

The Principle of Moderation (*Wasatiyyah*) in Navigating Dialogue with Quranists: A Case Study in Malaysia

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Abstract

Objectives: This paper examines the persistence of Quranist thought in Malaysia and argues that despite various efforts, the problem remains unresolved. It therefore proposes a *wasatiyyah* approach as a balanced alternative to guide more effective engagement.

Methodology: This qualitative study employs documentation, observation, and content analysis. Primary data were drawn from Quranist writings, supported by scholarly literature. In addition, observational insights from direct engagement and dialogue sessions with individuals inclined towards Quranist thought were utilised to inform the construction of a preliminary *wasatiyyah*-based framework for engagement.

Findings: The study finds that Quranist rejection of hadith is shaped by Orientalist influence, weak religious literacy, and simplistic thinking reinforced by online communities. A *wasatiyyah* approach grounded in wisdom, compassion, and gradual clarification offers a more constructive framework than either harsh condemnation or permissive neglect. Engaging with Quranists requires perseverance, sincerity, and balance in fostering dialogue.

Originality/Value: The study proposes a context-specific conceptual framework that shifts engagement from polemics to principled *da'wah*, offering practical guidance for preachers and institutions. It recommends future research to examine classical precedents of engaging heterodox groups and empirically test this framework through interviews and case studies.

Keywords: Quranism; Hadith Rejection; *Wasatiyyah*; *Da'wah* Engagement

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منهج الوسطية في إدارة الحوار مع القرآنيين: دراسة حالة في ماليزيا

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ملخص البحث

أهداف البحث: يتناول هذا البحث الفكر القرآني في ماليزيا، الذي تجدد منذ ثمانينيات القرن الماضي وتوسّع عبر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، وتبيّن أنّ المشكلة ما زالت قائمة رغم الجهود المبذولة. ويقترح البحث منهج الوسطية بوصفه بديلاً متوازناً لتحقيق تفاعل أكثر فعالية مع هذه الفئة.

منهج البحث: يعتمد البحث المنهج النوعي، من خلال توظيف التوثيق، والملاحظة، وتحليل المحتوى. تمثّل البيانات الأولية في كتابات المنتمين إلى التيار القرآني، مدعومة بالأدبيات العلمية ذات الصلة. واستُفيد من المعطيات المستخلصة من الملاحظة المباشرة وجلسات الحوار مع أفراد يميلون للفكر القرآني، وذلك للإسهام في بناء إطار أولي قائم على مبدأ الوسطية في منهجية التعامل معهم.

النتائج: تبيّن أنّ إنكار القرآنيين للحديث يتأثر بالفكر الاستشراقي، وضعف الثقافة الدينية، والنزعة إلى التفكير التبسيطي، التي تعززها المجتمعات الإلكترونية. ويظهر البحث أنّ المنهج الوسطي القائم على الحكمة والرحمة والتدرّج في الإقناع، أكثر فاعلية من أسلوبي التشديد أو التساهل. ويخلص إلى أنّ التعامل مع القرآنيين يتطلب الصبر والإخلاص والتوازن في الحوار.

أصالة البحث: يقترح البحث إطاراً مفاهيمياً معاصراً خاصاً بالسياق الماليزي، ينقل التعامل مع القرآنيين من الجدل والمواجهة إلى دعوة رصينة قائمة على المنهج الوسطي، ويقدم إرشادات عملية للدعاة والمؤسسات الدينية. ويوصي البحث الدراسات المستقبلية ببحث مواقف العلماء الكلاسيكيين من الجماعات المنحرفة، واختبار هذا الإطار ميدانياً عبر المقابلات ودراسات الحالة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: القرآنيون، إنكار الحديث، الوسطية، الدعوة

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© ٢٠٢٦، أمات فامسير، وأحمد شاه، وإثنين، مجلة كلية الشريعة والدراسات الإسلامية، دار نشر جامعة قطر. تم نشر هذه المقالة البحثية وفقاً لشروط Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0). وتسمح هذه الرخصة بالاستخدام غير التجاري، وينبغي نسبة العمل إلى صاحبه، مع بيان أي تعديلات عليه. كما يتيح حرية نسخ، وتوزيع، ونقل العمل بأي شكل من الأشكال، أو بأية وسيلة، ومزجه وتحويله والبناء عليه، طالما يُنسب العمل الأصلي إلى المؤلف. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

1 Introduction

1.1 Re-emergence of ‘Quran-only’ Discourse in the Modern Period

The dispute against al-Sunnah, primarily driven by a movement known as the Qur’aniyyun (Quranists; a group that strictly adheres to the Quran alone and is widely identified as the deniers of the Sunnah), resurfaced in several places¹, including Egypt, India, and other Arab countries, at the beginning of the 14th Hijri century. Al-Ghawrī stated that doubts about al-Sunnah had long disappeared. Still, in this era, they have returned in the shape of the modern intellectual movement influenced by Orientalists.² If we observe, the issues raised concerning the rejection of al-Sunnah were actually the result of Western colonial propaganda, aiming to create doubts among some Muslims, especially the intellectual class and leaders, to weaken their religious strength and eventually prevent the Muslim community from rising against Western colonisation at that time.³

Among the Orientalist figures who were actively engaged in research and criticism of Islam, especially of hadith, were Ignác Goldziher, Joseph Schacht, G.H.A. Juynboll, Carl Brockelmann, Duncan Black MacDonald, and others. They tried to prove that al-Hadith was not the words of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, but instead an invention and utterance of later Muslims.⁴ Various criticisms and baseless accusations were made against hadith, for example, the claim that al-Sunnah was merely a collection of customs and practices inherited from the era of ignorance, that hadith writing only started after the first Hijri century, that the development of hadith was due to interaction between Islam and other religions during the first two centuries, and so on. Not only that, but they also condemned the Companions, such as accusing Abū Ḥurayrah of fabricating hadith for personal interests, as well as alleging that Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī forged hadith upon the request of the Umayyad rulers, and other similar claims.⁵

From this starting point, many Muslims themselves became influenced. Dona Armayanti and Zulhidah mentioned that some hadith observers stated the rise of modern *inkār al-sunnah* began from the time of Muḥammad ‘Abduh. Even though this claim can still be debated, Maḥmūd Abū Rayyah once referred to

1 The critique of Hadith emerged within a broader framework of criticism directed at the sources of Islamic legislation. Difficulties related to the understanding of the Qur’an in some of its translations, along with claims regarding its attribution to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, contributed to the consolidation of critical perceptions about the source of revelation, an influence that later extended to questioning the authority of the Sunnah. As one researcher notes: “some non-Muslims complained that they find it difficult to understand the Qur’ān. This difficulty was reinforced by the defective translations of the meanings of the Qur’ān, and by the claim that the Qur’ān was written by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.” See Abdulsalam Moqbel Almajeedy, ‘Structural and Thematic Coherence in Qur’ānic Sūrah (Taswīr): A New Domain in Qur’ānic inimitability (Sūrat Al-Nisā’ as a model),’ *Journal of College of Sharia and Islamic Studies* 40, no. 1 (2022), 252.

2 Sayyid ‘Abd al-Mājid al-Ghawrī, *Inkār al-Sunnah Tārīkhuhu wa Firaquhu wa Dawāfi’uhu* (Selangor: Penerbit KUIS, 2016), 63.

3 Faisal Ahmad Shah, *Kaedah Tepat Memahami Hadis* (Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Malaya Press, 2023), 258.

