

The Concept of *Wasatiyyah* in The Views of al-Zamakhshari and Fakh al-Dīn al-Rāzī

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ABSTRACT: *Bombings in the name of Islam, such as in Turkey, Indonesia, and French have damaged to the integrity of Islam. These acts of extremism are ubiquitous and lead to Islamophobia especially in western countries. While in fact, Islam has taught and promoted the concept of moderation (wasatiyyah) since its emergence in order to avoid extremism among humankind. One of the main underpinning verses in the Qur'an that talks about the concept of wasatiyyah is Surah Al-Baqarah, Verse 143. This paper explores two different views of theological schools, namely Al-Zamakhshari, who represents the Mu'tazilites and Fakh al-Dīn al-Rāzī, who represents the Ash'arites in dealing with the verse and its interpretations. In its analysis, the paper applied a theological approach to analyse the primary materials. It is expected that the findings will help in the implementation of the concept of moderation (Wasatiyyah) in the contemporary era. Finally, it will also serve as a guide on the ideal way of practicing Islam in order to eliminate and reduce extremism and foster peaceful co-existence between Muslims and adherents of other religions in the world.*

Pemboman atas nama Islam, seperti di Turki, Indonesia, dan Prancis telah merusak integritas Islam. Tindakan ekstremisme ini ada di mana-mana dan mengarah ke Islamofobia terutama di negara-negara barat. Padahal sebenarnya, Islam telah mengajarkan dan mempromosikan konsep moderasi (*wasatiyyah*) sejak kemunculannya untuk menghindari ekstremisme

di antara umat manusia. Salah satu ayat utama yang mendasari dalam Al-Qur'an yang berbicara tentang konsep wasatiyyah adalah Surah Al-Baqarah, Ayat 143. Naskah ini mengeksplorasi dua pandangan yang berbeda dari sekolah-sekolah teologis, yaitu Al-Zamakhshari, yang mewakili Mu'tazilah dan Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, yang mewakili kaum Ash'ari dalam kaitannya dengan ayat dan interpretasinya. Dalam analisisnya, naskah ini menerapkan pendekatan teologis untuk menganalisis bahan-bahan primer. Diharapkan temuan ini akan membantu dalam penerapan konsep moderasi (*wasatiyyah*) di era kontemporer. Akhirnya, itu juga akan berfungsi sebagai panduan tentang cara ideal mempraktikkan Islam untuk menghilangkan dan mengurangi ekstrimisme dan menumbuhkan ko-eksistensi damai antara Muslim dan penganut agama lain di dunia.

Keywords: *Wasatiyyah, moderation, extremism, al-zamakhshari, al-razi.*

INTRODUCTION

Recently, extremism in Islam has become a serious problem for people around the world. The bombings such as in Turkey, Indonesia, and the French have generated a lot of damages to the integrity of Islam. More specifically, extremism has increasingly created Islamophobia in western countries. While in fact, the concept of moderation (*wasatiyyah*) has been taught since the early emergence of Islam (Ikhwan, Ju'subaidi, Rohmad, & Muawanah, 2019).

Al-Quran is the word of God that is revealed to the last prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) through the Angel Gabriel as the miracle for him within the period of 23 years. For that reason, it is essential for every Muslim needs to comprehend the meaning of the Qur'an (Rahman et al. 2017). To understand the meaning of Qur'an, there are a lot of methods and approaches offered by Islamic scholars since the classical time to the current era. Moreover, many companions of Prophet Muhammad had put a lot of effort into interpreting the Qur'an in order to give meaningful understanding for Muslims, and it was done since the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Furthermore, these works were then continued by the later Islamic scholars at different times so that Muslims knew

about the types of methodology of the exegesis such as *Tafsir bi al-Ra'yi* and *Tafsir bi al-Ma'thur*. There are different types of interpretations of the Qur'an written by Islamic scholars, which were theological, traditionalist, juridical, and literary philosophical (Rahman et al. 2017) (Zahra, 2019). In this regard, the papers will discuss and compare each of them regarding the interpretation of the concept of *Wasatiyyah* mentioned in the Qur'an.

