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## A POST-SECTARIAN SUNNI THEOLOGY IN INDONESIA: A Theo-philosophical Engagement with Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama

Muniron

UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri, Indonesia  
E-mail: muniron@uinkediri.ac.id

Limas Dodi

UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri, Indonesia  
E-mail: dr\_limasdodi@uinkediri.ac.id

Fidia Astuti

UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri, Indonesia  
E-mail: fidia@uinkediri.ac.id

Jainudin

UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia  
E-mail: jainudin@uinsa.ac.id

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**Corresponding Author:** Muniron

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**Abstract:** This article proposes an inclusive theo-philosophical approach as a new paradigm for mitigating ideological conflicts among contemporary Islamic groups, with particular attention to Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama. Drawing on the integration of revelation and reason articulated by Amin Abdullah, as well as the faith-centered orientation developed by Hassan Hanafi, the study argues that the theological differences between the two organizations are predominantly methodological rather than substantive. Empirical findings from Kediri indicate that theological dialogue grounded in inclusive ethical principles can foster concrete practices of reconciliation, strengthen social cohesion, and reduce the potential for polarization. Drawing on John Hick's reflections on pluralism, the article develops a model of reconciliation grounded in epistemic humility, dialogical hermeneutics, and historical consciousness. The analysis demonstrates that theological harmonization is not only feasible within the Indonesian Sunni context but also offers a meaningful contribution to global post-

sectarian discourse. Ultimately, the study underscores the significance of an inclusive theo-philosophical paradigm as a foundation for articulating a more adaptive, moderate, and responsive Islamic theology that corresponds to the complexities of modern society.

**Keywords:** Post-sectarian Sunni theology; Theo-philosophical Approach; Muhammadiyah; Nahdlatul Ulama; Indonesian Islam.

## Introduction

Amid escalating ideological tensions within Muslim communities worldwide, Sunni theology faces an urgent imperative to transcend sectarian divisions and articulate inclusive paradigms capable of reconciling doctrinal fidelity with ethical pluralism. This shift away from absolutist epistemologies toward post-sectarian frameworks is not merely an abstract academic concern but an acute practical necessity, particularly in light of the instrumentalization of theological differences within digital arenas and political discourses, which intensified polarization and weakened social cohesion.<sup>1</sup>

In Indonesia—the world’s largest Muslim-majority country—this challenge is particularly evident in the relationship between Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the two most influential Sunni organizations, commonly associated with modernist-rationalist and traditionalist-Sufi orientations, respectively.<sup>2</sup> While existing scholarship has highlighted their complementary roles in fostering religious moderation, multicultural coexistence, and civic

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander R. Arifianto, “Moderate Islamic Organisations and Contestation Over Political Theology: The Responses by Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Towards Islamism in Indonesia,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Political Norms in Southeast Asia*, ed. Gabriel Facal, Elsa Lafaye De Micheaux, and Astrid Norén-Nilsson (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2024), 337–55, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-9655-1\\_20](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-9655-1_20); Wahyudi Akmaliah, “The Demise of Moderate Islam: New Media, Contestation, and Reclaiming Religious Authorities,” *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 10, no. 1 (May 2020): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v10i1.1-24>.

<sup>2</sup> Tasman Hamami, “Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama Education: Two Main Pillars of National Education in Indonesia,” *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 18, no. 2 (December 2021): 307–30, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.2021.182-06>; Umiarso El-Rumi, “Socio-Cultural Transformation of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama Communities in East Java Prismatic Society,” *Millati: Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities* 7, no. 1 (July 2022): 67–83, <https://doi.org/10.18326/mlt.v7i1.6985>.

engagement,<sup>3</sup> these studies tend to privilege sociological and political explanations. Consequently, theological differences are often treated as static sociocultural markers rather than as dynamic interpretive engagements with revelation (*naqlī*) and reason (*‘aqlī*).<sup>4</sup> Addressing this lacuna, the present article advances an inclusive theo-philosophical approach—understood as a synthesis of revelatory normativity and rational reflexivity—as a constructive paradigm for mitigating intra-Sunni tensions, arguing that Muhammadiyah-NU divergences are primarily methodological rather than doctrinal in nature.

Within the classical Islamic intellectual tradition, theologians such as al-Ghazālī and Ibn Taymiyyah conceptualized *‘aqīdah* (creed) as the epistemic foundation of religious life, in which revelation constitutes the immutable divine source while reason operates as its interpretive complement, enabling contextual responsiveness without undermining transcendental authority.<sup>5</sup> This *naqlī-‘aqlī* dialectic underpins theology’s dual function as both a normative guide and an adaptive ethical framework, a position further reinforced by Maḥmūd Shaltūt’s assertion that doctrinal stability forms the cornerstone of sharia and *akhlāq*.<sup>6</sup> In the modern context, however, this equilibrium has often been disrupted by absolutist interpretations that privilege one epistemic pole at the expense of the other, thereby exacerbating sectarian antagonism.<sup>7</sup>

Indonesian Islam offers a particularly fertile terrain for rearticulating this balance. Muhammadiyah’s emphasis on *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) and ritual purification complements NU’s commitment to *taqlīd* (jurisprudential continuity) and Sufi spirituality, revealing not irrenconcilable oppositions but convergent trajectories

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<sup>3</sup> Hamami, “Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama Education”; Arifianto, “Moderate Islamic Organisations and Contestation Over Political Theology.”

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Aiman Awalluddin, “Redefining Rational (*Aqlī*) and Revelation (*Naqlī*) into a Concept of Islamic Systemology,” *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 9, no. 2 (December 2019): 407–27, <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2019.9.2.407-427>; Amin Abdullah, “Islam as a Cultural Capital in Indonesia and the Malay World: A Convergence of Islamic Studies, Social Sciences and Humanities,” *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 11, no. 2 (December 2017): 307, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2017.11.2.307-328>.