4 Mohd. Muhiden Abd. Rahman, “Pandangan Orientalis Terhadap al-Hadith dan Jawapannya dari Perspektif Islam,” *Jurnal Usuluddin* 5 (1997), 76

5 Abū al-Layth al-Khayr Ābādī, *Ittijāhāt fī Dirāsah al-Sunnah Qadīmuḥā wa Ḥadīthuhā* (Selangor: Darul Syakir, 2005), 55-74.

the expressions of ‘**Abduh** in his writings to promote the “Quran-first” narrative.¹ Meanwhile, in 1929, Aḥmad Amīn emerged, influenced by Orientalist thought, and opposed hadith. Later, this trend was also followed by Maḥmūd Abū Rayyah and Rashad Khalifa from Egypt.² In India and Pakistan, however, the *Qur’aniyyun* movement appeared as a result of British colonial influence. Benny Afwadzi mentioned that this movement was fragmented and led by Abdullah Jakrilevi, Ahmad al-Din Amratserri, Ahmad Parwez, and Abd al-Khaliq Malwadah. This *Qur’aniyyun* group also had two main principles: First, only the Qur’an should be used as a reference and guidance in religious and spiritual matters. Second, the hadith of the Prophet ﷺ is not considered a valid proof in religion.³

The Quranist thought in Indonesia began to appear openly around the 1980s. However, there is a strong possibility that the seeds of rejection of the Sunnah had already been sown secretly long before that, primarily through the influence of Orientalists such as Snouck Hurgronje, who was well-known for his colonial agenda to weaken the intellectual strength and religious tradition of Muslims. In the historical records of the development of this movement in Indonesia, several figures were identified as directly involved in spreading this thought, among them were Lukman Saad, H. Abd al-Rahman, Ir. Ircham Sutarto, H. Sanwan, Dalimi Lubis, and Nazwar Syamsu.⁴

1.2 Contemporary Presence of Quranist Thought and Institutional Responses in Malaysia

In the Malaysian context, the rise of Quranist thinking began to draw public attention in 1986, when the publication of a controversial work, *Hadis: Satu Penilaian Semula*, by Kassim Ahmad, shook the country, followed by several other writings in the years after. Through his writings, Kassim Ahmad applied a rationalist logic in interpreting the religious texts and rejecting hadith. He argued that the Qur’an is a complete, perfect, and detailed book that guides Muslims.⁵ On the other hand, according to him, hadith was only a collection of words and actions attributed to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, but without any guarantee of authenticity. Therefore, he emphasised that only hadith that align with the content of the Qur’an can be accepted, while those considered contradictory must be rejected automatically.⁶ Kassim Ahmad was also the pioneer and founder of the Anti-Hadith Movement in Malaysia, as well as the leader of Jemaah al-Quran

1 Dona Armayanti dan Zulhidah, “Inkar Sunah: Asal Usul Dan Perkembangan Pemikiran Inkar Sunah Di Dunia Islam” *Tashdiq: Jurnal Kajian Agama dan Dakwah* 2.1 (2023), 7.

2 Aḥmad Amīn, *Fajr al-Islām* (Windsor: Muassasah Handāwī, 2017), Maḥmūd Abū Rayyah, *Aḍwā’ ‘alā al-Sunnah al-Muḥammadiyah* (Kaherah: Dār al-Ma’ārif, t.t).

3 Benny Afwadzi, “Epistemologi Inkar Al-Sunnah: Telaah Pemikiran Kassim Ahmad” *Al Furqan: Jurnal Imu Al Qur’an dan Tafsir* 1.2 (2018), 129.

4 Abdul Majid Khon, *Pemikiran Moden dalam Sunnah Pendekatan Ilmu Hadith* (Jakarta: Kencana Prenadamedia Group, 2015), 79-82.

5 Izwan Mohd Ali et. al., Kassim Ahmad Dan Pemikiran Anti Hadis, *Jurnal AL-ANWAR, Persatuan Bekas Mahasiswa Islam Timur (PBMITT)* 7.1 (2019), 2-3.

6 Benny Afwadzi, “Epistemologi Inkar Al-Sunnah: Telaah Pemikiran Kassim Ahmad” *Al Furqan: Jurnal Imu Al Qur’an dan Tafsir* 1.2 (2018), 133-135.

Malaysia (JAM), which was later changed to Forum Iqra' (FORIQ). His movement has often become the subject of research by scholars both inside and outside Malaysia concerning this Quranist phenomenon.¹

Although this way of thinking seems less active nowadays in Malaysia, it has resurfaced with the reappearance of Quranist ideas, primarily through social media platforms such as Facebook and TikTok. For example, on 31 May 2024, a video went viral on Facebook showing a Muslim individual who openly doubted the authenticity of a hadith of the Prophet ﷺ regarding the incident of him being affected by magic. This person questioned the hadith narrated in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, arguing that it contradicted the Qur'an. According to him, the Qur'an clearly states that those who claim the Prophet ﷺ was bewitched belong to the group of wrongdoers. Therefore, he concluded that accepting this hadith as authentic is the same as acknowledging something that goes against the Qur'an, which would place a person among the wrongdoers mentioned in that verse. In addition, the individual also raised a question about how to distinguish the Prophet's ﷺ condition when he was in his sound mind from when he was allegedly under the influence of magic, if the incident happened.²

Furthermore, through dialogue sessions between us and several Quranists, it has been shown that they still exist in Malaysia and continue to move in underground ways. Some of them act as successors to Kassim Ahmad's legacy, while others follow the Quranist path through different figures, not necessarily connected to Kassim Ahmad or Rashad Khalifa. Although most of them hold different views, especially in the interpretation of Qur'anic verses, they agree that there is no need to rely on hadith as a source for Islamic law. This indicates that the thought still exists and remains active, but they do not appear or express it openly.³

In efforts to address this group, various measures have been taken at the individual, academic, and enforcement levels, including the issuance of fatwas. Mohd Al'Ikhsan Ghazali et al. noted that the religious authorities at both federal and state levels have taken firm steps by issuing fatwas, banning books that promote anti-hadith ideology, and holding discussions and faith clarification sessions with followers of this teaching. Jawatankuasa Fatwa Kebangsaan for instance, decided in 1986 that the book *Hadith: Satu Penilaian Semula* was in contradiction with Islamic teachings, and that anyone who rejects hadith as a source of law is considered to have left Islam. This action was further reinforced by the publication of scholarly works from religious institutions, universities, and local religious figures who came forward to provide clarification and academic refutation against the arguments of Kassim Ahmad and the supporters of the anti-hadith movement.⁴

Apart from official institutions, civil society and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also played an

1 Mohd Norzi Nasir et. al., "Metode Kassim Ahmad Dalam Kajian Hadis: Satu Penilaian Dalam Timbangan Metode Ilmiah Ulama Hadis" *HADIS: Jurnal Ilmiah Berwasit Tahun keenam* 11 (Jun 2026), 50.

2 Muhammad Nasri Bin Azhar. (2024, May 31). Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/mh77yMaDAs6FVMqh/?mibextid=oFDknk>

3 A direct dialogue session between the researchers and two Quranist informants on 20 July 2024, from 9 to 11 a.m. (2 hours).

