

CONTESTATION OF THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT DURING THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC (INDONESIAN CONTEXT)

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Kasriadi

kasriadijaib@gmail.com

UIN Alauddin Makassar

Barsihannor

barsihannor@uin-alauddin.ac.id

UIN Alauddin Makassar

Indo Santalia

indosantalia@uin-alauddin.ac.id

UIN Alauddin Makassar

Abstract: *The involvement in theological thought (kalam) during the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia can be summarized into three groups. First, fatalism is the understanding of a society that believes that everything in this world is the totality of destiny and is the decree of Allah SWT. The second understanding is free will, believing in a person's freedom to choose between different plans and actions rather than waiting for fate to befall him. The third one is a central axis theology. Religious moderation can be understood as a view, attitude, or action that always takes the middle, fair, and non-extreme path in religion. Religious moderation should be understood as a balanced religious attitude between the practice of one's own religion (exclusive) and respect for the religious practices of other religions (inclusive).*

Keywords: *theological thought, covid 19*

A. Introduction

When covid 19 broke out in 2019, the attention, discussion, and public discourse were mainly aimed at health aspects and the impact of covid on human life, especially in the economic field. The biggest challenge faced by efforts to overcome covid 19 is the level of



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compliance with health protocols and the necessary restrictions facing significant challenges.¹ In reality, violations and public rejection of health protocols occur in many places. Various health protocols and appeals imposed by the government have received criticism because they are considered ineffective.

The government should focus more on the health aspect in tackling this pandemic. They forget that the role of anthropocentric religion has a big hand that tends to be narrowed.² One of the findings from CSIS³Indonesia reveals the prominent role of religion in determining and directing people's behavior during the pandemic. Denial and disobedience are often based on religious postulates as justification. Government policies on regional restrictions and so on which often make it difficult for the community. On the other hand, the role of the media displays contestation from various aspects.

For Muslims, covid is often disputed, and its source is from where, i.e., Allah SWT., and the remedy is also from Allah SWT. If the source is from Allah SWT, worship is the remedy, and the worship is in the Mosque. Then a new problem will arise if the community is prohibited from worshipping (congregation). In this section, the author limits the discussion by formulating two formulations of the problem as follows:

1. How do religious people respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia?
2. How is religious moderation in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia?

B. Research Aims

This paper aims to answer how religion can influence human behavior to support compliance and non-compliance in responding to this pandemic. Secondly, there is influence, discourse, and contestation in the doctrinal thinking of religious teachings so that we can know the proper steps/attitudes in responding to the covid 19 pandemic.

C. Results And Discussion

1. Ummat's Response to Covid 19

The covid pandemic is often associated with one's faith. For Muslims, for example, covid is often disputed that its source is from where Allah SWT and the remedy is also from

¹ Abdul Syatar, "Darurat Moderasi Beragama di Tengah Pandemi Corona Virus Disease 2019 (corona-19)", *Kurioritas* 13, no. 1 (Juni 2020): p. 1-2

² Vini Hidayani dan Doli Wirto, "Membangun Umat Antroposentris di Tengah Pandemi Covid-19", *QOF* 5, no. 2 (November 2021): p. 148.

³ CSIS Indonesian stands for Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and is a think tank focusing on the economy, politics and social change, and international relations. CSIS conducts policy studies, as well as public advocacy and public education.

Allah SWT. If the source is from Allah SWT, worship is the remedy, and the worship is in the Mosque. Then a new problem will arise if the community is prohibited from worshipping (congregation). The issue is whether this religion is in the public or private domain.

The existence of aspects of understanding that are too narrow in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic is contrary to manifesting religious teachings. If we look at and observe the behavior of society, in this case, the Muslim ummah, we can categorize it into several religious views as follows:

a. Fatalism

The view of fatalism believes that a person is already overpowered by fate and cannot change it.⁴ Many people believe that the Covid-19 pandemic is *Ta'un* (like the plague that once occurred during the time of the Prophet). This pandemic is a doom passed down by Allah SWT to humans who have committed many sins and impiety on the face of this earth. Another opinion states that this pandemic is the kind of disaster that Allah has sent down as a cleanser; Allah SWT is cleansing the earth from the perpetrators of depravity.

