

## Conflict of Understanding of Wahabi-Salafi Creed and Sharia and the Aswaja Tarekat in North Sumatra: The Challenge of Religious Moderation in Indonesia

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### Abstract

*This study aims to examine the roots of religious conflict among Islamic groups and to formulate conflict-mitigation strategies through intensive dialogue and mutual understanding. This research employs a qualitative approach combining literature review and fieldwork. Data were collected from scholarly journals and books, in-depth interviews with Islamic scholars and preachers affiliated with Wahhabi-Salafi movements and tarekat communities, as well as Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) on issues of aqidah and shari'ah. Field research was conducted in several regions of North Sumatra, including Stabat, Binjai, Medan, and Deli Serdang. The findings reveal fundamental differences in theological concepts and interpretations of Islamic law between Wahhabi-Salafi groups and Sufi-tarekat communities. These differences are particularly evident in the interpretation of mutashabihat verses, where Wahhabi-Salafi adherents tend to avoid or reject ta'wil, while scholars of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah tradition advocate ta'wil to preserve the transcendence of Allah and to avoid anthropomorphic understandings. In the domain of Shari'ah, Wahhabi-Salafi groups generally reject religious practices that are not explicitly performed by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), whereas tarekat scholars-predominantly following the Shafi'i school recognize the concept of bid'ah hasanah in subsidiary aspects of ritual worship. Overall, the study indicates that the Sufi-tarekat approach in North Sumatra demonstrates a more moderate and accommodative orientation compared to Wahhabi-Salafi interpretations, underscoring the importance of dialogical engagement grounded in Islamic moderation for reducing religious tensions.*

### Keywords

tarekat; aswaja; Islamic moderation; religious doctrine conflict; radicalism



## I. Introduction

Religious understanding in Indonesia, particularly since the Salafi Wahabi congregation began actively conveying their doctrines, has become increasingly characterized by a proliferation of conflicting religious understandings among Indonesian Muslims, including in North Sumatra and Jakarta. Each of these emerging understandings is represented by its respective ulama (Islamic scholars).

Qasim noted that due to conflicts related to different understandings, some places of worship became victims of destruction during various forms of riots such as: attacks, sealing, rejection, prohibition of religious activities, etc. Of the 59 places of worship, the majority were for Christian churches (91 out of 43 churches), Ahmadiyah (9 mosques), Muslims (2 mosques), LDII (2 mosques), Christian Buddhists (2 buildings of worship) and Wahhabi (1 mosque).

Among the conflicting understandings within the Muslim community is the conflict between the scholars of the Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jamaah and the Wahabi Salafi sects. With advances in digital technology, the conflict between these two understandings has become more open and has penetrated the public sphere, increasingly pervasive and widespread, both in the virtual and real worlds. Yet, the *ummatan wasatan* (a community that mediates between different people) is the foundation for instilling a moderate understanding to achieve the Muslim character mentioned in the Quran.

In the current socio-cultural differences in Indonesia, the paradigm of moderate Islam is seen as a differentiating factor to overcome the diversity of opinions; the *wasatiyah* attitude can be implemented in actions and understanding of both faith, sharia, and even Sufism.

The understanding of Sufism can be represented by various organizations or congregations of Sufism. According to Muhammad As-Sanusi al-Idris, throughout the Islamic world there are 40 kinds of names of Sufism, including: Shiddiqiyyah, Uwaisiyyah, Junaidiyyah, Halajiyah, Qodiriyah, Madyaniyyah, Rifa'iyah, Utabiyah, Hasimiyyah, Suhrawardiyah, Ahmaddiyah, Syaziliyyah, Wafaiyyah, Zaruqiyyah, Jazuliyah and other Sufism. In Indonesia there are also many names and kinds of Sufism and organizations, both international and local, such as the Qadiriyyah Sufi Order of Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jailany, the Syaziliyyah of Imam Syazily, the Naqsabandiyyah of Bahauddin Naqsabandi and the Khalwatiyyah.