4 Mohd Al'Ikhsan Ghazali et. al., "Strategi Menangani Kemelut Golongan Anti Hadis (GAH)", *Sains Humanika* 8: 3.2 (2016), 77.

essential role in curbing the influence of this ideology. Public complaints served as the basis for enforcement actions by the authorities. At the same time, Islamic NGOs such as ABIM published analytical writings, including the 1991 book *Islam dan Hadis: Satu Analisis Ke atas Usaha-Usaha Merosakkan Peribadi dan Autoriti Rasulullah S.A.W.* Academic research was also conducted, including master's theses that directly criticised the ideas of Kassim Ahmad and Rashad Khalifa. In addition, specific individuals also contributed by producing pamphlets, guidebooks, and newspaper articles to raise public awareness about the dangers of this ideology.¹

1.3 The Need for a Wasatiyyah-Based Framework

Although various efforts have been made (whether through firm and confrontational measures or through diplomacy and dialogue), the reality is that the challenge of Quranist thought has not yet been fully addressed. This happens because both approaches stem from different foundations of understanding, and often end without resolution.² What is more concerning is that if interaction is carried out too harshly and without wisdom, it not only fails to resolve the core confusion but may also worsen the tension between Quranist groups and the religious authorities. Therefore, there is a need to formulate a more balanced, wise, and *wasatiyyah*-based method, not as a denial of the efforts of official institutions, but rather as a complement and improvement towards more thoughtful engagement. This article proposes a *wasatiyyah*-oriented framework in engaging with Quranist groups in Malaysia. It is hoped that this writing can open an initial discourse on more appropriate ways, not only for authorities and religious officials but also as public guidance in dealing with these groups, thereby laying a foundation for a more effective approach in the future.

This study aims to explore how *wasatiyyah* approaches can offer a balanced and constructive framework in engaging with Quranist groups in Malaysia. Accordingly, this paper begins by explaining the concept of *wasatiyyah* in Islam and its general application in the field of *da'wah*, particularly in interaction with non-Muslims and extremist groups. It then examines more closely the attitudes and ideas of the Quranists towards hadith and attempts to understand the underlying factors that gave rise to such tendencies. Finally, this paper explains how the principles of *wasatiyyah* can be applied in engaging with Quranists, presenting an initial framework that is both prophetic and balanced.

2. Research Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative approach because it is best suited to gaining a deeper understanding of

1 Ibid., 78.

2 Omar Yaakob, "Menolak Penyelewengan Pemikiran Anti-Hadis," IKRAM, edited 21 April 2014, accessed 10 Ogos 2025, <https://ikram.org.my/menolak-penyelewengan-pemikiran-anti-hadis/>

Quranist thought and its root causes.¹ The qualitative approach enables this study to explore the concept of *wasatiyyah* in Islam and its manifestation in *da'wah* and in interactions with extreme groups, such as the Quranists. This approach is also appropriate for further examining how the concept of *wasatiyyah* can be implemented in engaging with this group and assessing its effectiveness.

In data collection, the documentation method was used, in which primary and secondary sources were gathered to identify and analyse Quranist ideas regarding hadith, particularly in both the general and Malaysian contexts. The primary sources include the writings and books of the Quranist group itself, as well as related books. Meanwhile, the secondary sources consist of journal articles, theses, dissertations, and books related to the theme of this study: the study of Quranist thought, the concept of *wasatiyyah* in Islam, and the interaction with Quranist ideas. These sources were obtained through libraries, online articles, and digital libraries such as *al-Maktabah al-Shāmilah*. In addition to documentary analysis, this study employed qualitative observation based on dialogue and engagement sessions conducted between the researchers and three individuals inclined towards Quranist thought, identified through snowball sampling. Participants were approached voluntarily, anonymised, and no identifying details were recorded. Observations from these sessions were used to capture patterns of interaction, responses, and behavioural tendencies, particularly regarding emotional tone, openness to dialogue, and reactions to different engagement approaches. This method complemented the documentary data by providing contextual and experiential insights into how Quranist ideas are expressed and negotiated in actual interactions.

For data analysis, this study employed content analysis as its primary analytical method. This approach involved a systematic examination of the primary texts produced by Quranist figures, particularly concerning their views on hadith, as well as an analysis of the principles and methods of *wasatiyyah* in engaging with opposing groups. The content analysis further focused on identifying how these principles may be conceptually and practically applied in interaction with Quranist thought. In addition, this study also incorporated qualitative observation derived from engagement and dialogue sessions between the researchers and three individuals inclined towards Quranist views. These observations act as supplementary insights to support and contextualise the conceptual discussion. The observational analysis focused on interactional dynamics, argumentative patterns, and responses to different engagement approaches, thereby enriching the interpretation of the textual findings.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Wasatiyyah in Islam

Wasatiyyah is one of the critical concepts in Islam because it relates to the way of life and conduct of religion in the lives of individuals and society. Linguistically, *wasatiyyah* is a word derived from the Arabic word

¹ Mohd Awang Idris, Haslina Muhamad, and R Zirwatul Aida R Ibrahim. *Metodologi Penyelidikan Sains Sosial*. (Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Malaya Press, 2018), 76.

وسط (*wasat*). According to Ibn Manẓūr, *wasatīyyah* carries several meanings, namely virtue, moderation, justice, goodness, and mediation. The concept of *wasatīyyah* was understood by classical scholars as balance and justice, which covers three main aspects: creed (*‘aqīdah* / theology), *sharī‘ah* (law), and ethics (*akhlāq* / morality). This understanding can be referred to through the interpretation of classical scholars on the words of Allah in Surah al-Baqarah, verse 143:

﴿وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا﴾ [البقرة: 143]

Translation: ‘And so We have made you ‘believers’ an upright (i.e., moderate, balanced, and outstanding) community so that you may be witnesses over humanity and that the Messenger may be a witness over you.’ (Surah al-Baqarah: 143).

Al-Ṭabarī interpreted the phrase “*ummatan wasatan*” (al-Baqarah: 143) as a just (*‘adl*) and chosen (*khiyār*) community, meaning a moderate people who avoid extremism and maintain balance between worldly and spiritual affairs, as well as between the rights of Allah and the rights of fellow creatures.¹ This interpretation is in line with the view of al-Baghawī, who emphasized that the meaning of *wasat* is a just and best community, because the best of anything is that which is in the middle. He stressed that Muslims are a middle community in religion, preserved from *ghuluw* (excessiveness) and *taqṣīr* (negligence).² Meanwhile, Imam al-Qurṭubī added another dimension, that the position of the Muslim community is “in the middle” because they are placed between the prophets and other nations, thus worthy to become witnesses of justice for all mankind.³

In a more contemporary context, Yūsuf al-Qarḍāwī explained that *al-wasatīyyah* is one of the main distinctive characteristics (*al-khaṣā’iṣ al-‘āmmah*) of Islam. This term refers to a state of moderation and balance between two opposing matters, without leaning towards one side to the neglect of the other. It also means not giving one aspect its due while sacrificing the rights of the other.⁴ Instead, *al-wasatīyyah* demands balance by providing space to every aspect fairly and granting its right with proper consideration, without exaggeration and without falling short of what is appropriate.⁵

However, the concept of *al-wasatīyyah* is also often misunderstood by certain groups. Khairul Azhar Meerangani et al. explained that some parties inclined towards liberal thought interpret *wasatīyyah* as absolute freedom, making Islam a religion that is overly easy, flexible, and tolerant without limits, according

1 Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Tawīl Āy al-Qur’ān*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Cairo: Dār Hajr, 2001/1422 H), 2: 627.

