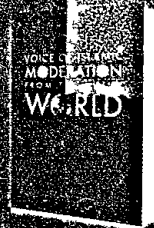


VOICE OF ISLAMIC  
MODERATION  
FROM THE MALAY  
WORLD

M. KAMAL HASSAN



## ABOUT THE BOOK

This is a book written by an independent and non-partisan Muslim Malay academic, mainly for a non-Muslim audience in mind, either in

Malaysia or overseas. It is also addressed to the Muslim leaders, intelligentsia, professionals and students who are interested in the issue of peaceful coexistence of the Muslim world and the West.

It consists of eleven essays which were written in the light of the challenges of globalisation and a post-September 11 (9/11) "New World Order" which has set the stage for a heightened global tension between the Western world and the world of Islam.

The book represents a unique Muslim perspective, namely that of independent Muslim intelligentsia in contemporary Malaysia. Its main focus is the subject of Islamic moderation (Arabic: *al-wasatiyyah*) based on the teachings of the Qur'an and elaborated by authoritative religious scholarship.

The voice of Islamic moderation coming from contemporary Malaysia is a reflection of the Malaysian milieu in which Islamic thought has been nurtured in a multi-ethnic society in which Muslims, though in the majority, have lived and coexisted with non-Muslims of various ethnic and religious groups in peace and harmony.

The image of Islam and Muslims, which has been tarnished and demonised in the world today, is countered here by a compelling and incisive discourse of moderation from Islamic perspectives.





TUN DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD

# VOICE OF ISLAMIC MODERATION FROM THE MALAY WORLD

M. KAMAL HASSAN



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*I humbly dedicate this book to my beloved parents,  
Hj. Hassan Hj. Ismail and Hjh. Che Fatimah bt. Mahmood  
who have departed from this transient world and returned to the  
Mercy of Allah the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful*





بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

*In the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful*



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## TRANSLITERATION OF ARABIC LETTERS

### Consonants



ع	’	د	d	ط	ṭ	م	m
ا	a	ذ	dh	ظ	ẓ	ن	n
ب	b	ر	r	ع	‘	ه	h
ت	t	ز	z	غ	gh	و	w
ث	th	س	s	ف	f	ى	y
ج	j	ش	sh	ق	q	ة	ah (in pause form)
ح	ḥ	ص	ṣ	ك	k		at ( in construct form)
خ	kh	ض	ḍ	ل	l	ال	al

### Vowels



#### Short

ا	a
و	u
ي	i

#### Double (*Shaddah*)

ي	iyy (final form ī)
و	uww (final form ū)

#### Long

آ	ā
أ	ā
و	ū

#### Diphthongs

او	au or aw
اي	ai or ay



## Foreword



I am infinitely grateful and duly honored to be invited by Distinguished Professor Dr. Mohd Kamal bin Hassan to write the foreword for this august compilation of his works on Islamic moderation – a subject I hold dear to my heart, it being the basis of my own graduate degree in Comparative Religion.

My relationship with Professor Kamal now extends into its fourth decade, having starting in the early 1980s when I was a student under his tutelage at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). It would not be an overstatement for me to state that I am today a product of his teaching and instruction, both in academics and in life. His compassionate and inclusive philosophy, which underpins his academic work and his lifestyle, is the bedrock upon which so many of his students' lives have found nourishment and taken fruit, myself first amongst them.

Like all leading Muslim thinkers, Professor Kamal has been an avid reader and has written on several educational and intellectual issues from an Islamic perspective. Taken as a whole, his library is testament to his compassionate, inclusive, and holistic approach to Islam—a perspective needed in this era more than in any other in recent memory and for which history will surely remember him kindly.

His archive of previously written scholastic papers is representative of the consistent development of holistic thinking which has helped define the modern and moderate practice of Islam in Malaysia.

His views and thoughts have been integrated into the works of other leading scholars and budding intellectuals in Malaysia and elsewhere and have ensured his continuity and relevance in the public dialogue not only on the subject of Islam but for religion and indeed society in general.

