



HUMANITARIAN TURN IN CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC STUDIES

A REFLECTION OF ALI ZAIN AL-JUFRI'S THOUGHT ON RELIGIOUS MODERATION

Syauqi Imad

UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang
syauqihasan99@gmail.com

Irwan Ahmad Akbar

UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang
wawan.ahmad7@gmail.com

Abstract

This research aims to examine Ali Zain al-Jufri's religious moderation. Through his work, *al-Insaniyya qabla al-Tadayyun (Humanity before Religiosity)*, al-Jufri responds to the religious forms of Muslims in several parts of the world. By focusing on this work, the researchers thoroughly explore al-Jufri's thoughts regarding religious moderation. Why is this work relevant for study? Apart from the fact that no previous research has examined al-Jufri's work, this work is increasingly relevant to study if we reflect on current sociological facts. Much violence occurs in the name of religion. Those behaviors are nothing more than forms of interpretation, which are then considered the voice of God. At least, al-Jufri's work is one way out as an oasis to these problems. The method used in this research is a review-based qualitative method that focuses on examining al-Jufri's work. This research is classified as library research. In the end, this research concluded that there are three significant values of al-Jufri's religious moderation, including the command to speak good words (Surah al-Baqarah [2]: 83), the prohibition on killing fellow humans (Surah al-Ma'idah [3]: 32), and the order to uphold justice on earth (Surah al-Nisa [5]: 135). Therefore, al-Jufri distinguished religion and religiosity. Humanity, for him, is above religiosity, not religion.

Keywords: *Religion, Religiosity, Humanity, Religious Moderation.*



Introduction

Religion represents sacred texts, while religiosity is a product of human interpretation of sacred texts, which creates religious practices.¹ Religious truth is absolute, while religiosity is profane.² What about Islam? Is it religion or religiosity? The *mutakallimun* (Islamic theologians) state that Islam is the religion brought by the Prophet Muhammad for humanity so that they can live happily in this world and the hereafter.³

Meanwhile, *fuqaha'* (Islamic jurisprudence scholars) state that Islam is a religion that has core teachings: carrying out the *shahada* (the declaration of faith in one Allah and His messenger, Muhammad), performing prayers, giving *zakat*, fasting, and *haji*. Thus, this explanation illustrates that Islam has a religious dimension.⁴

¹ Mohammad Fahri, and Ahmad Zainuri, "Moderasi Beragama di Indonesia Mohamad," *Religions* 13, no. 5 (2022): 95-100, <http://jurnal.radenfatah.ac.id/index.php/intizar/article/download/5640/3010>.

² Izza Royyani, and Aziza Kumalasari, "Kritik Wacana 'Allah Perlu Dibela': Tinjauan Ulang atas QS. Muhammad Ayat 7 dan QS. Al-Hajj Ayat 40," *Al-Dzikra: Jurnal Studi Ilmu al-Qur'an dan al-Hadits* 14, no. 2 (December 25, 2020): 313-332, DOI: 10.24042/al-dzikra.v14i2.6307.

³ Abu Muhammad al-Husaini ibn Mas'ud al-Baghawi, *Ma'alim at-Tanzil* (Beirut: Dar Taybah, 1998).

⁴ Wahbah az-Zuhaili, *At-Tafsir al-Munir*, edited by Malik Ibrahim (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2016).

However, al-Nasa'i articulates that being a Muslim means saving other Muslims. In a hadith narrated by al-Nasa'i, it is stated that *al-muslim man salima al-muslimun min lisanihi wa yadihi [...]* (A Muslim is one who saves other Muslims from his words and deeds).⁵ Thus, it can be concluded that Islam originally has been the nuance of religion, when it shifts to the term Muslim it changes to the nuance of religiosity.

