

Interpreting Qur'ānic Verses on Religious Moderation in Friday Sermons: An Oral Exegesis Study at At-Taḳwa Grand Mosque, Bulakamba, Brebes



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Abstract: This article examines how Qur'ānic verses concerning religious moderation are interpreted in six Friday sermons delivered at At-Taḳwa Grand Mosque in Bulakamba, Brebes. Existing scholarship on religious moderation has largely focused on public policy, religious communication, and social harmony, while paying less attention to the interpretive process through which sermons function as oral exegesis. This qualitative study combines the Living Qur'ān approach, oral exegesis, and contextual interpretation. Its primary data comprise six sermon texts addressing tolerance, national commitment, radicalism, civility, tabayyun (verification), and local culture; observation and interviews are used to clarify the contexts in which the sermons were produced and received. The analysis identifies the cited verses, reconstructs the meanings assigned to them in the sermons, compares these readings with classical and contemporary Qur'ānic commentaries, and evaluates their patterns of contextualization. The findings reveal three principal patterns. First, Qur'ān 2:143 and 5:8 are interpreted in a moral-contextual manner to construct a balanced, just, and nonviolent Muslim identity. Second, Qur'ān 2:256, 49:13, and 49:6 are actualized as foundations for tolerance, recognition of diversity, and the ethics of information verification. Third, the simplification of radicalism, liberalism, Arab culture, and the status of non-Muslims demonstrates the pedagogical and selective limits of oral exegesis. The article argues that Friday sermons constitute an effective arena of public exegesis, but their authority must be accompanied by contextual precision, openness to interpretive plurality, and a clear distinction between the Qur'ānic message and contemporary social agendas.

Keywords: oral exegesis; Friday sermons; religious moderation; Living Qur'ān; contextualization; Bulakamba

Abstrak: Artikel ini menganalisis cara ayat-ayat al-Qur'ān tentang moderasi beragama ditafsirkan dalam enam teks khutbah Jumat di Masjid Besar At-Taḳwa Bulakamba, Brebes. Kajian tentang moderasi beragama selama ini lebih banyak menyoroti kebijakan, komunikasi dakwah, dan harmoni sosial, sedangkan proses penafsiran ayat dalam khutbah sebagai bentuk tafsīr lisan belum banyak diperhatikan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan kerangka living Qur'ān, tafsīr lisan, dan pembacaan kontekstual. Data primer berupa enam teks khutbah bertema toleransi, kebangsaan, radikalisme, kesantunan, tabayyun, dan budaya lokal; observasi serta wawancara digunakan untuk menjelaskan konteks produksi dan penerimaan khutbah. Analisis dilakukan dengan mengidentifikasi ayat yang dikutip, merekonstruksi maknanya dalam khutbah, membandingkannya dengan tafsīr klasik dan kontemporer, lalu menilai pola kontekstualisasinya. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan tiga pola utama. Pertama, ayat-ayat seperti QS al-Baqarah [2]:143 dan QS al-Mā'idah [5]:8 ditafsirkan secara moral-kontekstual untuk membangun identitas Muslim yang seimbang, adil, dan antikekerasan. Kedua, QS al-Baqarah [2]:256, QS al-Hujurat [49]:13, dan QS al-Hujurat [49]:6 diaktualisasikan sebagai dasar toleransi, pengakuan atas keragaman, dan etika verifikasi informasi. Ketiga, penyederhanaan konsep radikalisme, liberalisme, budaya Arab, dan kedudukan non-Muslim menunjukkan batas tafsīr lisan yang cenderung pedagogis dan selektif. Artikel ini menegaskan bahwa khutbah Jumat merupakan arena tafsīr publik yang efektif, tetapi otoritasnya perlu disertai ketelitian konteks, keterbukaan terhadap keragaman tafsīr, dan pembedaan yang jelas antara pesan ayat dan agenda sosial kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: tafsīr lisan; khutbah Jumat; moderasi beragama; living Qur'ān; kontekstualisasi; Bulakamba