The subject of Islamic moderation has gained global popularity since the 9/11 tragedy and has been discussed at many international conferences in the Muslim world. Given the lack of unanimity on its true meaning, it is worth mentioning that the concept of Islamic moderation is derived from the Qur'anic declaration (Qu'ran 2:149) that Allah the Almighty has made the Islamic community or nation "a middle community" or, as Abdullah Yusuf Ali in his translation of the Qur'an (The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an) translates as "an Ummah justly balanced". From this verse Muslim classical scholars concluded that the justly balanced moderation (*wasatiyyah*) was in fact the primary characteristics of Islamic community as willed by Allah Almighty Himself. Imam al-Ghazali was among those who used the concept of "the mean" to expound their theories of Islamic ethics. The commentaries of al-Tabari, al-Qurtubi and Ibn Kathir on the verse should be referred to by contemporary thinkers to understand the true meaning of the concept. In general the classical Muslim scholars are agreed that being "a middle community" or "an Ummah justly balanced" means essentially possessing a combination of four interconnected attributes: justice, goodness, avoidance of extreme laxity or extravagance, and being in the middle position.

With this understanding of Islamic moderation, many contemporary Muslim scholars strongly condemn the phenomenon of militant radicalism and religious extremism that appeared in Muslim countries in the early seventies as it contradicted the Qur'anic spirit of moderation and peaceful co-existence. Leaders of International

Islamic movements, such as Hassan al-Hudhaibi, strongly reminded the Muslim community that “We are peaceful propagators, not judges” but the radical fringe would not take heed of the wise counsels of the learned elders.

In the collection of scholastic essays presented in this book, Professor Kamal has boldly propagated a relevant and powerful role for an Islam which is integrated into a modern and heterogeneous society – one which emphatically rejects any hegemony but instead insists on respect and accommodation by each for each other. This worldview is at the same time uniquely Malaysian, as our society is a microcosm of this very diversity, and Islam, while prevalent in the Nation, coexists harmoniously with other world religions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Christianity.

The concept of the middle way, also shared by other world religions such as Buddhism and even Christianity and Judaism, is an overriding theme that ranges across this discourse, and which is endorsed by other leading Islamic moderates – most notably Dr. Yusuf al Qarḍhāwī a well-known Islamic scholar who is widely regarded among Muslim scholars as one of the most authoritative contemporary experts on the subjects, and whose influence is felt deeply by the author.

As an educator first and last, Professor Kamal has introduced in 1983 an integrated educational curriculum in the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) to apply his holistic vision of Islamic higher education which combined character development with intellectual excellence, and ethics with professional education. Professor Kamal has articulated a program and curriculum to apply his rigorous theory to practical programs for informing, guiding, and teaching adherents to incorporate an empathic, understanding, and introspective practice of Islam into their day to day lives. The correct

instruction about Islam should foster not only awareness but also understanding of our religion. As amongst the first batch of students to study in IIUM in 1983, I benefitted immensely from the various group dynamics exercises like *Ibadah* Camps, the *Halaqahs* and the close rapport between the lecturers and the students in those days. The spirit of Islamic moderation was imparted to us in co-curricular activities led by Professor Kamal which incorporated an empathic understanding and introspective practice of Islam into the students' day to day lives. The correct instruction about Islam should foster not only awareness but also the practice of justly balanced moderation in our religion which accommodates religious differences and cultural diversities.

Today, in the face of heightened Islamophobia and the challenges of a new age of turbulence, it is necessary to enlighten both Muslims and non-Muslims about the moderate and mainstream tenets of the faith as such an understanding will engender greater appreciation of each community for the other – something which is sorely lacking in relations between Muslims and non-Muslims today and which, if left uncorrected, will foster greater mistrust and misunderstanding in the future.

At the same time, it is high time that Muslim communities become more assertive about their justly balanced Islamic identity, which will serve the cause of greater mutual respect, but also serves to counter the ill-effects of the extremities within Islam itself – by radicals on the right as well as the left – and draw the mainstream identification of Islam towards the middle and not the fringe which is regrettably where it is today.

The rich history of Islam, and its myriad contribution to science, mathematics, medicine, and other knowledge is something that

Muslims the world over must reclaim not only for the benefit of their own, as well as for other world communities. Such self-awareness also counteracts the influence of hegemony by the civilisations of the West, which today is the root cause of frustration and anger that many Islamic societies feel and which in turn breeds either extremism in Islam or submissiveness to non-Islamic practices.

Recalling Islam's rich history of enlightened thought is not sufficient in and of itself, so that what is also called for today is a changing of the Muslim mindset so that it is more engaged in the positive development of our world, as well as the inner development of its people. This is needed not only in Malaysia but in all societies, and those that can elevate themselves to such introspection will undoubtedly do so for their own benefit as well as for the benefit of Islam in the eyes of the world.