Meanwhile, the Wahabi movement is better known as a purification movement, and its scholars are better known for their understanding that considers Indonesian customs, culture, and traditions as deviant and full of heresy, superstition, and polytheism. According to Qasim, through the jargon (doctrine) of "purification" (*tauhid*), the Wahabi movement spread its understanding throughout the world, including Indonesia, and increasingly demonstrated its opposition to those Muslims who disagreed with it. This Puritan group often raises suspicions or accusations of *takfir* against individuals or groups outside its fold, including misleading the Nusantara Islam movement, which is considered a symbol of moderation and a flexible understanding of Islam. NU often presents itself as an organization committed to religious tradition. Wahhabis, on the other hand, are an iconoclastic religious group, often accusing NU followers of being superstitious, heretical, and superstitious. The Salafi Wahhabi group dislikes the Nusantara Islam initiated by NU, and the term Nusantara appears to be gaining strength and is rumored to be a characteristic of Indonesian Islam.

Recently, Lumajang has also experienced the "turmoil" of a transnational diaspora movement. There has been at least one case of the distribution of Wahhabi black leaflets, six of which were secretly distributed to residents' homes and even taped to trees. The leaflets prohibited the recitation of "Bismillah," "Qunut," and "Tahlil" and also disseminated radical announcements in various mosques and among student groups. These bulletins contained interpretations and interpretations of Quranic verses that were far removed from the context of Indonesian social life.

According to Kusumah, Wahhabism tends to be provocative and controversial among Indonesia's diverse Muslim community. Currently, the Wahhabi-Salafi movement is quite popular in Indonesia, with *da'wah* popular among social media users, and the Wahabi-Salafi *da'wah* movement has also given rise to much activism among Muslims.



According to Ustadz Abdul Somad (UAS), there is essentially not much difference between the Wahhabis and the Salafis of today. While the Wahhabi group is named after its main figure, Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab, its followers and supporters are called Wahabis. Later, the name Wahabi was changed to Salafis. Not all Wahhabis are extreme; some are moderate and can be engaged in dialogue about heresy, superstition, and *kurafat*. Said Aqil Siroj believes that Wahhabis can foster terrorism and radicalism because their understanding easily leads others astray, misleads, and declares those who differ in their beliefs to be infidels.

Religious moderation in Islam is known as *wasathiyah*, which comes from the word *wasath*, meaning "middle" or "balance." This moderation encourages Muslims to be fair and avoid extremes in both religious beliefs and practices. Allah's Word in Surah al-Baqarah (2): 143 emphasizes that Muslims are a "middle nation" tasked with being role models for all humanity. This verse rejects the Jewish claim to be the chosen nation and emphasizes the superiority of Muslims in terms of moderation.

The urgency of this research is the urgent need to ease the tension of conflicting understandings so as not to give rise to radicalism and violence in the religious life of Muslims in Indonesia, especially in North Sumatra. This study aims to examine the similarities and differences in the understanding of the doctrine of faith and sharia between Salafi Wahabi and Aswaja Islamic scholars, seeking common ground so that these different doctrines can be brought closer through dialogue, intensive discussion, so that a moderate attitude emerges between the diversity of these religious groups. It is hoped that the similarities in goals (good intentions) despite differing scientific and logical perspectives can be tolerated so that tensions can be eased and understood.

## II. Review of Literature

The understanding of moderation in Islam has been discussed by several classical and contemporary scholars. Tafsir Ibn Kathir, al-Jawziyyah, and al-Maraghi provide in-depth explanations of verses related to medieval attitudes, such as the QS. al-Baqarah (2): 143 and QS. al-Furqan (25): 67, which mentions the importance of balance in giving. The hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad SAW also teach that "the best thing is the middle" (HR. al-Baihaqi), which is the main basis for the concept of moderation in Islam.

In Indonesia, the role of religious scholars is significant within society. Their understanding can lead to tolerant or radical, or even downright extreme, attitudes. Among the studies examining the role of religious scholars in society are:

1. Study Ahdi Makmur, in his research entitled "The Role of Ulama in Advancing Banjar Society in South Kalimantan," stated: "Ulama means a person who possesses knowledge." In the Malay world, words often used to refer to ulama include "Guru," "Tok Guru," or "Tuan Guru." The names or titles for ulama in the Islamic tradition in Indonesia also vary, such as: "Teungku" (Aceh), "Tuanku" or "Buya" (West Sumatra), "Ajengan" (West Java), "Kyai" (Central and East Java), and "Tuan Guru" (NTB). In South Kalimantan, they are officially known as Guru, Mualim (informally), and Tuan Guru, formally. However, this research does not discuss Salafi Wahabi and Terakat ulama, other than discussing their role in Banjar society in general. Likewise, its location is in South Kalimantan.

