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THE CONCEPT OF AL-WASATIYYAH AND THE CHALLENGE OF ISLAM LIBERAL IN INDONESIA



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The justly balanced worldview of Islam has wide implications for contemporary Muslim society encompassing the Muslims' religiosity, spirituality, intellectuality, outlook, attitudes, behaviour, relationships and activism. Each one of the twenty positions spelled out by al-Qaradhawi also serves as general principles and guidelines towards achieving the goals of Islamic moderation, and avoid the tendency of Muslim societies to be caught between the two poles of immoderation (*ifraat*) and negligence (*tafreet*).

The justly balanced (al-wasatiyyah) worldview of Islam has the following implications:

- 1) Facilitation (*al-taisir*) in the giving of formal legal opinion (*al-fatwa*), and emphasizing glad tidings (*al-tabshir*) in Islamic propagation (*al-da'wah*) efforts.
- 2) Combining the principles of the Pious Ancestors (*al-salafiyyah*) and the requirements for renewal (*al-tajdid*), or combining authenticity (*al-asalah*) with contemporary requirements (*al-mu'asarah*).
- 3) Balancing between the permanent principles (*al-thawabit*) of Islamic law and the changing conditions (*mutaghayyirat*) of the time.
- 4) The coupling (*al-muzawajah*) of religious duty (*al-wajib*) with the social reality (*al-waqi'*) (or understanding of the social reality).
- 5) Engaging in dialogue (*al-hiwar*) and coexistence (*al-ta'ayush*) with other people, and practicing tolerance (*al-tasamuh*) with those who differ.
- 6) Adopting the principles of consultation (*al-shura*), justice (*al-'adalah*), freedom of peoples (*hurriyat al-shu'ub*) and human rights (*huquq al-insan*).
- 7) Being just (*insaf*) to women, liberating them from the oppression of customs inherited from eras of backwardness, and from the oppression of foreign customs coming from the civilization of disintegration.
- 8) Presenting Islam as a balanced, integrated civilizational mission (*risalah hadariyyah*), for the revival, liberation and unification of the *ummah*. (2001: 146-147)

My research indicates that the rise of "Islam Liberal" movement in Indonesia is a serious internal challenge to the true meaning of Wasatiyyah. A comparison with a Singaporean Muslim stand will show the deviationist tendency of the "Islam Liberal Network".

My research also shows that both the "Neo-Liberalist" and the "Ultra-Liberalist" schools of thought within the Muslim community represent obstacles and challenges for the Muslims who travel along the path of *al-sirat al-mustaqim* (the straight path) as dictated by the rightly balanced approach which rejects both extremism as well as liberalism.

This approach observes the Qur'anic injunction "not to transgress the balance, and to establish the balance justly and not to lessen the balance" (Q. *Al-Rahman* 55: 8). This approach demands that the particular texts be understood in the context of the general objectives without committing the errors of the "Neo-Liberalists" and the "Ultra-Liberalists".

The Liberal movement is bound to grow, in spite of the 'Ulama' Council ruling, as it enjoys the sympathy and support from several secularist and non-Muslim non-governmental organisations in Indonesia and overseas. The LibForAll Foundation, for example, with Abdurrahman Wahid ("Gus Dur") as a co-founder and some Indonesian supporters of the neo-liberalism movement as its Advisors, has embarked on several programmes in Indonesia to promote "a pluralistic and tolerant understanding of Islam." (<http://www.libforall.org/programs-achievements>, p.13. Accessed on 18th of June, 2008). The programmes have also "validated a progressive interpretation of Islam to tens of millions of Indonesian Muslims." (<http://www.libforall.org/programs-achievements>, p.13. Accessed on 18th of June, 2008)

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