Malaysia must not shirk its own responsibility in this effort. As leaders who prescribe policy for the people, it is our responsibility to encourage polity to enable the correct practice of moderate Islam in society. This ideology is central to the Government's "Coalition of Moderates", a diplomacy espoused by the Prime Minister Dato' Sri Mohd Najib Bin Tun Hj. Abdul Razak, in which diversity, dialogue and peaceful co-existence are the prevalent themes guiding inter-civilisational relations. It also calls for a "vanguard" of moderates to stop being a silent majority and to start reflecting the courage of our conviction.

In Malaysia, about sixty per cent of Malaysians are Muslims, the other forty per cent profess a variety of faiths i.e. Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and others. Although the Malaysian Constitution provides for Islam as the religion of the Federation, it protects the right of all Malaysians to practise

their religion in peace and harmony. The Prime Minister has set as the top priority of his administration the principle of “1Malaysia”, emphasising People First, Performance Now.

The government of Malaysia advocates a path of *Wasatiyyah* or justly balanced moderation whether in formulating and executing domestic policies or in conducting international relations. We must learn from Islamic communities in our neighboring States, such as Singapore and Indonesia, and also aspire to contribute to the worthy cause of establishing the concept of Islamic moderation or *al-wasatiyyah* and to promote the moderate path of Islam – the path of “*ummah wasaf*” – amongst all Islamic communities the world over. No less than this lofty ambition is the aim of this author – in this book before you and indeed in all his life’s work.

I have been fortunate to be under the tutelage of so eminent a teacher and mentor. It is with great humility that I am today in position to offer my own small acknowledgement by extending my support for this important intellectual discourse of a Muslim Malaysian intellectual which I invite you to immerse yourself into without further ado.

Dr. Zambry bin Abdul Kadir  
Chief Minister  
State of Perak Darul Ridzwan  
Malaysia

## Introduction



This is a book written by an independent and non-partisan Muslim Malay academic, mainly for a non-Muslim audience in mind, either in Malaysia or overseas. It is also addressed to the Muslim leaders, intelligentsia, professionals and students who are interested in the issue of peaceful coexistence of the Muslim world and the West. It consists of eleven essays which were written in the light of the challenges of globalisation and a post-September 11 (9/11) “New World Order” which has set the stage for a heightened global tension between the Western world and the world of Islam. The book represents a third Muslim perspective, namely that of independent Muslim intelligentsia in contemporary Malaysia, the other two being the pro-government and the pro-opposition perspectives. As a country practising parliamentary democracy with a multi-party system since 1955, Malaysia has developed the three perspectives for many decades now, but the most popular perspectives are the pro-government and the pro-opposition because of their politically-oriented nature and their strong emotional appeal to their respective constituencies, followers, supporters and the general public. The non-partisan academic perspective to which the present writer belongs tries to be more objective and less emotional, sometimes very self-critical, more so when the audience is non-Muslim, Western educated or made up of international intelligentsia.

The main focus of this book is the subject of Islamic moderation (Arabic: *al-wasatiyyah*) based on the teachings of the Qur’ān and elaborated by authoritative religious scholarship. In view of the existence of a variety of interpretations regarding the term “moderation”, it is important that an Islamic perspective and definition of moderation

be understood by Muslims as well as non-Muslims, irrespective of whether they agree or not with the definition. The academic input into the popular or political discourse on moderation from the Islamic perspective is a necessary contribution, insofar as it helps the public to differentiate between the correct and the incorrect perceptions or understanding of the concept.

The voice of Islamic moderation coming from contemporary Malaysia is a reflection of the Malaysian milieu in which Islamic thought has been nurtured in a multi-ethnic society in which Muslims, though in the majority, have lived and coexisted with non-Muslims of various ethnic and religious groups in peace and harmony. Malaysia is a unique Muslim-majority country in which political power is shared among the major ethnic groups but the Muslim Malays have been the major power holders. Economic power, though, has been and still is, largely in the hands of the Chinese community. The conventional economic system is still dominant but the Islamic banking, insurance and pawn-broking systems are becoming very popular as Muslims look for alternatives to the *ribā* (interest)-based institutions. Malaysia is fast becoming a leading centre of Islamic banking and finance. Politically the system allows for secular-based opposition parties as well as a strong Islamically-based opposition party which has defeated government parties in several elections and is still in control of two states in Malaysia. This democratic set-up has moulded a national culture which makes political or religious extremism unpopular and uncalled for. The winning formula for all communities has always been one in which there is a realistic recognition of the pluralistic nature of the nation and the need to balance between the particular interest of a community and the larger interest of national stability, national security and national wellbeing, without stepping beyond the limits of freedom as provided for in the Constitution of the nation. Therefore the voice of moderation is the preferred voice even within

the Muslim community which, unfortunately, has been pulled in opposite directions throughout its contemporary history, beginning from the early fifties.