<sup>5</sup> Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, *Ihya’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma’rifah, 1980); Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā*, 3 (Riyāḍ: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1965).

<sup>6</sup> Mahmud Shaltūt, *al-Islām: ‘Aqīdah wa Shari‘ah* (Cairo: al-Idārah al-‘Āmmah li-l-Thaqāfah al-Islāmīyah bi-l-Azhar, 1959).

<sup>7</sup> Akmaliah, “The Demise of Moderate Islam.”

toward *tawhīd* (divine unity).<sup>8</sup> Empirical observations from regions such as Kediri, East Java—where sustained collaboration between Muhammadiyah and NU in education, pesantren reform, and community welfare has become a well-established practice—suggest that such convergence is neither incidental nor merely pragmatic, but rather rooted in shared ethical commitments that transcend methodological variations.<sup>9</sup>

Despite these synergies, the literature on Muhammadiyah-NU relations remains disproportionately sociological and political, focusing on institutional dynamics, electoral alliances, and digital contestation while insufficiently engaging the theological epistemologies that animate these interactions.<sup>10</sup> Even analyses that document their joint advocacy for religious moderation amid the rise of Islamism tend to infer harmony from observable outcomes—such as multicultural initiatives—rather than grounding it in systematic engagements with revelatory texts or rational hermeneutics.<sup>11</sup> This descriptive bias perpetuates reductive binaries such as reformist versus traditionalist, obscuring how theological epistemologies configure religious authority and ethical praxis.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the expansion of social media has intensified doctrinal polemics, yet such conflicts are rarely examined as expressions of divergent *naqli-‘aqli* configurations.<sup>13</sup>

To overcome this limitation, the article engages both global and local theological innovations. John Hick’s pluralist hypothesis, which critiques absolutist truth claims as historically contingent interpretations of the Real (*al-Haqq*), provides a foundational

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<sup>8</sup> El-Rumi, “Socio-Cultural Transformation of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama Communities in East Java Prismatic Society”; Hamami, “Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama Education.”

<sup>9</sup> Muhammad Qorib and Umiarso, “The Religious Moderation Model Based on the Unity of Theo-Socio-Anthropological Values in Muhammadiyah and NU Pesantren in Indonesia,” *Cogent Education* 12, no. 1 (December 2025): 2584644, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2025.2584644>; El-Rumi, “Socio-Cultural Transformation of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama Communities in East Java Prismatic Society.”

<sup>10</sup> Arifianto, “Moderate Islamic Organisations and Contestation Over Political Theology”; Akmaliah, “The Demise of Moderate Islam.”

<sup>11</sup> Arifianto, “Moderate Islamic Organisations and Contestation Over Political Theology.”

<sup>12</sup> Abdullah, “Islam as a Cultural Capital in Indonesia and the Malay World.”

<sup>13</sup> Akmaliah, “The Demise of Moderate Islam.”

conceptual lens for reframing intra-religious difference as a plurality of responses to a singular transcendent reality.<sup>14</sup> Although originally developed within Christian interfaith discourse, Hick's emphasis on epistemic humility and dialogical hermeneutics resonates with Islamic intellectual traditions, including Mu'tazilite rationalism and Ash'arite synthesis, and has been productively extended to intra-Islamic pluralism.<sup>15</sup>

Complementing this perspective, Amin Abdullah's neo-modernist framework situates revelation as epistemically primary while positioning reason as its dialogical partner, advancing a "text-community-context" hermeneutic that renders theology responsive to sociocultural transformation without diluting its revelatory core.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Hasan Hanafi's project of a "new theology" reconceptualizes faith (*īmān*) as a liberatory praxis, critiquing dogmatic orthodoxy in favor of anthropocentric reinterpretations aligned with social justice and human emancipation.<sup>17</sup> Together, these intellectual trajectories inform a theo-philosophical model of reconciliation grounded in inclusive ethical principles, operationalizing epistemic humility, dialogical exegesis, and historical reflectivity to harmonize Muhammadiyah's rationalist *ijtihad* with NU's tradition-oriented *taqlid*.

Empirically anchored in Kediri, East Java—a microcosm of inter-organizational cooperation where Muhammadiyah and NU jointly support pesantren reforms and communal religious practices—this study asks how a theo-philosophical engagement with the *naqli-'aqli* dialectic can reconfigure Muhammadiyah-NU theological relations beyond sectarian binaries and foster post-sectarian practices in contemporary Indonesian Islam? Drawing on ethnographic observation and localized hermeneutical analysis, this study demonstrates that such engagements produce tangible reconciliatory outcomes, including reduced polarization, strengthened communal cohesion, and adaptive theological reasoning responsive to the

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<sup>14</sup> John Harwood Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (London and Berlin: Springer, 1985).

<sup>15</sup> Akeem Olayinka Kazeem and Fatmir Shehu, "Analyzing John H. Hick's Religious Pluralism and Its Implications from Islamic Ethical Perspectives," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 13, no. 2 (December 2023): 178–94, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.132.12>.

<sup>16</sup> Abdullah, "Islam as a Cultural Capital in Indonesia and the Malay World."

<sup>17</sup> Hassan Hanafi, *Min Al-'Aqidab Ilā al-Thawrah [From Creed to Revolution]* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 2000).

complexities of modern life. By foregrounding theology as an active epistemic arena rather than a static backdrop, this article contributes to both Indonesian Sunni discourse and broader debates on post-sectarian theology, affirming Islam's enduring capacity for inclusive and ethically grounded renewal.