In regard to the concept of moderation (*wasatiyyah*), Islam is a religion of mercy to all (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*). It teaches harmony in all aspects of human life. Islam promotes a middle path for its followers, known as the concept of *Wasatiyyah*. There is a great amount of research on the conception of *Wasatiyyah* from classical Muslim scholars to contemporary Muslim intellectuals in the 21st century, such as Al-Qaradawi (Qaradawi, 2010), Hassan (Hassan, 2011), Kamali (Kamali, 2010) and many others. In general, all Muslim scholars agreed that the concept of *Wasatiyyah* had been mentioned in the Qur'an to describe the nature of Muslims to be a just community. Allah The Al-Mighty mentions in Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 143:

“And thus we have made you a just community that you will be witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you. And we did not make the qiblah which you used to face except that we might make evident who would follow the Messenger from who would turn back on his heels. And indeed, it is difficult except for those whom Allah has guided. And never would Allah have caused you to lose your faith. Indeed, Allah is, to the people, Kind and Merciful.”

The above verse is a special and powerful message for all Muslims that their primary responsibility is to promote moderation, tolerance, justice, and peaceful co-existence among all people in the world regardless of different racial, socio-cultural and religious backgrounds. Based on this verse, the key term that becomes the reference for all scholars to describe the conception of *Wasatiyyah* is the Qur'anic expression *Ummatan Wasatan* (Q.S. 2: 143). In his book *Wasatiyyah Approach: The Definition, Conception, and Application*, defined the term *Wasatiyyah* as just, the best, selective, moderate, and balanced (Abdullah Md Zin, 2013). However, in this case, we are going to look at the Quranic exegesis of *Ummatan Wasatan* by two prominent scholars who are al-Zamakhshari and al-Razi from their monumental books.

This paper will explore two different views of theological schools, namely Al-Zamakhshari, who represents the Mu'tazilites and

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, who represents the Ash'arites on their interpretations of the concept of *wasatiyyah* and its implementation in the modern era. In doing so, the content analysis approach is applied to analyze the primary materials related to the concept of moderation in order to compare their interpretations with the contemporary understanding of the subject. It is hoped that the discussion will generate an insight into how the classical scholarship viewed the concept of *Wasatiyah* and how this may be applicable in the contemporary period. For the systematization, this paper is organized into several sub-sections, including introduction, a brief biography of Al-Zamakhshari, and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, their major works and methodologies, their schools and theologies, and their interpretation of *Wasatiyyah* from the Qur'an. Finally, the paper is ended with a conclusion of the discussed topic.

METHODS

This type of research is library research, namely research that seeks to obtain data using library sources. The data that is the centre of this study are collected through variable data which are based on the writings, thoughts, and opinions of the figures and experts who talk about the central theme of this study, namely about the concept of *wasatiyyah* according to the views of al-Zamakhshari and Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī. This research is categorized in research in the field of thought, where this research is heuristic. Heuristics, in philosophy, is the actualization of his dreams always. Thought must try again to present the fundamental problems. The study of thought must reject mechanistic thinking and rebuild the flow of dynamic and creative ideas (Anton Bakker and Achmad Charris Zubair, 1990).

BIOGRAPHY OF AL-ZAMAKHSHARI AND FAKHR AL-DĪN AL-RĀZĪ

The full name of the first Islamic scholar is Abu al-Qasim Maḥmūd bin Umar al-Khawarizmi al-Zamakhshari. He was born on 467 H, which coincides with the year 1075 AD in a small village named Zamakhsyar, which was located in the Khawarizmi region (Ayazi, 2009). Al-Zamakhshari began to study in his own country. Then he traveled to Bukhara, where he studied literature to Mansur Abi Mudhar. Moreover, Al-Zamakhshari also studied literature, linguistics, kalam, and the science of monotheism with Maḥmūd bin Jarīr al-Dabbi al-Asfahāni. He was one of the scholars who spread the Mu'tazilism in the area of Khawarizmi, and he was the one who greatly influenced al-Zamakhshari with the Mu'tazilism. In the field of fiqh,

al-Zamkhshari studied with Abu 'Ali al-Darīr and Sadīd al-Khayāi as well as studied the science of interpretation with al-Hakīm al-Jasymi (Ayazi, 2009). Afterward, he went back to Mecca and settled long enough to get the nickname of Jar Allah (the Neighbor of God). Since then, he started writing his commentary entitled, "Al-Kasysyaf an-Haqa'iq Ghawamidh Al-Tanzil wa Uyun Aqawil fi Wujuh Al-tanzil." He passed away in 538 H in Jurjaniah, Khawarizm, after he returned back from Mecca (Al-Qaththan, 2015).