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Introduction

Qur'ānic interpretation does not occur only in commentaries, classrooms, or academic forums. Qur'ānic meanings are also produced and disseminated through recurrent forms of oral communication in Muslim life. The Friday sermon is one of the most important such settings because it brings together the recitation of verses, the preacher's religious authority, the presence of a congregation, and the demand to relate revelation to contemporary concerns. In this context, the sermon may be understood as oral exegesis: an explanation of Qur'ānic meaning delivered orally, concisely, and persuasively for the needs of a particular audience.¹

The Living Qur'ān approach provides an epistemological basis for understanding the sermon as part of the Qur'ān's social life. It examines not only how the text is understood, but also how the Qur'ān is received, used, performed, and actualized within a community.² Friday sermons stand at the intersection of the Qur'ān's informative and performative functions. Verses are informative insofar as they are explained and assigned meaning, and performative insofar as they are used to shape the congregation's conduct, identity, and moral judgments.

Religious moderation has become an increasingly prominent theme in Indonesian religious sermons. In the Ministry of Religious Affairs' formulation, it is characterized by national commitment, tolerance, rejection of violence, and accommodation of local culture.³ This formulation intersects with several Qur'ānic values, including balance and justice in Qur'ān 2:143, the prohibition of religious coercion in 2:256, recognition of diversity in 49:13, justice toward disliked groups in 5:8, and the obligation to verify information in 49:6. Yet the relationship between the policy concept of "religious moderation" and the meaning of these verses is not automatic. It is constructed through the preacher's selection of verses, semantic emphases, social analogies, and moral language.

A number of studies have examined Friday sermons as media of da'wah, instruments for shaping public opinion, and channels for transmitting social values. Wali Ramadhani, Mohd Faizulamri bin Mohd Saad, and Dara Humaira show that oral interpretation in sermons is situational, closely connected to the audience's lifeworld, and shaped by the preacher's preunderstanding.⁴ Living Qur'ān scholarship likewise emphasizes the need to combine textual reading with observation of social practice so that research does not lapse into either textualism or mere ritual description.⁵ Nevertheless, few studies have specifically assessed the accuracy, patterns, and limits of contextualizing verses on religious moderation in Friday sermons.

This article addresses that gap through an examination of six Friday sermon texts from At-Taqwa Grand Mosque in Bulakamba, Brebes. It asks two questions. First, how are

¹ Wali Ramadhani, Mohd Faizulamri bin Mohd Saad, and Dara Humaira, "Exegeting the Qur'ān in Friday Sermons," *Mutawatir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Ḥadīth* 14, no. 1 (2024): 84–86.

² Didi Junaedi, "Living Qur'ān: Sebuah Pendekatan Baru dalam Kajian al-Qur'ān," *Journal of Qur'ān and Ḥadīth Studies* 4, no. 2 (2015): 169–72, 187–90; Ahmad Rafiq, "The Living Qur'ān," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu Al-Qur'ān dan Hadis* 22, no. 2 (2021): 472–74, 481–83.

³ Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Moderasi Beragama* (Jakarta: Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, 2019), 43.

⁴ Ramadhani, Saad, and Humaira, "Exegeting the Qur'ān in Friday Sermons," 84–89, 101–7.

⁵ Muhamad Ali, "Kajian Naskah dan Kajian Living Qur'ān dan Living Ḥadīth," *Journal of Qur'ān and Ḥadīth Studies* 4, no. 2 (2015): 147–49, 163–67, <https://doi.org/10.15408/quhas.v4i2.2391>; Rafiq, "The Living Qur'ān," 472–74, 481–83.

Qur'ānic verses concerning moderation, tolerance, justice, nonviolence, tabayyun, and culture interpreted in the sermons? Second, what patterns of contextualization emerge, and what are their interpretive limits? The article argues that these sermons produce a moral-contextual exegesis that effectively connects Qur'ānic verses with communal needs; yet, because sermons are concise and pedagogical, some readings tend to simplify the complexity of the texts, social concepts, and the diversity of religious positions.

