

## INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN *MAFĀTĪH AL-GAIB*

BY FAKHR AD-DĪN AR-RĀZIY

A Semiotic Recontextualization of *Tafsīr Ḥiwārī* for Religious Moderation

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### Abstract

This study examines the assumption that *Mafātīh al-Gaib* by ar-Rāziy contains a moderate and applicable form of interreligious dialogue that can strengthen religious moderation in Indonesia. Using a qualitative, library-based approach, the research focuses on Christians (Nasrani) as the primary subject, analyzing Qur'anic verses related to social issues within the Indonesian context. A synchronic–diachronic semiotic recontextualization method is employed and linked to the religious moderation framework of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs. The findings demonstrate moderate narratives in ar-Rāziy's dialogical exegesis, including the permissibility of non-Muslims entering mosques, exchanging greetings with them, and appointing non-Muslim leaders. These interpretations reflect a dialogical pattern incorporating pro, contra, and moderate arguments. Substantively, the findings align with key pillars of religious moderation, such as national commitment, tolerance, cultural accommodation, and non-violence. The study contributes to strengthening religious moderation curricula and provides relevant material for educational and religious outreach programs.

**Keywords:** Interreligious Dialogue, *Tafsīr Mafātīh al-Gaib*, Semiotic Recontextualization, Religious Moderation, and *Tafsīr Ḥiwārī*.

***Dialog Lintas Agama dalam Tafsir Mafātiḥ Al-Gaib Karya Fakhr Ad-Din Ar-Rāziy:  
Rekontekstualisasi Semiotik Tafsir Ḥiwārī untuk Moderasi Beragama***

***Abstrak***

*Penelitian ini menguji asumsi bahwa Mafātiḥ al-Gaib karya ar-Rāziy mengandung dialog lintas agama yang moderat dan implementatif sebagai penguat moderasi beragama di Indonesia. Penelitian kualitatif ini menjadikan Mafātiḥ al-Gaib sebagai obyek utama penelitian pustaka dengan menjadikan Nasrani sebagai data pokok. Ayat-ayat terkait Nasrani dalam ranah sosial diambil dari isu-isu sensitif di Indonesia. Analisis rekontekstualisasi semiotika sinkronis-diakronis dihubungkan dengan moderasi beragama Kemenag RI. Hasilnya memperlihatkan narasi-narasi moderat dalam tafsir dialogis Mafātiḥ al-Gaib yang mencakup: 1) boleh nonmuslim masuk masjid, 2) boleh memulai atau menjawab salam nonmuslim, 3) dan boleh mengangkat pemimpin nonmuslim. Pola tafsir dialogisnya mencakup argumen pro, kontra, dan moderat terhadap tiga hasil temuan. Hasil pertama merefleksikan relevansi moderat pada pilar komitmen kebangsaan dan toleransi. Hasil kedua pada toleransi dan akomodatif terhadap budaya lokal. Hasil ketiga pada toleransi dan anti kekerasan. Hasilnya berkontribusi sebagai penguat kurikulum moderasi beragama di perguruan tinggi, madrasah, dan sekolah, serta bahan dakwah dan penyuluhan keagamaan.*

***Kata kunci:*** *Dialog Lintas Agama, Tafsir Mafātiḥ al-Gaib, Rekontekstualisasi Semiotik, Moderasi Beragama, Tafsir Ḥiwārī.*

## Introduction

Numerous studies have examined *Mafātih al-Gaib* (MG) by Fakhr al-Dīn ar-Rāziy (ar-Rāziy); however, relatively few have approached it through a dialogical exegesis (*tafsīr ḥiwārī*) framework (Masturin 2019, 150). This is largely because most Qur’anic exegesis has been studied monologically (*tafsīr āḥādī*), a tendency that risks monopolizing truth claims and may lead to intolerance and radicalism (Akib 2024, 92). In the contemporary context, there is a pressing need for a broad and open approach to Qur’anic interpretation, as emphasized by ar-Rāziy in the introduction to his *tafsīr* (Ar-Rāziy 1981, 11–12). A survey conducted at UIN Padang indicates that dialogical exegesis provides space for the exchange of perspectives among interpreters, across disciplinary contexts, and in relation to contemporary issues (Markos 2023, 58). This approach fosters constructive argumentative dialogue, thereby preventing differences from easily devolving into accusations of deviance (Ali et al. 2021, 383), as each viewpoint is grounded in accountable reasoning, as articulated by Muhammad ‘Alawī al-Mālikīy (1993, 5–6).

According to az-Ẓahabīy, ar-Rāziy, in *Mafātih al-Gaib* (MG), frequently presents a dialogical engagement of diverse viewpoints, both within the internal discourse of Islam and across religious traditions (M. H. az-Ẓahabīy 1976, 252). Nevertheless, no study has yet definitively concluded that ar-Rāziy’s exegetical model in MG can be categorized as dialogical exegesis (Muntaza & Hanapi 2023, 38). Therefore, this research seeks to examine this assumption by investigating whether MG may indeed be classified as a form of dialogical *tafsīr* or not. Furthermore, if such a classification is substantiated, this study will explore whether these dialogical elements include interactions with Christian communities. If present, the analysis will proceed to examine whether such dialogical narratives can be recontextualized through a semiotic approach. Finally, the study will consider how these findings may be implemented in constructing messages of religious moderation, given that interreligious harmony—without necessitating the fusion or exchange of theological doctrines—constitutes one of the core missions of the Prophet Muḥammad’s da’wah, and aligns with the broader objective of promoting religious moderation (H. Faisal et al. 2022, 66).

The researcher also observes that the tendency of dialogical exegesis oriented toward religious moderation can be classified into three patterns. First, an approach that moves from reality to reality (Taufik Rahman 2022, 131–132). Second, from reality to text (Muhammad Wiyono 2019, 2). Third, from text to reality (Alfan Shidqon and Fathurrosyid 2023, 156). However, no study has yet identified a fourth pattern, namely from text to text (*min an-naṣ naḥwa an-naṣ*). Therefore, this research seeks to fill this gap while simultaneously enriching the scholarly discourse on dialogical Qur’anic exegesis.

