

IMAM AL-GHAZALI'S CONCEPT OF RELIGIOUS COUNSELING IN FORMING MODERATE ATTITUDES

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Abstract: The increasing polarization of religious attitudes in contemporary society necessitates exploring historical and theological resources that promote moderation and balance. This article delves into Imam al-Ghazali's concept of religious counseling, aiming to understand its principles and methods that can cultivate moderate attitudes among individuals and communities. Employing a qualitative approach with a focus on literature review, this research analyzes al-Ghazali's seminal works, particularly *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* and *Mizan al-'Amal*, to uncover how his teachings contribute to fostering spiritual well-being, ethical behavior, and social harmony. Imam al-Ghazali's emphasis on moderation, ethical conduct, and integrating spiritual and social responsibilities significantly contribute to religious counseling in contemporary contexts. His advocacy for the middle path (*wasatiyyah*) offers a robust framework that addresses the pressing challenges of extremism and polarization. Al-Ghazali's teachings encourage practitioners of religious counseling to promote balance and harmony within their communities by emphasizing ethical behavior rooted in Islamic virtues. Al-Ghazali underscores the importance of maintaining mutual respect, tolerance, and constructive dialogue across diverse backgrounds by fostering an understanding of the interconnectedness between personal spirituality and communal welfare. This approach enriches individual spiritual well-being and enhances social cohesion by encouraging individuals to fulfill their religious obligations while actively engaging in societal improvement efforts. By mitigating the root causes of extremism through a holistic approach to counseling, al-Ghazali's teachings provide invaluable guidance for religious counselors seeking to effectively navigate and reduce contemporary social challenges.

Keywords: *wasatiyyah*; Imam al-Ghazali; extremism; spiritual balance; moderation; religious life

Abstrak: Polarisasi meningkatnya sikap-sikap keagamaan dalam masyarakat kontemporer menuntut eksplorasi sumber-sumber sejarah dan teologis yang mempromosikan moderasi dan keseimbangan. Artikel ini menggali konsep konseling keagamaan Imam al-Ghazali, bertujuan untuk memahami prinsip-prinsip dan metodenya yang dapat membudayakan sikap moderat di kalangan individu dan komunitas. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif yang berfokus pada tinjauan literatur, penelitian ini menganalisis karya-karya al-Ghazali yang mendasar, terutama *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* dan *Mizan al-'Amal*, untuk mengungkap bagaimana ajarannya berkontribusi dalam memajukan kesejahteraan spiritual, perilaku etis, dan harmoni sosial. Penekanan Imam al-Ghazali pada moderasi, perilaku etis, dan integrasi tanggung jawab spiritual dan sosial memberikan kontribusi signifikan dalam konseling keagamaan pada konteks kontemporer. Perhatiannya terhadap *wasatiyyah* menawarkan kerangka kerja yang kokoh yang menangani tantangan-tantangan mendesak ekstremisme dan polarisasi. Ajaran al-Ghazali mendorong praktisi konseling keagamaan untuk mempromosikan keseimbangan dan harmoni dalam komunitas mereka dengan menekankan perilaku etis yang berakar pada kebajikan Islam. Dengan memupuk pemahaman tentang keterkaitan antara spiritualitas pribadi dan kesejahteraan komunal, al-Ghazali menegaskan pentingnya memelihara saling menghargai, toleransi, dan dialog konstruktif lintas latar belakang yang beragam. Pendekatan ini tidak hanya memperkaya kesejahteraan spiritual individu tetapi juga meningkatkan kohesi sosial dengan mendorong individu untuk memenuhi kewajiban keagamaan mereka sambil aktif terlibat dalam upaya perbaikan sosial. Dengan mengurangi akar penyebab ekstremisme melalui pendekatan holistik dalam konseling, ajaran al-Ghazali memberikan panduan berharga bagi konselor keagamaan yang ingin menavigasi dan mengatasi tantangan sosial kontemporer secara efektif.