### **Theological Articulation of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama within A Post-Sectarian Framework**

Building on the preceding discussion of post-sectarian Sunni theology and the *naqli-aqli* dialectic, this section moves from the conceptual framework to its concrete theological articulation within Indonesian Islam. Rather than approaching Kediri, East Java, merely as a sociological setting, this discussion treats it as a lived theological space in which Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) negotiate doctrinal continuity, ethical responsibility, and communal harmony. In this sense, Kediri functions as an empirical locus for examining how methodological differences within Sunni theology can operate within a shared post-sectarian horizon.

The discussion of Muhammadiyah's theology indicates that the organization's religious thought develops through a complementary rational–textual approach. Muhammadiyah's theological orientation is frequently understood as *Burbānī*, an approach that emphasizes the harmony between reason and revelation in addressing divine matters. Nevertheless, Muhammadiyah remains cognizant of the limitations of reason in accessing the divine realm. Accordingly, Muhammadiyah's theology may be examined through three principal concepts: (1) the concept of God's attributes, (2) the concept of faith, and (3) the theory of human action. The following discussion systematically elaborates on each of these concepts.

#### *1. The Concept of God's Attributes*

Muhammadiyah theology affirms that God possesses perfect attributes. God is One in His divinity, attributes, and deeds. Mulkhan explains that God possesses the attributes of being and the ability to create; the attributes of being ability to create; the attributes of hearing and seeing; and the attributes of speech, and that He possesses all the attributes of perfection without the slightest attribute

of impossibility or deficiency. God creates in accordance with His will and volition.<sup>18</sup>

In line with this, Yusron Kahmi—a member of the Kediri City Branch of Muhammadiyah—said:

“Allah certainly and necessarily exists (*Wajib al-Wujud*). He is the First without beginning and the Last without end (*al-Awwal bilā bidāyah wa al-Akhir bilā nihāyah*). Muhammadiyah also holds that Allah’s attributes are unlimited, as Allah is infinite. In the Book of *Tauhid*, the decree of the 18<sup>th</sup> Muhammadiyah Congress in Solo in 1929, it is emphasized that every Muslim is obliged to believe in Allah as *al-Ilāh al-Ḥaqq*, the Most True God who created all things”.<sup>19</sup>

The 1926 Muhammadiyah Congress resolution likewise recognized God’s universal attributes, such as existence and will, without limiting the number of His attributes. Universally, God’s attributes differ from those of created beings; God has neither beginning nor end. Fauzan Saleh emphasized that Muhammadiyah theology recognizes thirteen attributes of God, as al-Ash‘ari held.<sup>20</sup>

Compared to the Mu‘tazilite view, which denies God’s attributes (*nafy al-sifāt*), Muhammadiyah theology affirms the existence of God’s attributes. However, Muhammadiyah’s primary and secondary sources do not elaborate in detail on whether God’s attributes are identical to His essence or distinct from it.<sup>21</sup> Yusron further emphasizes this position:

“However, it should be noted that Muhammadiyah avoids discussing matters that lie beyond the reach of reason; it considers reflection upon His creation sufficient to demonstrate His power and wisdom. Muhammadiyah does not adhere to any particular school and avoids unproductive theological debates among the Murji‘ah, Khawārij, Jabariyyah,

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<sup>18</sup> S Abdillah, S Budi, and Mahjudin, “Analysis of Muhammadiyah Ideology on the Performance of Muhammadiyah Primary and Secondary Education Institutions with Leadership as Mediation,” *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute-Journal (BIRCI-Journal)* 6, no. 1 (2018): 1079–190.

<sup>19</sup> Y Kahmi, *Interview* (2023).

<sup>20</sup> Ahyan Putra and Aiur Ochirov, “The Effect of Watching Political Programs on Islamic-Based Party-Political Images among Muhammadiyah Students,” *International Journal of Communication and Society* 2, no. 2 (2020): 58–69, <https://doi.org/10.31763/ijcs.v2i1.82>.

<sup>21</sup> Yudhi Kawangung, “Religious Moderation Discourse in Plurality of Social Harmony in Indonesia,” *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 3, no. 1 (2019): 160–70, <https://doi.org/10.29332/ijssh.v3n1.277>.

Qadariyyah, Mu'tazilah, Ash'ariyyah, Māturīdiyyah, and others. Instead, Muhammadiyah seeks not to neglect more essential concerns, such as improving the welfare of the people and enhancing the life of the nation".<sup>22</sup>

This theological restraint does not signify doctrinal vagueness, but rather reflects Muhammadiyah's theo-philosophical orientation, in which metaphysical precision is subordinated to ethical relevance and social responsibility.

Thus, Muhammadiyah theology emphasizes the universal aspects of divinity without engaging in metaphysical debates that lack direct relevance to human well-being. God is understood as omnipotent, distinct from all created beings, and eternal.

## 2. Faith as Dynamic Commitment and Ethical Praxis

In Muhammadiyah's view, faith is dynamic—it can increase and decrease. This suggests that faith, in both its narrow and broad senses, can be strengthened through the reinforcement of belief and through actions conducted in accordance with God's commands, as well as through enhanced self-discipline in presenting oneself appropriately before God and society.<sup>23</sup>

Strengthening faith through belief corresponds to faith in the broader sense, whereas strengthening faith through actions corresponds to faith in the broader sense. As Fauzan emphasizes:

"...Muhammadiyah recognizes the distinction between perfect and imperfect faith. It also acknowledges that faith fluctuates and is strongly influenced by good deeds and one's environment. Muhammadiyah rejects views that hastily label others as infidels, as those who commit major sins are still regarded as believers".<sup>24</sup>

This statement demonstrates Muhammadiyah's emphasis on the importance of good deeds (*'amal bi-l-arkān*) within the structure of faith, in which faith and knowledge are maintained in balance. Muhammadiyah does not seek to rigidly categorize faith as perfect or imperfect, as such distinctions may potentially be used as a basis for declaring others unbelievers.