This research concludes that ulama play a traditional role, even though they live in the modern era. Regardless of their typology, ulama have united Banjar society. They play a significant role in fostering balance, harmony, and unity among the various

perspectives, interests, and groups within Banjar society. The research also found that demographic and sociocultural factors are not closely related to the role of ulama, except for religiosity.

2. Further research was conducted by M. Khoiril Anwar and Muhammad Afdillah entitled "The Role of Ulama in the Archipelago in Achieving Harmonization of Religious Communities." This research mentions the definition of ulama taken from Hsubky (1995:45). According to Hsubky, ulama are defined as servants of Allah who possess "khasyyatullah," namely true knowledge of Allah. They are considered the heirs of the prophets, enlightening the people through their knowledge and guidance. Ulama act as leaders or role models ("uswah hasanah") in cultivating piety and istiqomah, which are the foundation of worship. They demonstrate an attitude of truth and justice, without fear of criticism. Ulama are unshaken by lust, active in upholding goodness, and striving to prevent evil. Ulama function as unifiers of the people, persistently fighting for and elevating Islam. They fight in the path of Allah, continuing the struggle of the Prophet Muhammad to achieve the pleasure of Allah SWT. This research explain show Islam entered the archipelago, what is the role of the ulama in realizing harmony between religious communities and what is the scientific contribution of the role of the ulama for the future of Islam in the archipelago.
3. This study also concludes the importance of conducting dialectic between religious doctrine and culture, and non-violent local religious symbols, as demonstrated by Sunan Kudus in approaching his community through Hindu and Buddhist symbols. This is evident in the architecture of the Kudus Mosque; the shape of the tower, gate, and ablution fountain, which symbolize the eight Buddhist paths, are a manifestation of Sunan Kudus's compromise. Likewise, Sunan Kalijaga is exemplified as being very tolerant of local culture. He believed that people would distance themselves if their beliefs were attacked. Therefore, they must be approached gradually and followed while influencing them. This exemplifies the role of ulama in realizing harmony between religious communities, as seen in how the ulama of the past spread Islam without violence and respected one another. Therefore, the lesson to be learned is that ulama always embrace all levels of society, both those of the same religion and those of different religions, demonstrating a high level of religious moderation.
4. The next research was conducted by Padila entitled "The role of ulama in the development of Islam in Ogan Ilir". This research concludes that the successful role of ulama in increasing public interest in learning with the emergence of formal educational institutions is in addition to the importance of the spirit of reforming religious understanding which was pioneered by the mudo (reformist kiai), even though this thought had to face sharply with the movement of the tuo (conservative kiai).

### **III. Research Method**

This research will employ a descriptive qualitative methodology with a paradigm of religious moderation within both monotheism and sharia. In examining the doctrines of creed and sharia across research groups, this study also employs a thematic interpretation approach to explore the understanding of verses and hadith related to religious moderation within the realms of creed and sharia. The data were collected through the study and selection of journals, books and reviews related to the research objectives, as well as

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interviews with leaders, scholars and ustaz from the Salafi Wahabi and Aswaja sects and also strengthened by FGD (Focus Group Discussion).

This study focuses on how the concept of religious moderation can be applied to both faith and sharia, thus fostering tolerant attitudes and morals. Interpretations from Wahhabi, Salafi, and Aswaja scholars are compared to identify similarities and differences in interpretations of faith and sharia. Then, they examine common ground and shared goals, which hopefully will also foster moderate attitudes.

#### IV. Results and Discussion

##### **Differences in Moderation in the Understanding of Salafi Wahabi and the Aswaja Order of North Sumatra in Aqidah and Sharia**

The Wahhabi movement originated from the thought of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhâb, the founder of the Arabian Wahabi movement, which was heavily influenced by Ibn Taymiyyah and the Hanbali school of thought. Initially, this movement focused on purifying the faith, but it was not identical to Ibn Taymiyyah. This movement emerged as a response to the weaknesses of the Muslim community, including the worship of the graves of sheikhs. Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahab criticized the belief in the power of those considered sacred, criticized scholars who allowed such practices, and rejected blind imitation in religious matters. He encouraged Muslims to adhere as firmly as possible to the Quran and Sunnah, and to avoid traditional interpretations.

