympathy, and followers in an effort to strengthen ideas and thoughts offered. The power of ideas and beliefs of the people who are always contested is a potential that is built in order to get rewards, sympathy that forms strength (Ritzer, 2012). (Ritzer. 2014: 740) another strength that MTA has in the education, economic, and communication sectors is a means of supporting the mission of the existence of MTA, as for the response of the traditional groups towards MTA are more focused on the ways of preaching carried out by the leaders.

The da'wah practice carried out by the residents of the Interpretation Council to return to the Qur'an and as-Sunnah is not immediately accepted by the community, some people reject the methods of da'wah carried out by the members of this council. The rejection is, among others, first, for theological reasons, namely their understanding that considered to have fallen into the many deviations of the Mu'tazilah. Second, the denial of certain concepts of reality that differ in paradigm from other groups, such as the essence of magic as believed by Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah. (Abu Ismail Rijal, problematikaumat.com); third, resistance to its da'wah because of intolerance towards the practice of religious cultural traditions that are considered not in accordance with the principles of their beliefs, for

example, the ritual practice of three days of death, tahlilan, yasinan, kenduren, Mauludan, ziyarat, and other religious cultural practices. The refusal is a natural difference and does not need to be exaggerated because religious practice must experience this necessity.

In addition to the practices and methods of da'wah, the understanding of salafus Sholih (companions, tabiin, and tabiut tabiin) even questioned the practice of MTA da'wah as purification or silencing of religion because it emphasized the study of understanding verse by verse in the Qur'an, which usually uses the translated version issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. According to Ibnu Burdah, the strength of the MTA recitation actually lies in the style and mass communication of its leader, Ahmad Sukino, not the depth and strength of the study. The delivery by the "ustad" was felt to be very straightforward, clear, and easily understood by the common people. (Ibnu Burdah. www.jawapos.com)

Such attitudes, views, and assessments of the Qur'anic Interpretation Council lead to the conclusion that MTA is a non-moderate, intolerant religious group, not pay attention to social conditions and the cultural heritage of the local community, thus triggering friction and cultural clashes between MTA and groups holding traditional customs. In the religious map of Indonesia, this traditional group is a large group that has played a role in the history and dynamics of the archipelago's religion, a group that plays a cultural role in the history of the life of the Indonesian people as agents of knowledge, values, and religious practices substantially, informally as practiced by other textual formalism groups. Even the traditional historical values of the nation that were shown by the perpetrators of Islamic history in the past such as ulama, wali,

and kyai became teachings that must be followed, it would be very naive if the teachings of the walisongo were removed from the map of historical knowledge (Sunyoto, 2012).

3. Wasathiyah in Alquran dan Wasathiyah of MTA

Islam teaches the principles of moderation (wasathiyah) because as the source of Islam, the Qur'an contains an understanding and description of the nature, attitude, and paradigm of social life that is lasting and continuous, in which an inclusive and tolerant attitude is described in a plurality and cultural difference. (Zuhairi. 2014: 158-196) Due to differences in understanding the concept of moderation in this religion, so the development of discourse on Islamic moderation raises the characteristics and models of Islamic moderation according to the study approaches to Islam (Abuddin Nata, n.d.).

One of the problems that must be responded wisely is whether the attitude of returning to the source of religious teachings can be said as moderation, of course, this is closely related to the interpretation and understanding of the concepts used in understanding the verses of the Qur'an and al-Hadith. The Qur'an itself is a book of moderation among various views and beliefs, and in its application requires redefinition to suit the times. Although it is difficult to define moderation in a clear and accepted understanding by various groups, in general the concept of moderation in the Qur'an is related to the history of human life, which includes views, beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and attachments between humans and nature.

Various interpretations of wasathiyah give rise to different views, some of which understand the existence of a middle ground, not leading to the right (extreme)

or to the left (liberal). Moderate is also understood as a moral attitude and rational personality, polite, gentle, friendly and not rude, not vindictive, or hating. (A Musthofa Bisri, t.t, p. 342), but it can also mean a middle ground and balance between two sides. (Syamsuddin, Din, t.t, p. 263). Ideally, this balance attitude is applied in all aspects of Islamic teachings in the fields of tauhid (monotheism), worship, morality, and syari'at through the principle of not burdening the implementers of the teachings, namely eliminating all difficulties (Shallabi, 2020). (Shallabi. 2020: xi-xvii)