For Hosen, Islam as a religion is true, but when a Muslim carries out Islam, the potential for many mistakes appears.⁶ Because Islam is Allah's religion, a Muslim is just an ordinary human being who cannot avoid making mistakes. Hanafi reasons that it is not Islam that is wrong, but the religious attitude of its adherents (Muslims) that has the potential to be wrong.⁷

⁵ Ahmad ibn Shu'aeb al-Nasa'i, *Sunan al-Nasa'i* (Aleppo: Maktab al-Matbu'at, 1994).

⁶ Nadirsyah Hosen, "Chapter 9: Natural Law in Islam from Theological and Legal Perspectives," in *Research Handbook on Natural Law Theory* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019), 148-163, DOI: 10.4337/9781788110044.00016; Nadirsyah Hosen, "Challenging Traditional Islamic Authority: The Impact of Social Media in Indonesia," *Proceeding of International Conference on Da'wa and Communication* 1, no. 1 (219): 84-100, DOI: 10.2139/ssrn.3736749; Nadirsyah Hosen, "Islam Nusantara: A Local Islam with Global Ambitions?" *Indonesia at Melbourne*, February, 26, 2016, <http://indonesiaatmelbourne.unimelb.edu.au/islam-nusantara-a-local-islam-with-global-ambitions>.

⁷ Yusuf Hanafi et al., *Internalisasi Nilai-*

The problem today is that many individuals claim to be Muslims. Their religiosity does not reflect Muslim values. Ideally, a Muslim must perform a religious sense based on the hadith above. Ironically, it is Muslims who are the perpetrators who threaten other people.

Therefore, al-Jufri, through his work entitled *al-Insaniyya qabla al-Tadayyun* (2010), explicitly uses the term *al-tadayyun* (religiosity) instead of *al-din* (religion). He is well aware that humanity is at the top of the hierarchy in social life.⁸ He emphasizes that humanity is not above religion; religion remains number one for him. In al-Jufri's view, religion and religiosity are related but must be distinguished.⁹ The Qur'an and al-Hadith are undoubtedly true and holy religious texts. However, the views and attitudes of a Muslim are certainly not necessarily actual or holy. This failure to separate makes what is understood in the scriptures seem as absolute as the truth of the scriptures. In his work, al-Jufri tries to solve the problems of Mus-

lims today, who often make mistakes in their actions.

This research examines the concept of religious moderation from the perspective of Ali Zain al-Jufri and focuses on his work entitled *al-Insaniyya Qabla al-Tadayyun*, as a primary source. Hence, this research is classified as qualitative-descriptive research with a critical review and some comments on the work about religious moderation.

Al-Jufri and His Thought of Humanity before Religiosity

Al-Jufri and His Life

Ali Zainal Abidin ibn Abd al-Rahman al-Jufri is a Sunni Yemeni preacher and spiritual figure. He was born in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia on April 16, 1971. Al-Jufri is one of the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad through the lineage of Husain.¹⁰

¹⁰ S.A. Zein, *Habib Ali al-Jufri: Menyayangi Sesama, Memanusiakan Manusia*, edited by Yanuar Arifin (Jakarta Selatan: Laksana, 2021). The following is al-Jufri's genealogy: 'Ali ibn Abd al-Rahman, ibn 'Ali, ibn Muhammad, ibn 'Alawi, ibn 'Ali, ibn 'Alawi, ibn 'Ali, ibn Ahmad, ibn 'Alawi, ibn 'Abd al-Rahman Mawla al-Arsyah, ibn Muhammad, ibn 'Abdallah al-Tarisi, ibn 'Alawi al-Khawas, ibn Abu Bakr al-Jifri, ibn Muhammad, ibn 'Ali, ibn Muhammad, ibn Ahmad, ibn Muhammad al-Faqih al-Muqaddam, ibn 'Ali, ibn Muhammad Sahib al-Mirbat, ibn 'Ali Khali Qasam, ibn 'Alawi al-Sani, ibn Muhammad Sahib al-Sawma'ah, ibn 'Alawi al-Awwal, ibn 'Ubayd Allah, ibn Ahmad al-Muhajir, ibn 'Isa al-Rumi, ibn Muhammad al-Naqib, ibn 'Ali al-Uraydi, ibn

nilai Moderasi Beragama dalam Perkuliahan Pendidikan Agama Islam pada Perguruan Tinggi Umum (Sidoarjo: Delta Pijar Khatulistiwa, 2022).