Method

This research is a qualitative case study conducted at At-Taḳwa Grand Mosque in Bulakamba, Brebes. The mosque was selected because it serves as the district's principal mosque, maintains a structured preaching schedule, and performs worship, educational, and social-service functions. Bulakamba lies along Java's northern coastal highway and has a predominantly Muslim population with diverse occupations and patterns of social mobility. This context makes the Friday sermon an important medium for addressing national identity, interreligious relations, violence, social media, and local culture.⁶

The primary data consist of six sermon texts purposively selected because they explicitly address: (1) tolerance and national commitment, (2) interreligious tolerance, (3) the dangers of radicalism, (4) civility, (5) religious moderation and tabayyun, and (6) relations between Islam and local culture. Observations of sermon delivery, focused interviews with preachers, mosque administrators, and congregants, and internal mosque documents were used to clarify the contexts in which the discourse was produced and received. The personal identities of informants were not treated as units of analysis; the study focuses on the interpretive structure of the Qur'ānic verses within the sermon texts.

The analysis proceeded in five stages. First, all texts were transcribed, and passages containing verses, translations, explanations, analogies, and moral conclusions were coded. Second, the verses were grouped according to theme and argumentative function. Third, the meanings constructed in the sermons were compared with the commentaries of al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, Ibn 'Āshūr, and M. Quraish Shihab. Fourth, the process of contextualization was evaluated by distinguishing historical meaning, ethical value, and contemporary social application. Fifth, the findings were organized into thematic-contextual, moral-pedagogical, and institutional-national patterns of exegesis. Triangulation was conducted by comparing the sermon texts, observations, interviews, and mosque documents.

This study does not seek to measure quantitatively the influence of sermons on congregants' attitudes. Interviews are used as contextual data rather than as a basis for claims about behavioral change. The findings therefore concern patterns of meaning production and the potential formation of religious subjects, not the statistical effectiveness of religious-moderation programs.

Results and Discussion

Friday Sermons as Oral Exegesis and Living Qur'ān Practice

The term oral exegesis refers to the explanation of the Qur'ān through speech addressed to a live audience. Unlike written commentary, which allows extended discussion,

⁶ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013), 97–102, 251–54.

chains of transmission, comparison of opinions, and detailed linguistic analysis, oral exegesis works through selection, repetition, analogy, and examples drawn from the listeners' everyday lives. These characteristics make sermons effective for moral education, but they also increase the risk of simplification, generalization, and the blurring of distinctions between a verse's meaning and its application.

In this study, the Living Qur'ān approach situates sermons as practices through which the Qur'ān is received and actualized. Verses are not merely quoted as legitimizing proof; they are transformed into a social vocabulary related to national identity, tolerance, digital media, civility, and local culture. Because the study remains anchored in Qur'ānic exegesis, the analysis does not stop at the social function of verses. Each use of a verse is compared with the horizon of meanings found in classical and contemporary commentaries.

Abdullah Saeed's contextual approach is used to distinguish four layers of analysis: the wording and internal context of the verse, the sociohistorical context of revelation, the broader ethical value, and its application in a contemporary setting.⁷ This framework helps avoid two tendencies: first, treating the sermon's application as the verse's only meaning; and second, separating the Qur'ānic message from the social problems facing the community. The sermons are therefore evaluated not merely by their conformity to the language of moderation, but by the accuracy of the relationship they establish among the verse, its universal values, and the context to which it is applied.

The concept of *wasatīyyah* must likewise be understood more carefully than as a mere "middle position." In al-Ṭabarī's commentary, the phrase *ummataṇ wasaṭan* in Qur'ān 2:143 is associated with justice and the community's distinction as a witness over humankind. al-Qurṭubī connects it with justice because the middle position is seen as distancing a person from two excessive extremes. Quraish Shihab emphasizes that *wasatīyyah* does not mean lacking conviction; rather, it is the ability to place things proportionately on the basis of knowledge of both religious teachings and social reality.⁸ Qur'ānic moderation should therefore be assessed through justice, a balanced sense of responsibility, and moral witness, rather than merely through the rejection of two labels deemed extreme.