During his life, Al-Zamakhshari was considered as a prolific Islamic Scholar who generated many contributions and publications, which gave many benefits for Muslims in particular. Muqaddimah al-Adab, Al-Jibāl wa al-Amkinah, Al-Fāiq fi Garīb al-Ḥadīṣ, Syaqa'iq al-Nu'man fi Ḥaqā'iq al-Nu'man (Manakib Imām Abū Ḥanīfah), Al-Risālah al-Naṣīḥah, Tasliyah al-Ḍarīr, Syarh Kitāb Sibawaih, Al-Mufaṣṣal, Kitāb al-Asmā' fi al-Lughah, Nakt al-I'rāb fi Garīb al-I'rāb, Al-Amali fi al-Naḥwi, Sarair al Amsal, Safi al Iy min Kalām al-Syafi'iy, Diwan Rasāil, Rabī'u al-Abrā, Aṭwaq al-Ḍahab, Al-Kasf fi al-Qira'at, and Risālah fi al-Majaz wa al-Isti'arah. The most influential of his book was "al-Kasysyaf 'an Ḥaqa'iq al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūni al-Aqāwīl fi Wujūhi al-Ta'wīl" (Ayazi, 2009).

Almost similarly, Imam Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī was considered as one of the prominent scholars in the Muslim world. He was born in the city of Rayy in 544/ 1149. His full name is Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Umar bin Hussain bin Hassan bin Ali, al-Tamimi, al-Bakri, al-Tabristani, al-Razi, Fakhr al-Dīn. He was also known as ibn al-Khatib, al-Shafī'i, the Imam of ilmal-Kalām, a major jurist of the Shafī'i school, commentator of the Holy Quran, a great philosopher, mathematician, astronomer, and physician (Al-Dhahabi, 2012). Moreover, Al-Subki stated that he was the Imam of the whole world of his time (Al-Subki, 1964). Furthermore, Imam al-Razi studied Islamic studies, which include the Qur'an and his exegesis from his father directly who namely Dia al-Din, who was a great scholar and known by his followers in the City of Rayy at that time. At the later time, he learned theology with Kamal al-Din Simmani and philosophy with Muhammad al-Baghawi in the city of Maraghah and Rayy. Afterward, he also mastered various other knowledge which covers medical, natural sciences, and mathematics.

During his life, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī has produced several monumental works. The most important books are Al-Bayan wa al-Burhan fi al-Radd ala Ahl al-Zaygh wa al-Tughyan, Al-Mahsul fi 'Ilm al-Usool, Nihayat al 'Uqool fi Dirayat al-Usool, Risala al-Huduth, Sharh al-Isharat Ibn Sina, Sharh Asma' Allah al-Husna, Sharh al-Wajiz

fil Fiqh lil-Ghazali, Mafatih al-Ghayb, which is famous as Tafsir al-Kabir, Al-Matalib al-Aliya, and Tafsir Surah al-Fatiha. It is the first volume of Tafsir al-Kabir (Ibn Kathir, 2010). Additionally, according to Mahmud Basyuni Fudah, the most influential of his books was Tafsir Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb which was called as the big commentary (Tafsir al-Kabir) (Mahmud Basyuni Fudah, 1986). The book contained the Quranic commentary by using two approaches which include Tafsir bi al-Ra'yi (logic) and Tafsir bi al-Ma'thur (narrative) and it would be discussed in this paper. Additionally, Tafsir Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb included the discussion on philosophical, traditionalist, theological and exegesis of the Qur'an verses. It also could be deemed as an encyclopedia book.

THE MU'TAZILITE VS. ASH'ARITE THEOLOGICAL THOUGHTS

The Mu'tazilite is an Islamic rationalist theology which was known as kalam that became the most important doctrinal school in Islam. They recognized the supremacy of free will and human reason, then promoted ontology, psychology, and epistemology to form the basis for their speculation in the nature of God, man, the universe, and religious phenomena like law and the divine revelation. They kept holding on a doctrine that evil and good might be comprehended through the human intellect (Ikhwan, 2018) (Munjin, 2017).