⁸ Noorhaidi Hasan, "Religious Diversity and Blasphemy Law: Understanding Growing Religious Conflict and Intolerance in Post-Suharto Indonesia," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 55, no. 1 (June 26, 2017): 105-126, DOI: 10.14421/ajis.2017.551.105-126.

⁹ Ali Zainul Abidin ibn Abdirrahman al-Jufri, *Al-Insaniyya Qabla al-Tadayyun* (Abu Dhabi: Dar Al Faqih, 2015).

Al-Jufri has studied religion since childhood through his first teacher, his aunt (his mother's sister), Safiyyah binti Alawi ibn Hasan al-Jufri. It was his aunt who had a significant influence in shaping his Sufism. Indeed, his aunt was known as a respected Sufi figure. Furthermore, al-Jufri studied with Abd al-Qadir ibn Ahmad al-Saqqaf for about 11 years in studying *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, and several classic books that are very important for Sunni adherents. Al-Jufri also studied the sciences of Hadith, *Usul*, and Islamic history with Muhammad ibn Alawi al-Maliki. For four years, al-Jufri studied with Abu Bakr al-'Adni ibn 'Ali al-Masyhur in studying *Sunan ibn Majah*, *al-Risalat al-Jami'ah*, *Bidayat al-Hidayah*, *al-Muqaddima al-Hadramiyyah*, *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*, *Tafsir Ayat al-Ahkam*, and *Tafsir al-Baghawi*.¹¹

At 21, al-Jufri studied at the al-Dirasat al-Islamiyyah (Islamic Studies) Faculty, Sana'a University, Yemen (1991-1993). After that, he settled in Tarim, Hadhramaut, Yemen, accompanying Umar ibn Muhammad ibn Hafiz until 2003. Syaikh Apart from studying with

Ja'far al-Sadiq, ibn Muhammad al-Baqir, ibn 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin, ibn Husain, ibn 'Ali ibn Abi Talib dan Fatimah al-Zahra', binti Muhammad Saw. Dicky Adi Setiawan, *Gagasan Moderasi Beragama Habib Ali Zainal Abidin al-Jufri* (Purwokerto: CV. Pena Persada, 2021).

¹¹ Ali Zainul Abidin ibn Abdirrahman al-Jufri, *Kemanusiaan Sebelum Keberagamaan* (Jakarta Selatan: Noura Books, 2019).

Umar al-Hafiz, al-Jufri also studied with other influential figures such as Umar al-Khatib, Mutawalli al-Sya'rawi, and several important Egyptian Muslim figures such as Muhammad Zakiyud-Din Ibrahim. Therefore, al-Jufri has mastered many qualifications from various Islamic science branches and teaches at several schools in Yemen. After 1993, al-Jufri began to spread his thought to several countries such as UAE, Jordan, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Sudan (Arabia), Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, India (Asia), Kenya and Tanzania (Africa), United Kingdom, Germany, France, Netherlands (Europe), and the United States. Apart from actively preaching in various *da'wah*, al-Jufri is also quite productive in writing works such as *Sahifah Sajjadiyyah*, *Risalat al-Huquq*, *Ziyarah Amin-Allah*, and *al-Insaniyyah qabla al-Tadayyu*.¹²

Al-Jufri's *Al-Insaniyaah qabla al-Tadayyun*

Al-Jufri's work, *Al-Insaniyaah qabla al-Tadayyun*, consists of 63 articles arranged in simple and written in substantive language. The book was initially written in Arabic and translated into various languages, such as English and Indonesian.¹³ In the first part, al-Jufri

¹² Setiawan, *Gagasan Moderasi Beragama Habib Ali Zainal Abidin al-Jufri*.