As a supplementary lens, Michel Foucault's concepts of power/knowledge and subject formation are used in a limited way to examine the effects of repeated discourse. Foucault is neither employed as a method for interpreting verses nor made the basis for the four categories of representation, misrepresentation, marginalization, and delegitimation. His concepts simply help explain how sermons, delivered from an authoritative pulpit, can

⁷ Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'ān: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 149–52.

⁸ Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, ed. 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Cairo: Dār Ḥajr, 2001), vol. 2, 626–29; Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīyah, 1964), vol. 2, 153–56; M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsīr al-Miṣbāḥ: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian al-Qur'ān* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), vol. 1, 325–31; M. Quraish Shihab, *Wasatīyyah: Wawasan Islam tentang Moderasi Beragama* (Tangerang Selatan: Lentera Hati, 2019), 39–45.

normalize an image of the “ideal Muslim” and determine which terms are considered legitimate in religious discourse.⁹

The Mosque and the Social Context of Bulakamba

At-Taqlwa Grand Mosque was established around 1942 and developed into a district-level center of worship and socio-religious activity. Its administration is divided into the areas of ‘imārah, ri’āyah, and idārah, while the schedules of prayer leaders and Friday preachers are arranged on a rotating basis. This structure indicates that the sermon is not simply a spontaneous individual expression, but part of the mosque's institutional practice. The preacher's authority intersects with that of the institution, which determines the setting, schedule, and general character of the religious message.

As a coastal area situated along Java's northern highway, Bulakamba is exposed to diverse flows of information, population mobility, economic change, and cultural encounters. Although its population is predominantly Muslim, issues of tolerance, national identity, social media, and local culture remain relevant because diversity is not limited to religious difference; it also includes differences in organizational affiliation, religious orientation, occupation, education, and access to information. The six sermons may therefore be read as responses to the need to preserve social cohesion without relinquishing Islamic identity.

Corpus of Verses and Interpretive Directions

The six sermons assign different functions to Qur'ānic verses. Some verses provide definitions, others serve as moral legitimation, and still others bridge the text to contemporary issues. Table 1 summarizes the relationship between the sermon themes, the dominant verses, and their interpretive directions.

No.	Sermon Theme	Dominant Verse/Source	Interpretive Direction
1	Tolerance and national commitment	Qur'ān 2:256; 49:13	Prohibition of religious coercion, recognition of diversity, and responsibility for sustaining shared life
2	Interreligious tolerance	Qur'ān 2:256; 49:13	Tolerance as Muslim social ethics and a means of social harmony
3	Dangers of radicalism	Qur'ān 4:93	Prohibition of violence and killing as a basis for rejecting radicalism
4	Civility	Qur'ān 31:19	Restraint in speech and ethics of communication
5	Religious moderation and tabayyun	Qur'ān 2:143; 49:6	Wasatīyyah as balance and tabayyun as an ethics of information
6	Islam and local culture	Qur'ān 49:13 implicitly; the legal maxim al-'ada	Recognition of cultural diversity and legitimation of customs that do not conflict with religious principles

⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 26–32; Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 109–33.

Table 1. Sermon Corpus and Interpretive Directions

1. Qur‘ān 2:143: *Wasatiyyah* as Moral Balance and Public Identity

The sermon “Religious Moderation and Tabayyun” cites Qur‘ān 2:143 to argue that Islam teaches balance in every aspect of life and that this balance constitutes moderation. This reading accords with the mainstream exegetical tradition, which associates *wasat* with justice, goodness, and the position that enables the community to serve as a witness. al-Ṭabarī summarizes *wasat* as just and elect, while al-Qurṭubī emphasizes a middle position that distances the community from excess. Ibn ‘Āshūr associates it with proportionality, which qualifies the community to perform its function of witness.¹⁰

The sermon’s strength lies in its attempt to translate *wasatiyyah* from an abstract concept into public ethics. The moderate Muslim is portrayed as a person who avoids excess, rejects violence, accepts difference, and assumes responsibility for shared life. This actualization is defensible because the verse’s function of witness has a social dimension. The community is not described as *wasat* merely because it stands between two groups, but because it practices accountable justice.