2 Abū Muḥammad al-Husayn ibn Mas‘ūd al-Baghawī, *Ma‘ālim al-Tanzīl fī Tafṣīr al-Qur’ān (Tafṣīr al-Baghawī)*, ed. ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Mahdī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1420 H), 1: 174.

3 Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li-Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, ed. Aḥmad al-Bardūnī and Ibrāhīm Aṭfīsh (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 2nd ed., 1384 H/1964), 2: 153.

4 Asma Nouri, “Applied Fiqh in Al-Qarḍāwī’s Thought: An Analytical Study of Its Foundations and Methodology,” *Journal of College of Sharia and Islamic Studies* 43, no. 1 (2025), 170.

5 Yūsuf al-Qarḍāwī, *al-Khaṣā’iṣ al-‘āmmah Li al-Islam* (Kaherah: Maktabah Wahbah, 2003), 115.

to the changes of time. For them, holding firmly to religious principles is considered a form of extremism. On the other hand, the fundamentalist groups accuse the *wasatiyyah* approach of being a trick to submit to non-Islamic systems or as an excuse to take the easy way. This confusion arises from the tendency of both streams to evaluate *wasatiyyah* only through a narrow lens of “moderation,” without referring to the comprehensive framework which emphasizes balance, justice, and wisdom as outlined in true Islam.¹

In the context of *wasatiyyah* as an approach in interacting with Quranist groups (as intended in this writing), it can be synergized through the concept of *wasatiyyah* in *da‘wah* as mentioned by Mohamad Zulkifli Abdul Ghani, which is a deep understanding of *da‘wah* that requires implementation based on the principles of *wasatiyyah*, that is, placing something in its proper place and level with fairness in terms of law, values, and practice. In other words, understanding *da‘wah* through the framework of Islamic *wasatiyyah* means ensuring that every approach is carried out accurately and relevant to the context, so that *da‘wah* always remains on the right track and effective in delivering the message of Islam to society.²

In line with this, Zulkefli Aini et al. emphasised that a preacher is required to practice the principles of *al-wasatiyyah* in their conduct with the *mad‘u*. This includes avoiding extreme attitudes in expressing opinions, avoiding harshness in situations that do not require firmness, and presenting Islam as a religion of tolerance, compassion, and mercy. Preachers must also always encourage goodness (*al-targhīb*), speak kindly, interact in the best way, and preach with *ḥikmah*.³

Likewise, when engaging with Quranist groups, the *wasatiyyah* approach requires that *da‘wah* be delivered with wisdom, without harshness or extremism, and with space for fair dialogue and explanation. This principle is fundamental when facing the challenges of modern thought, including the Quranist trend that rejects the authority of hadith. Therefore, before examining more deeply the ideas and arguments of the Quranist group, understanding *wasatiyyah* serves as a methodological foundation of *da‘wah* based on justice, wisdom, and balance. With this framework, interaction with them can be carried out not merely with emotions or rhetoric, but with firm arguments and a more effective approach.

3.2 Understanding the Quranism

The term *Qur‘āniyyūn* (القرآنيون) is a modern term that refers to a specific group that appeared in the contemporary era. Linguistically, this term is attributed to the Qur‘an, with the plural *Qur‘āniyyūn* and the singular *Qur‘ānī*. However, this term was never used in the early period of Islam to refer to any group

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- 1 Khairul Azhar Meerangani, Muhammad Ikhlas Rosele & Syamsul Azizul Marinsah, “Pendekatan Wasatiyyah dalam Interaksi Inter-Agama di Malaysia: Wasatiyyah Approach in Inter-Religious Interaction in Malaysia.” *MANU Journal of Humanities* 31, no. 2 (2020), 23-24.
 - 2 Mohamad Zulkifli Abdul Ghani, Abdul Ghafar Don, dan Khazri Osman, “Keistimewaan dan Ciri-Ciri Wasatiyyah Dakwah,” in *Dakwah dalam Pelbagai Dimensi*, ed. Abdul Ghafar Don and Ahmad Irdha Mokhtar (Bangi: Jabatan Pengajian Dakwah & Kepimpinan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2017), 52–53.
 - 3 Zulkefli Aini, Che Zarrina & Mohamad Zulkifli, “Pendekatan Dakwah alWasatiyyah,” *Afkar* Vol. 20 Issue 1 (2018): 187.

among the Muslim community.¹ Gabriel Said Reynolds, in *The Emergence of Islam*, mentioned that the term *Quranism* refers to a modern trend in Islam that holds to the principle of “the Qur’an only.” Ahmad Subhy Mansour founded this trend and rejects the authority of classical Islamic tradition, including the entire Sunnah literature, especially hadith, as well as the doctrine of *ijmā’*. Reynolds also explained that, unlike conservative and liberal Muslim groups who both refer to the Qur’an and hadith in defending their understanding of Islam, the Quranist group refers only to the Qur’an. This rejection gives the Quranists greater flexibility in addressing religious issues from their own perspective.²

In line with this, Husayn Alavi Mehr and Mahdi Fathi emphasized that the intellectual foundation of the Quranist movement comes from the rejection of the hadith of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, whether entirely or in large part, by claiming that the Qur’an alone is sufficient as the only source of legislation since Allah Himself has guaranteed its preservation.³ In the context of local discourse, Abur Hamdi bin Usman and Norhamizah Gasmin explained that the *Qur’āniyyūn* or Jemaah al-Quran is an anti-hadith movement that systematically rejects the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ, and even spreads doubts about it. They present themselves as a group calling for a return to the teachings of the Qur’an. Still, in reality they also invite society to abandon the hadith through *shubuhāt* (specious doubts) created to confuse the public.⁴

When explaining about the *Qur’āniyyūn*, Khādim Ḥusayn Ilahī mentioned that they were divided into three.⁵ Categories: [First] A group that rejected the hadith of the Prophet ﷺ completely. According to them, hadith is already contained within the Qur’an itself; therefore, there is no need for additional explanations of hadith outside of the Qur’an. This group also believed that the Prophet ﷺ had no authority in religious matters, since his duty was only to convey the Qur’an and he had no authority over the Sharī‘ah.⁶ [Second] A group that rejected hadith which is not mentioned in the Qur’an, whether explicitly or implicitly, as well as rejecting hadith that they claimed to be in contradiction with their reasoning. This group might still practice hadith in matters of worship, such as prayer, fasting, and zakat. Still, they refused hadith that they considered against reason, especially in matters of the unseen, such as the *Isrā’* and *Mi‘rāj*, the punishment of the grave, and intercession.⁷ [Third] A group that only accepted *mutawātir* hadith and rejected *āḥād*

1 Al-Qaḥṭānī, Mar’ī bin Muḥammad ‘Ā’id, “Mawqif al-Qur’āniyyīn min al-Rasūl”, *Majalah al-Andalus li al-‘Ulūm al-Insāniyyah wa al-Ijtimā’iyyah* 10.85 (2023), 12.

2 Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Emergence of Islam: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 207–208.

3 Alavi Mehr, Husayn, and Mahdi Fathi. 2022. “Challenges of the Quranists’ Intellectual Foundations.” *The Quran: Contemporary Studies* 1 (1): 58–59.