From Fauzan's perspective:

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<sup>22</sup> Kahmi, *Interview*.

<sup>23</sup> F Del Castillo, "Religion and Spirituality in Society," in [Http://www.Studycountry.Com/Guide/GH-Religion.Htm](http://www.Studycountry.Com/Guide/GH-Religion.Htm), no. January, 2013, 9:125–125.

<sup>24</sup> Fauzan Shaleh, *Interview*, 2023.

“I do not wish to be preoccupied with the terms perfect or imperfect faith. Rather, I emphasize that Muhammadiyah’s theology represents Islam as a mercy for all creation. The most authentic interpretation of Islam as a mercy for all of creation is articulated in the mission of progressive Islam, as affirmed at the 48<sup>th</sup> Muhammadiyah Congress in Surakarta. For Muhammadiyah, Islam is a progressive religion (*din al-ḥaḍārah*) that brings mercy to all aspects of life”.<sup>25</sup>

This conception of faith reinforces Muhammadiyah’s post-sectarian inclination, as it prioritizes ethical inclusivity and communal harmony over exclusionary theological judgments.

### 3. Human Action: Responsibility under Divine Decree

This concept concerns human actions in relation to God’s decree (*qaḍā’*) and destiny (*qadar*). Mulkhan stated that, as part of the Sunni tradition, Muhammadiyah occupies a “middle ground” between extreme theological positions. Fauzan explained:

“...because a Muslim who commits a major sin remains a believer, according to Muhammadiyah, such a person will ultimately enter heaven, as stated in the compilation of rulings of the Muhammadiyah Tarjih Council. In this respect, Muhammadiyah is closer to a moderate Sunni position—neither Jabariyyah nor Qadariyyah. Muhammadiyah emphasizes human responsibility for actions without denying divine destiny. Destiny represents God’s decree that human beings must understand and actualize in order to live a successful life. Muhammadiyah is known as the people of truth and *sunnah*, who affirm that human beings are required to strive.”<sup>26</sup>

Thus, Muhammadiyah recognizes two roles in the realization of human action: the role of God and the role of human beings. Saleh emphasizes that Allah determined *qaḍā’* and *qadar* prior to creation, yet humans are still granted agency through the concept of *al-kaṣb*.<sup>27</sup> This indicates the presence of both divine contribution through decree and human contribution through effort, reflecting Mulkhan’s view that Muhammadiyah, as a Sunni movement, occupies a balanced position between theological extremes.

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<sup>25</sup> Shaleh, *Interview*.

<sup>26</sup> Shaleh, *Interview*.

<sup>27</sup> Fauzan Saleh, “The Belief of Al-Qaḍā and al-Qadr in Islamic Theological Discourse,” *Studia Islamika* 8, no. 3 (January 1970), <https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v8i3.682>.

While Muhammadiyah articulates a rational-pragmatic theological orientation that emphasizes ethical praxis and social transformation, Nahdlatul Ulama represents a tradition-oriented Sunni theology that safeguards doctrinal continuity through classical theological formulations. Both orientations, however, operate within the shared framework of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah.

In the realm of theology, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) exhibits a particularistic character, marked by careful and in-depth attention to detailed aspects of the faith, including secondary jurisprudential matters (*furū'iyah*). Several key theological concepts of Nahdlatul Ulama can be outlined as follows.

First is the concept of God's attributes. Nahdlatul Ulama holds that Allah possesses attributes that manifest His perfection without likening Him to any created being. Hasan, referring to the theological perspectives of Ash'ariyyah and Māturīdiyyah, emphasizes that Allah has attributes;<sup>28</sup> however, these attributes are not identical to His essence, even though their existence is inseparable from it. This position was affirmed by Masduki, Chair of the Kediri Branch of LDNU, in the following interview:

“Nahdlatul Ulama adheres to the Aswaja (Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah) school of thought, particularly the Ash'ariyyah-Māturīdiyyah tradition in matters of faith. Allah possesses attributes—commonly stated to number twenty or thirteen. The basis for this view is found, among other sources, in Q.S. al-Iklāṣ, whose *asbāb al-nuzūl* relate to questions posed by unbelievers regarding God's attributes. The Prophet Muhammad explained that this chapter elucidates the attributes of my Lord, while simultaneously refuting the Mu'tazilah view that denies the existence of God's attributes. Allah's attributes are neither identical to His essence nor separate from it (*lā hiya huwa wa lā hiya ghayrubu*). Allah's attributes differ from those of created beings: Allah's attributes are *qadīm*, whereas created beings are *ḥādīth*”.<sup>29</sup>

Second is the concept of faith in the Nahdlatul Ulama theology. In NU's view, faith is grounded in inner conviction (*al-ma'rifaḥ bi-l-qalb*) and verbal confession (*iqrār bi-l-lisān*) as the fundamental

<sup>28</sup> Amal Fathullah Zarkasyi et al., “The Theological Discourse on Divine Attributes: A Comparative Study of Ash'arite, Māturīdite, and Mu'tazilite Perspectives,” *Journal of Islamic and Occidental Studies* 3, no. 1 (June 2025): 111–41, <https://doi.org/10.21111/jios.v3i1.56>.