Two aspects to be seen in MTA's wasathiyah practice are religious attitudes that are reflected in the organization's internal attitudes, where MTA bases its understanding of moderation as stated in the normativeness of the Qur'an that Islamic teachings are moderate, so MTA's attitude to follow the instructions of the Qur'an and al-Hadith can be said to be moderate. The MTA's moderation orientation is a picture of moderation as aspired in the Qur'an and al-Hadith, but the orientation of the MTA's struggle in carrying out its da'wah mission to the community is still in the process of adaptation and is still facing resistance from traditional groups.

a. MTA's Internal Attitude

In strengthening the internal side of the institution, aqidah/faith is the most important principle in mobilizing the missions of da'wah, education, and social. All MTA members believe that the bond of tauhid/monotheism of a Muslim to Allah SWT in all aspects of worship is the main principle, all forms of good deeds that do not originate from Allah and His messenger are not accepted, and this purification principle is

maintained in the spirit of the organization.

In the aspect of worship, MTA is of the view that all practices are based on clear legal sources, namely the Qur'an and al-Hadith, and further, understanding and interpretation of the two sources is based on understanding from the books of mu'tabar interpretation, and understanding by understanding the relationship between verses and verses or verses with Hadith and also with relevant narrations of companions (tafsir bil ma'tsur), belief in this method is considered strong not to be trapped into groups (mazhab). In such belief, the rejection of mahzab is because it is not commanded in religion, mazhab is the same as taqlid, or imitating and following the views of others. (Nur Kholid Syaifulloh. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwCA71wI07g&t=4s>).

The principle of independence in understanding religion in the MTA tradition not to be trapped in taqlid has confirmed the position of MTA ijtihad in the contestation of other religious groups in Surakarta. MTA Ijtihad is self-study from the book of usul fiqh, the science of muktabar in the Islamic world, studying the works handed down by the ulama/scholars who have come to the present day. This is what MTA does in deciding religious issues, who do not interpret by themselves but studying the ultimate interpretation in the Islamic world. In this way, it is impossible for this group to accept forms of rituals, worship, and traditions whose foundations are not found in the Qur'an and al-Hadith, so other groups view them as heretical because they do not tolerate traditions that exist in

society such as tahlilan, yasinan, barzanji, death anniversary, kenduri, and so on.

b. Attitudes against External Groups

The MTA group believes that the concept of Rahmatan lil 'alamin is addressed to all creatures of Allah SWT, not to certain groups, segments, groups, or parts, but so each one gets a part and is not controlled or owned by certain groups, including in matters relating to truth, each group has beliefs and truths that have the rights to be actualized without imposing the will of others. Ahmad Sukino's statement that he does not practice religious traditions such as tahlilan, yasinan, mauludan and so on is the right of every individual or group who believes in it, and he who does not practice such tradition is Ahmad Sukino's belief.

In building an applicable and adaptive moderate society in Surakarta, MTA also builds internal strengths to strengthen the organization, carry out organizational missions and goals, create social relations like other institutions, namely establishing communication, interaction, and cooperation relationships as long as within the boundaries of the teachings of Islam. This limitation is firmly held as a principle of normative moderation. Although it is questionable how the principle of normative moderation can be applied in maintaining the integrity of society, even though many traditions of society are rejected.

In maintaining cooperative relations between and inter-religious adherents, MTA is incorporated in the FKUB (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama/Religious Harmony

Forum), which is an official forum facilitated by the government, so religious people can sit together and be equal, discussing issues related to inter-religious relations. Issues that arise in Surakarta are cases of harassment and destruction of Christian tombs by school children aged 8-10 years who are allegedly educated by an informal institution called Kutab, a discourse to build halal tourism, halal food, build a shari'ah-based city of Solo to eliminate the stigma as a terrorist city. (Interview with the Head of the Surakarta Ministry of Religious Affairs Office).

c. Efforts in Building National Unity

The purpose of da'wah by MTA is to build people into people who stand with the values of goodness and truth vertically and horizontally, vertically to build piety and horizontally to build national unity as a manifestation of human and religious values because religion teaches to unite and maintain the unity of the people. In his speech, Abdullah Tufail said, "In any party, any group, every believer is a brother, therefore Muslims are obliged to eliminate suspicious attitudes, remove attitudes of bringing down each other, be compassionate (marhamah) among Muslims and fellow Indonesians, even if they do not meet in the same religion, Muslims are still in the same nation, in the same homeland".