In 1924, the ruler of Hijaz, Ibn Saud, collaborated with Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahab, a Wahhabi leader. The two planned to establish Wahhabiism as the official state school of thought. This step included an extreme plan to destroy historical sites, including the tombs of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Muslims were required to disavow any sect and were asked to return to the Quran and Hadith as the primary sources of Islam. Those who disagreed were threatened and stigmatized as deviants from the pure teachings of Islam.

Fundamentally, Wahhabi teachings, which focus on the purification of *tawhid* (creed), are regarded by Harun Nasution as an effort to eliminate *bid'ah* (religious innovations), which are considered deviations. According to Nasution, Muslims must return to original Islam in order to free themselves from *bid'ah* practices. There are three principal ideas of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab that influenced nineteenth-century reformist thought: first, the Qur'an and Hadith are the sole authentic sources of Islamic teachings; second, *taqlid* (blind adherence) to human authorities, including scholars, is impermissible; and third, *ijtihad* remains continuously open.

The Wahhabi purification and reform movement is often perceived as rigid and uncompromising, which can trigger horizontal conflicts with other Muslim groups. This movement is frequently accused of being rebellious by groups that disagree with its views. Wahhabis regard *tasawwuf* (Sufism) as a doctrine that preserves superstition, promotes cultural stagnation, and deviates from true Islam. This view is considered erroneous by H.A.R. Gibb, who argues that Sufism is an integral part of Islamic tradition that continues to develop and remain vibrant. As long as spirituality is preserved, Islam will continue to grow while upholding moral and spiritual values; however, when spirituality weakens, Islam may experience decline, although it will not disappear entirely.

Tasawwuf constitutes the foundational understanding of Islam that has been embedded since the early arrival of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago. The form of Islam that developed throughout Nusantara from the era of the *Walisono* to contemporary *ulama* and *kiai* is characterized by friendliness, politeness, peacefulness, and tolerance. This

model of Islam is widely known as moderate Islam or *Islam wasathiyah* and has been continuously safeguarded by religious scholars. Along with the dynamics of the times, the socio-religious character of the Indonesian people initially gentle and peaceful has faced significant change. Moderate religious thought is therefore considered essential as a deradicalization strategy to curb the spread of radical ideologies in Indonesia. Prioritizing religious moderation serves as a crucial form of deradicalization against extreme religious doctrines and is vital for suppressing the growth of radicalism in Indonesia.

In North Sumatra, Salafi-Wahhabi understandings have also begun to develop. In certain areas, such as Binjai, clashes have occurred within communities. Salafi-Wahhabi teachings have started to spread in Medan City, Hamparan Perak, Amplas, Deli Serdang, and other regions. Meanwhile, the most widespread *tariqa* in North Sumatra is the Naqshbandiyyah Khalidiyyah, propagated by Shaykh Abdul Wahab Rokan. This order has expanded extensively throughout North Sumatra, originating from its center in Besilam Tanjung Pura and spreading to Kuala Simpang, Besitang, Pangkalan Brandan, Stabat, Binjai, Medan and its surroundings, Asahan, Simalungun, Labuhan Batu, and the Rokan region bordering Pekanbaru. The Naqshbandiyyah Khalidiyyah later diversified into branches known as Naqshbandiyyah Khalidiyyah Jalaliyah and Naqshbandiyyah Mujaddidiyyah Jabal Qubis. In contrast, followers of the Qadiriyyah and TQN (Qadiriyyah-Naqshbandiyyah Order) are relatively few.

This study examines the understanding of religious moderation in matters of *aqidah* and *sharia* between Salafi-Wahhabi groups in North Sumatra and Aswaja *tariqa* scholars. In *aqidah*, Islam emphasizes balance between deterministic views (*Jabariyyah*) and absolute free will (*Qadariyyah*), as stated in Qur'an Surah Ar-Ra'd (13): 11 and Surah Ash-Shaffat (37): 96. This moderation in creed serves to prevent extremism in belief.

Moderation in *sharia* is reflected in verses such as Surah Al-Furqan (25): 67, which emphasizes balance in spending neither excessive nor miserly. This principle is applied in daily life to create a balanced, moderate, and just society. Even in moral conduct (*akhlaq*), Islamic teachings prohibit excessiveness in all matters, as stated in the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): "Those who go to extremes are ruined" (Narrated by Muslim). This moderate attitude fosters a just and balanced personality.