¹³ Ahmad Saufi Abie, "Moderasi Beragama Menurut Penafsiran Habib 'Ali al-Jufri dalam Kitab *Al-Insaniyyah qablat Tadayyun*," (*Under-*

explains his reflection on human beings that often failed. For example, when al-Jufri discussed Marx's thoughts and the power of Lenin-Stalin with an atheist student, al-Jufri felt that implementing this ideology was a complete failure. For him, Marx was a philosopher, while Lenin was a fraud, and Stalin was a butcher. The young man countered this narrative. Then, al-Jufri's criticism always gave birth to the opposite for the atheist youth until the day before dawn. Even though the discussion proceeded peacefully, al-Jufri felt that he was only driven by lust when discussing. He is often unable to be objective and only performs double-standard behavior. In essence, al-Jufri provides essential advice so that people need to learn to accept differences. So as not to get caught in the valley of bigotry, which, according to him, is the seed of every destruction.

In the second part, al-Jufri focuses on several contemporary phenomena that characterize the lives of Muslims in Yemen, Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, and other places where religion is used as a political instrument. Al-Jufri reminded the country's leaders not to be complacent with political victories that seemed to represent God's will. This statement received a response from an Egyptian resident who criticized

graduated Thesis, UIN Antasari Banjarmasin, 2015), <https://idr.uin-antasari.ac.id/id/eprint/18697>.

al-Jufri's argument because he seemed to suggest a leader from a non-Muslim circle. Consequently, al-Jufri concluded that a Muslim must be fair and objective. A Muslim should not judge based on love or hate but honestly because of his knowledge and faith in Allah.

Then, in the third part, al-Jufri criticizes the youth generations' lives and views. According to him, youth is the most strategic party to cause confusion, which impacts atheism and heretical thinking. However, despite this, al-Jufri appreciates young people who are still willing to learn and always search for the truth. Often, youths with high egos and unstable emotions can bring up violence. Learn as freely as possible, as long as his thoughts do not hurt fellow human beings, just like Abraham, who went from disbelief to faith.

In the fourth part, al-Jufri discusses several essential concepts on religious moderation in al-Jufri's view. He quoted one of the Prophet's hadiths about respecting brotherhood, preventing bloodshed, and making the streets safe. Al-Jufri focuses on three things: the command to speak good words (surah al-Baqarah [2]: 83), the prohibition on killing fellow humans (surah al-Ma'idah [5]: 32), and the order to uphold justice on earth (surah al-Nisa [4]: 135). It is the theoretical basis for al-Jufri's moderate perspective, which became the book's title, *Humanity before Religiosity*.

In the fifth part, al-Jufri focuses on Muslim individuals and groups of Muslims who claim other people as disbelievers or infidels. For him, this behavior was vehemently opposed by the Prophet Muhammad. When someone says to his brother as infidels, it will return to one of them. He philosophically breaks down the meaning of infidel using a linguistic approach, then contextualizes it in the Islamic Sharia. Furthermore, he concluded that it is definite infidels that can be fought when they are manifestly harmful to the established peace. A person cannot consider disbelief based solely on his assumptions, but there must be empirical evidence that describes destructive behavior. At least, the minimum standard for being able to say someone is an infidel if he/she declares self-consciously that he or she is an infidel. As long as there is no empirical evidence and recognition, the label of infidel cannot be attributed to anyone. Ultimately, the most authoritative to judge an unbeliever is God.

In the sixth part, al-Jufri suggests that humans are always balanced in evaluating truth. Even if those who do and say are non-Muslims, if it is true, then dare to say it is true. Al-Jufri explained the example of the tragedy of Galileo's punishment because he was considered to be against the church. Al-Jufri also explained a humanitarian crisis phenomenon in several Central African coun-

tries, such as the Seleka coup attempt, which incidentally was a minority Muslim group against Christian leaders who were considered infidels. Imam Omar Layama, as president of the Central African Muslim community, joined with Archbishop Diedonne Nzapalainga, actively calling for peace. In this case, al-Jufri views political motives as permanently colored by religious narratives, thereby threatening peace. In the end, this does not solve any problem. Precisely, it adds to the complex two-way relationship that is mutually contradictory. Muslims hate the West more and more; the West hates Muslims even more because they are portrayed as those who like violence. Again, Muslims need evident and proportional consideration to suppose the truth from anywhere, no matter how bitter.