The aim of this study is to complement existing trends in dialogical exegesis by descriptively presenting forms of interreligious dialogue in *Mafātīḥ al-Gaib* (MG) by ar-Rāziy, with a particular focus on discussions concerning Christian communities. The research data are drawn from sensitive issues that frequently arise in the public sphere, such as the entry of non-Muslims into mosques, initiating and responding to greetings (*salām*) with non-Muslims, and the appointment of Muslim leaders from among non-Muslims.

In general, the selection of these three issues is based on three considerations. First, the existence of enduring pro and contra dynamics that have persisted since the classical period within a synchronic context (Al-Jawziyya 1997, 246). Second, the recurrence of such debates in the contemporary diachronic context, which—if not approached with due wisdom—carry the potential to generate conflict in the name of religion (Rahman and Shah 2020, 95). Third, the importance of opening spaces for dialogue in order to understand differences, rather than to condemn those who hold divergent views (Fuad and Masuwd 2023, 213). More specifically, the selection of these three cases is also grounded in three considerations. First, in the modern context, places of worship can no longer be understood exclusively as ritual spaces, but must also be seen as socio-humanitarian spaces (Rohman 2025, 55). Second, the greeting (*salām*) should not be interpreted exclusively as a prayer belonging to a particular group, but rather as a communicative means of acknowledging the presence of others (Hafid and Hatsama 2020, 10). Third, restricting leadership based on religious affiliation risks hindering national progress and may provoke radicalism and terrorism in the name of religion; therefore, in the context of the modern state, leadership is more appropriately grounded in integrity rather than religious identity (Susanto 2018, 65).

Based on this academic background, the study formulates three research questions. *First*, how does ar-Rāziy engage Christian communities dialogically in *Mafātīḥ al-Gaib* (MG)? *Second*, how can these dialogical exegetical texts—particularly those related to Christian communities—be semiotically recontextualized into messages of religious moderation? *Third*, what contribution can this study make to fostering tolerance between Muslims and Christians within the broader framework of strengthening religious moderation in Indonesia?

This study departs from the assumption that classical exegetical texts—often perceived as obsolete, rigid, and outdated—are, in fact, not so (Maulana 2021, 118). Rather, such classical texts are capable of adapting to changing times through processes of recontextualization in accordance with both local and global needs (Muthahari et al., 2024, 1638). Among the approaches to recontextualization are semiotic analysis (Mokoginta 2025, 182), the hermeneutical framework of Sahiron Samsudin (Samsudin

2019, 134), and the *maqāṣid asy-syarī'ah* approach of Moqsith Ghozali (Moqsith 2016, 28). In this regard, the researcher adopts a synchronic–diachronic semiotic recontextualization approach to compare social contexts across different historical periods—from the Prophetic era, the time of ar-Rāziy, and the broader classical and medieval periods—to the contemporary context of religious moderation, particularly within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) (Ummu & Mirwan 2021, 59).

Existing studies have demonstrated that the paradigms of Qur'anic interpretation continuously evolve over time (Salsabila 2023, 237). Such transformations are shaped by the intellectual and scholarly backgrounds of the exegetes, as well as by prevailing socio-political conditions (Muchlisin 2024, 216). Scholars from the Eastern tradition tend to be deeply grounded in classical textual literacy while still engaging with contemporary contextualization (Maulana 2021, 118). Conversely, Western scholars are often strong in contemporary contextualization without neglecting classical sources (Samsudin 2019, 135). There are also approaches that integrate both orientations by combining classical Islamic studies with contemporary religious studies (Setiawan 2016b, 91–91). One of the methods employed in this integrative approach is thematic exegesis applied to current discourses, such as interreligious dialogue (Akbar & Rahman 2023, 21).

Texts give rise to civilization, just as social reality sustains it. Text and reality may converge through processes of recontextualization: texts function as sources of inspiration, while reality serves as a site of introspection, culminating in new forms of expression articulated in contemporary writings (*ḥāsyiah*) (Al-Jamal 1996, I: 3-11). In the present era—often characterized as a “war of texts”—the actualization of such *ḥāsyiah* becomes increasingly crucial, as scholarly existence is frequently measured by the proliferation of publications in reputable national and international journals. Ultimately, it is these texts that shape social realities and play a significant role in the formulation of public policy.

## Research Methodology

### *Type of Research*

This qualitative study is based on library research, drawing on data from *Mafātih al-Gaib* (MG) by ar-Rāziy, selected according to the theme of interreligious dialogue, particularly concerning Christian communities. The overarching theme of Christianity is examined with a focus on sociological aspects that reflect values of religious moderation. These sociological dimensions are derived from ar-Rāziy's exegesis of selected Qur'anic verses that address sensitive issues in Indonesia and frequently

generate public debate. The verses under consideration include *sūrat* at-Taubah (9): 28 regarding the entry of non-Muslims into mosques, *sūrat* an-Nisā' (4): 86 concerning initiating and responding to greetings (*salām*) with non-Muslims, and *sūrat* al-Mā'idah (5): 51 regarding the appointment of non-Muslim leaders. Ar-Rāziy's exegesis of these verses in *Mafātih al-Gaib* (MG) is rich in symbolic dimensions that can be meaningfully interpreted as articulations of religious moderation (A. M. A. Rahman et al. 2025, 235). These verses are first examined through their exegetical treatment in MG and subsequently recontextualized using a semiotic approach (F. Rahman and Sahib 2023, 7628–7629). The study then evaluates how such interpretations may be implemented in contemporary life in accordance with the values of religious moderation promoted by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag RI), which function as a form of soft power with the potential to serve as an instrument of diplomacy amid global disorder, as articulated by President Prabowo in his address to the United Nations General Assembly (Hidayat 2025, 199).

#### *Data Analysis*

The data are analyzed through three stages: restatement, description, and interpretation. Exegetical passages in *Mafātih al-Gaib* (MG) that contain dialogue with Christian communities are identified through the terminologies employed by ar-Rāziy—such as *masā'il*, *wujūh*, and *su'ālāt*—and are subsequently presented in the form of restatement. To reveal emerging patterns and tendencies, a descriptive analytical stage is then conducted. Finally, a synchronic and diachronic semiotic approach, integrated with the concept of religious moderation, is employed in the interpretive stage (Yaumi, Rahman, and Sahib 2024, 54). These three stages serve as the basis for the researcher in formulating conclusions that address the research questions. In addition, data derived from the exegetical text of *Mafātih al-Gaib* (MG) are complemented with *ḥāsyiyah* in order to support their integration into educational curricula as well as their use as material for da'wah. A similar methodological approach has also been employed in the research of Sahiron Samsudin (Samsudin 2019, 133).