The themes of religious moderation discussed in relation to *aqidah* and *sharia* include:

1. **Concepts of Aqidah**, encompassing:
  - a. The concept of *Ma'rifatullah* (knowing Allah)
  - b. The concept of Allah's hands, feet, face, and Essence
  - c. *Tashbih*, *ta'wil*, and interpretation of *mutashabihat* verses related to creed
2. **Sharia (Islamic Law)**, including:
  - a. *Taklifi* and *Wadh'i* rulings
  - b. The concepts of *Sunnah* and *Bid'ah* in creed and worship
  - c. Sources of legal rulings and legal evidences
  - d. Selected principles of worship-related legal maxims (including *usul* and *furu'*)

Our dialogues with Salafi-Wahhabi preachers (*ustaz*) in North Sumatra reveal views that largely align with those of Salafi-Wahhabi scholars in Indonesia and Mecca. In matters of *aqidah*, particularly in understanding Allah, Husnel Anwar asserts that comprehension of Allah and His attributes must be based solely on textual evidence (*nass*), as these pertain to creed and the unseen. Human reason, he argues, is limited to correlating one text with another and must ultimately submit to revelation. Therefore, when the texts mention that Allah is above the Throne (*al-'Arsh*) or in the heavens, believers should affirm this as stated, as in Surah Taha (20): 5: "The Most Merciful is above the Throne."

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According to this view, the phrase *istawa 'ala al-'Arsh* should be understood according to its apparent meaning without *ta'wil*, as practiced by the Mu'tazilah. Although the manner (*kayfiyyah*) of this *istiwa'* cannot be comprehended, its affirmation is linguistically and historically defensible, particularly based on the understanding of the Prophet and his Companions. Mujahid interpreted *istawa 'ala al-'Arsh* as Allah being exalted above the Throne, and similar views were held by scholars such as Al-Shan'ani, who considered it among Allah's *fi'liyyah* attributes without visualization.

Husnel further explains that Allah created the universe, which exists within dimensions, whereas the Throne is beyond the created universe. Consequently, Allah exists beyond created dimensions and does not unite with creation, nor does He dwell within His servants. For this reason, the concept of *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of existence) is rejected. This belief is reinforced by Surah Al-Mulk (67): 16, which asks whether people feel secure from the Lord who is above the heavens.

Regarding attributes such as hands, feet, and face, Husnel adopts the approach of *tafwidh*, affirming these attributes without imagining or likening them to created beings. He follows the methodology of early scholars (*salaf*) such as Sufyan al-Thawri, Imam Malik, Al-Awza'i, and Al-Layth ibn Sa'd, as transmitted by Al-Khallal. Al-Khallal narrates that these scholars stated: "Let them pass as they have come." This approach affirms the reality of divine attributes while negating knowledge of their modality.

Some scholars, such as Abdurrahman al-Maidani, cite Imam Abu Hanifah's opinion, recorded in *Al-Fiqh al-Akbar*, asserting disbelief for those who deny that Allah is above the heavens, based on Qur'anic affirmations of Allah's transcendence. According to al-Maidani, Salafis affirm Allah's Names and Attributes strictly according to textual evidence and refrain from speculation beyond what is explicitly stated.

Similarly, other Salafi teachers in Stabat and Binjai emphasize that although terms such as hands, feet, and face are used, Allah's attributes are unlike those of His creation and should be affirmed without speculation. They frequently reference contemporary Saudi scholars such as Shaykh Salih al-Fawzan, Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymin, Shaykh 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Baz, and Nasir al-Din al-Albani.

In contrast, Aswaja *tariqa* scholars tend to interpret *istawa 'ala al-'Arsh* as an expression of Allah's majesty rather than a physical location. This view aligns with that of Imam 'Ali, who stated that Allah created the Throne not as a dwelling place but as a manifestation of His greatness. Shaykh Misno further offers interpretive explanations, suggesting that Allah metaphorically "reigns" within the believer by creating, controlling, and governing human existence.

Attributes such as hands, feet, and face are interpreted symbolically as Allah's power and control over believers, analogous to an owner's control over livestock—without implying physical resemblance. Shaykh Muhaimin similarly explains Allah through His Names, actions, and attributes, emphasizing spiritual annihilation (*fana'*) wherein divine will dominates human agency, referencing Surah Al-Anfal (8): 17.