Kata kunci: *wasatiyyah*; Imam al-Ghazali, ekstremisme; keseimbangan rohani; moderasi; kehidupan beragama

Introduction

Current global social and political conditions show an increasing polarization of religious attitudes, leading to conflict and instability. Radicalism and religious extremism are severe challenges for many countries, including Indonesia. Amid this situation, exploring theological resources that can promote moderation and balance is crucial. One figure who offers profound insight into this is Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, widely known as Imam al-Ghazali. Al-Ghazali was a theologian, philosopher and Sufi who lived in the 11th century and whose work has significantly influenced classical and modern Islamic thought. Through his works, such as *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* and *Mizan al-'Amal*, al-Ghazali conveys essential concepts that can be used in religious counseling to form moderate attitudes.

Previous research relevant to this topic includes various studies on Imam al-Ghazali's contribution to Islamic thought and ethics. In his book *al-Ghazali: The Mystic*, Smith discusses how al-Ghazali's mystical experiences influenced his ethical and spiritual views, which were applied in everyday life and religious practice.¹ In addition, Karamustafa's research in *Sufism: The Formative Period* provides an overview of how al-Ghazali's Sufi thought played a role in forming an approach to balance and moderation in religion.² Watt, in "Muslim Intellectual: A Study of al-Ghazali," also highlights the importance of knowledge ('ilm) in al-Ghazali's thought and how this knowledge is integrated with ethical and spiritual practices.³

Imam al-Ghazali emphasized the importance of balance and moderation in religious life. He taught that true religious life must avoid extremism and balance spiritual and material needs. Al-Ghazali calls this principle *wasatiyyah*, or the middle way. This concept was relevant in its time and has strong relevance in the modern context, where many individuals and communities face similar challenges in maintaining balance and moderation in their

religious practices. Apart from that, al-Ghazali also emphasized the importance of purifying the heart (*tazkiyah al-qalb*) and developing good character as part of the spiritual journey.

Al-Ghazali's works reflect a holistic approach to religious counseling, in which human life's spiritual, ethical, and social aspects are considered holistically. In "*Ihya' Ulum al-Din*," al-Ghazali discusses various aspects of religious life, from ritual worship to social ethics. He emphasizes that individuals' spiritual and moral well-being is closely related to social and community well-being. Therefore, according to al-Ghazali, religious counseling focuses on individual spiritual aspects and efforts to create social harmony.

This research explores the concept of religious counseling taught by Imam al-Ghazali and how these concepts can be applied in a modern context to form a moderate attitude. Through an in-depth analysis of al-Ghazali's significant works, this article will identify the basic principles of religious counseling he taught, as well as practical methods that can be used by religious counselors today. It will also explain how al-Ghazali's teachings about balance, purification of the heart, and character development can help overcome the challenges of extremism and radicalism facing modern society.

Imam al-Ghazali also emphasized the importance of knowledge ('ilm) in religious counseling. He believes correct knowledge of religious teachings is an important foundation for forming good character and moderate attitudes. In "*Mizan al-'Amal*," al-Ghazali explains that deep knowledge of religion must be accompanied by consistent and ethical practice. This shows that al-Ghazali sees religious counseling as an integrative process, where knowledge and practice complement each other to achieve spiritual and moral balance.

In a modern context, al-Ghazali's teachings on religious counseling can make a significant contribution to facing contemporary challenges. For example, teachings about *wasatiyyah* can be used to develop religious education programs that emphasize moderation and balance. In addition, al-Ghazali's holistic approach can be applied in religious counseling services that aim to improve

¹ Margaret Smith, *Al-Ghazali: The Mystic* (London: Luzac & Company Ltd., 1944), p. 17.

² Ahmet T Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 21.

³ W Montgomery Watt, *Muslim Intellectual: A Study of Al-Ghazali*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1963), p. 25.

individuals' and communities' spiritual and social welfare. Thus, this research seeks to understand Imam al-Ghazali's teachings on religious counseling and explore the practical application of these teachings in forming moderate attitudes in a modern context.