At its core, the understanding of fatalism believes that everything is the destiny of the creator, and humans, as creations, can only accept that destiny. Life and death have been determined, whether or not we die positive for covid 19, all of which have been arranged by the creator. So, there is no need to do too much action because the community, instead of getting the existing benefits, makes it difficult. In psychology, there is resilience as a problem solver, regardless of where the source of the thought begins.⁵

This view is widely found among the lower class, perhaps because the lack of understanding of the spiritual dimension coupled with the need for essential fulfillment has narrowed to make many people "very stupid" in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. They argue that not working does not eat, and not eating means dying, whether to choose where to die from corona or die of starvation because they have to quarantine and are not allowed to leave the house.

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b. Free Will

Free will can mean the freedom/ability to choose between different plans and actions. This second group of people argues that this pandemic is a challenge that must be solved. This group is okay if they pray, but not with a tight *shaf*. They are okay with the *tarawih*

⁴ Solihin, "Peran Manusia dalam Kehidupan Fatalisme", *Jurnal Al Amar* 1, no. 3 (Mei 2020): p. 61-63.

⁵ Pusat Penelitian dan publikasi Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat Universitas Islam Negeri Antasari, *Covid-19 dan Psikologi Islam* (Banjarmasin: Antasari Press, 2021), p. 73-74.

prayers being carried out at home. Weddings, markets, and schools synonymous with crowds must maintain distance with health protocols to reduce the risk of contracting the coronavirus.⁶

Later, some people were also disappointed with the government's attitude or policy that prohibited crowds (congregations) in mosques; there were even mosques that were closed to prevent crowds, but on the other hand, in the market, malls were left open, and there were very few health protocols implemented. Another issue is that there is a nod that getting a vaccine shot does not guarantee we do not get infected. Vaccines that should be antibodies in the body have become requirements in managing administration. Those who are not vaccinated will not be served.

People who are free will are those who are always trying to survive this pandemic. On the other hand, people will see that religion is no longer considered necessary in dealing with the pandemic. This dynamic is considered *takabbur* because, no matter how strong humans are in preventing the Covid-19 pandemic, they certainly cannot guarantee their safety.

c. Central Axis Theology

The central axis theology is intended to balance fatalism and free will by combining endeavor and *tawakkal* to Allah SWT. This attitude of society is that they trust doctors more than *ustad*, for example, in organizing corpses that have died due to covid 19.⁷ According to Islam, the organization of funerals must follow the proper method of *fiqh*. The bodies were wrapped in shrouds without other accessories, but due to covid had to use plastic bags, use disinfectants, and the organizers had to use unique medical clothing (PPE).

Whereas in educational institutions, schools, for example. The pandemic's beginning was "welcomed by students as they were disbursed," and learning was shifted to online. This solution is carried out to prevent the virus's spread to students. However, on the other hand, changes in learning methods and internet access in the regions is uneven (some are good and some are bad), making many students half-heartedly participate in subjects. It is common for teachers to come directly to the student's homes if they are known to have never actively participated in learning.

⁶ Ansani, "Analisis Terhadap Kontestasi Idiologi Kegamaan Kaitannya dengan Pandemi Covid 19", *Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar dan Sosial Humaniora*, 1 no. 6 (April 2022): p. 1230.

⁷ See Faried, F. Senong. *Fikih Pandemi Beribadah di Masa Wabah*. (Cet. I; Jakarta Selatan: NUO PUBLISING, 2020), p. 55-63.

Religious moderation with center-axis Theology means a religious attitude positioned at the midpoint between these two extremes⁸ is the ideal understanding given that in Islamic teachings allowing something that was initially forbidden for emergency reasons. The presence of pandemic fiqh as a solution to worship amid the upset of some Muslims who are too rigid in understanding the teachings of Islam. In Ramadan, for example, which is always synonymous with tarawih congregational prayers in mosques, when corona is prohibited, many daises give tutorials on tarawih congregational prayers at home.⁹ Islam as a religion has given many leeways. Nevertheless, it still goes back to the people. Whether or not it can become its private domain with the creator. Islam is the perfect religion that must be understood so as not to be outdated and able to be a good solution in all aspects of life

d. Religious Moderation: Smart in Responding to the Covid-19 Pandemic

Over the past five years, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has vigorously campaigned for religious moderation to ensure understanding and practice so that religious teachings are not understood to the extreme. This effort can undoubtedly be seen and felt in the impact of this moderation program. Nevertheless, signs of internal conflict among religious people are still being felt.

Religious moderation can be understood as a way of view, attitude, or behavior that always takes a middle ground, is impartial and is not extreme in religion.¹⁰ In specific communities, we often find either rightmost or far-left thoughts, including moderate or extreme degrees. This measurement can be corrected by using reliable sources such as Religious texts of the Qur'an and Sunnah, rules of the country's constitution, local wisdom, and mutual agreement in the form of consensus.