The history of Mu'tazilism went back to the eighth century CE. The key figures of the school who were Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī and his son Abū Hāshim. Bahshamiyya was his student who later developed an essential branch. Bahshamiyya has many adherents which were Abū Hāshim's student, Abū 'Alī b. Khallād and Abū 'Abdallāh al-Basrī (Modarressi, 1993). Moreover, Abū Husayn al-Basrī passed away in 1044, and he was considered as one of the last famous scholars of Mu'tazilite thought. Later on, the development has started its decline in Sunni Islam, at the end, disappearing in the fourteenth century. However, its impact still existed in Islam throughout the Middle Ages, modern era, as well as happened until today (Amir Moezzi, 1992)

On the other hand, the founder of Ash'arite theological thought is Abū Hasan al-Ash'arī and he is previously studied with the Mu'tazilite Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī. He left his Mu'tazilite teaching in order to build his theological school. He tried to combine two theological-doctrinal system between Hanbali traditionalism and Mu'tazilism. The Ash'arites have implemented their rational argument in the doctrines as well as the revealed scriptures, but they preferred the supremacy of revelation over the reason in their methodology. Basically, they have followed the methods and concepts which were developed by previous

Islamic scholars such as what Ibn Kullab did regarding the combination of rational approach between Sunni traditionalist and the Mu'tazilites in their doctrinal positions (Perler & Rudolph, 2000).

After the death of Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013), he was the prominent Maliki jurist and theologian. The Ash'arism became one of the influential theological schools in the Islamic world in the 20 Century. Ash'arism got its main climax at the first Seljuk under the regime of Nizam al-Muluk (d. 1099) and it was considered and applied as the important doctrine at the Nizamiya universities. They were many famous Ash'arite theologians at that time such as famous Imām al-Haramayn Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 1085) and Abū Bakr Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Fūrakī (Madelung, 2006).

Furthermore, Al-Juwayni was the first person who to introduce philosophical methods and conception into Ash'arite kalām. In the time of al-Juwayni, the old phase of Ash'arism has finished. The later phase was shaped by the permeation of Ash'arite methods and theological thought that emphasize on logic as well as logic. This second phase was developed by Imam al-Ghazālī, who passed away in 1111 and al-Shahrastānī the one, who writes his works. In the eastern regions of Islam, Ash'arism became one of the most influential schools of thought until the end of the sixteenth century. In Sunni Islam, it generated more excellent development. It kept much longer rather than Mu'tazilism, even if, like its counterpart, it continuously encountered anti-rationalist resistance from the traditionalist sphere (Badeen, 2008); (Jauhari, 2017).

THE VIEWS OF AL-ZAMAKHSHARI AND AL-RAZION WASATIYAH

Allah SWT mentions in the Qur'an, surah a-Baqarah, verse 143:

“And thus we have made you a just community that you will be witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you. And we did not make the qiblah which you used to face except that we might make evident who would follow the Messenger from who would turn back on his heels. And indeed, it is difficult except for those whom Allah has guided. And never would Allah have caused you to lose your faith. Indeed, Allah is, to the people, Kind and Merciful”

In the Al-Kasshāf written by al-Zamakhshari, he initially began his interpretation with some specific points to explain, such as the name of the surah. Then, he classified it into Mecca and Medina,

explained their meaning, and mentioned other names if there is a history and he showed it specifically. Besides, typically, he talked about the types of Quranic recitation and linguistic aspects, starting from the science of grammar, the root of word and others. Afterward, he provided an explanation and an interpretation, and lastly, he reviewed some of the opinions of the Islamic scholars with pieces of evidences. Sometimes, he rejected the opinion that disagreed with his position (Ayazi, 2009).

In this case, (al-Zamakshari, 2009) interpreted the word “أمة وسطا” in surah *al-Baqarah* 143 with “the preferred *Ummah*” and he further mentioned that the word “وسطا” has two meanings which are first, it means a preference, a character of name, which is the middle of things. Therefore, the singular and plural, the masculine and the feminine, are equal (Saputro, 2016). Thereafter, he gives an example of using that word from the story of Arabian people in the past when they ask pilgrims to provide the most beautiful money to them when they rent a camel. Secondly, the meaning of *وسطا* is just. This because the middle path which is not bias between the parties that does not incline one to another (Suriadi Samsuri, Mursidin, 2018).