Method

This research uses a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach to explore the concept of religious counseling taught by Imam al-Ghazali and its application in a modern context. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to understand al-Ghazali's teachings through text analysis and contextual interpretation. This research was designed as a literature study focusing on Imam al-Ghazali's principal works and relevant secondary literature. A descriptive-analytical approach is used to systematically describe and analyze the contents of these works systematically systematically describe and analyze these works. The literature study allows researchers to collect data from various written sources documenting al-Ghazali's thoughts and their application in religious counseling.

This research's main primary data sources are Imam al-Ghazali's works, including "Ihya' Ulum al-Din" and "Mizan al-'Amal." Secondary literature, such as books, journal articles and dissertations on al-Ghazali's thoughts and religious counseling, was also used. Data collection was done through library research, which involves identifying, selecting, and analyzing written sources relevant to the research topic.

Data analysis was carried out using a hermeneutic approach, which involves interpreting texts to understand their meaning in their historical and philosophical context. This hermeneutic approach allows researchers to contextualize al-Ghazali's teachings in relevant social and cultural situations. Triangulation of data sources was carried out to ensure the validity and reliability of the research. This involves using multiple data sources to confirm findings and ensure consistency in interpretation. In addition, researchers also consulted the findings with experts in the fields of Islamic thought and religious counseling to

obtain feedback and ensure the accuracy of the interpretation.

Results and Discussion

Al-Ghazali's Concept of Religious Counseling

This research reveals several main findings related to the religious counseling taught by Imam al-Ghazali and its relevance in forming moderate attitudes in the modern era. These findings were obtained through an in-depth analysis of al-Ghazali's significant works, such as *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* and *Mizan al-'Amal*, and supporting secondary literature.

1. Principles of Wasatiyyah (Middle Way)

Imam al-Ghazali emphasized the principle of *wasatiyyah*, or the middle way, as the foundation of a moderate religious life.⁴ According to al-Ghazali, extremism, whether in the form of religious fanaticism or secular materialism, can damage the spiritual and moral balance of individuals and society.⁵ This principle of *wasatiyyah* encourages Muslims to maintain a balance between spiritual and material needs, as well as between individual rights and obligations and social responsibility.

Wasatiyyah, or the middle way, is a principle that avoids all forms of extremism.⁶ According to al-Ghazali, excessive religious fanaticism can lead to intolerance and violence, while extreme secular materialism can result in moral and spiritual degradation.⁷ Thus, *wasatiyyah* is a way to achieve harmony in personal and social life.⁸ Al-Ghazali emphasized that this balance is not only in terms of worship but also in everyday life. For example, in giving charity, a person must maintain a balance between personal interests and the interests of

⁴ Ulyan Nasri and M. Tabibuddin, "Paradigma Moderasi Beragama: Revitalisasi Fungsi Pendidikan Islam Dalam Konteks Multikultural Perspektif Pemikiran Imam Al-Ghazali," *Jurnal Ilmiah Profesi Pendidikan* 8, no. 4 (2023): 1959–1966.

⁵ Zainuddin Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad Al-Thusi. *Al-Ghazali, Ihya Ulum Al-Din* (Mesir: Dar al-Taqwa, 2000).

⁶ Zainuddin Syarif and Abd Hannan, "Fundamentalism and the Challenges of Religious Moderation in the New Normal Era," *Madania: Jurnal Kajian Keislaman*, vol. 25, no. 1 (2021), p. 1.

⁷ Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 163.

⁸ Smith, *Al-Ghazali: The Mystic*.

society. This is reflected in his teaching that wealth should be used for personal gain and to help those in need.⁹

The principle of *wasatiyyah* also emphasizes the importance of moderation in all things. In this case, al-Ghazali teaches that a person must moderately eat, drink, dress, and all other aspects of life. This moderation helps maintain a balance between physical and spiritual needs.¹⁰ In addition, the principle of *wasatiyyah* includes tolerance and openness to differences. Al-Ghazali taught that differences of opinion in religious matters must be respected and not used as a reason for disagreement. This tolerant attitude helps create a harmonious and peaceful environment in society.