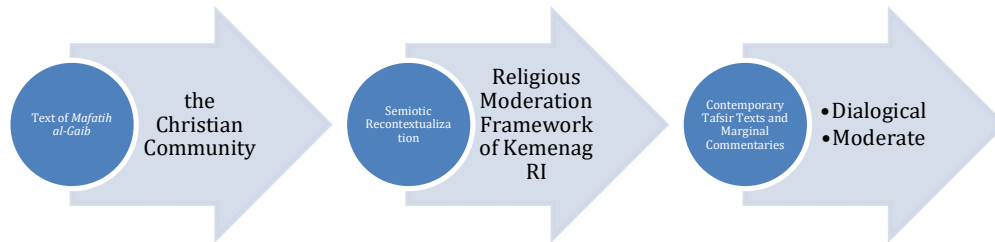
To facilitate understanding of the research methodology, a data coding table and a conceptual framework diagram are presented below:

**Table 1:** Coding of Data

<i>CODING</i>	PRO		CONTRA		MODERATE	
	SYNCHRONIC	DIACHRONIC	SYNCHRONIC	DIACHRONIC	SYNCHRONIC	DIACHRONIC
Non-Muslim entering mosques						

Initiating and responding to greetings with non-Muslims  
Appointing non-Muslims leaders

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Graphic 1: Conceptual Framework

### The Growth and Intellectual Development of ar-Rāziy and *Mafātih al-Gaib*

Studying a text cannot be separated from examining the socio-historical context in which the text emerged (Ibn Khallikan 1977, 1–3). In order to understand the contextual reality of ar-Rāziy, this study outlines his intellectual development as well as the various realities that influenced him. This approach contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of interreligious dialogue in *Mafātih al-Gaib* (MG) and how its semiotic recontextualization can be made relevant (Salma et al. 2025, 734). The following section also discusses its integration into education and da‘wah, as proposed by Amin Abdullah (Abdullah 2020, 17).

Ar-Rāziy’s full name is Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar ibn al-Ḥusain ibn al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Aliy at-Taymiy al-Bakriy al-Ṭabaristāniy ar-Rāziy, originating from the region that is now Tehran, the capital of Iran (Ibn Khallikan 1977, IV: 248). Ar-Rāziy was born in 544 AH and passed away in 606 AH on the day of Eid al-Fitr in the city of Herat, one of the major cities in present-day Afghanistan (S. al-D. az-Ḥababiy 1957, XXI: 501).

Ar-Rāziy received his early education under the guidance of his father, a prominent scholar in the city of Shahristan Rayy, near present-day Tehran, Iran. He later studied with numerous scholars and intellectuals of his time, supported by two major linguistic competencies: Arabic and Persian, the primary scholarly languages of that period. Due to his intellectual reputation, ar-Rāziy maintained close relations with political authorities, a condition that also contributed to his relatively better economic standing compared to many other scholars of his era. The socio-cultural context of ar-Rāziy’s time was characterized by intense intellectual debates, both within Islamic discourse—such as between the Karrāmiyya and the Mujassimah—and across religious boundaries,

including discussions with Christian thought (As-Safadi 2000, IV: 176). These dynamics significantly shaped his intellectual environment and educational formation. In addition, Sufi spiritual practice played an important role in cultivating ar-Rāziy's inner purity and spiritual refinement (Saidung, Muhammad, and Salsabila 2025, 220).

Ar-Rāziy's religious intellectual background was shaped not only by his father but also by the thought of al-Juwayniy and al-Ghazāliy (al-Ghazali 2017, I: 9–13). This influence led him to follow their intellectual tradition, particularly in engaging in argumentative discourse on both intra-Islamic issues and interreligious matters (Ibn Abi Usaibi 2007, 466). Ar-Rāziy became well known for his dialogical, argumentative, and encyclopedic approach to scholarship (Al-Buti 2009, I: 130). His close relationship with political authorities also contributed to his prominent political and economic standing. High-ranking government officials were even known to attend his scholarly sessions, which served as intellectual inspiration in the formulation of political policies (Ibn Abi Usaibi 2007, 465).

Freedom of thought and openness to the development of knowledge, on the one hand, coexisted with the continued dominance of conservative intellectual currents in certain circles, on the other. These two tendencies generated intense scholarly debates among scholars and intellectuals (Irawan 2024, 88). This intellectual climate ultimately shaped ar-Rāziy's critical mode of thinking, which he articulated in his exegesis through a dialogical methodology, both within Islamic discourse and in interreligious engagement. Ar-Rāziy sought to convince later generations that there is no contradiction between faith and scientific knowledge. However, such a reconciliation can only be achieved when one is able to recontextualize meaning through existing semiotic indications (Irawati et al. 2024, 12).

### Dialogical Exegesis in *Mafātiḥ al-Gaib* and Semiotic Recontextualization

The collected data concerning dialogues on Christian communities encompass three main issues: the entry of non-Muslims into mosques, initiating and responding to greetings (*salām*) with non-Muslims, and the appointment of non-Muslim leaders.