4 Abur Hamdi bin Usman and Norhamizah binti Gasmin, “Golongan Quraniyyun: Implikasi terhadap Pemikiran Masyarakat Islam,” in *e-Proceeding of 3rd INHAD International Muzakarah & Mu‘tamar on Hadith (IMAM 2018)* (Kajang, Selangor: Hadith Research Institute (INHAD), International Islamic University College Selangor, 27 December 2018), 31–32.

5 Khādim Ḥusayn Ilahī, *al-Qur’āniyyūn wa Shubuhātuhum ḥawla al-Sunnah* (Taif: Maktabah al-Ṣiddīq, 2000), 153–188.

6 Benny Afwadzi, “Epistemologi Inkār al-Sunnah: Telaah Pemikiran Kassim Ahmad”, 129.

7 Ishak Suliaman, “Liberalisme dalam Anti Hadith di Indonesia dan Malaysia,” in *Islam Liberal: Isu dan Cabaran*, ed. Abdul Karim Ali and Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor (Selangor: Persatuan Ulama’ Malaysia, 2009), 112–113.

hadith, even if they were *ṣaḥīḥ*, with the argument that there should be no speculation (*ẓann*) in religious matters.⁽¹⁾

This group has been actively spreading its ideas and expanding its influence worldwide, particularly in Malaysia. Among their activities is creating confusion among Muslims with ideas that cast doubt on the position of hadith as a source of Islamic reference. One of the confusions they promote is the claim that hadith is the cause of division and misunderstanding among Muslims. According to Kassim Ahmad, the hadith, or Sunnah, is a false teaching that appeared around 200–250 years later and was attributed to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. These “false teachings (hadith/Sunnah),” he argued, have been and continue to be the primary source of confusion and division among Muslims for more than a thousand years. “The division caused by the hadith was then legitimised and institutionalised.” In fact, according to him, the duty of a Messenger is only to deliver Allah’s revelation, which is the Qur’an, while the explanations of the Prophet ﷺ are dependent on the situation of his time.⁽²⁾

Furthermore, this group also claims that the authenticity of hadith is nothing more than an uncertain report that has been added to and reduced according to specific interests, whether economic, political, or others. According to them, hadith is not guaranteed to be true; the only guarantee is the Qur’an. They also argue that the existence of *mutawātir* hadith is unlikely, on the basis that their number is not certain.⁽³⁾ Others hold the view that hadith is not under Allah’s protection, and therefore it is not sacred and cannot escape from fabrication and alteration. As proof, they argue that the Companions never gave serious attention to preserving and transmitting hadith, pointing out that the *Khulafā’ al-Rāshidīn* did not widely disseminate hadith transmission, and that Caliph ‘Umar al-Khaṭṭāb even prohibited it in his time. If hadith were truly part of the symbols of religion, then surely they would have been the first to preserve it by writing it down, just as the Qur’an was written and compiled.⁽⁴⁾ Such claims reflect the various confusions in the thinking of the Quranist group, which cannot be discussed in detail in this paper. There are still many other arguments they raise concerning the Sunnah and hadith, but they cannot be fully gathered here due to the limitation of space and the focus of this discussion.

Most of the confusion and controversies in the thinking of this group are a result of several factors explained by scholars. According to Zikri Darussamin, some Quranists lack sufficient knowledge of Arabic, Islamic history, the process of hadith transmission and compilation, and the methods and methodologies of hadith studies. This lack makes them quick to conclude without understanding the complexity and

1 Ibid., 113.

2 Abur Hamdi bin Usman and Norhamizah binti Gasmin, “Golongan Quraniyyun: Implikasi terhadap Pemikiran Masyarakat Islam,” in *e-Proceeding of 3rd INHAD International Muzakarah & Mu’tamar on Hadith (IMAM 2018)* (Kajang, Selangor: Hadith Research Institute (INHAD), International Islamic University College Selangor, 27 December 2018), 34-35.

3 Deden Suparman, *Anti Hadis dan Engkar Sunnah: Suatu Kajian Perbandingan Antara Malaysia dan Indonesia* (Disertasi Jabatan Sejarah dan Tamadun Islam, 2003), 187–191.

4 Muhammad Taufiq Amat Famsir @ Amat Tamsir and Faisal Ahmad Shah, *Pemikiran Liberal Dalam Kritik Matan Hadis: Di Mana Silapnya?* (Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Malaya Press, 2024), 118-119.

systematic nature of hadith sciences. Others, meanwhile, tend to understand Islam only through the Qur'an in a literal sense, relying solely on logic, without wanting to engage in the study of the Sunnah and related disciplines. Such an attitude stems from a desire to think independently, free from the norms and traditions of Islamic scholarship, especially those related to the authority of the Prophet's ﷺ hadith.¹

Abu Bakar Muhammad Mahmud also emphasized that most of the figures who reject the Sunnah are not from religious scholars who specialize in *sharī'ah* or hadith studies. Instead, they come from various backgrounds, such as medicine, law, and literature, yet speak about the Sunnah without a strong basis of knowledge. Only a small number of them truly engage with the Sunnah after going through deep studies in *sharī'ah*. This situation further shows that their rejection does not come from genuine scholarly research but rather arises from ignorance, confusion, and uncontrolled rational tendencies.²

The inclination towards Quranist ideology overlaps with cognitive tendencies often observed in dogmatic ideological commitments, a dogmatic pattern of thought. A recent study by Leor Zmigrod and her team at the University of Cambridge shows that individuals exposed to extremist thinking often exhibit rigid thought patterns and tend to seek religious explanations that are simple, clear, and absolute. They find it challenging to accept the complexity or discussions that require deep analysis, and are therefore inclined to choose shortcuts that give immediate certainty. The combination of these cognitive and personality traits makes them more vulnerable to ideologies that offer simple, clear, and absolute answers to life's complexities. The difficulty of the mind in processing complex matters can push a person towards clear black-and-white doctrines, making them more exposed to hard authoritarian ideologies.³ Therefore, it is not surprising when Quranist groups reject the Sunnah and hold only to the Qur'an. This is because, within their framework of thought, the Quranist approach seems firmer, more structured, and more straightforward compared to the hadith tradition, which requires mastery of *isnād*, *matn*, and the diversity of its classifications. This phenomenon shows how weakness in dealing with religious complexity can drive someone towards a simplistic understanding, which eventually shapes extremist and dogmatic tendencies.

In addition, the group's psychological factors, as well as confirmation bias, play an essential role in strengthening Quranist thought. They usually interact within like-minded communities, including through certain websites and online discussion groups, which serve as spaces to reinforce anti-hadith arguments. This situation indirectly influences individuals who lack deep knowledge of Islam to accept such views. Findings from the researcher's discussions with informants also show that this group remains active,

1 Zikri Darussamin, "Kassim Ahmad Pelopor Inkār Sunnah di Malaysia," *AlFikra: Jurnal Ilmiah Keislaman* 8, no. 1 (Januari–Juni 2009): 22–23.

2 Abu Bakar Muhammad Mahmud Ali, "Ittijāhāt al-Qur'āniyyīn wa al-'Aqlāniyyīn fī al-'Aṣr al-Ḥadīth fī Inkār al-Sunnah," *Majallat Dirāsāt al-'Arabīyyah* 51, no. 3 (2025): 1619–1620.