In the modern context, the principle of *wasatiyyah* is very relevant to overcoming extremism. For example, educational programs that teach the values of moderation can help reduce bigotry and intolerance.¹¹ Thus, *wasatiyyah* is essential for promoting peace and harmony in modern society. *Wasatiyyah* is also relevant in the context of interreligious relations. Al-Ghazali emphasized the importance of dialogue and cooperation between followers of different religions.¹² Interreligious dialogue based on *wasatiyyah* principles can help reduce tensions and promote mutual understanding.

In practice, *wasatiyyah* principles can be applied in various aspects of life. For example, *wasatiyyah* teaches the importance of balancing profit and social responsibility in economics. In politics, *wasatiyyah* emphasized the importance of balance between power and service to the people. Al-Ghazali also emphasized that *wasatiyyah* is the key to achieving true happiness. He says happiness cannot be achieved through extremism but through balance and moderation.¹³ True happiness is the result of a balanced and harmonious life.

The importance of *wasatiyyah* in education must also be addressed. Ghazali believes that education must teach the values of moderation and balance.¹⁴ Education based on *wasatiyyah* principles can help form a tolerant and balanced generation.¹⁵ Overall, the *wasatiyyah* principles taught by al-Ghazali are a strong foundation for a balanced and harmonious life. This principle allows individuals and society to avoid extremism and achieve balance in all aspects of life.¹⁶ By implementing *wasatiyyah*, we can create a more peaceful and harmonious world.

2. The Importance of Purifying the Heart (*Tazkiyah al-Qalb*)

Al-Ghazali emphasized the importance of purifying the heart as an integral part of religious counseling. In “*Ihya’ Ulum al-Din*,” al-Ghazali states that a heart that is clean and free from spiritual illnesses such as *hasad* (envy), *riya’* (showing off), and *takabur* (arrogance) is a prerequisite for achieving spiritual and moral balance. This *tazkiyah al-qalb* process involves introspection, repentance, and consistent worship practices to eliminate bad traits and replace them with praiseworthy characteristics.¹⁷

Purifying the heart, or *tazkiyah al-qalb*, is an ongoing process requiring consistent effort. Al-Ghazali teaches that purification of the heart begins with deep introspection, where a person must honestly assess themselves and identify the evil qualities within themselves.¹⁸ The next step is sincere repentance, where a person promises to abandon these bad qualities and try not to repeat them.

The *tazkiyah al-qalb* process also involves consistent worship practices. Al-Ghazali emphasized the importance of prayer, fasting, zakat and pilgrimage to cleanse the heart. He also stressed the importance of *dhikr* and reading the Quran

⁹ Mohamed Sherif, *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), p. 49.

¹⁰ Maurice Bouyges, *Essai de Chronologie Des Oeuvres de Al-Ghazali*, (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1959), h. 37.

¹¹ Tim Winter, *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 45.

¹² Sherif, *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue...*, p. 57.

¹³ Watt, *Muslim Intellectual: A Study of Al-Ghazali...*, p. 85.

¹⁴ Winter, *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology...*, p. 73.

¹⁵ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1994), p. 65.

¹⁶ Sherif, *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue...*, p. 69.

¹⁷ Hasyim Thoyib, *Al-Ghazali Dan Metafisika Kebebasan: Kontribusi Untuk Diskursus Hukum Islam Di Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2012), p. 81.

¹⁸ Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology*.

to get closer to Allah and maintain a clean heart. Al-Ghazali believes a clean heart is the key to achieving spiritual and moral balance. According to him, heart diseases such as envy, showing off, and arrogance are the main obstacles to achieving inner peace and spiritual well-being.¹⁹ Therefore, heart purification is an essential step in one's spiritual journey.