#### *The Dilemma of the Ritual Impurity of Polytheists and the Legal Status of Their Access into Mosques*

The verse used to discuss this issue is *sūrat* at-Taubah (9): 28, which states:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّمَا الْمُشْرِكُونَ نَجَسٌ فَلَا يَقْرَبُوا الْمَسْجِدَ الْحَرَامَ بَعْدَ عَامِهِمْ هَذَا وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ عَيْلَةً فَسَوْفَ يُغْنِيكُمْ  
 اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ إِن شَاءَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٢٨﴾

*O you who have believed, indeed the polytheists are unclean, so let them not approach al-Masjid al-Haram after this, their [final] year. And if you fear privation, Allah will enrich you from His bounty if He wills. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Wise.*

Ar-Rāziy raises two main issues in his discussion of this verse: first, whether polytheists are ritually impure (*najis*) or not; and second, whether they are permitted to enter mosques. He addresses the first issue in a dialogical exegetical form using the term *masā'il*. Ar-Rāziy presents az-Zamakhshariy's view, which holds that the bodies of polytheists are impure like dogs and pigs, based on a report from Ibn 'Abbās. He also cites the view of the Zaydiy Syī'iy scholar al-Hādiy, who argues that physical contact with a polytheist requires ablution (*wuḍū'*), based on a report from al-Ḥasan. On the other hand, ar-Rāziy presents the opinion of the majority of jurists who maintain that the bodies of polytheists are pure. He also cites al-Qāḍiy's view, which affirms their purity based on reports that the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) once drank from their vessels (Ar-Rāziy 1981, XVI: 25).

Meanwhile, ar-Rāziy appears to lean toward the view that the bodies of polytheists are ritually impure (*najis*), based on the apparent meaning of the verse (at-Taubah [9]: 28). He argues that there is no strong and detailed evidence that definitively establishes the purity of their bodies. Although there are solitary (*āḥād*) hadith reports, their epistemic status is probabilistic (*ẓanniy aṣ-ṣubūt*) and their meaning is also open to interpretation (*ẓanniy ad-dalālah*). According to ar-Rāziy, such evidence is insufficient to override a definitive textual proof (*qaṭ'iy aṣ-ṣubūt wa ad-dalālah*), namely the verse of *sūrat* at-Taubah (9): 28. Nevertheless, ar-Rāziy does not explicitly state in a definitive manner that the bodies of polytheists are impure (Ar-Rāziy 1981, XVI: 26).

Ar-Rāziy addresses the second issue by presenting Asy-Syāfi'iy's view, which holds that polytheists are only prohibited from entering the Masjid al-Ḥarām (Sacred Mosque). He then cites Mālik's opinion, which extends the prohibition to all mosques. On the other hand, ar-Rāziy also presents Abū Ḥanīfah's view, which maintains that polytheists are not prohibited from entering either the Masjid al-Ḥarām or other mosques in general (Ar-Rāziy 1981, XVI: 27).

Meanwhile, ar-Rāziy appears to incline toward asy-Syāfi'iy's opinion, arguing that the explicit wording (*manṭūq*) of *sūrat* at-Taubah (9): 28 refutes Abū Ḥanīfah's position, while its implied meaning (*mafḥūm*) refutes Mālik's view. Ar-Rāziy supports asy-Syāfi'iy's stance because he interprets the apparent meaning of *sūrat* at-Taubah (9): 28 as restricting the prohibition only to the Masjid al-Ḥarām (Sacred Mosque) and other sacred precincts (*ḥaram*) based on *sūrat* al-Isrā' (17): 1 and relevant hadith reports (Ar-Rāziy 1981, XVI: 27).

### Dialogical Character

In ar-Rāziy's exegesis, only two dialogical positions are presented regarding the question of whether non-Muslims are ritually impure (*najis*), and three characters are presented concerning whether non-Muslims are permitted to enter mosques.

The two dialogical positions regarding whether non-Muslims are ritually impure (*najis*) are as follows: first, a pro-impurity position, which is supported by az-Zamakhshariy based on a report from Ibn 'Abbās, as well as al-Hādiy from the Zaydiy Syī'iy tradition, and is implicitly aligned with ar-Rāziy's tendency; second, an anti-impurity position, which is supported by the majority of jurists as well as al-Qādiy. Meanwhile, a third, mediating or moderate position that reconciles the pro and contra views is not found in *Mafātih al-Gaib* regarding the issue of the ritual impurity of non-Muslims.

As for the issue of non-Muslims entering mosques, the dialogical character can be classified into three positions. First, a pro-permissibility position, which allows non-Muslims to enter all mosques, including the Sacred Mosque (Masjid al-Ḥarām), as supported by Abū Ḥanīfah and reflecting a strong moderating orientation in his thought (Rizapoor and Rahimi 2023, 213). Second, a contra-permissibility position, which prohibits non-Muslims from entering any mosque whatsoever, particularly Masjid al-Ḥarām, as advocated by Mālik. Third, a mediating position that balances the two extremes, permitting non-Muslims to enter all mosques except Masjid al-Ḥarām, as articulated by Asy-Syāfi'iy and explicitly favored by ar-Rāziy.

### Synchronic–Diachronic Semiotic Analysis

Regarding the issue of whether non-Muslims are ritually impure (*najis*), the analysis begins from the signifier (*signifiant*) of the term “najas” in the verse. Synchronically, in the intellectual context of the sixth and seventh centuries (the period of ar-Rāziy's life), the signified (*signifié*) of “najas” is understood as “impurity” in two dimensions. First, *najāsah* refers to physical filth that can be perceived through the senses, particularly sight. Second, it refers to a non-physical form of impurity that can only be perceived through inner vision (*baṣīrah*). This understanding aligns with the view of ar-Rāgīb al-Aṣfahāniy (343–502 H) in his lexicographical work (Al-Asfahaniy 2009, 791). On the other hand, the term *najas* in the verse is interpreted by Najm ad-Dīn al-Kubrā (540–618 H) as referring to the impurity of shirk (*najāsah asy-syirk*), rather than physical bodily impurity. In contrast, al-Qurṭubiy (d. 671 H) understands *najas* in the verse as bodily impurity, arguing that non-Muslims are constantly in a state of ritual impurity (*junub*), and that those in such a state are prohibited from entering mosques (Al-Qurṭubiy 2008 VIII: 105). This view is also supported by one of al-Bayḍāwi's opinions

(d. 685 H), which states that non-Muslims are impure because they do not purify themselves from ritual impurity (Al-Baiḍāwīy 1988, III: 77).