However, the formulation “inclining neither toward liberalism nor toward extremism” reveals an oversimplification. Liberalism and extremism are not necessarily equivalent categories and encompass different spectra and contexts. If *wasatiyyah* is defined solely by rejecting two labels, moderation risks losing its positive criteria. A more adequate exegesis should make justice, witness, knowledge, and proportionality its principal measures. A person is therefore not moderate simply because they occupy a middle position, but because their decisions and actions protect rights and prevent injustice.

2. Qur‘ān 2:256 and 49:13: Tolerance, Freedom, and Recognition

Two sermons on tolerance draw on Qur‘ān 2:256 and 49:13. The statement, “Islam does not permit coercion in religion,” presents *lā ikrāha fī al-dīn* as a principle of noncoercion. Within the exegetical tradition, the verse has been understood as affirming that faith cannot arise from compulsion, because truth has become distinct from error. Debates over the occasion of revelation and the scope of the ruling do not negate its basic principle that religious conviction requires assent rather than coercion.¹¹

Qur‘ān 49:13 is used to emphasize that differences among peoples and tribes are intended for *ta’aruf*, mutual recognition, rather than hostility. This reading accords with the verse’s structure, which links humanity’s common origin, social diversity, and the rejection of lineage-based superiority. Piety cannot be used to establish a social hierarchy because full knowledge of piety belongs to God. In the public sphere, the verse provides a basis for recognizing human dignity and cooperation amid diversity.

The sermons successfully translate both verses into a language of tolerance. Yet tolerance is portrayed primarily as a Muslim obligation to “treat non-Muslims well.” Non-

¹⁰ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, vol. 2, 626–29; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li-Aḥkām al-Qur‘ān*, vol. 2, 153–56; Muḥammad al-Tāhir Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-al-Tanwīr* (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisīyah li-Nashr, 1984), vol. 2, 17–20.

¹¹ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsīr al-Miṣbāḥ*, vol. 1, 551–55.

Muslims appear as objects of tolerance rather than as citizens and social partners with equal rights. A stronger reading should move from unilateral tolerance toward mutual recognition, protection of religious freedom, equal access to public services, and the prohibition of discrimination. Such an extension does not depart from the verses; it articulates the ethical implications of noncoercion and the purpose of *ta'āruf*.

The contextualization of national commitment also requires an explicit argument. The Qur'ān does not directly refer to the modern nation-state, but its principles of honoring covenants, upholding justice, and protecting human beings can be applied to civic life. Love of country and constitutional commitment should therefore not simply be appended to the verse on diversity; they should be explained as forms of responsibility for maintaining a public covenant that protects all citizens.

3. Qur'ān 5:8 and 4:93: Justice and the Rejection of Violence

Although Qur'ān 5:8 is not always the principal citation in each sermon, its value is strongly present in the discourse of moderation. The verse commands believers to bear witness with justice and forbids hatred of a people from leading them into injustice. Its structure is crucial because justice is tested precisely when one confronts those one dislikes. al-Qurṭubī and Quraish Shihab emphasize that the command *i'dilū* is not restricted to one's own group; justice must transcend emotion, affinity, and hostility.¹²

This principle provides the strongest foundation for religious moderation. Tolerance may stop at a willingness to let others live, whereas justice requires active protection of their rights. Sermons on moderation should therefore place Qur'ān 5:8 at the center of their evaluation of policies, speech, and social relations. Moderation must not be used to demand perpetual calm from those suffering injustice while leaving the structures that produce discrimination uncriticized.

The sermon on radicalism uses Qur'ān 4:93 as a basis for rejecting violence. The verse directly addresses the severe punishment awaiting one who intentionally kills a believer. Its use against terrorism and violence can be understood as an extension of the value of protecting life; however, the sermon should clarify that “radicalism” is a modern sociopolitical concept and is not identical to the verse's immediate object. The interpretive bridge lies in the prohibition of killing, the sanctity of life, and the rejection of unjustified violence.