Purification of the heart also has a positive impact on social relationships. A clean heart allows a person to have harmonious relationships with others because he is free from bad qualities that can damage those relationships.²⁰ Thus, *tazkiyah al-qalb* is crucial not only for individual welfare but also for the welfare of society.

Al-Ghazali also taught that purification of the heart is a continuous process. The human heart is always vulnerable to temptation and spiritual illness, so the heart must be purified continuously. Practices such as introspection, repentance, and worship must become part of daily life to maintain a clean heart.²¹ In the modern context, *tazkiyah al-qalb* is relevant to overcoming many people's spiritual crises. Full of stress and pressure, modern life often makes the heart dirty and restless. The process of purifying the heart taught by al-Ghazali can help individuals find inner peace and spiritual balance.²²

Purification of the heart is also essential in the context of religious counseling. Religious counselors can use al-Ghazali's teachings about *tazkiyah al-qalb* to help clients overcome their spiritual and moral problems. By guiding clients through purifying the heart, counselors can help them find inner peace and improve their quality of life.²³ Al-Ghazali also emphasized that purification of the heart must be done with sincere intentions.

According to him, sincere intentions are the key to achieving the desired results in the *tazkiyah al-qalb* process. Without sincere intentions, efforts to cleanse the heart will be in vain.

In practice, purification of the heart can be done in various ways. Besides introspection, repentance and worship, al-Ghazali also recommends avoiding environments and relationships that can damage the heart. Choosing good friends and a positive environment is essential in maintaining a clean heart. Overall, the purification of the heart is a vital process for one's spiritual life. With a clean heart, a person can achieve spiritual and moral balance and have harmonious relationships with other people. Al-Ghazali's teachings on *tazkiyah al-qalb* are a valuable guide to achieving inner peace and spiritual well-being.

3. Integration of Science and Practice

In *Mizan al-'Amal*, al-Ghazali emphasizes integrating science ('ilm) and practice ('amal) in religious life. According to al-Ghazali, correct knowledge of spiritual teachings must be accompanied by consistent and ethical practical application. Knowledge not accompanied by action is considered useless, and conversely, actions not based on correct knowledge can be misleading.²⁴ Al-Ghazali believes that knowledge with practice is valuable. He taught that science must always be accompanied by actions following religious teachings.²⁵ For example, this knowledge is useless for someone who knows the importance of prayer but does not carry it out. Likewise, practices based on something other than correct knowledge can lead someone down the wrong path.

Integration between science and practice is an essential principle in religious life. According to al-Ghazali, science guides what is right and wrong, while practice is a way to apply this knowledge in everyday life. With this integration, a person's religious life will become balanced.²⁶

Al-Ghazali also emphasized the importance of sincerity in religious practice. He says the

¹⁹ Bouyges, *Essai de Chronologie Des Oeuvres de Al-Ghazali*.

²⁰ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sejarah Pemikiran Islam: Dari Abad Klasik Hingga Kontemporer* (Jakarta: Pustaka Firdaus, 2011), p. 61.

²¹ J B Sudarmanto, *Islam, Kebudayaan, Dan Kemanusiaan: Perspektif Al-Ghazali*, (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2010), p. 77.

²² Kojiro Nakamura, *Ethical and Religious Thought in the Middle Ages: A Study of Ghazali's Ethical Concept*, (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1994), p. 68.

²³ Taufik Abdullah, *Sufisme Dan Kebatinan: Antara Tradisi Dan Modernitas*, (Jakarta: Paramadina, 2008), p. 46.

²⁴ Ahmad Thib Amir, *Filsafat Ketuhanan Menurut Al-Ghazali*, (Bandung: Mizan, 2005), p. 80.

²⁵ Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology...*, p. 133.