From a diachronic analysis up to the eighth century, it can be observed that Abū Ḥayyān (654–745 H) reinforces the view of al-Qurṭubīy and al-Bayḍāwīy, which holds that non-Muslims are ritually impure due to their failure to purify themselves from impurity (Abu Hayyan 1993, V: 398). Meanwhile, al-Khāzin (678–741 H) interprets the term *najas* in the verse as legal or juridical impurity (*najāsah ḥukmīyah*), rather than physical impurity (*najāsah ‘aynīyah*). This is based on the consensus of jurists that the bodies of non-Muslims are pure; the term *najas* is therefore understood as a form of censure directed at their disbelief rather than their physical condition (Al-Khazin 1979, II: 348). This view is further supported by Ibn Kathīr (701–774 H), who states that the majority of scholars maintain that the impurity attributed to non-Muslims does not refer to their physical bodies, as Allah has permitted and declared pure their food (Ibn Katsir 2008, IV: 116).

In a diachronic analysis extending to the contemporary period, it is understood that the views of az-Zamakhshariy and al-Hādiy asy-Syi’iy, when traced historically, are interpreted as opening a perspective that Syī’iy ideology—and traditions inclined toward it, such as Mu’tazilism—have consistently exhibited a degree of antipathy toward non-Muslims. This tendency is framed as historically persistent, based on the assumption that non-Muslims, in general, have often displayed phobic attitudes toward Muslims (Muhammad Muslim 2025, 87–88). This is consistent with the current reality of the conflict between Israel and the US on one side and Iran on the other, which is not merely a matter of geopolitics but is deeply imbued with religious and sectarian overtones. The statements of az-Zamakhshariy al-Mu’taziliy and al-Hādiy az-Zaidiy asy-Syi’iy, who historically deemed non-Muslims impure, point to Iran’s firm and harsh stance towards hostile non-Muslims, in this case Israel and the US. As for those who do not oppose them, it is only fitting that fair and just treatment be prioritised (Al Jufri 2019, 269).

Based on a dialogical exegetical approach combined with a diachronic analysis of *Mafātīḥ al-Gaib* (MG) on *sūrat at-Taubah* (9): 28, it can be explained that the visit of Pope Francis to the Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta in September 2024, as well as earlier visits by several non-Muslim figures such as Prince Charles (2008), Barack Obama (2010), and Narendra Modi (2018), is permissible under both Islamic legal principles (*syarī‘ah*) and positive law (Rosady et al. 2025, 453–454). Contemporary fatwas also affirm this permissibility (Hakim & Azizi 2023, 2). This understanding helps address the ongoing pro and contra discourse in various media regarding Pope Francis’s visit to Istiqlal in September 2024

### Relevance of Religious Moderation

Based on data found in the MG commentary, supported by synchronic-diachronic analysis, there is a clear relevance of religious moderation to the pillar of national commitment, as evidenced by the views of az-Zamakhsyariy and al-Hādiy az-Zaidiy, which led to the designation of non-Muslims as impure in the context of the sixth to seventh centuries AH, and signs of resistance against hostile non-Muslims in the contemporary context. Furthermore, the relevance of religious moderation is also evident in the pillar of tolerance, marked by the views of Abū Ḥanīfah and asy-Syāfi'iy, which resulted in the permissibility of non-Muslims entering mosques in the context of the sixth to seventh centuries AH, as well as the principle of interfaith harmony in a contemporary context (Ridho, Sodiqin, and Mujib 2025, 38).

**Table 2:** Integrated Synchronic–Diachronic Analysis Table of Religious Moderation (Case Study I)

No.	Signifier	Signified (6th-7th C AH)	Contemporary Signified	Relevance to Religious Moderation
1	The views az-Zamakhsyariy dan al-Hādiy az-Zaidiy	Considering non-Muslims as ritually impure	Resistance toward non-Muslims' hostile	National commitment (preserving national sovereignty against colonialism)
2	The views of Abū Ḥanīfah dan asy-Syāfi'iy	Permitting non-Muslims to enter mosques	Interreligious harmony	Tolerance

### *The Dilemma of Initiating and Responding to Greetings (Salām) with non-Muslims*

Ar-Rāziy explains this matter on an-Nisā'(4): 86:

وَإِذَا حُيِّيتُمْ بِتَحِيَّةٍ فَحَيُّوا بِأَحْسَنَ مِنْهَا أَوْ رُدُّوهَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَسِيبًا ﴿٨٦﴾

*And when you are greeted with a greeting, greet [in return] with one better than it or [at least] return it [in a like manner]. Indeed, Allah is ever, over all things, an Accountant.*

Ar-Rāziy raises two issues in his discussion of this verse. First, whether it is permissible to initiate greetings (*salām*) with non-Muslims. Second, whether it is permissible to respond to greetings from non-Muslims.

Ar-Rāziy addressed the first issue in the form of a dialogical commentary. Ar-Rāziy cited a narration from the Prophet (peace be upon him) who said: “Jews should not start with a greeting”. Ar-Rāziy also cited the view of Abū Ḥanīfah, who stated that: “One must not initiate greetings with them, neither in writing nor in any other form”. Ar-Rāziy also presents the view of Abū Yūsūf, who states that: “Do not greet them and do not shake hands with them”, yet on the other hand, Abū Yūsūf also permits initiating a greeting if one enters their premises, but only by saying: “Peace be upon those who

follow guidance". Abū Yūsūf permits initiating the greeting towards them if there is a need (Ar-Rāziy 1981, X: 220).

Ar-Rāziy answered the second question with the opinion of the majority of scholars who stated that: "The answer should only be *wa'alaikum* based on the narration that when the Jews met the Prophet saw, they said *as-sāmu 'alaika* (death to you) so the Prophet saw only replied *wa'alaikum* and that became sunnah." (Ar-Rāziy 1981, X: 220).

On the other hand, ar-Rāziy explained that some scholars allow responding to their greetings by saying *wa'alaikum as-salām*, but al-Ḥasan only allows *wa'alaikum as-salām* and not adding *warahmah* because it is part of *istigfār*. Meanwhile, asy-Sya'bi responded to a Christian's greeting by saying *wa'alaikum as-salām warahmatullah*, some criticized him, but he replied: "Do Christians not also live in the mercy of Allah??" (Ar-Rāziy 1981, X: 220).

### Dialogical Character

In ar-Rāziy's exegesis, two dialogical positions are presented regarding the issue of initiating greetings (*salām*) to non-Muslims, and three dialogical positions are presented regarding the issue of responding to greetings from non-Muslims.