3 Leor Zmigrod, "Psychological 'Signature' for the Extremist Mind Uncovered," *University of Cambridge*, n.d., accessed 14 August 2025, <https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/extremistmind>.

operating in secret and often holding internal discussions on issues related to Quranist thought.¹ Such interactions nurture the confidence that their views are more correct compared to the majority of Muslims, which in turn makes it difficult for them to accept criticism. This phenomenon resembles *illusory superiority* and *ingroup bias*, in which people tend to see themselves as reformers while mainstream scholars are seen as rigid and outdated.

Therefore, preachers and religious institutions need to be aware that the profile of Quranist thought is usually shaped by dogmatic attitudes, scepticism towards authority, and personal experiences that lead to a loss of trust in hadith scholarship, including negative perceptions of contradictory narrations or the misuse of weak hadith by unqualified speakers. Such characteristics demonstrate that engagement with this group cannot be approached in a confrontational or dismissive manner alone. Instead, it requires a method that is both balanced and constructive, guided by the principles of *wasāṭiyyah*, so that dialogue with Quranists can be conducted with wisdom.

3.3 Can We Engage with Quranists?

Before going further, a question may arise: “*Can we actually interact with the ahl al-bid‘ah, such as the Quranists?*” We often hear the *āthār* and the actions of the *salaf* who were very harsh in dealing with the *ahl al-bid‘ah* in their time. This was a consensus among the *Salaf and Ahl al-Sunnah* that the *ahl al-bida‘* must be detested. Al-Baghawī explained: “*The Companions, the Tābi‘īn, the generation after them, and the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah have agreed and reached ijma‘ on this matter; namely to show enmity towards the ahl al-bid‘ah and to cut off relations with them.*”² Likewise, Ibn Qudāmah mentioned that the *salaf* prohibited sitting with the *ahl al-bid‘ah*, studying their books, or listening to their words. Therefore, it must be firmly emphasized that such teachings are false.³

This can be seen through the sayings and actions of the early *salaf*. For instance, Ibn ‘Umar stated regarding the Qadariyyah: “*Convey to them that I disassociate myself from them, and they also disassociate themselves from me.*” Abū Qilābah also advised: “*Do not sit with the followers of desires or those who love to argue, for I fear that they will drag you into their misguidance and mix it with some of what you already know.*” Sufyān al-Thawrī further emphasized: “*Whoever hears of an innovation (bid‘ah), let him not convey it to his companions, for I fear that it may become embedded in their hearts.*”⁴ This illustrates the firm stance of the *Salaf* in dealing with the *ahl al-bid‘ah*. They unanimously agreed that any form of interaction that could allow deviant ideas to exert influence must be avoided entirely. This principle was grounded in the awareness that false arguments are often adorned with rhetoric capable of misleading, particularly those

1 A direct dialogue session between the researchers and two Quranist informants on 20 July 2024, from 9 to 11 a.m. (2 hours).

2 Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn ibn Mas‘ūd al-Baghawī, *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arnāuṭ and Muḥammad Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh (Damascus and Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 2nd ed., 1403 H/1983), 1: 227.

3 ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr al-Ṣāliḥī al-Dimashqī, *al-Kanz al-Akbar min al-Amr bi al-Ma‘rūf wa al-Nahy ‘an al-Munkar*, ed. Muṣṭafā ‘Uthmān Ṣamīda (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1st ed., 1417 H/1996), 435.

4 Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn ibn Mas‘ūd al-Baghawī, *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*, 1: 227.

who lack a deep grounding in religious knowledge. Therefore, avoiding debates, rejecting open dialogue, and preventing the spread of *bid'ah* narratives were regarded as part of the efforts to preserve the purity of faith and protect the community from confusion.

Nevertheless, as 'Abd al-Mun'im Asrār explains, the stance of the *Salaf* must be understood within the historical and social conditions of their time. Their stern rebukes, even to the point of declaring *takfīr*, were directed primarily at leading figures of *bid'ah* and extremist preachers who actively sought to undermine the very foundations of the religion. Many of them were in fact *zindīq*, whose aim was to dismantle Islam from within. The broader community of that early period also remained firmly committed to the Qur'an and the Sunnah, with the mainstream majority still aligned with *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*, even while facing major trials such as the *Mihnah Khalq al-Qur'ān*. Thus, according to him, it is not appropriate to apply the words of the *Salaf* and their actions absolutely to individuals today, whose circumstances differ greatly from those of the past. Considering contemporary realities, interaction with such groups should be balanced: firmly rejecting the falsehood of deviant teachings, yet at the same time allowing space for guidance, dialogue, and clarification.¹

Ibn Balbān in his work *Qalā'id al-Iqyān* has explained the Ḥanbalī perspective regarding interaction with the *ahl al-bid'ah*. According to the Ḥanābilah, they should generally be avoided, neither mixing nor showing close familiarity with them. However, this avoidance is conditional: first, if such individuals actively invite others into their misguidance; and second, if one fears being influenced by them and cannot advise effectively.² By implication, if a person possesses sufficient knowledge and capability, then avoidance is not obligatory. On the contrary, such a person should engage and confront them with proper guidance and clarification.

In this regard, al-Ghazālī's perspective in *al-Iqtisād fī al-I'tiqād* offers a highly relevant framework for understanding how a preacher should interact with groups entangled in deviant thought. According to him, human beings can be divided into several categories when confronted with religious arguments. Among them is a group of unbelievers or *ahl al-bid'ah* who are obstinate, rigid, and firmly attached to falsehood from childhood until old age. For such people, al-Ghazālī argues that debate and discussion bring no benefit; rather, they only increase in stubbornness. The only effective remedy in their case is firm political enforcement (*siyāsah*).³ By contrast, al-Ghazālī also acknowledges the existence of another group who, though misguided, possess intelligence, doubts, and a genuine sense of curiosity. Their hearts are softer, and with wisdom, they can be guided towards the truth. Thus, he stresses that this group must be approached with gentleness, compassion, and *talattuf*, not through harsh arguments or confrontational

1 'Abd al-Mun'im 'Abd al-Ghafūr Asrār, "Dawābiṭ li-Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah fī al-Ta'āmul ma'a Ahl al-Ahwā' wa al-Bida'," *Majallat Abḥāth*, no. 14 (April–June 2019): 426.

2 Ibn Balbān, *Qalā'id al-Iqyāl fī Ikhtisār 'Aqīdah Ibn Ḥamdān* ed. 'Abd Allāh bin Muḥammad al-'Abd Allāh (Beirut: Dār al-Minhāj, 2023), 272.

3 Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād fī al-I'tiqād*, ed. Anas al-Sharafāwī (Beirut: Dār al-Minhāj, 2021), 107–108.

debates aimed at victory. A combative style of disputation would only strengthen them in their misguidance, whereas a measured and caring approach opens the way for their return to truth.¹

This perspective is highly relevant when applied to engage with Quranist groups today. They are by no means a homogeneous community. Some are indeed dogmatic, firmly rejecting hadith and actively promoting their ideology on a wide scale. Such individuals may justifiably be addressed through legal measures and institutional safeguards. Yet others are confused, caught in *shubuhāt* (doubts), or younger generations swayed by the simplistic narrative that the Qur'an alone is sufficient without the Sunnah. It is this second group that calls for wisdom, guided dialogue, and gradual clarification. They remain within the realm of possibility to rediscover the truth. Al-Ghazālī himself cautioned against preachers who, in their zeal to defend orthodoxy, became excessively fanatical and humiliating opponents rather than guiding them. He reminded us in *al-Iqtisād fī al-ʿItiqād*:

“Most forms of ignorance have in fact taken root in the hearts of the common people because of the fanaticism of a group of ignorant men from among the Ahl al-Haqq. They displayed the truth in the guise of harsh disputation and argumentation, and looked upon their weaker opponents with eyes of contempt and disdain. This provoked within those opponents’ motives of resistance and opposition, until false beliefs became firmly embedded in their souls. Consequently, it became difficult for scholars with wisdom to erase them, despite the obviousness of their corruption and falsehood.”²

According to him, such an attitude only causes ignorance and misguidance to take deeper root in the hearts of ordinary people, for they perceive the truth as arriving in an arrogant and overbearing form. Hence, the principle of *wasatīyyah* demands that preachers refrain from harshness and condemnation. Instead, they should look upon the Quranists with eyes of *Rahmah*, seeing them as members of the ummah who are confused and in need of careful guidance.