²⁶ Bouyges, *Essai de Chronologie Des Oeuvres de Al-Ghazali...*, p. 22.

worship practice carried out without sincerity is in vain. Sincerity is the key to ensuring that our actions align with religious teachings and have high spiritual value.²⁷ In religious counseling, integration between science and practice is critical. Religious counselors must have a deep understanding of religious teachings and be able to apply them to real situations their clients face. With this integration, counselors can provide advice that is not only theoretical but also practical and relevant.

Integration of science and practice is also essential in religious education. Al-Ghazali believes religious education must teach students about spiritual teachings and how to apply them in everyday life.²⁸ Education focusing on integration can help students become knowledgeable individuals with good morals. Apart from that, this integration is also relevant in social life. Al-Ghazali taught that religious knowledge must be applied in social interactions to create a harmonious and civilized society. For example, the principles of justice and compassion taught by religion must be realized in concrete actions such as helping those in need and behaving reasonably towards others.

In practice, science and practice can be integrated in various ways. For example, a person can create a daily schedule that includes time for religious study and time for carrying out religious practices. Taking part in religious studies and joining a spiritual community can also help someone apply the knowledge they have learned.

Al-Ghazali also taught that integrating science and practice must be carried out continuously. According to him, the process of learning and worship is a continuous process and should not stop. Thus, a person must always try to increase and apply religious knowledge daily.²⁹ Integrating science and practice is a fundamental principle in religious life. Using this principle, a person can achieve spiritual and moral balance and become

an individual with good morals. Al-Ghazali's teachings about integrating science and practice are a valuable guide for achieving a balanced and harmonious life.

4. Good Character Development

Al-Ghazali also taught that religious counseling must focus on developing good character (*akhlaq*). He identified several commendable characteristics that must be developed, such as patience, sincerity, humility, and generosity. Al-Ghazali believes that good character is a manifestation of a clean heart and is a reflection of correct religious practice.³⁰ Developing good character is one of the main goals of spiritual counseling. Al-Ghazali says good character results from a clean heart and a proper understanding of religious teachings. He taught that character development must start from purifying the heart (*tazkiyah al-qalb*) because a clean heart will give birth to commendable qualities.

Al-Ghazali identified several commendable characteristics that must be developed, including patience, sincerity, humility and generosity. According to him, patience is the key to facing life's trials and maintaining inner peace. Sincerity is essential to ensure that every action is carried out with sincere intentions.³¹ Humility is an important character trait for maintaining harmonious relationships with other people. Al-Ghazali taught that humility helps one avoid pride and feel closer to Allah. Generosity is a manifestation of compassion and concern for others.

In religious counseling, developing good character is a fundamental goal. Religious counselors can use al-Ghazali's teachings to help clients create commendable qualities and improve their quality of life. By focusing on character development, spiritual counseling can help individuals become better members of society.³² Al-Ghazali also emphasized that developing good character requires consistent effort. He teaches

²⁷ Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Mizan Al-'Amal*, (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'arif, 2001), p. 133.

²⁸ Ibrahim M Abu-Rabi', *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 155.

²⁹ Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology...*, p. 30.

³⁰ M Syafi'i Mahmud, *Etika Politik Islam: Studi Pemikiran Al-Ghazali*, (Jakarta: Rajawali Pers, 2006), h. 68.

³¹ H D Masdar, *Al-Ghazali: Pemikiran, Etika, Dan Spiritualitas* (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2007), p. 205.

³² Badri Yatim, *Kembali Ke Fitrah: Membaca Filsafat Al-Ghazali*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Zaman, 2004), h. 93.

that commendable qualities cannot be created quickly in a short time but require a continuous process. Therefore, people must always try to improve themselves and their character.

Apart from that, good character development also requires a conducive environment. Al-Ghazali believes that a good environment and relationships are essential to support character development.³³ By choosing good friends and a positive environment, a person can more easily develop commendable qualities. Good character development is also relevant in an educational context. Al-Ghazali believes that education must teach moral and ethical values that can help students develop good character. Education focusing on character development can help form a generation with noble character and contribute positively to society.