Whereas, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, 1981) started focusing on specific points such as an explanation of correlation among surah, the science of the Sufism, philosophy, his view against the Mu'tazilite as well as he discussed more of the Islamic jurisprudence from different schools of thought with their pieces evidences and linguistic. In relation to the Quranic exegesis on the word “أمة وسطا” in the surah *al-Baqarah* that aforementioned, he divided the interpretation of the verse into seven major points. In this paper, the discussion is focusing only on the three major points that are related to the concept of *Wasatiyah* (Ikhwan, 2015). The first, he elucidated about the grammatical and language like the usage of *وكذلك* in the several sentences for the similarities.

The second, he interpreted the meaning of *وسطا* into four meanings which are first, a justice, second the best, third preference and fourth balance or moderation in religion. Then he explains them one by one with an example in the sentence. Furthermore, He substantiated his explanation by using many sources that include Quranic scripture, Islamic tradition (Ikhwan, Oktio Frenki, & Rohmad, 2019), poetry, and also the rational argument against the Mu'tazilites opinion. For an example, the word of justice was mentioned in the Qur'an *قال أوسطهم* which means justice among them, in the hadith *خير الأمور أوسطها* that means justice among them as well.

Moreover, he explained about meaning of **وسطا** is the best by giving the evidence from the Qur'an too such as Allah says **كنتم خير أمة** **أخرجت للناس** which refers to the best *Ummah*, then he says that the Quranic exegetes have preferred and have chosen this meaning rather than justice. After that, he shows the meaning of **وسطا** is preference such as saying that **فلان أوسطنا نسبا** that is the preferred descent among people. Lastly, he said that the meaning of **وسطا** is moderation or balance in the religion, a situation between two extremism not to be **الغلو التفريط و التقصير** like what happened in the Christianity when they believed in the concept of trinity and in the Judaism once they killed their prophets and they modified their holy books (Sidiq, 2019).

The third, he defended his position against the Mu'tazilite doctrine by raising an argument about the nature of God its attributes. It is about the action of Allah, the Mu'tazilites give the metaphorical meaning to verse **جعلناكم** with apparent actions of Allah. According to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, the word **جعلناكم** shows that actions are determined by Allah as mentioned in the previous verse with the word **يهدي من يشاء إلى صراط مستقيم**. However, the Mu'tazilites interpret Allah's action to mean his kindness. Instead, they give precedence to human action because of their doctrine of justice.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussions of Al-Zamakhshari and Al-Razi above, it can be concluded that there are similarities from both scholars regarding the meaning of the "أمة وسطا" in the verse 143 of surah al-Baqarah, namely the preference and justice. However, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī provides more meaning to its conception compared to Al-Zamakhshari. On the other hand, the difference between Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī gives us more detail and more specific in his explanation, while Al-Zamakhshari is very brief and simple in the elucidation of the concept of wasatiyyah. From the discussion, it is clear that there is a debate between Mu'tazilites and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in relation to the nature of God and its attribute, in this sense is the action of Allah in the world **جعلناكم**.

Furthermore, related the topic of this paper about the concept of Wasatiyyah, whether it can be applied in this modern era to eliminate the extremism that happened in some parts of the world. According to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's interpretation (1981) on the word **وسطا** which means moderation or balance in the religion in his statement **أنهم متوسطون في الدين بين المفرط والمفرط والغالي والمقصر في الأثناء** **لأنهم لم يغلوا كما غلت النصارى فجعلوا ابنا وإلها ولا قصرُوا كتقصير اليهود في قتل الأنبياء وتبديل الكتب وغير ذلك مما قصرُوا فيه**, it's a fundamental element of

exegesis from him regarding the concept of Wasatiyah and surely it is still relevant and can be implemented at the modern time in order to create the religious co-existence and harmony among people from different backgrounds, nationalities, cultures, races and religions, as well as the actions of extremism that occurred in some parts of the world can be reduced with this concept. Interestingly, this conception has been explained and interpreted since a long time ago by Islamic scholars in their book.

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