The two dialogical positions regarding the permissibility of initiating greetings (*salām*) to non-Muslims are as follows. First, a contra-permissibility position, which prohibits initiating *salām* to non-Muslims. This view is based on a report from the Prophet (peace be upon him) forbidding the initiation of *salām* to Jews, reinforced by Abū Ḥanīfah's explicit ruling that initiating *salām* to non-Muslims is impermissible in any form, whether in writing or otherwise. It is further supported by the first position of Abū Yūsuf, who generally prohibits initiating *salām* to non-Muslims, including shaking hands with them. Second, a pro-permissibility position, which allows initiating *salām* to non-Muslims. This view is grounded in Abū Yūsuf's second opinion, which permits initiating *salām* when there is a need, such as ensuring mutual safety and social comfort.

The dialogical character of the second issue—whether it is permissible to respond to greetings (*salām*) from non-Muslims—is not framed as a binary opposition between pro and contra positions, as all the views presented by ar-Rāziy agree that responding to such greetings is permissible. The discussion instead concerns the different forms of response, which can be classified into three positions. The first position holds that the greeting of non-Muslims should be answered only with "*wa 'alaykum*," although al-Qurṭubiy considers even "*alaykum*" without the conjunction "*wa*" sufficient, as an anticipation of bad intentions referring to the narration of the Prophet saw. The second position allows responding with "*wa 'alaykum as-salām*" as an equivalent reply to their good intentions, based on the view of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣriy. The third position holds that

the greeting may be answered with “*wa ‘alaykum as-salām wa raḥmatullāh,*” as a response that is better than their greeting, based on the opinion of Asy-Sya‘biy. When related to *sūrat an-Nisā’* (4): 86, these three positions can be understood as follows: the first and second positions correspond to the principle of “*ruddūhā*” (returning the greeting equivalently), while the third position reflects the principle of “*bi aḥsana minhā*” (responding with what is better).

#### Synchronic–Diachronic Semiotic Analysis

The issue of whether it is permissible to initiate and respond to greetings (*salām*) with non-Muslims originates from the signifier (*signifiant*) “*taḥiyyah*” in *sūrat an-Nisā’* (4): 86. Synchronically, in the intellectual context of the sixth and seventh centuries AH, the signified (*signifié*) of “*taḥiyyah*” is understood as a supplication for a better and more prosperous life (Al-Asfahani 2009, 270; Az-Zamakhshari 1972, I: 227). Al-Qurṭubī adds that the term *taḥiyyah*, in addition to meaning supplication, can also denote authority (*al-mulk*) or gift (*al-hadiyyah*); however, the most sound interpretation is that it refers to *salām*. He further states that the non-Muslims whose greetings are obligatory to respond to are those classified as *dhimmiy* (protected non-Muslim citizens). As for non-Muslims other than protected non-Muslims (*dhimmi*), it is enough to reply with the word “*alaik*” without using the letter “*waw*” at the beginning, as this would imply a negative connotation, suggesting that the non-Muslim’s ill intent in greeting a Muslim is somehow being realised. In general, during the sixth and seventh centuries AH, the issue of whether it is permissible to initiate and respond to greetings (*salām*) with non-Muslims was characterized by three main perspectives. First, a general permissibility view, which considers it part of universal ethical conduct in da‘wah, as reflected in *sūrat an-Nisā’* (4): 86 and *sūrat al-Mumtaḥanah* (60): 8. Second, a total prohibition view, which regards such interaction as part of maintaining theological identity boundaries. Third, a restricted permissibility view, which allows it within certain limits as a form of social ethics, without dissolving or compromising theological identity.

Meanwhile, from a diachronic analysis, it can be observed that during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) there was indeed tension in political relations between Islam and Jews, including Christianity, so it was natural that the greeting in that context became a political symbol as well as a religious icon. In the classical period, including during the lifetime of ar-Rāziy, greetings (*salām*) had already been regulated under Islamic legal frameworks that were modified based on the classification of non-Muslims into *zimmiy* and *ḥarbiy*. In this period, the use of *salām* was guided by the principle of *iḥtiyāt* (caution), aimed at safeguarding communal and religious identity. However, in the contemporary period, societies live within unified

nation-states that integrate diverse ethnic, religious, racial, and social groups. In this context, religion and culture increasingly interact, complement one another, and mutually accommodate based on specific situations and conditions (Iqbal et al. 2025, 843). As a result, greetings (*salām*), including conveying congratulations to non-Muslims on their religious holidays, have come to function as symbols of social relations aimed at maintaining harmony and peace among fellow citizens (Testriono and Billahi 2025, 406). Moreover, in the Indonesian context, the greeting “*as-salāmu ‘alaikum*” as well as expressions of congratulation in moments of celebration have become part of the nation’s local culture, which is widely embraced by Indonesians regardless of their religious affiliation (Khairi et al. 2025, 122).

Thus, the synchronic–diachronic semiotic analysis of ar-Rāziy’s dialogical exegesis in *Mafātīḥ al-Gaib* (MG) on *sūrat an-Nisā’* (4): 86 generates a discourse on the issue of whether it is permissible to initiate and respond to greetings (*salām*) with non-Muslims. Both synchronic and diachronic analyses indicate a shared conclusion that initiating and responding to such greetings is permissible. This finding is consistent with the universal message of the Qur’an, the contextual interpretation of the Prophetic traditions, and the *ijtihād* of scholars, and it remains relevant to social ethics within the life of society, the nation, and the Indonesian state, as well as its cultural framework (Jati and Wani 2025, 375). This, for sure, ensures the purity of faith, the validity of Islamic law, and the spiritual purity of believers, as issues within the social sphere will not lead to a change of faith or the blurring of religious beliefs (Syafa’at and Fauzi 2025, 553).

Based on a dialogical interpretation, supplemented by a diachronic analysis of MG’s exegesis of *sūrat an-Nisā’* (4): 86, it can be explained that interfaith greetings are permitted under Islamic law and have become the official greeting in formal events involving people of different faiths, with the aim of fostering peace and compassion amongst the nation’s people (Shidiq & Isroani 2023, 281). Controversy is inevitable, due to differing perspectives; some view it theologically and therefore deem it forbidden, whilst others view it sociologically and therefore permit it (Wafirah et al. 2020, 238).