This statement is based on the word of God in surah Al Mumtahanah which explains that Muslims are not wrong to be fair and do good to people outside of Islam because Allah loves those who do justice, what is forbidden is to cooperate with people who are hostile to Islam, who tries to

expel Islam from the country, so cooperating with this kind of people means a big mistake and an act of injustice.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5JXXA3Gd6s4&t=1095s>)

Unity and integrity are believed in the consciousness of the MTA leaders and instilled in all members and to Muslims. According to Abdullah Tufail, those who think that khilafiyah is the cause of the division of Muslims are those who do not understand the history, sociology, and psychology of Islam.

He said that the division of the ummah is caused by an attitude of envy, jealousy as referred to in the Qur'an (Qs. 3:19). This reference to understanding the Qur'anic text is understood simply and practically in accordance with what is written in it by connecting relevant verses (munasabah bainal ayat wal ayat) or by explaining cause and effect in related verses by adding meanings in context.

The problem of the division of the ummah is understood, analyzed, and concluded by referring to psychological behavior and traits that exist in humans such as, (1) envy or dislike of seeing other people's strengths, envy or feeling angry, and cunning or a lot of bad sense, deceit, cheat, and like to cheat. (2) Withdrew in shame for his own wrong stance and fatwa. (3) Ethnocentrism or the feeling in which the group feels the most correct, the best, and the greatest, so measuring other groups with the values and norms of its own group. (4) Feeling of self or group as the center of attention (centrism) and strong in religion (group fanaticism). (5) Excessive family attitude. (6)

Immaturity in accepting the truth, namely the inability to justify what is right even though it comes from the opponents or blame the wrongs even though it is from someone's own circle). (7) Arrogance in the sense of rejecting the truth and belittling others, being self-effacing or feeling capable, an malicious heart that causes Muslims to be unable to unite.

Unity and integrity is not just by a matter of word, (sorry, I'm anti tahlil), differences of opinion are not anti sil-aturahmi / friendship. Extreme means coercion of the will. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-MpCF4aog-Y>)

The desire to realize the ideals of unity is pursued by forming a joint forum of several Islamic groups with the assumption that existing Islamic institutions are willing to join together, but due to ideological friction from other groups, this effort has failed and what is being done now is through a government forum that is considered to have the authority to manifest these goals.

d. Giving a Meaning to Wasathiyah of MTA Version in Building Unity

How to understand and practice the right religion is related to the methods, means, and principles possessed by each religious group. Differences in this case can invite polemics and cause friction due to tensions that are generated and cannot be resolved. A mature attitude in dealing with differences is the best choice not to demean and blame other groups. In this case, the choice of traditional accommodation, on the one hand, and purification or return to the source of religious teachings, on the other hand, are an attitude of

returning to each group as maturity in moderation.

Although difficult to define moderation in a clear and accepted understanding by various groups, in general, the Qur'an as a way of life is a moderate path chosen by MTA according to its methods and means. The choice of methods and means as adopted by MTA is a necessity from other understanding models.

MTA is a religious group in Indonesia that is blooming and growing as a result of the globalization of religious thoughts, views, and beliefs brought by Middle Eastern ulama/scholars to Indonesia, and the fact that their presence is accepted with all its shortcomings and advantages. The choice of understanding brought by Middle Eastern ulama/scholars is recognized as a path that brings differences and dislikes, and leads to disharmony in socio-religious life.

Theologically, the MTA version of the understanding and contextualization model of Islam is purification, namely the purification of Islamic understanding and movements in accordance with the original meaning of Islam with the principle of not taking sides with certain mahzab and groups. MTA's attitude shows an independent attitude in carrying out Islamic messages, so when dealing with understanding and applying the meaning of wasathiyah or moderation, MTA still shows its attitude in accordance with its beliefs.

In matters dealing with the practice of worship, MTA has determined a firm stance, for example in terms of separating the types of worship that are mahdhah and ghairu

mahdhah, MTA emphasizes the type of worship that is strict in law (nash sharih), the use of fiqh knowledge and fiqh proposals as a method in analyzing the verses of the Qur'an and al-Hadith (Suryadilaga, 2016) is also used to support understanding as a moderation model.)