<sup>29</sup> A Masduki, *Interview*, 2023.

elements (*al-aṣl*) of faith. By fulfilling these two elements, an individual is considered to have met the criteria of a believer.<sup>30</sup> Even in certain emergencies, when verbal confession is not possible, inner conviction is considered sufficient to establish one's faith. Masduki explains this as follows:

“Nahdlatul Ulama views a Muslim's faith as fluctuating, at times perfect and at times imperfect. Faith consists of three elements: *al-'ilm* (knowledge), *al-i'tiqād* (conviction), and *al-i'tirāf* (verbal confession). These three constitute a sequential unity. The fundamental principles of faith are *al-'ilm*, *al-i'tiqād*, and *al-i'tirāf*. As for good deeds (*'amal bi-l-arkān*), according to the NU interpretation of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah principle, they are not the core elements of faith but rather its branches (*furū'*). Therefore, a person who commits a major sin remains a believer”.<sup>31</sup>

Third is the status of those who commit major sins. In accordance with this concept of faith, Nahdlatul Ulama maintains that Muslims who commit major sins—so long as they do not fall into *shirk*—remain believers rather than unbelievers. This position reflects NU's principle of moderation (*tawassuṭ*). Muzadi emphasizes that NU's moderate stance is characterized by its reluctance to declare a judgment of *shirk* or disbelief upon individuals who have not yet perfected their monotheism.<sup>32</sup> Masduki likewise emphasizes this position:

“For Nahdlatul Ulama, Muslims who commit major sins still have the status of believers with the label of *fāsiq*. Because good deeds are not a basic element of faith, the perpetrator of the sin, as long as he is not a *shirk*, is still called *al-mu'min al-'aṣī* or *abl al-kabā'ir*. His fate in the afterlife is under the will of Allah, but in the end, he will still go to heaven”.<sup>33</sup>

This view implies that a Muslim who commits a major sin still retains the possibility of eschatological salvation. Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah maintain that believers who die without repentance will not

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<sup>30</sup> Siti Uswatun Khasanah, “Nahdlatul Ulama Da'wah Dynamics: Socio-Cultural Change and Disruption,” *KOMUNIKA: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi* 16, no. 2 (October 2022): 183–99, <https://doi.org/10.24090/komunika.v16i2.6810>.

<sup>31</sup> Masduki, *Interview*.

<sup>32</sup> Oman Sukmana, Zaenal Abidin, and Juli Astutik, “The Role of Islamic NGOs in The Social Welfare Movement: Study on The Muhammadiyah Organization in Malang City, Indonesia,” *Journal of Positive School Psychology* 6, no. 3 (n.d.): 9979–90.

<sup>33</sup> Masduki, *Interview*.

remain in hell eternally but will ultimately enter paradise by virtue of their continued faith.<sup>34</sup> Entry into paradise may occur directly through Allah's forgiveness or through the Prophet's intercession, or after undergoing a temporary punishment in hell.<sup>35</sup>

Fourth is the theory of human action. In Nahdlatul Ulama theology, determining will (*mashī'ah*) originates from God, while effort (*kasb*) originates from human beings. This implies that humans may plan and intend actions, yet their successful realization ultimately remains subject to God's will.<sup>36</sup> This position situates NU in the middle ground between Jabariyyah and Qadariyyah. Jabariyyah tends to negate human agency due to the dominance of divine predestination, whereas Qadariyyah emphasizes absolute human freedom. NU's perspective, as articulated by Masduki, draws upon al-Ash'ari's theory of *kasb*:

“Nahdlatul Ulama adopts a middle position by following al-Ash'ari's theory of *kasb*. Its principle states that there is no creator except Allah (*lā khāliq illā Allāh*). Since Allah created human beings, human actions are likewise created by Allah. However, humans possess will (*wa mā tashā'ūna*), and when that will is directed toward an action, Allah brings that action into existence. This is what is meant by *kasb*, and it constitutes the basis of human accountability for their actions”.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, it may be emphasized that Nahdlatul Ulama theology exhibits several principal characteristics: (1) affirming that Allah creates all human actions; (2) continuing to acknowledge human agency through the concept of *kasb*; (3) positioning itself moderately (*tawassuṭ*) between the extremes of Jabariyyah and Qadariyyah; and (4) drawing upon the Ash'ariyyah and Māturīdiyyah traditions without explicitly privileging one over the other in determining the extent of human involvement in action.

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<sup>34</sup> Riyad Salim Al-Issa et al., “To Heaven through Hell: Are There Cognitive Foundations for Purgatory? Evidence from Islamic Cultures,” *Religions* 12, no. 11 (November 2021): 1026, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12111026>.

<sup>35</sup> Mohamed Elaskary and Eun Yun, “Death, Resurrection, and Shrine Visitations: An Islamic Perspective,” *Religions* 8, no. 3 (February 2017): 34, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8030034>.

<sup>36</sup> Suarning, “The Concept of Al-Kasb Theory in Islamic Theology: A Critical Analysis from Quranic Perspective,” *International Journal of Cultural and Religious Studies* 3, no. 1 (May 2023): 32–36, <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijcrs.2023.3.1.4>.

<sup>37</sup> Masduki, *Interview*.

To clarify the differences in theological orientation between Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, a systematic comparative mapping of the key concepts articulated by both organizations is required. The following table summarizes the principal distinctions in their theological approaches, concepts of divinity, understandings of faith, positions on charity, and theories of human action, as reflected in their respective official discourses, the views of prominent figures, and their intellectual traditions. This tabular presentation is not intended to establish a normative contrast between the two organizations, but rather to highlight their distinct epistemological characteristics and practical orientations, both of which are rooted in the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah tradition within the context of Indonesian Islam.

The theological differences between Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, as presented in this discussion, are not contradictory but instead reflect two distinct expressions of Sunni orthodoxy that differ primarily in epistemological style and practical orientation. Muhammadiyah embodies a modernist, rational–ethical theology that privileges social praxis, while NU sustains a traditional Aswaja theology that emphasizes doctrinal precision and spiritual continuity.