#### Relevance of Religious Moderation

Based on the data found in *Mafātīḥ al-Gaib* (MG) and supported by synchronic–diachronic analysis, the relevance of religious moderation is evident in the pillar of tolerance. This is reflected in the signifier of Abū Yūsuf’s view, which produces the signified permissibility of initiating greetings (*salām*) to non-Muslims. In addition, the signified meanings derived from the Prophetic report, as well as the views of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣriy and asy-Sya’biy, also affirm the permissibility of responding to greetings from non-Muslims. Furthermore, the relevance of religious moderation is also apparent in

the pillar of cultural accommodation. This is demonstrated through the recontextualization of greetings (*salām*) in Indonesia, where they have become part of local culture and social ethics of communal life, rather than an exclusive theological identity (Alinah 2025, 363).

Table 3: Integrated Synchronic–Diachronic Analysis Table of Religious Moderation (Case Study II)

No.	Signifier	Signified (6th-7th C AH)	Contemporary Signified	Relevance to Religious Moderation
1	The view Abū Yūsūf	Permitting the initiation of greetings to non-Muslims (for da'wah purposes)	Social ethics and humanitarian conduct	Tolerance
2	The views of al-Ḥasan al-Basriy and asy-Sya'biy	Permitting responding to greetings from non-Muslims	National habits	Accommodation toward local culture

#### *The Dilemma of Appointing non-Muslim Leaders*

Ar-Rāziy presents this discussion in his exegesis of *sūrat al-Mā'idah* (5): 51:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالنَّصَارَىٰ أَوْلِيَاءَ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّهُمْ مِنْكُمْ فَإِنَّهُ مِنْهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٥١﴾

*O you who have believed, do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies. They are [in fact] allies of one another. And whoever is an ally to them among you - then indeed, he is [one] of them. Indeed, Allah guides not the wrongdoing people.*

The issue in this verse is whether it is permissible to appoint a non-Muslim as a leader over Muslims. Ar-Rāziy interprets this verse in a dialogical manner by presenting the report of Abū Mūsā al-Asy'ariy's conversation with Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. Abū Mūsā al-Asy'ariy informed the caliph that he had a Christian secretary, upon which the caliph reprimanded him and instructed him to appoint a Muslim secretary, citing this verse as the basis. Abū Mūsā al-Asy'ariy then responded to the caliph, saying, "For him is his religion, and for me is his integrity as a secretary." The caliph replied, "I do not honor them, for Allah has humiliated them; and I do not bring them close, for Allah has distanced them." Abū Mūsā al-Asy'ariy further explained to the caliph, "The situation in the city of Basra will not be stable without him." The caliph then responded, "If that is the case, what will you do when that Christian has died?" He concluded, "Therefore, it is better for you to do now what you will eventually have to do later" (Ar-Rāziy 1981, XII: 18).

### Dialogical Character

In ar-Rāziy's exegesis, two dialogical positions are presented regarding the issue of whether it is permissible to appoint non-Muslims as leaders over Muslims. The first is a pro-permissibility position, which supports the appointment of non-Muslim leadership based on professional competence and integrity. This view is attributed to Abū Mūsā al-Asy'ariy. The second is a contra-permissibility position, which rejects the appointment of non-Muslim leadership by emphasizing theological considerations. This view is attributed to the *Amirulmukminin*, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. A third mediating position is not found in ar-Rāziy's exposition of this issue. Moreover, ar-Rāziy appears to merely present these views without indicating a preference or providing explicit commentary on any of them.

### Synchronic–Diachronic Semiotic Analysis

In the dialogical exegesis of *Mafātīḥ al-Gaib* (MG) on *sūrat al-Mā'idah* (5): 51, the signifier “Christian secretary” (*nāṣrāniy kātib*) points to the signified of religious identity, which is perceived as potentially destabilizing the early consolidation phase of the Islamic polity. This can be read through a synchronic semiotic lens situated in the period of Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, where concerns over administrative affiliation were closely tied to maintaining political and communal cohesion. On the other hand, a synchronic reading also reveals that the signifier “integrity” (*amānah/istiqāmah*) leads to the signified of merit-based administrative competence, emphasizing that bureaucratic functions should prioritize meritocracy without disregarding religious considerations (Adamou and Zoumari 2024, 102).

Within this framework, Abū Mūsā al-Asy'ariy's decision to appoint a non-Muslim secretary can be understood as a signifier pointing to the signified that such practice is not categorically prohibited, but rather situated within an ongoing discursive space of interpretive deliberation. This is partly because senior Companions of the Prophet would not deliberately engage in clearly prohibited acts in an overt manner (Krismono, Abdi, and Syahmirwan 2025, 101). Rather, the issue lies in the timing, which was deemed inappropriate, prompting the caliph's reprimand. In the early period of the Islamic polity, the primary priority was the internal consolidation of the Muslim community in order to establish unity (Harun 2019, 329). Consequently, non-Muslims were not yet granted access to strategic administrative positions, as such appointments were considered potentially disruptive to the stability of internal consolidation within the Muslim community (M. Muji Buddin SM et al. 2025, 20–21).

From a diachronic perspective, there is a noticeable shift in the signified, even though the signifier remains unchanged. This transformation is closely related to the

transition from an Islamic model of sovereignty to a modern state system characterized by fragmented national sovereignty. In the early phase of the Islamic polity, the presence of non-Muslims in strategic administrative positions was perceived as potentially destabilizing internal Muslim cohesion. However, in the contemporary context, this meaning has shifted toward a representation of civic equality guaranteed by constitutional frameworks. Nevertheless, this principle of equality still carries the potential to be misused into unconstitutional actions if it is not safeguarded and implemented proportionally in national and state life. Thus, the diachronic message derived from the dialogical exegesis of *Maḥāṣin al-Gaib* (MG) on *sūrat* al-Mā'idah (5): 51 has an indirect relevance to strengthening the pillar of anti-violence within the framework of religious moderation in Indonesia (Muchlisin 2024, 227–228).