In practice, good character development can be done in various ways. For example, a person may take a training program or course on character development. In addition, reading books and literature that teach moral and ethical values can also help in this process. Al-Ghazali also emphasized the importance of role models in character development. According to him, good examples and examples are an effective way to teach moral values.³⁴ Therefore, a person must try to be an excellent example for others. Overall, developing good character is a fundamental goal in religious life. By developing commendable qualities, a person can achieve spiritual and moral balance and become an individual with noble character. Al-Ghazali's teachings on character development are a valuable guide to achieving a balanced and harmonious life.

Wasatiyyah Principles as the Foundation of Religious Life According to Imam al- Ghazali

Imam al-Ghazali emphasized the principle of *wasatiyyah*, or the middle way, as the basis for a moderate religious life. This principle teaches Muslims to balance spiritual and material needs, individual rights and obligations, and social

responsibility. Al-Ghazali opposes extremism, both religious fanaticism and secular materialism because it can damage the spiritual and moral balance of individuals and society.

Wasatiyyah encourages Muslims to avoid all forms of extremism. Excessive religious fanaticism can lead to intolerance and violence, while extreme secular materialism can lead to moral and spiritual degradation.³⁵ Therefore, *wasatiyyah* becomes a way to achieve harmony in personal and social life.

Al-Ghazali emphasized that balance must be maintained in all aspects of life, including worship and daily life. For example, a person must consider personal and societal interests. Wealth should be used for individual interests and to help those in need. The principle of *wasatiyyah* also emphasizes the importance of moderation in all things, such as eating, drinking, dressing and other aspects of life. Moderation helps maintain a balance between physical and spiritual needs. In addition, *wasatiyyah* includes tolerance and openness to differences. Al-Ghazali taught that differences of opinion in religion must be respected and not be a reason for disagreement. This tolerant attitude helps create a harmonious and peaceful environment in society.

In the modern context, the principle of *wasatiyyah* is very relevant to overcoming extremism. Educational programs that teach the values of moderation can help reduce bigotry and intolerance, thereby promoting peace and harmony in society. *Wasatiyyah* is also relevant in interreligious relations. Al-Ghazali emphasized the importance of dialogue and cooperation between followers of different religions. Interreligious dialogue based on *wasatiyyah* principles can help reduce tensions and promote mutual understanding.³⁶

In practice, *wasatiyyah* can be applied in various aspects of life, such as economics and politics. In economics, *wasatiyyah* teaches the importance of balance between profit and social responsibility.³⁷ In politics, *wasatiyyah* emphasized

³³ Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period...*, p. 45.

³⁴ Thoyib, *Al-Ghazali Dan Metafisika Kebebasan: Kontribusi Untuk Diskursus Hukum Islam Di Indonesia...*, p. 81.

³⁵ Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology...*, p. 109.

³⁶ Sherif, *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue...*, p. 85.

³⁷ Nakamura, *Ethical and Religious Thought in the Middle*

a balance between power and service to the people.

Al-Ghazali also emphasized that *wasatiyyah* is the key to achieving true happiness. Happiness cannot be achieved through extremism but through balance and moderation. *Wasatiyyah*-based education is essential for forming a tolerant and balanced generation. Education that teaches the values of moderation and balance can help students become knowledgeable and well-mannered individuals. Overall, the *wasatiyyah* principles taught by al-Ghazali are a strong foundation for a balanced and harmonious life. By implementing *wasatiyyah*, individuals and society can avoid extremism and achieve balance in all aspects of life, creating a more peaceful and harmonious world.

Expanding on the principles of *wasatiyyah*, al-Ghazali's teachings highlight the importance of intellectual and spiritual integrity. He argued that intellectual pursuits should be aligned with spiritual goals, ensuring that knowledge leads to wisdom and moral development rather than arrogance or detachment from ethical principles. This integration of intellect and spirituality is crucial for maintaining a balanced approach to life and preventing the fragmentation of personal and social identity.