In the seventh part, al-Jufri emphasizes discussion on the elite group of thinkers and intellectuals responding more critically and in a balanced way to recent phenomena, especially within the Muslim community. Many issues of humanitarian violence are carried out by groups who, according to al-Jufri, are called *fatwa fighters* who judge anyone different from them. However, other facts also show that narratives from intellectual elite groups have contributed to violence, such as the bloodshed since the French Revolution. Often, the intellectual elite echoes the narrative of the

right to freedom of expression, but in reality, this freedom clashes with fundamental human values. Furthermore, al-Jufri needs to remind us that there is only a benefit in simply focusing on people's worldview, as the disease that misleading the human soul results in the decline of the human moral order. Finally, dialogue wrapped in scientific terms is not far from satisfying human interests and desires.

After al-Jufri explained a subtle critical narrative at length, in the final part of his book, al-Jufri gave advice and suggested, as in the Qur'an, that believers would give good news. The usual pattern is that a verse of the Qur'an will begin with a warning, consequences, and punishment, and then, at the end of the verse, it will end with the good news that Allah has given to believers. In this part, al-Jufri wants to show that no matter how bad a human's behavior is, Allah will accept his repentance if he intends to be the right human.

Al-Jufri's Reflection on Religious Moderation

Al-Jufri is one of the 500 most influential Muslim intellectuals, according to Georgetown University and Jordan's Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Center. As an authoritative figure, his work also received praise and awards. In Hosen's opinion, this book really shakes the readers' hearts. Because al-Jufri is consi-

dered observant in reading some of the phenomena that have occurred recently.¹⁴ In Zein's opinion, the author of the biography of Habib Ali al-Jufri states that this book is the work of a wise person with excellent knowledge.¹⁵ Therefore, he is welcomed by many people. Because of this, his work is very relatable to current society.

This work resulted from al-Jufri's experiences in his journey worldwide. In a way, al-Jufri appears as an anthropologist keen to photograph every phenomenon and incident. Then, he gave critical comments wrapped in human values. That is why Hosen finds this book very moving; it cannot be denied that every comment by al-Jufri truly touches the deepest depths of human beings. Scholars assess that some of the topics raised by al-Jufri are right on target in photographing the problems of Muslims today. Al-Jufri's explanations range from phenomenal to conceptual issues. One compelling thing about his work is the early part that al-Jufri opens with self-criticism. He commented on many phenomena. Even so, al-Jufri targeted himself first before finally targeting other parties.

Al-Jufri emphasizes religious moderation by quoting a hadith of the Prophet, which tells the story of a man who came to the Prophet during the early days of

¹⁴ Al-Jufri, *Kemanusiaan Sebelum Keberagamaan*.

¹⁵ Zein, *Habib Ali Al-Jufri*.

the Prophet's preaching in Mecca. The man asks the Prophet one question about what messages Muhammad brought as a messenger of God. The Prophet's answer is to uphold brotherly bonds, prevent bloodshed, make the streets safe, destroy idols, and worship Allah without partners with Him.¹⁶ Based on the Prophet's response, it can be concluded that there are two types of messages on humanity (such as brotherhood, preventing war, and security) and on theology, such as teachings of monotheism, destroying idols, and worshiping Allah. For al-Jufri, the Prophet's message conveys that human values precede religious teachings in life. In this case, al-Jufri divides religion and religiosity, for many Muslims often violate human norms and values. It means that a Muslim commits these deviations in the name of Islam. Therefore, for al-Jufri, the phenomenon of a Muslim's behavior is not based on Islam as a religion but Islam as religiosity.