Based on dialogical exegesis combined with a diachronic analysis of *Maḥāṣin al-Gaib* (MG) on *sūrat* al-Mā'idah (5): 51, it can be explained that appointing non-Muslims as leaders over Muslims is permissible both under Islamic legal reasoning and under Indonesian positive law, provided that the criterion of leadership is integrity. This is because leadership is primarily grounded in competence and integrity rather than religious affiliation (Minan & Afifi 2020, 31). However, there are also significant opposing views, which draw upon interpretations of classical scholars such as al-Māwardiy (Sutisna et al. 2021, 43). This divergence of perspectives helps explain the pro and contra discourse surrounding the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, which was heavily influenced by issues of religious politicization rather than purely theological concerns (Hamdi 2021, 9).

#### Relevance of Religious Moderation

A synchronic-diachronic semiotic approach prevents the text from becoming trapped in a static interpretation, given that the essence of a text's meaning ideally evolves in step with the dynamics of the times. Even if the meaning is of a 'belief' nature that is already absolute, transformation is nonetheless inevitable, though only in terms of the path towards that meaning. However, if the meaning is of a "social" nature, then the transformation of meaning and the path towards that meaning are an inevitability that cannot be avoided. Religious identity, in relation to the principles of modern citizenship, does not negate or reconstruct one another, but rather reinforces each other. Religious identity rooted in textual sources retains an adaptive capacity, allowing it to remain in harmony with the dynamics of changing times. On the other hand, modern reality is constructed upon normative frameworks that give it a relatively stable character, making it less susceptible to external intervention or alteration (Fuaddin and Qudsy 2024, 193).

Shaykh Ali Jum’ah emphasizes a *rahmānīy* (rahmatan lil-‘ālamīn) reading of the text so that it is not understood in a rigid or static manner. In essence, when apparent contradictions arise between text and reality, the issue does not lie in the text nor in reality itself, but rather in the reader who fails to uphold the fundamental *rahmānīy* principle—one that is not limited to *rahmatan lil-muslimīn* but extends to *rahmatan lil-‘ālamīn*. By grounding interpretation in this *rahmānīy* reading, the values of religious moderation—particularly anti-violence and tolerance—can be more effectively realized (Falah 2023, 1).

Table 4: Integrated Synchronic–Diachronic Analysis Table of Religious Moderation (Case Study III)

No.	Signifier	Signified (6th-7th C AH)	Contemporary Signified	Relevance to Religious Moderation
1	The view of <i>Amirulmukminin</i> ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb	Prohibiting the appointment of non-Muslims as leaders	Internal consolidation of the Muslim community	Preventing unconstitutional actions (non-violence)
2	The view of Abū Mūsā al-‘Asy’ariy	Permitting the appointment of non-Muslims as leaders	Equality among citizens guaranteed by the constitution	Tolerance

The principle and attitude of moderation, along with its four pillars, can be directly identified in *Mafātīḥ al-Gaib* (MG) (Rofiqi et al. 2023, 17). The principle of moderation is reflected in ar-Rāziy’s use of uṣūl al-fiqh reasoning and his reliance on riwāyah-based approaches. Meanwhile, the attitude of moderation is evident in the practices of several figures, such as Asy-Sya’biy and Abū Mūsā al-Asy’ariy. The principles and attitudes of moderation within MG’s dialogical exegesis demonstrate the potential of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) to serve as authoritative references in strengthening both the theory and practice of religious moderation. This can be achieved through synchronic–diachronic semiotic recontextualization as well as other semiotic readings, such as heuristic and retroactive approaches (Amin, Fathurrosyid, and Nadhiroh 2025, 258–259).

The influence of Qur’anic exegesis is determined not only by the quality of the exegete but also by governmental support, which strengthens the legitimacy of tafsir and enhances its acceptance within society. Therefore, based on the findings of this study, which demonstrate the dialogical dimensions of *Mafātīḥ al-Gaib* (MG) across various sociological domains, there is a need for its implementation within Indonesia’s educational curriculum, both at the higher education level and beyond. It should also be utilized as an educational resource for public outreach in Indonesia’s plural society, so that the vision and mission of religious moderation in Indonesia do not remain

merely discursive, but can be actualized as a tangible social reality. State funding is also required to enrich and expand studies on religious moderation based on classical *kitab kuning* texts. A concrete example of this initiative can be seen in the International *Musabaqah Qir'at al-Kutub* held in Sengkang, Wajo Regency, South Sulawesi, in October 2025.

## Conclusion

It turns out that classical book (*kitab kuning*), which have often been regarded by some as outdated and stagnant, in fact contain substantial discourses on global issues such as interreligious dialogue. These discourses are expressed both at the level of principles and in concrete attitudes. The findings of this study (in contrast to previous research) demonstrate that the dialogical approach (*tafsir hiwariy*) with its three character typology (pro, contra, and moderate) positions ar-Rāziy's *Mafātiḥ al-Gaib* not merely as an intellectual product of its own era, but as a work that reflects an ongoing adaptive process in response to the dynamics of religious and cultural diversity. The three issues that have been dialogically examined yield a clear set of conclusions: (1) non-Muslims are permitted to enter mosques, provided that the sanctity and proper boundaries of the المسجد are maintained; (2) it is permissible to initiate and respond to greetings (*salām*) with non-Muslims, with emphasis on social-ethical considerations; and (3) appointing non-Muslim leaders over Muslims is valid when grounded in constitutional principles of equality and the integrity of fellow citizens. The concept of dialogical exegesis employed in this study has enabled the identification of a new pattern in both tafsir and linguistic studies simultaneously, shaped by global and contemporary issues.

This study is limited by the researcher's focus on issues considered sensitive in Indonesia; therefore, it does not provide a comprehensive examination of interreligious issues as a whole. In addition, the use of synchronic and diachronic semiotic analysis also constitutes a limitation of this research, as there are still many other semiotic approaches that could be employed. Accordingly, further comprehensive studies are needed that cover broader dimensions of interreligious dialogue and incorporate alternative linguistic and semiotic frameworks. In this way, a more holistic understanding of interfaith dialogue within classical *turāth* texts can be developed and utilized as a reference for strengthening religious moderation.

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