From a post-sectarian theo-philosophical perspective, these differences should not be understood as barriers to unity, but as complementary modes of engaging revelation and reason. Both organizations hold a moderate Sunni position, rejecting the extremes of Jabariyyah and Qadariyyah while affirming human moral responsibility within the framework of divine will. This methodological plurality enriches the theological landscape of Indonesian Islam and provides a concrete foundation for reconciliatory practice, as will be further illustrated in the Kediri context.

### **Post-Sectarian Theological Convergence between Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama**

Having examined the distinctive theological orientations of Muhammadiyah and NU in the preceding sections, this part moves beyond descriptive comparison toward a synthetic analysis. Rather than reiterating organizational differences, it seeks to demonstrate how these differences operate within a shared Sunni theological

horizon and, more importantly, how they enable constructive convergence. This analytical shift marks the transition from theological mapping to post-sectarian interpretation.

The theological differences between Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) are not fundamentally rooted in essential doctrinal conflicts, but rather in methodological diversity in interpreting revelatory texts and in varying degrees of precision in articulating the basic principles of faith. This diversity emerges because certain Qur'ānic verses and hadiths are general in nature and *ẓanni al-dalalah*, thereby allowing room for multiple interpretations. Differences in the intellectual capacity and scholarly horizons of religious authorities further enrich the modes of reasoning that have developed within these two largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia.

At times, socio-political dynamics may accentuate the surface appearance of theological divergence, even though such dynamics do not alter the foundational core of Sunni belief shared by both organizations.

Within a more reflective framework, the differences between the two organizations do not pertain to the substance of belief itself but rather to the instrumental dimensions of theology. Such epistemological awareness enables the recognition that the theological diversity of Muhammadiyah and NU, in fact, creates opportunities for meaningful convergence, especially in areas that constitute the shared foundation of Sunni Islam.

From a post-sectarian perspective, this convergence is not aimed at erasing doctrinal plurality, but re-situating it within a broader theo-philosophical framework that integrates revelation, reason, and ethical responsibility.

#### 1. *Theological Convergence on the Attributes of God*

Despite differences in the number and classification of divine attributes, both Muhammadiyah and NU converge on the affirmation of Allah's attributes as an indispensable foundation of Sunni theology.

Both Muhammadiyah and NU recognize the attributes of Allah as fundamental principles of the Islamic creed. Muhammadiyah formulates the doctrine of Allah's attributes through the Tarjih Decision Collection (*Himpunan Putusan Tarjih/HPT*) and official organizational documents, which adopt thirteen obligatory attributes of Allah as commonly understood within the Ash'ariyyah tradition, including *al-asmā' al-ḥusnā* as part of these attributes. Nevertheless,

Muhammadiyah does not bind itself to a specific school of *kalām*, instead adopting an eclectic approach grounded primarily in *naqli* arguments.

NU, by contrast, explicitly situates itself within the Ash‘ariyyah-Māturīdiyyah theological tradition, affirming the twenty essential attributes of Allah along with their corresponding impossible attributes. NU’s argumentative framework emphasizes that these attributes constitute evidence of God’s perfection and categorically negate any resemblance between God and His creatures. This shared epistemological orientation indicates that both Muhammadiyah and NU reject the doctrine of *nafy al-ṣifāt* (the denial of God’s attributes), which constitutes a central tenet of Mu‘tazilah theology.

Thus, the common ground between the two organizations lies in their mutual affirmation of Allah’s attributes as foundational teachings of Ahl al-Sunnah, a position that has historically represented the consensus of Sunni scholars.

This shared rejection of *nafy al-ṣifāt* situates both organizations firmly within the historical consensus of Sunni Kalām, demonstrating that their divergence lies in articulating rather than theological substance.

## 2. Theological Convergence on the Concept of Faith

Convergence between Muhammadiyah and NU is also evident in their understanding of faith as a dynamic and graded reality rather than a static or absolutist category.

Muhammadiyah defines faith in two ways: in a narrow sense (*‘aqīdah*), which is limited to belief in the heart, and in a broader sense, which encompasses belief in the heart, verbal acknowledgment, and deeds. Within this framework, deeds are not regarded as an essential constituent of faith but rather as an indicator of its quality. Accordingly, Muhammadiyah understands faith as a dynamic reality that can increase or decrease (*yaẓīd wa yanquṣ*).

NU likewise situates faith within a hierarchical structure: minimal faith (*al-aṣl*) consists of belief in the heart and verbal confession, while perfect faith (*al-kāmil*) incorporates deeds as a branch (*al-far‘*). In this regard, NU also acknowledges fluctuations in faith, while underscoring the role of deeds as an indicator of its perfection.

Both organizations converge on two fundamental principles: (1) that the core element of faith lies in belief within the heart, and (2)

that deeds play a significant role in strengthening and perfecting faith. This convergence confirms that both Muhammadiyah and NU operate within a shared Sunni epistemological framework. Such convergence reinforces a post-sectarian ethical orientation, as it discourages exclusionary judgments and prioritizes moral cultivation over doctrinal rigidity.

### 3. *Theological Convergence on Mortal Sin*

Both Muhammadiyah and NU articulate a shared Sunni position on the status of major sinners, rejecting *takfir*-based approaches that historically fueled sectarian polarization. Muhammadiyah maintains that Muslims who commit major sins other than *shirk* remain believers (*al-mu'min al-'āsi*). This position is reinforced by the doctrine that perpetrators of major sins will ultimately enter paradise by virtue of their faith, although they may first undergo punishment in hell, as indicated in authentic hadiths concerning the eventual salvation of sinful believers.

NU upholds the same position: those who commit major sins will not remain in hell eternally and will ultimately enter paradise. NU further elaborates on the possibility of receiving intercession (*shafā'ah*) and divine forgiveness, such that some perpetrators of major sins may enter paradise directly without first undergoing punishment.