3.4 Wasatīyyah in Engaging Quranists

Wasatīyyah is a principle that emphasises the middle position, which avoids extremism in *daʿwah* but at the same time does not neglect the duty of *Amr Maʿrūf Nahi Munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding wrong). Mohammad Kamil Hj. Abd. Majid stated that those who truly practice *wasatīyyah* in interacting with the *madʿu* are the ones who place themselves in the middle. They do not go to extremes by preaching forcefully, using harsh arguments, or employing methods that ignore the impact on the target audience. At the same time, they are also not among those who neglect their duty by staying silent and letting deviations and confusion spread without any corrective effort. Instead, it is this middle group who strives to approach, guide, and correct misunderstandings with wisdom and in accordance with the demands of the Qur'an and

¹ Ibid., 109-111.

² Ibid., 110.

Sunnah.¹

Among the *wasatiyyah* strategies emphasised by the Qur'an is the approach of *ḥikmah* (wisdom), which means delivering arguments with an understanding of the context and the intellectual level of the *da'wah* target. Second, *al-maw'izah al-ḥasanah* (good advice), which functions to soften the heart and open the space for more harmonious dialogue. Third, *al-mujādalah bi allatī hiya aḥsan* (arguing in the best manner), which is to reason calmly, politely, and rationally, without embarrassing or putting down the opposing side. These are the approaches to apply when interacting with Quranist groups to ensure *da'wah* efforts do not fall into harmful polarisation. In fact, they serve as the foundation for a more practical strategic framework for managing these differences, as detailed in the following section.

To provide a deeper understanding of the concept of *wasatiyyah* in engaging with Quranist groups, and to distinguish this approach from the patterns of extremists as well as those who neglect the duty of *da'wah*, this study adapts the principles of *wasatiyyah* in *da'wah* as explained by Mohamad Zulkifli Abdul Ghani et al.² Nevertheless, the table presented below is not a direct reproduction of their framework. Instead, this study has restructured and modified it specifically for the context of engaging with Quranists, so that its focus and application align with the objectives of this research. The details of these adapted principles can be seen in the following table:

Table 1: Wasatiyyah Approaches in Engaging Quranist Groups

(Extremists (Harsh	(Wasatiyyah (Moderate	(Neglectful (Loose
Close the door completely and allow no space for advice or dialogue	View them as mad'u who deserve to be approached and guided, except for those who boastfully and openly oppose Ahl al-Sunnah	Consider Quranist thought as harmless and therefore let them freely spread their ideas without any effort of clarification or corrective action
Using harsh, rude, and emotional language in preaching until it closes their hearts	Delivering arguments with polite language yet still firm, rational, and suitable to their level of understanding	Too soft to the point of not daring to correct the clear confusion in their arguments
Rejecting any form of discussion or dialogue with the Quranists	Willing to engage in academic dialogue, but within the limits of Sharī'ah	Too open in dialogue until they accept Quranist arguments that clearly contradict religious principles
Completely closing the space of interaction with Quranists, as if they no longer have hope to return	Accepting them as part of the community who are confused and misguided, and striving to interact with patience	Letting Quranist ideas spread as if they are of equal value to mainstream views
Forcing them to accept the entire Sunnah immediately	Giving explanations step by step, strengthening their conviction in the Qur'an before explaining the authority of the Sunnah	Neglecting <i>da'wah</i> efforts, not even trying to argue with the Quranists

This table illustrates three main approaches to Quranist groups: the extremist (harsh), the neglectful

1 Zulkifli Aini, Che Zarrina & Mohamad Zulkifli, "Pendekatan Dakwah alWasatiyyah," *Afkar* Vol. 20 Issue 1 (2018): 189.

2 Mohamad Zulkifli Abdul Ghani, Abdul Ghafar Don, dan Khazri Osman, "Keistimewaan dan Ciri-Ciri Wasatiyyah Dakwah," dalam *Dakwah dalam Pelbagai Dimensi*, 62-63.

(too loose), and the *wasatīyyah* (balanced middle). This categorisation is adapted from the characteristics of *wasatīyyah* in *da'wah* outlined by Mohamad Zulkifli Abdul Ghani et al., and then applied specifically in the context of interaction with Quranist groups.

First, the extremist group tends to see the Quranists only through the lens of condemnation and rejection. They are quick to judge this group as disbelievers or deviants, without giving them space to be advised or guided. The language used is often harsh, emotional, and rude, which closes the opportunity to touch the hearts of the *da'wah* target. This group also rejects any form of dialogue or discussion, because they believe the Quranists no longer have hope of returning. Such a tendency leads to a pressing approach, demanding that they accept the entire Sunnah immediately without considering the intellectual background, doubts, and context that shape their views.

Second, the neglectful group takes the opposite direction, being too loose to the point of neglecting the responsibility of *da'wah*. They see Quranist thought as harmless and, therefore, allow their arguments to circulate in society without any effort to correct them. Such an approach is too soft until it fails to address clear confusion, and sometimes too open in dialogue to the extent of accepting arguments that clearly contradict the true principles of Islam. This group also tends to neglect the process of *tarbiyah*, does not provide space for gradual explanation, and eventually places Quranist thought as if it were equal in status with the mainstream views of the Muslim community.

Third, the *wasatīyyah* approach presents a middle path that balances between upholding religious principles and accommodating present realities. A preacher with *wasatīyyah* character will see the Quranists as *mad'u* who need to be guided with wisdom, good advice, and respectful dialogue. They accept dialogue; rather, they are willing to discuss academically within the limits of the Sharī'ah, while still guarding the principles to avoid being overly accommodating. In delivering arguments, the language is rational, gentle, and suitable to this group's level of understanding. This approach also emphasizes the need for a gradual *da'wah* strategy. Their confidence in the Qur'an can serve as a foundation for strengthening their knowledge of the Sunnah step by step, so that drastic rejection does not occur.

In summary, engaging with the Quranist group should not fall into two extremes: either being too harsh until the door of guidance is closed, or too loose until the principles of religion are compromised. The balanced path is the *wasatīyyah* approach, which is based on wisdom, patience, and prudence in delivering the truth, while still holding firmly to the pure principles of the Sharī'ah.

3.5 Experiences and Practical Guides in Approaching Quranists¹

Based on direct qualitative engagement, observation, and dialogue sessions with three individuals inclined towards Quranist thought, this study finds that engaging this group requires more than textual refutation or doctrinal firmness alone. The interaction sessions suggest that relational dynamics, emotional tone, and the gradual development of trust are important for effective engagement. These dialogue sessions were conducted in accordance with the *wasatiyyah*-based framework developed in this study, which guided the researchers' approach throughout the engagement process. Accordingly, the following guides were created from a reflective analysis of these qualitative observations, drawing on both informal interactions and more structured dialogues conducted during the study.