The practice of *ta'wil* regarding *mutashabihat* verses has historical precedent among major Companions such as Ibn 'Abbas and Mujahid, as well as later scholars. For example, Ibn 'Abbas interpreted "the Hand of Allah is above their hands" (QS. Al-Fath: 10) as Allah's favor surpassing all others, and "seeking the Face of Allah" as seeking His pleasure. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani interpreted Allah's descent to the lowest heaven as the descent of angels of mercy.

Based on textual analysis and interviews with Salafi-Wahhabi scholars and Aswaja *tariqa* leaders, this study identifies significant differences in understanding and attitudes between the two groups, which are summarized in the following table:

**Table 1.** Salafi-Wahhabi and Indonesian Sufi Scholars' Perspectives on Religious Moderation in Aqidah and Sharia

No	Unit of Analysis	Tariqa Sufi Scholars	Salafi-Wahhabi Scholars
1	Basis of Understanding	Cultural–religious and traditional in nature, inheriting classical Islamic understandings, emphasizing normative aspects, and accepting established schools of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh). In interpreting the Qur'an and Sunnah, reference to the interpretations of qualified ulama is essential, as not all Muslims possess the capacity to perform ijihad.	Emphasis on the purification of tawhid and creed ('aqidah); scholarly opinions are not considered primary sources of Islamic law; the gate of ijihad remains perpetually open. A return to the Qur'an and Sunnah is regarded as the original sources of Islamic doctrine; this approach tends to be non-madhab-oriented, rejects blind taqlid, and opposes practices associated with superstition, religious innovations (bid'ah), and myths (khurafat).
2	Understanding Aspect	Able to distinguish and accommodate diverse viewpoints amid Indonesia's socio-cultural diversity. Interpretation is entrusted to qualified ulama who possess expertise in their respective fields.	Tariqa practices are considered to potentially undermine the purity of Islam. Muslims who visit the graves of saints (wali) or tariqa shaykhs and believe in supernatural powers are often regarded as committing shirk. Those who seek assistance from entities other than Allah such as shaykhs, saints, or other unseen forces are likewise considered polytheistic. This perspective strongly opposes animistic beliefs that compromise tawhid, such as the veneration of trees or objects. In addition, blind taqlid of religious scholars is rejected; instead, a return to the original textual evidence of the Qur'an and Sunnah is advocated, with minimal reliance on

			<p>traditional interpretations. Interpretive approaches generally emphasize a literal and textual reading, prioritizing the apparent (zahir) meaning of the texts.</p>
3	Implementation Dimension	<p>The practice of aqidah, sharī'ah, and tasawwuf reflects a wasatiyyah (moderate) attitude</p>	<p>The characteristics tend to be strict and somewhat rigid. Although some adherents display moderate attitudes, others tend toward takfīrī orientations (readily declaring others unbelievers) and exhibit low levels of tolerance.</p>
4	Understanding of Moderation Verses and Hadiths in Aqidah and Sharia	<p>The wasath (moderate) Muslim community does not adopt excessive or extreme attitudes toward the Prophet. In matters of aqidah, they tend to possess a deeper, more detailed, and nuanced understanding of Allah. Generally, they permit practices such as tawassul and rabithah, encourage grave visitation especially to the tombs of righteous individuals avoid hastily declaring fellow Muslims unbelievers, adhere predominantly to Ash'ari-Maturidi theology, and often follow pious scholars believed to possess spiritual virtues (karamah).</p> <p>In general, they do not equate the Prophets with God, do not attribute divine qualities to them, do not place them on an equal footing with divinity, nor worship them or regard them as independent healers of</p>	<p>The best approach is the middle path, considering that the realities of human life inevitably involve differences. For this reason, al-Wasathiyah al-Islamiyyah values positive elements of both the Rabbani (divine) and Insani (human) dimensions. It integrates material and spiritual needs, harmonizes revelation with reason, and balances communal interests (al-'ammah / al-jama'iyyah) with individual welfare (al-fardiyyah).</p> <p>In matters of aqidah, Salafi groups tend to understand Allah in a textual manner, prohibiting or avoiding ta'wil of mutashabihat verses and affirming the meanings as they appear, or consigning their true meanings solely to Allah.</p>

illness. Instead, Muslims honor the Prophets, follow the shari'ah they conveyed, and support the religious missions they brought. Religious moderation is also reflected in their balanced approach to issues of ritual purity, impurity, halal-haram regulations, and moral conduct.