In the social community context, MTA distinguishes issues that are mahdhah and ghairu mahdhah in nature, ordaninance of worship that has been officially determined by religion is carried out according to belief and understanding, while those that are not determined are treated with a disclaimer or omission of practice. This firmness is shown in the practice of praying, practicing Qunut or not, and practicing tahlil or no tahlil according to the MTA is the business of those who practice it, but socially they are brothers who must be addressed in ukhuwah Islamiyah. (17 Apr 2021. Lecture by Kh. Abdullah Thufail (Founder MTA): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Ui_D_glCa0 . Sikap moral MTA terhadap dan tuduhan yang dialamatkan kepada MTA tentang dosa tahlilan lebih besar dari zina adalah bukan faham dari MTA dan diyakini sebagai sikap dan respon orang-orang atau kelompok yang membencinya. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sjWiLlslldGY>. 24 Apr 2021)

Such situation is considered as a form of God's test or trial given to all MTA followers by not responding negatively or resisting in order to maintain good inter-religious relations as well as maintaining religious unity and integrity, but remaining consistent with its stance (Ismail & Pluralisme, 2019). The purpose and objective of why such

problems are not resolved in a communicative dialogical manner is because these methods will worsen the religious image of the people in Indonesia, namely the stigma of national unity and integrity will fade and open the chasm of national division. A situation that is not desired in Islam because this religion teaches unity.

In its history, until now, MTA has experienced a change towards openness in attitudes and views, the issue of religious cultural traditions is understood as the right of every group, and making distance in worship practices is an attitude that must be respected by other groups, not to criticize and corner each other instead of accusing or blaming each other as a group of strange, extreme, not moderate, and so forth.

D. CONCLUSION

Discussion on religious movements, especially those associated with ideology, cannot be separated from linguistic discourse and the understandings that are always associated in it. The concept of the relevance of wasathiyah which is attached to the religious institution of Qur'anic Interpretation Council (MTA) Surakarta is the result of reading and study in it. In understanding the concept of moderation or wasathiyah, Islamic religious studies cannot be separated from the linguistic source of the Qur'an, which is the main reference in explaining the religious attitude of a person or a group, in this case wasathiyah is understood as an attitude of impartiality to extremists and liberals. The relevance of wasathiyah in the view of the Qur'anic Interpretation Council (MTA) Surakarta is summed up in the following points:

First, the concept of wasathiyah in the Qur'an is understood and interpreted theologically and normatively by MTA by prioritizing binary understanding, between right and wrong, good and bad, and so on, so what appears in views and beliefs is the contrast between atheism and polytheism, further the position between the two as a middle ground is an attitude, and a middle ground that must be implemented.

Moderation in matters of belief is followed by the MTA group in other matters, for example in the socio-religious aspect the differences between various groups of people are not caused by differences in understanding or khilafiyah, but because of feelings of envy and jealousy as stated in the Qur'an. The concept of this type of moderation is based on normative ethical aspects, where good and bad are a divine transcendence value taught by Allah SWT.

Second, the relevance of the understanding of the MTA version moderation which tends to be theologically normative is accepted by some groups as a model of understanding that does not emphasize considerations of academic detail, so as to make it easier for members and followers to understand Islamic teachings, but such considerations are considered too shallow and even questioned as superficial (Burdah. www.jawapos.com) and in certain cases, because of their differences with other groups, they are declared heretical, (Abu Ismail Rijal: problematikaumat.com Bid'ah) in addition to being rejected because of the normative understanding model that tends to judge in black and white.

Third, differences in attitudes in dealing with cultural traditions are a necessity that must be accepted with greatness, not hostility and hatred

considering that the ways of individuals or groups in translating, understanding, and applying the concept of wasathiyah can be categorized into three epistemological models, some of which are normative theological, rationalist, and esoteric mystic. The three of them become a holistically unified in understanding and actualizing the values of Islamic teachings even though in reality such practices are still far from being realized. Of the three epistemological models, MTA tends to be first type, namely normative theological, the suitability of society in this type is a choice as well as a rejection of other models.

The model of religious understanding and practice by adopting, emphasizing, or even rejecting one of the three models is not the right theological choice. The three of them become a whole that must be adjusted normatively and historically by both the MTA and other religious groups.

This research recommends MTA's moderate vision to emphasize the internal vision of the organization and the need to build the strength of the moderate external vision argument and take a historical praxis approach in order to facilitate communication in building community unity in Surakarta.

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