Radicalism should also not be reduced to physical violence. Violence may be preceded by dehumanization, *takfir*, propaganda, and the cultivation of hostility. Conversely, not every critical position or demand for fundamental change is radical in the violent sense. Sermon exegesis would be more precise if it distinguished religious commitment, social criticism, extremism, and violence. Such distinctions prevent anti-violence verses from being used to delegitimize every dissenting voice.

4. Qur'ān 49:6: *Tabayyun* as an Ethics of Digital Information

Qur'ān 49:6 is actualized in the sermon “Religious Moderation and *Tabayyun*” to address the circulation of hoaxes on social media. This contextualization is one of the strongest examples of oral exegesis in the corpus because the relationship between the verse's

¹² al-Qurṭubī, al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān, vol. 6, 108–111; Shihab, Tafsīr al-Miṣbāḥ, vol. 3, 41–43.

message and the contemporary problem is explained directly. The verse commands the verification of news brought by an unreliable person, lest a group be harmed through ignorance and those responsible later regret their actions.

In its revelatory context, the verse concerns the risk of social decisions based on unverified information. Its universal values include epistemic caution, responsibility for the consequences of information, and the prohibition of judging others on the basis of uncertain reports. Digital media heightens the relevance of these values because users are not only recipients but also disseminators of information. *Tabayyun* therefore entails checking sources, context, dates, evidence, and the consequences of sharing.

The sermon's limitation emerges when social media is portrayed almost entirely as a dangerous space. Qur'ān 49:6 does not command the rejection of a particular medium; it commands the verification of information. Official sources can be mistaken, while unofficial sources may convey accurate data. The verse should therefore not be used to discredit all information originating outside formal institutions. A more contextual exegesis directs the congregation toward source literacy and accountability rather than uncritical compliance.

5. Qur'ān 31:19: Civility without Silencing Criticism

The sermon on civility cites the final part of Qur'ān 31:19, which likens the harshest of voices to the braying of a donkey. The verse belongs to Luqmān's series of counsels concerning moderation in one's gait and restraint in one's voice. Its central message is an ethics of self-presentation and communication that avoids arrogance, harshness, and excess. In exegetical tradition, the comparison with the donkey's voice is not intended to prohibit firm speech, but to criticize communication that has lost propriety and proportion.¹³

The sermon applies the verse to form courteous Muslims who avoid abusive language. This actualization is relevant in a society marked by verbal conflict and hate speech. Civility, however, must not be equated with the absence of criticism. The Qur'ān itself commands just testimony and opposition to wrongdoing. Criticism can be expressed firmly without degrading human dignity. Qur'ān 31:19 is therefore better understood as an ethics governing how criticism is expressed, not as a reason to reject criticism itself.

6. Islam and Local Culture: Between Recognition of Diversity and Generalization

The sermon on local culture argues that Islam should not be wholly equated with Arab traditions and invokes the legal maxim *al-'ada muḥakkama* to legitimize sound customary practices. This line of argument accords with the need to distinguish normative teachings from historical cultural forms. The diversity of peoples and tribes in Qur'ān 49:13 provides a theological horizon in which cultural difference is not a deviation to be eradicated. However, *al-'āda muḥakkamah* is a legal maxim, not a Qur'ānic verse. The statement "what Muslims regard as good is also good in the sight of God" is better known as a report or saying attributed to Ibn Mas'ūd, not as Qur'ānic text. Sermons must distinguish these sources clearly so that congregants do not conflate Qur'ānic verses, *ḥadīth*, *athar*, and juristic maxims.

The sermon also risks constructing a simplistic opposition between a hospitable "local Islam" and an "Arab culture" that narrows religion. Arab culture is not monolithic, and many elements of the Arabic language and intellectual tradition have served as vital media for the

¹³ Shihab, *Tafsīr al-Miṣbāḥ*, vol. 11, 139–41.

transmission of Islam. The relevant issue is not a culture's place of origin, but its conformity with the principles of tawhid, justice, public welfare, and protection of human dignity. This approach allows local culture to be accepted without turning cultural debate into a new stereotype.