Especially for the people of Indonesia, it has become a habit to pray congregational prayers in mosques. However, this congregational prayer activity must be limited during the Covid-19 pandemic. The hope is that the prayers that are done well examine the triggers for the transmission of the virus. Some people can understand it logically. However, only a few are reluctant about this. Indonesia is a country that adheres to the understanding of tawhid. In dealing with the Covid-19 outbreak, the community must be encouraged to carry out education, such as through the socialization of a more active religious moderation movement,

⁸ Sabara, "Beragama dengan Moderat di Era Pandemi Covi-19", *MIMIKRI* 6, no. 2 (November 2020): p. 136.

⁹ Sabara, "Beragama dengan Moderat di Era Pandemi Covi-19", *MIMIKRI* 6, no. 2 (November 2020): p. 138-139.

¹⁰ Pusat Penelitian dan publikasi Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat Universitas Islam Negeri Antasari, *Covid-19 dan Psikologi Islam* (Banjarmasin: Antasari Press, 2021), p. 73-74.), p.1 7

so that there are no internal conflicts between people or between religious people requires a particular approach.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia plays a vital role in overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic by issuing various policies whose primary purpose is based on religious moderation. For example, SE. January 1, 2020, related to implementing the Covid-19 handling protocol in places of worship. The circular letter contains the importance of preventing the spread of Covid-19 in places of worship by inviting officials of the Ministry of Religious Affairs to socialize and synergize the circular in the community.¹¹ The basis of the principle of religious moderation is fairness and balance. This principle develops in understanding and practicing religion, especially when dealing with social situations. Religious moderation requires impartial and balanced insight in an objective sense based on scientific principles. Religious moderation means deliberate efforts and responding to hoaxes in the age of digital information development. This hoax has a significant impact on society, including some related to religious attitudes in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. Religious moderation as a perspective, therefore, aims to place a Muslim's response to the Covid-19 pandemic into a fair and balanced religious attitude based on objective evidence.

The ideal attitude of Muslims to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic as well as possible is to find as much information as possible about Covid-19 from credible sources. In this way, it is hoped to get clues and solutions to the problem. The attitude of Muslims in question is to trust professional experts in their fields, not to trust unauthorized third parties. Comply with government regulations, and implement health protocols.

According to the author three things to know. First, we should maintain a balance between vertical relationships to Allah SWT, maintaining faith and piety. Allah SWT will always take care of his servant, who always asks for help from those who draw near him. Second, we endeavor to take precautions that are intended so that we are strictly compliant with the government's recommendations. Third, instill an attitude of optimism and confidence in Allah SWT of healing. This is important because anxiety makes up half of the disease, while calmness is a cure for achieving healing. It is not a disease that Allah SWT brings down unless there is a cure.

¹¹ Abdul Syatar, "Darurat Moderasi Beragama di Tengah Pandemi Corona Virus Deases 2019 (Covid-19)" *Kuorioritas* 13 no. 1 (Juni 2020): p. 5.

Thus, the covid-19 pandemic makes us complacent about assuming it is an outbreak, but it also provides some wisdom in life: 1) with this coronavirus, humans should take better care of the health of what they eat and drink. In addition to being obliged to be healthy, they also ensure that they are Halal and tayyib; 2) the existence of this corona virus can strengthen faith and convince to Allah SWT, the almighty, over everything; 3) humans should do positive activities for the sake of health and stay away from harmful activities to avoid dosing and disease; and 4) humans must believe that the plague and calamity of Allah SWT that may overcome each problem with the permission of Allah SWT.

D. Conclusion

The contestation of theological thinking (kalam) during the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia can be concluded into three groups. First, fatalism is an understanding of societies that believes that everything in this world is the whole of destiny and decree from Allah SWT. The second understanding is free will, which is a belief in a person who believes in the freedom to choose between different plans and actions so as not to wait for that fate to be on him. The last belief is central axis theology or moderate understanding of religion. This understanding seeks to always be present in a modernity that is not extreme and extremist to the left. Religious moderation can be understood as a way of viewing, attitude, or behavior always taking a middle, impartial, and non-extreme path in religion. Religious moderation should be understood as a balanced religious attitude between the practice of one's religion (exclusive) and respect for the religious practices of others of different faiths (inclusive).

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