This shared position demonstrates that both organizations reject the doctrines of the Khawārij and Mu'tazilah, which declare major sinners to be unbelievers or regard their faith as null and void. Thus, both Muhammadiyah and NU remain firmly situated within the Sunni theological tradition. This theological proximity plays a crucial role in maintaining communal cohesion, particularly within a plural Sunni context such as Indonesia.

### 4. *Common Ground in Human Action Theory*

In the theory of human action, convergence between Muhammadiyah and NU becomes especially apparent in their shared commitment to a middle Sunni position between determinism and radical free will. Muhammadiyah and NU both emphasize a moderate Sunni theological position situated between the extremes of Jabariyyah and Qadariyyah. Muhammadiyah underscores the role of human effort while consistently affirming that Allah is the ultimate creator of all deeds. NU, drawing upon the Ash'ariyyah and Māturīdiyyah traditions, likewise positions human beings as *muktasib*

(acquiring agents), while maintaining that the creation of actions remains subject to Allah’s will.

The convergence between the two lies in their shared recognition of the dual roles of Allah and human beings, with ontological priority firmly residing with God. In this regard, both positions remain consistent with the established Sunni theory of *kasb* within the intellectual tradition of *kalām*. This shared adherence to the theory of *kasb* illustrates how methodological diversity can coexist with ontological consensus regarding divine sovereignty.

To clarify this convergence systematically, the following table summarizes the principal points of theological agreement between Muammadiyah and NU within the Sunni tradition.

**Table 1: Comparative Sunni Theological Positions of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama**

Theological Aspects	Muhammadiyah	Nahdlatul Ulama	Common Ground
The Attributes of God	Affirms thirteen essential attributes of Allah, including <i>al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā</i> as divine attributes; not bound to a particular school of theology.	Adheres to the Ash‘ariyyah and Māturīdiyyah traditions; affirms twenty obligatory attributes along with impossible attributes.	Both affirm the attributes of Allah as the foundation of the Sunni creed and reject <i>nafy al-ṣifāt</i> .
The Concept of Faith	Faith has a narrow meaning (belief in the heart) and a broad meaning (heart, verbal confession, and deeds); faith is dynamic and subject to increase and decrease.	Faith is structured hierarchically, ranging from minimal faith (heart and tongue) to perfect faith (including deeds); faith is graded accordingly.	Belief in the heart constitutes the essential core of faith; deeds enhance the quality and perfection of faith.
Major Sins	Perpetrators of major sins (other than <i>shirk</i> ) remain believers and are not condemned to eternal punishment in hell.	Holds the same position: perpetrators of major sins remain believers and are not eternally punished in hell.	Both reject the doctrines of the Khawārij and Mu‘tazilah, in accordance with Sunni theology.
The Theory of Human Actions	Sunni middle position: human effort exists, while	Sunni middle position: humans acquire actions	Both recognize the roles of human agency and divine

	Allah remains the creator of all deeds.	<i>(kash)</i> , while Allah's will is ultimately decisive.	will, and reject the extremes of Jabariyyah and Qadariyyah.
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Ultimately, the theological convergence between Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama demonstrates that differences in *kalām* should not be understood as grounds for emphasizing division, but rather as a space for articulating rationality and continuity within a shared Islamic horizon. Viewed through a post-sectarian theo-philosophical lens, this convergence reflects not doctrinal homogeization, but a mature Sunni pluralism rooted in shared epistemological commitments.

This finding further confirms that dialogical reconstruction between Muhammadiyah and NU is not an endeavor aimed at doctrinal unification, but rather an effort to reinterpret the Sunni heritage in a more discerning, proportionate, and contextual manner. In this sense, theological diversity within Indonesian Sunni Islam should be understood not as an anomaly but as an intellectual asset that sustains an inclusive, ethically grounded, and forward-looking religious landscape.

### **An Inclusive Theo-philosophical Framework for Post-Sectarian Sunni Theology**

Building upon the theological convergence identified between Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatu Ulama, this section proposes an inclusive theo-philosophical approach as a conceptual culmination of the study. The framework is not introduced as a purely normative abstraction, but rather emerges inductively from empirical findings and comparative theological analysis within the Indonesian context, particularly in Kediri. It seeks to demonstrate how post-sectarian Sunni theology can be articulated without dissolving doctrinal integrity by integrating shared faith commitments with inclusive ethical reasoning.

This inclusive theo-philosophical approach aligns with Amin Abdullah's conception of integrating revelation (*wahy*) and reason (*'aql*) as complementary epistemic sources in the development of Islamic theology.<sup>38</sup> From this perspective, theology is understood not

<sup>38</sup> Muhammad Amin Abdullah, "Islamic Studies in Higher Education in Indonesia: Challenges, Impact and Prospects for the World Community," *Al-Jami'ab: Journal of Islamic Studies* 55, no. 2 (December 2017): 391–426,

merely as a system of doctrines but as a reflective praxis that mediates between normative revelation and contextual reasoning. This orientation is further reinforced by Hassan Hanafi's methodological stance, which emphasizes faith as the starting point of theological reflection rather than its final outcome.<sup>39</sup> Together, these perspectives frame theology as a dynamic process that connects metaphysical commitment with ethical and social responsibility.

Empirical findings from Kediri demonstrate that this approach makes a tangible contribution to sustaining socio-religious harmony amid the diversity of Islamic organizations. The interaction between Muhammadiyah and NU in everyday religious life illustrates that theological dialogue and reconciliation are not merely academic ideals, but also provide a practical mechanism for reducing social conflict rooted in religious differences.<sup>40</sup> In this context, post-sectarian theology is enacted through cooperation, mutual recognition, and dialogical engagement across organizational boundaries.