In the domain of shari'ah and legal practice, tariqa scholars generally apply the five categories of taklifi rulings, adhere to one of the four established schools of fiqh, employ usul al-fiqh principles in a detailed manner, and distinguish between usul and furu' in acts of worship. They do not classify sunnah and bid'ah as legal rulings in themselves, maintain openness to renewed ijtihad, while simultaneously preserving constructive and authoritative madhhab traditions

Generally, they prohibit tawassul and rabithah, considering them forms of shirk because they involve human intermediaries between believers and Allah. They also tend to discourage grave visitation, particularly to the graves of righteous individuals, as it is viewed as potentially leading to shirk.

In general, they also disapprove of forms of shalawat not explicitly found in the Prophet's hadith, considering them excessive and potentially equating the Prophet with Allah, despite professing deep love for the Prophet by strictly adhering to his outward (zahir) practical Sunnah.

In the field of shari'ah, Salafi-Wahhabi Islamic legal reasoning tends to judge religious practices primarily through the binary categories of sunnah or bid'ah, rather than returning them to the five categories of taklifi rulings. They tend to be non-madhhab-oriented or independent of established schools, although some claim affiliation with the Hanbali school. While they employ certain principles of usul al-fiqh, they also disregard or reject others. The gate of ijtihad is regarded as

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widely open, leading followers to directly interpret Qur'anic verses and hadiths textually, sometimes overlooking the interpretations of qualified scholars. Legal arguments are often based solely on Qur'anic verses and authenticated Sunnah as understood through selected Companions or salaf, with limited attention to the detailed principles of *usul* and *furu'* of worship as developed within the Aswaja tradition.

## V. Conclusion

The concept of religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) constitutes a fundamental characteristic of Islam, emphasizing balance between worldly and hereafter-oriented concerns, between outward (*zahir*) and inward (*batin*) dimensions, between strictness and ease, between miserliness and extravagance, and between excessive rigidity and undue leniency. Such moderation prevents Muslims from falling into extreme attitudes in matters of *aqidah*, *shari'ah*, and moral conduct (*akhlaq*). Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions underscore the importance of this middle path, which serves as a defining feature of the Muslim community. The implementation of moderation in religious life not only fosters personal balance but also contributes to social and political harmony, positioning Muslims as a moral exemplar for humanity at large.

However, in interpreting verses related to *aqidah*, Salafi-Wahhabi groups in North Sumatra similar to those in other regions tend to adopt a strict and textual approach. Based on the belief that matters of creed and the unseen nature of Allah must rely solely on textual evidence (*nass*), reason is employed only to compile and correlate one text with another and cannot function independently. When Allah describes Himself as possessing attributes such as Face, Hands, Feet, or descending to the lowest heaven, these descriptions are understood as they appear, without imagining their modality or likening them to created beings. *Ta'wil* (the metaphorical reinterpretation of literal meanings) is consistently avoided, as it is considered a potential source of error and deviation.

In matters of *shari'ah*, Salafi-Wahhabi groups likewise tend to evaluate religious practices through the lens of *bid'ah*, rigorously avoiding any additions to acts of purely ritual worship (*'ibadah mahdah*), even within subsidiary matters (*furu'*), and confining themselves strictly to practices explicitly established in Prophetic hadith.

In contrast, *tariqa* scholars of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* in North Sumatra employ *ta'wil* in interpreting *mutashabihat* verses to prevent misunderstanding among Muslims, based on the theological conviction that Allah is unlike His creation and does not possess a physical form (*jism*) such as hands, feet, or face.

Similarly, in the field of shari‘ah, tariqa scholars in North Sumatra consistently adhere to the Aswaja tradition, particularly the Shafi‘i school of jurisprudence, while maintaining a flexible and non-rigid approach. Subsidiary devotional practices (furu‘ al-‘ibadat) transmitted through chains of spiritual instruction, even when not explicitly supported by hadith, as well as practices inspired by spiritual insight (ilham), continue to be observed. Consequently, in practical implementation, tariqa scholars in North Sumatra demonstrate a more wasathiyyah (moderate) orientation in both aqidah and shari‘ah. By contrast, Salafi-Wahhabi scholars and preachers tend to exhibit a more rigid and strict stance, with some displaying lower levels of tolerance.

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