[First], one key lesson from this study is the importance of building rapport through trust and respectful engagement. Our observations indicate that approaching Quranists with condemnation or an adversarial tone often leads to emotional withdrawal and defensive responses. In contrast, when they are approached as fellow Muslims who are sincerely seeking understanding rather than as ideological opponents, they tend to be more open to dialogue. In one engagement, a Quranist participant shared that he felt more comfortable discussing religious matters with scholars who engaged him calmly, compared to earlier encounters with preachers who responded with anger or dismissal. These earlier experiences contributed to his decision to disengage from dialogue altogether. This observation suggests that a non-confrontational approach does not imply agreement with their views, but functions as an essential foundation for sustaining meaningful engagement and avoiding premature breakdowns in communication.

[Second], meaningful engagement begins with listening. Our encounters indicate that many Quranists harbor long-standing doubts, frustrations, or negative experiences regarding hadith discourse, including exposure to weak narrations or the misuse of hadith by unqualified speakers. Allowing them to express these concerns fully, without interruption or immediate rebuttal, proved vital for understanding their initial *tasawwur* (conceptual framework). Based on engagement with three Quranist individuals, this listening approach often encouraged more profound reflection on the personal and intellectual factors behind their shift in thought. It also enabled the researchers to identify underlying assumptions and areas of confusion more accurately, thereby avoiding premature or misplaced responses that could be perceived as coercive or overly confrontational. Overall, this approach contributed to a clear shift in tone, from confrontation to dialogue, and reduced the perception that the discussion was aimed at “defeating” them rather than understanding and offering guidance.

[Third], identifying common ground played an essential role in sustaining dialogue, particularly by emphasising shared commitments such as reverence for the Qur'an and concern for preserving Islam's

¹ This study is based on observations from a dialogue session conducted between the researchers and three Quranist informants on 20 July 2024 at Lina's Counselling Café, Kuala Lumpur. We also extend our sincere appreciation to the Quranist informants (whose identities remain confidential) for their willingness to share their insights, perspectives, and references, which have significantly informed and guided this research.

authenticity. Our engagement experiences show that discussions with Quranist individuals often began with mutual agreement that the Qur'an is the primary source of Islamic guidance. The difference emerged over whether sources beyond the Qur'an, such as the Sunnah, should also be regarded as binding. Establishing this shared foundation helped frame the discussion in a more cooperative, rather than oppositional, manner. At a minimum, it created a less tense atmosphere. It made Quranists more willing to listen to historical and methodological explanations concerning the preservation and authority of hadith, even if these explanations were not immediately accepted.

[Fourth], our experience suggests that beginning with Qur'anic arguments recognised by Quranists themselves is generally more effective than starting with hadith-based proofs. Verses that emphasise obedience to the Messenger often provide a natural entry point for discussing the role of the Sunnah, particularly when introduced gradually and logically, without immediate demands for doctrinal acceptance. At the same time, this stage proved to be one of the more sensitive aspects of engagement. In several encounters, Quranist participants acknowledged that they were already familiar with such arguments and had heard similar explanations from preachers or religious figures, yet remained unconvinced. Nevertheless, our observations indicate that revisiting these discussions remains essential, not as a means of pressure, but as an opportunity for clarification and conceptual realignment.

[Fifth], the next phase after clearing the common ground is one of the more challenging moments in engagement: the dialogical stage, in which Quranists actively raise arguments questioning the authority of hadith. Based on our experience, this often involved references to narrations that are frequently problematised in contemporary discourse, such as reports concerning the Prophet ﷺ being affected by magic, issues related to dogs, or other narrations perceived as conflicting with reason or Qur'anic principles. At this stage, the preacher is tested not only in terms of technical knowledge but also in the ability to respond calmly and respectfully while maintaining a non-confrontational atmosphere. Effective engagement lies not merely in addressing the arguments themselves, but in doing so without allowing the discussion to shift into polemics or emotional escalation. Our observations suggest that when the tone moves towards accusation or ridicule, Quranists tend to become more defensive. In contrast, when responses are delivered with composure, empathy, and clear reasoning, while acknowledging the complexity of such narrations, the dialogue remains constructive even when disagreement persists. Maintaining this balance was crucial for preserving trust and enabling engagement to continue beyond a single session, rather than prematurely closing the space for dialogue.

Based on our experience during this process, some dialogue sessions did involve moments of tension, particularly when Quranist participants held firmly to their positions. At the same time, the researchers did not adopt an overly lenient or compromising stance in responding to these claims. Nevertheless, such moments did not lead to a breakdown in communication. Instead, the sessions concluded constructively and respectfully. Notably, the Quranist participants expressed a willingness to continue future discussions, indicating that despite ongoing disagreement, the relational space for engagement remained open. This

outcome underscores the importance of maintaining a balanced approach firm in principle yet measured in tone as a means of sustaining long-term *da'wah* engagement rather than pursuing immediate ideological resolution.

In summary, these experiences suggest that while Quranist convictions may not change quickly, a *wasatiyyah*-based approach grounded in empathy, patience, and wisdom helps preserve the possibility of guidance. When openness is maintained despite disagreement, the space for *da'wah* remains. In contrast, when engagement is marked by harshness, this space may close prematurely, limiting the potential for meaningful dialogue.

4 Conclusion

Engaging with Quranist groups requires an approach rooted in *hikmah* (wisdom), sustained patience, and the ability to maintain a balance between firmness in principle and compassion towards others. The *wasatiyyah* paradigm cautions against falling into extremes: on the one hand, being overly harsh to the extent that the door of guidance is shut, and on the other, being excessively lenient until the foundations of religion are compromised. By applying the practical guidelines outlined in this study, it is hoped that preachers and Islamic institutions will be able to fulfil their responsibilities more effectively while simultaneously creating opportunities for constructive and continuous dialogue. Ultimately, however, guidance (*hidāyah*) belongs solely to Allah, while the human role is limited to conveying the message with wisdom and planting the seeds of truth in others' hearts.

At the same time, this study recognises its limitations. Although it incorporates preliminary qualitative observations derived from direct engagement with individuals inclined towards Quranist thought, the scope of these observations remains limited in scale and depth. Consequently, the present research should be understood as a case study, with its primary emphasis on conceptual analysis and textual examination rather than on systematic fieldwork or large-scale empirical evaluation of the proposed *wasatiyyah* framework. Future research would therefore benefit from expanding this line of inquiry through more extensive observational studies, including sustained engagement, longitudinal observation, and structured qualitative fieldwork involving a wider range of participants. In addition, deeper historical investigations into how classical scholars interacted and engaged in dialogue with groups regarded as heterodox in their respective contexts may offer valuable comparative insights. By integrating historical precedents with contemporary empirical methods such as case studies and in-depth interviews, subsequent studies can further refine, contextualise, and assess the practical effectiveness of the *wasatiyyah*-based engagement framework proposed in this study.

In conclusion, the challenge of Quranist thought should neither be underestimated nor met with despair. Instead, it requires perseverance, sincerity, and reliance upon Allah. If a balanced approach is maintained, then, *in shā' Allāh*, the seeds of truth will gradually take root, and hearts once clouded by confusion may be guided back towards the light of the Sunnah.

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