Socio-historically, al-Jufri is an Alawiyyin who highly upheld Sufistic values, and the Ba'alawi clan is very close to the spiritual world. Habib Umar al-Hafiz is one of the characters that describes the Ba'alawi.¹⁷ The Alawiyyah

¹⁶ Sulayman ibn al-Ash'ariyya al-Sijistani, *Sunan Abi Daud* (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-'Asriyya, n.d.).

¹⁷ Fatimah Husein, "Preserving and Transmitting the Teachings of the Thariqah 'Alawiyyah: Diasporic Ba'Alawi Female Preachers in

tariqa (order), founded by the Ba'alawi clan, also highly upholds human values in its teachings. Despite living in a patriarchal society, when al-Jufri was little, he was taught by a female teacher, Safiyyah binti Alawi, a respected Sufi figure in Yemen. It shows that the Ba'alawi family prioritizes human values rather than the dominance of their social system. Consequently, this also influences al-Jufri's religious views on human values.

In his work, al-Jufri also responds to current Islamic phenomena through argumentation based on several verses of the Qur'an. Al-Jufri discusses surah al-Baqarah ([2]: 83) on the means of *humans*, *Muslims*, and *Ihsan* meanings and how it relates to *amr ma'ruf nahi munkar*. Al-Jufri also interprets surah al-Ma'idah [5]: 32 and surah al-Nisa [4]: 135. Al-Jufri's views on religious moderation are based on these verses.

Abi's research shows that al-Jufri's book indirectly implemented the thematic method in interpreting these three verses.¹⁸ For example, when al-Jufri interpreted "*wa qulu li al-nasi husna*" (*Speak kind words to fellow humans!*), he attempted to thematize based on the topic. Then, al-Jufri explained the reasons for the revelation of this verse—namely, a warning to the Israelis who selectively

Contemporary Indonesia," *The Journal of Indian Ocean World Studies* 4, no. 2 (2021): 165–87, DOI: 10.26443/jiows.v4i2.82.

¹⁸ Abie, "Moderasi Beragama Menurut Penafsiran Habib 'Ali al-Jufri."

apply religious teachings under the pretext of illiteracy. This aspect then becomes an indicator in interpreting the meaning of the verse in al-Jufri's view.¹⁹

Apart from that, al-Jufri's interpretation shows the pattern of *adabi wa al-ijtima'i*, the interpretation that brings out aspects of guidance (*hidayah*) in the context of society, then connects the meaning of the verses of the social system and development without complicated terms. The characteristics of al-Jufri's interpretation are the use of beautiful editorial concepts that motivate people to be enthusiastic about doing good deeds and contextualize the Qur'an to the social reality to be easily understood.²⁰

Despite this work significantly contributing to the context of social life, it needs to contribute more to an academic context because al-Jufri's writing arranges articles based on a period without a specific reference. Al-Jufri indirectly did not convey a scientific discourse, so it cannot be considered a baboon reference. However, overall, the work can describe the development of al-Jufri's thought.

¹⁹ Muhammad Shihab ad-Din Abu ath-Thana' al-Alusi, *Ruh al-Ma'ani* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' Turath, n.d.); Fakhr ad-Din Abu 'Abdullah Muhammad ibn 'Umar ar-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghaib*, edited by Muhammad 'Ali Baidlawi (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2004).

²⁰ Abie, "Moderasi Beragama Menurut Penafsiran Habib 'Ali al-Jufri."

Conclusion

The concept of religious moderation in the view of al-Jufri is based on the Qur'an, including the command to speak good words (surah al-Baqarah [2]: 83), the prohibition of killing fellow human beings (surah al-Ma'idah [4]: 32), and orders to uphold justice on earth (surah al-Nisa [5]: 135). These three primary reflections suggest the humanitarian aspects of religion study, such as a just, tolerant, and balanced attitude. This concept realizes peace, minimizes bloodshed, spreads goodness, and upholds justice correctly. Despite the dimension of religion, Islam as the personal area of a Muslim, Islam shifts into an aspect of religiosity in social life. Therefore, al-Jufri's view provides an oasis amid the midst of friction of social conflict in a pluralistic and multicultural society.

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