The image of Islam and Muslims, unfortunately, has been tarnished and demonised in the world today, particularly after the 11 September 2001 tragedy. Consequently Islam and the Muslim are associated in the minds of Westerners and non-Muslims with acts of violence, exploitation of women, denial of human rights and religious extremism. The “War on Terror” unleashed by the White House under President Bush and the militant responses of Muslim groups, together with the intransigence and injustices of the Zionist regime on the people of Palestine have heightened global tension and sparked serious international crises with far-reaching consequences in both the West and the Muslim world. As a concerned Muslim Malay academic who has lived in America as a post-graduate student at Columbia University, New York, for seven years (1968 – 1975) and a visiting professor at Georgetown University, Washington D. C. for two years (1997 – 1999), and traveled widely in the Muslim world, we felt the need to explain Islam to non-Muslim elites outside of Malaysia as well as in Malaysia. We purposely chose to address and converse with the Western-educated and middle class non-Muslims who read and communicate in English, because they have been exposed the most to Western thought and the biased Western perspectives on Islam and Muslims. It is important to our mind that this group be made to understand mainstream Muslim thought and the discourse of moderation from Islamic perspectives. Thus, the eleven essays compiled in this book were written to fulfil that goal and four of them were actually read before non-Muslim audiences in Malaysia as well as in USA, Japan and China. It is our hope that Westerners in general and non-Muslims in Malaysia would be able to appreciate the Islamic path of moderation that those essays try to project and that the

relationship with Muslims would remain cordial and harmonious in spite of the negative stereotyping and prejudices against Islam in the mainstream Western media.

In Part One, we project the resurgence of world religions as a positive development in light of the secularising tendencies of globalisation and the hegemonising trend of the secular forces behind the “New World Order”. Although the world religions have their own distinctive attributes and major theological differences, the religionists can work together in several common areas of concern such as the eradication of corruption, money politics, abuse of power, drug abuse, AIDS epidemic, materialistic greed, racism, communalism, hedonism, social ills and environmental degradation. In some of these areas we feel Muslim communities can and should benefit from the experiences and positive contributions of some non-Muslim groups and organisations.

In Part Two we discuss the implications of globalisation, particularly the negative aspects of the phenomenon, on the Malaysian Muslims which are made up mainly of the Malay ethnic group. It is our conviction that for the Malays to be able to take full advantage of the positive aspects of globalisation and withstand the impact of its negative elements, they have to undergo a major paradigm shift or change of mindset. If they remain complacent or are not serious in undergoing self transformation, they have only themselves to blame if they are later overwhelmed by the wave of globalisation. In that particular chapter (Chapter Five), we wish to emphasise to our Muslim as well as non-Muslim audience that one feature of Islamic moderation is the courage to undertake self-criticism or objective self-assessment of Muslim weaknesses and shortcomings.

In Part Three, we focus our attention on what Islamic moderation means in today’s context and the true meaning of *jihād* in light

of the popular tendency to equate terrorism as Muslim *jihād*. Hoping that the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) under the current Secretary General, whom we know personally, would seriously undertake the self-reform that it sorely needs, we feel that the time is also right for all member states of the reformed OIC to promote the moderate path of Islam – the path of “*ummah wasaʿat*” (a community in the middle/median position of justice and goodness) that Allah Most Gracious intended to become “witnesses unto mankind” (Q. 2: 143)<sup>1</sup>. We have listed, after the discussion on the meanings of Islamic moderation and related concepts, what we consider, in our humble estimation, as the policies, strategies and plans of actions that Muslim nations should undertake to implement the mission of Islamic moderation. The original essay was written in 2004 when we were serving as Malaysia’s sole representative on the OIC. Commission of Eminent Persons to prepare for a comprehensive blue-print of *ummatic* (or universal Islamic community) reform and the restructuring of the OIC. We had the opportunity to present our proposals in the Commission’s meetings in Kuala Lumpur and Islamabad. We believe that some of our humble proposals were well received by Muslim intellectuals associated with the OIC. At any rate, the special summit of the OIC held in December 2005 in Makkah al-Mukarramah gave special attention to the need for all Muslim countries and communities to practice the values and principles of Islamic moderation. Thereafter many Muslim leaders began to talk about the need to emphasise the concept of moderation as a universal Islamic discourse.