Furthermore, al-Ghazali's *wasatiyyah* addresses the need for economic justice. He advocated for the fair distribution of wealth and resources, emphasizing that economic practices should aim for personal gain and the community's well-being. This perspective is particularly relevant in 'today's global economy, where disparities in wealth and opportunities can lead to social unrest. Al-Ghazali's call for moderation in consumption and generosity in sharing resources is a timeless guideline for achieving economic equity and social stability.

Regarding social relations, al-Ghazali's *wasatiyyah* promotes empathy and compassion. He believed that understanding and addressing the needs of others is fundamental to a cohesive society. This principle encourages individuals to engage in acts of kindness and support communal efforts to improve the quality of life

for all members of society. *Wasatiyyah* helps build resilient communities.

Al-Ghazali also linked *wasatiyyah* to the concept of justice. He asserted that true justice is achieved through balance and fairness, where neither excess nor deficiency exists. In this regard, *wasatiyyah* is a guiding principle for legal and ethical decision-making. It ensures that laws and policies are implemented with equity, protecting the rights of all individuals and maintaining social order.³⁸

Moreover, *wasatiyyah* extends to environmental stewardship. Al-Ghazali taught that humans have to protect and preserve the natural world. This principle of moderation in using natural resources aligns with contemporary concerns about environmental sustainability. By advocating for a balanced relationship with nature, al-Ghazali's *wasatiyyah* provides a framework for responsible environmental practices that can help mitigate ecological crises.

In personal development, al-Ghazali's *wasatiyyah* emphasizes self-discipline and self-awareness. He encouraged individuals to cultivate patience, humility, and gratitude, contributing to inner peace and resilience. This balanced approach to personal growth helps individuals navigate life's challenges with a stable and composed mindset, fostering overall well-being.

Wasatiyyah also plays a crucial role in family life. Al-Ghazali highlighted the importance of maintaining harmony and balance within the family unit. He believed mutual respect, communication, and shared responsibilities are critical to a healthy and supportive family environment. By adhering to these principles, families can create nurturing spaces that promote the holistic development of all members.

In educational settings, al-Ghazali's principles of *wasatiyyah* advocate for a balanced curriculum that integrates academic knowledge with moral and ethical education. This approach ensures that students excel intellectually and develop a solid

³⁸ Muhamad Hasan Sebyar, "Harmonization of Islamic Legal Institutions and Customary Law in Marriage Dispensation Cases at The Panyabungan Religious Court," *MILRev : Metro Islamic Law Review*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2023), p. 155.

moral compass. By fostering a holistic educational environment, *wasatiyyah* helps produce well-rounded individuals capable of contributing positively to society.

Lastly, al-Ghazali's *wasatiyyah* is a vital global peace and cooperation principle. By promoting moderation, tolerance, and dialogue, *wasatiyyah* can help bridge cultural and religious divides. It encourages nations and communities to work together to address global challenges such as poverty, conflict, and environmental degradation. Through the lens of *wasatiyyah*, al-Ghazali's teachings offer a blueprint for a just and harmonious world, where balance and moderation lead to sustainable peace and prosperity.

Conclusion

This research concludes that understanding Imam al-Ghazali's teachings on *wasatiyyah*, or the middle way, is crucial for religious counseling to foster moderate attitudes. Al-Ghazali's emphasis on balance in spiritual and material life and his rejection of all forms of extremism provides a foundation for practical applications in modern counseling. His teachings advocate for a balance between individual rights and social responsibilities, promoting moderation in worship, behavior, and social interactions. This approach helps prevent moral and spiritual degradation caused by fanaticism and materialism. Additionally, al-Ghazali's emphasis on tolerance and openness to differing opinions supports creating a peaceful and harmonious social environment. Applying these principles in contemporary religious counseling can effectively address modern issues of extremism and intolerance, guiding individuals and communities toward a balanced and harmonious life.

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