General Patterns of Oral Exegesis and Their Discursive Effects

The analysis of the six sermons shows that oral exegesis at At-Taḳwa Mosque follows a thematic-contextual pattern. The preachers do not interpret verses sequentially, as in *taḥlīlī* commentary, but gather them around themes such as tolerance, moderation, violence, information, civility, and culture. The verses are then related to contemporary issues considered close to the congregation. This pattern resembles the situational character of oral exegesis and its close relationship with the audience's lifeworld.¹⁴

The second pattern is moral-pedagogical. The explanation of verses is directed toward cultivating personal qualities: tolerance, civility, justice, restraint from abusive speech, caution in sharing information, and rejection of violence. This form suits the sermon's function as public admonition. Yet the dominance of individual morality leaves structural problems less visible. Discrimination, unequal access, identity politics, and institutional violence cannot be adequately explained solely through the reform of individual character.

The third pattern is institutional-national. The verses are used to construct a positive relationship among Islamic identity, nationalism, and the religious-moderation program. National commitment appears as a consequence of tolerance and diversity. This contextualization is relevant to Indonesia, but it must continue to leave room for criticism of the state and religious institutions. National commitment does not mean accepting every policy; rather, it means preserving a just public order and correcting power when it departs from the protection of citizens.

From a discourse perspective, the repeated qualities “moderate, tolerant, nationalist, nonviolent, and culturally rooted” construct an ideal Muslim figure. The pulpit, scriptural proofs, and the preacher's authority render this figure normative. This process is not inherently negative, since all moral education shapes subjectivity. A problem arises when a single construction of identity closes off interpretive diversity that remains peaceful and constitutional. Moderation should therefore be presented as a method for upholding justice amid difference, not as a label for measuring conformity to the mainstream.

The principal contribution of oral exegesis in these sermons is its ability to translate Qur'ānic values into a vocabulary accessible to the congregation. Its limitation is the lack of space for explaining historical context, differences of opinion, and the limits of analogy. To strengthen the quality of sermons, preachers should explicitly distinguish three elements: the meaning addressed by a verse in its context, the general value derived from it, and the application of that value to a contemporary problem. This simple distinction can prevent a social application from being treated as the only meaning of revelation.

Implications for Qur'ānic and Tafsīr Studies

Theoretically, this study strengthens the position of the Friday sermon as an autonomous object of Qur'ānic and tafsīr studies rather than merely a secondary medium for

¹⁴ Ramadhani, Saad, and Humaira, “Exegesis of the Qur'ān in Friday Sermons,” 101–7.

disseminating conclusions produced in written commentaries. Earlier research on oral interpretation in Friday sermons has identified its situational, audience-oriented, and persuasive characteristics. This article builds on that insight but moves further by evaluating how preachers select verses, compress exegetical traditions, and transform textual meanings into public moral claims. By comparing sermon interpretations with classical and contemporary tafsīr, the study shows that oral exegesis is not simply a simplified repetition of written commentary. It is a distinct mode of meaning production shaped by temporal limits, institutional expectations, local concerns, and rhetorical judgment.¹⁵

The study also clarifies its relationship to Living Qur'ān scholarship. Research in this field has shown that the Qur'ān lives through reception, performance, ritual, institutional practice, and social use. The present research confirms that perspective, yet argues that the social function of a verse cannot be separated from the interpretive operation through which that function is authorized. A sermon is simultaneously a Living Qur'ān practice and an exegetical event: the verse is recited and performed, but also translated, paraphrased, connected to other texts, and directed toward a specific social problem. This dual focus distinguishes the study from approaches that describe communal practice without examining the semantic responsibility of interpretation.¹⁶