As for the elaboration of the concept of Islamic moderation or *al-wasaʿiyyah* as it is called in Arabic, we have decided to refer mainly to the writings of Dr. Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī, a well-known Islamic scholar who resides in Qatar, who is widely regarded among Muslim scholars as one of the most authoritative contemporary experts on

the subject. We have also highlighted the Singapore Muslim scholars' stand on Islamic moderation and compared that correct stand to the Indonesian Liberal Islam Network as a new challenge to mainstream Islamic thought and practice in Southeast Asia.

It is our sincere hope this book will contribute to a better understanding of what moderation means from the Islamic perspective, a moderation that remains faithful to the true teachings of Islam which gives a proper place for peaceful co-existence between Muslims and peoples of other religions, civilisational dialogue and inter-religious understanding and cooperation on social, moral or environmental issues.

Finally, we wish to express our heartfelt gratitude to Dato' Hj. Rais Hussin Hj. Mohamed Ariff, Executive Chairman and CEO of The Red Solar (M) Sdn. Bhd. who took the initiative to compile the essays we had written into a book and the trouble to get it published. Without his initiative, persistent prodding and generous assistance, these essays of ours will probably never see the light of the day because of several other priorities we had to attend to. May God reward him and his noble family for all his good deeds.

M. Kamal Hassan  
International Islamic University Malaysia

## NOTE

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1. The letter Q. throughout this book refers to the Qur'ān and the number which follows it refers to the *Sūrah* (Chapter) in the Qur'ān. In this case the number 2 after Q. refers to the second *Sūrah* (second Chapter), *al-Baqarah* in the Qur'ān. The number 143 which comes after the numbers of the Chapter refers

to the *Āyah* (verse) number 143 in *al-Baqarah*. This is the abbreviation system used in this book for easy reference to the Qur'ān.

The translation of Qur'ānic verses into English is based on the following references:

- a) M.T. Al-Hilali and M.M. Khan, *Translation of the meanings of The Noble Qur'ān in the English Language*. Madinah: King Fahd Complex for Printing of the Holy Qur'ān, 1404 A.H;
- b) A. Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān, English translation of the meanings and Commentary*. Madinah: King Fahd Complex for Printing of the Holy Qur'ān, n.d. ;
- c) Muhammad Asad, *The Message of The Qur'ān*. Gibraltar: Dār al-Andalus, 1980;
- d) *The Qur'ān*, Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meanings. Riyadh: Abulqasim Publishing House, 1997.

It should be mentioned that the present author has amended some of the English translations to facilitate a better understanding of the original Arabic text.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Professor Dr. Mohd. Kamal Hassan was conferred in 2010 the title Distinguished Professor (Professor Ulung in Malay language), the highest distinction given to serving academics in Malaysia, by the Ministry of Higher Education.

Professor Dr. Kamal has been a Fulbright Scholar and Columbia University President's Fellow, and has degrees from University of Malaya and Columbia University in New York City from where he earned his

Doctorate in Philosophy with a specialisation in Contemporary Islamic Thought in 1976.

Professor Dr. Kamal has demonstrated his visionary academic credentials time and again, with numerous "firsts", such as the First Holder of Malaysian Chair of Islam in Southeast Asia at Georgetown University, USA (1997-1998) and the First Holder of Chair of Ibn Khaldun at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) for the period 2006 to 2008.

He has also shown his efficacy as an administrator, notably as Shaykh al-Kulliyah at the Centre for Fundamental Knowledge at the IIUM over the span of the 1980s, and thereafter as Founding Dean of the Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences Faculty, culminating in his role as Deputy Rector for academic affairs for seven years and then becoming the first Malaysian Rector of the International Islamic University Malaysia, for another seven years.

His international accolades for his academic work are too numerous to catalogue, and continue to grow in depth and breadth to this day. Notably he has earned recognition from such august bodies such as the Federation of the Universities of the Islamic World (FIUW), the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the International Islamic University Islamabad, and Amir Naif Foundation for Research in Islamic Studies, Saudi Arabia.