Methodologically, the combination of Living Qur'ān research and contextual interpretation offers an integrated model for studying religious discourse. Muhamad Ali has emphasized the importance of connecting text-oriented study with research on the lived reception of scripture. This article operationalizes that connection through three analytical levels: the verse in its textual and historical horizon, the ethical value inferred from that horizon, and the contemporary application formulated in the sermon. Abdullah Saeed's contextual framework regulates this movement so that present-day concerns are neither imposed directly upon the verse nor excluded from interpretation. Consultation of al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, Ibn 'Āshūr, and M. Quraish Shihab functions as a critical control, revealing where the sermons preserve, select, expand, or simplify the exegetical tradition.¹⁷

Substantively, the findings refine scholarship on religious moderation. Rather than treating moderation as a single Qur'ānic term that can be transferred directly into state policy, the article demonstrates that it is constructed through a thematic constellation of verses on justice, non-coercion, human diversity, protection of life, information verification, and communicative ethics. The thematic-contextual, moral-pedagogical, and institutional-national patterns show how this constellation is reorganized for the pulpit. The sermons successfully translate Qur'ānic values into an accessible public ethic, but institutional labels such as "moderate," "radical," "liberal," and "nationalist" can become reductive when presented as self-evident Qur'ānic classifications. The study therefore distinguishes Qur'ānic ethical reasoning from the contingent vocabulary of contemporary governance.¹⁸

A further implication concerns interpretive authority. The authority of oral tafsīr is produced through scriptural citation, the preacher's scholarly standing, the mosque's

¹⁵ Ramadhani, Saad, and Humaira, "Exegeting the Qur'ān in Friday Sermons," 84–89, 101–7.

¹⁶ Junaedi, "Living Qur'ān," 169–72, 187–90; Rafiq, "The Living Qur'ān," 472–74, 481–83.

¹⁷ Ali, "Kajian Naskah dan Kajian Living Qur'ān dan Living Ḥadīth," 147–49, 163–67; Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'ān*, 149–52.

¹⁸ Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Moderasi Beragama*, 43.

institutional legitimacy, and the congregation's ritual attentiveness. Repetition from an authorized pulpit can normalize a particular image of the ideal Muslim, but authority is both productive and accountable: it may cultivate justice and social solidarity, yet it may also marginalize legitimate differences when one application is presented as the only faithful meaning of revelation. Practically, preacher training should therefore include concise historical contextualization, accurate differentiation among Qur'ān, ḥadīth, athar, and juristic maxims, and a clear distinction between textual meaning, ethical principle, and contemporary application. Future research should compare mosques affiliated with different organizations and examine how congregants receive, negotiate, or contest the interpretations they hear.¹⁹

Conclusion

This study shows that the six Friday sermons at At-Taqlwa Grand Mosque in Bulakamba constitute practices of oral exegesis that connect Qur'ānic verses with the issue of religious moderation. Qur'ān 2:143 is interpreted as balance and a moderate Muslim identity; Qur'ān 2:256 and 49:13 provide foundations for tolerance and recognition of diversity; Qur'ān 5:8 and 4:93 support justice and the rejection of violence; Qur'ān 49:6 is actualized as an ethics of digital information; and Qur'ān 31:19 is used to cultivate civility in communication. The interpretive patterns are thematic-contextual, moral-pedagogical, and institutional-national. The sermons successfully bring the verses' messages into issues close to the congregation, but their brevity also produces simplifications. Radicalism is sometimes reduced to physical violence, liberalism is treated as a uniform pole, non-Muslims more often appear as objects of tolerance, social media is portrayed primarily as a threat, and Arab culture is treated as overly homogeneous. These findings confirm that the authority of the sermon must be accompanied by exegetical discipline. Preachers should distinguish the historical meaning of a verse, its universal ethical value, and its contemporary application. Qur'ānic moderation should not be understood as a passive middle position or an administrative identity, but as an active commitment to justice, proportionality, the protection of life, religious freedom, information verification, and respect for diversity. Future research should examine congregational reception and compare patterns of oral exegesis in mosques affiliated with different organizations and located in different regions.

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¹⁹ Foucault, Power/Knowledge, 109–33.

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