At the global level, the significance of this conceptual framework becomes increasingly apparent in light of persistent sectarian conflicts and the challenges posed by religious pluralism. International scholarship suggests that a theo-philosophical framework is essential for bridging dogmatic divides, particularly through the promotion of universal ethical principles such as justice, compassion, and mutual understanding.<sup>41</sup> Hick's theory of religious

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<https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2017.552.391-426>; M. Amin Abdullah, "Religion, Science, and Culture: An Integrated, Interconnected Paradigm of Science," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 52, no. 1 (April 2015): 175, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2014.521.175-203>.

<sup>39</sup> Hasan Hanafi, *Islam in the Modern World: Religion, Ideology and Development* (Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, 1988); Hanafi, *Min Al-'Aqidah Ilā al-Thawrah [From Creed to Revolution]*; Fathurrahman Muhtar, "Toward Religious Moderation: Mohammed Arkoun's and Hasan Hanafi's Perspectives on Indonesian Wasatiah Islam," *Miqot: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 47, no. 2 (December 2023): 204, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v47i2.1119>.

<sup>40</sup> Ester Widiyaningtyas et al., "Philosophical Theology as a Catalyst for Inclusive Interreligious Dialogue in Plural Societies," *Jurnal Theologia* 36, no. 1 (2025): 93–108, <https://doi.org/10.21580/teo.2025.36.1.26004>.

<sup>41</sup> Sung Min Kim, J.B. Banawiratma, and Dicky Sofjan, "Religious Pluralism Discourse in Public Sphere of Indonesia: A Critical Application of Communicative Action Theory to Inter-Religious Dialogue," *Religió: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 10, no. 2 (September 2020): 158–88, <https://doi.org/10.15642/religió.v10i2.1307>; Azhari Akmal Tarigan et al., "Early Character of Islam in Medan: Challenging the

pluralism reinforces this argument by asserting that religious differences reflect diverse human responses to the same transcendent reality, thereby underscoring the necessity of inclusive approaches in both intra- and interreligious dialogues.<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, Hick's position has been subject to important critiques. Byrne argues that pluralist theology risks undermining religion's capacity to make substantive truth claims.<sup>43</sup> Heim highlights the unresolved problems concerning truth and differentiation within pluralist frameworks,<sup>44</sup> while Harrison emphasizes the concept of internal pluralisms, which accounts for forms of internal realism within religious traditions.<sup>45</sup> Rather than invalidating inclusivity, these critiques point to the need for a mediating theological position. In this regard, the inclusive theo-philosophical framework proposed here affirms theological particularity while cultivating epistemic humility and dialogical openness. It thus corresponds with reconciliation theory, which integrates social, psychological, and spiritual dimensions to foster sustainable peace.<sup>46</sup>

By placing inclusivity at the center of theological reflection, this framework addresses sectarian differentiation, which is widely recognized as a primary source of religious conflict. A growing body of multidisciplinary research demonstrates that theology developed through a dialogical-hermeneutical approach—one that accounts for historical and social contexts while remaining open to renewed interpretation—can establish a paradigm grounded in openness to pluralism and epistemic humility.<sup>47</sup> The urgency of such an approach

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Narrative of Religious Intolerance in an Indonesian City," *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 9, no. 1 (July 2025): 85, <https://doi.org/10.30821/jcims.v9i1.25388>; Victoria S. Harrison, "Internal Realism and the Problem of Religious Diversity," *Philosophia* 34, no. 3 (September 2006): 287–301, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11406-006-9029-5>.

<sup>42</sup> John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963); Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*.

<sup>43</sup> Peter Byrne, *Prolegomena to Religious Pluralism: Reference and Realism in Religion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

<sup>44</sup> S. Mark 1950- Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*, Faith Meets Faith Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995).

<sup>45</sup> Harrison, "Internal Realism and the Problem of Religious Diversity."

<sup>46</sup> John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997).

<sup>47</sup> Abdullah, "Islamic Studies in Higher Education in Indonesia"; Catherine Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (Crossroad Publishing Company, 2008).

is increasingly evident in regions marked by protracted sectarian conflict, such as the Middle East, where shifts in sectarian narratives have contributed to sustained violence.<sup>48</sup> From this standpoint, a theo-philosophical approach offers a viable post-sectarian outlook.

At the level of local praxis, the Kdiri case illustrates how this framework integrates theology with social practice. NU's emphasis on moderation (*tawassut*) and inclusivity, manifested in adaptive and tolerant modes of religious outreach,<sup>49</sup> complements Muhammadiyah's reformist ethos (*tajdid*) and commitment to social renewal.<sup>50</sup> The convergence of these orientations produces a practical synthesis grounded in shared ethical values, contributing not only to intra-Muslim harmony but also to broader social cohesion.

This model further generates strategic implications at three interconnected levels: religious organizations, government institutions, and educational institutions. Religious organizations are encouraged to sustain inclusive theological dialogue in order to minimize exclusivist and sectarian tendencies.<sup>51</sup> Government institutions play a facilitative role by supporting moderation initiatives and interfaith dialogue through sociocultural policies.<sup>52</sup> Educational institutions play a central role in cultivating inclusive theological perspectives among younger generations, as empirical studies demonstrate that intersubjectivity-based religious education significantly enhances mutual understanding and tolerance.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Nader Hashemi, Danny Postel, and University of Denver, eds., *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East* (Oxford; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017); Dina Yulianti, Otong Sulaeman, and Muhammad Ilyas, "Accusing Heresy is a Heresy: How Heresy Became an Instrument in Political Sectarianism," *Religió: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 10, no. 2 (September 2020): 189–209, <https://doi.org/10.15642/religio.v10i2.1516>.

<sup>49</sup> Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul Ulama (PBNU), *Khittab Nahdlatul Ulama dan Wawasan Keislaman* (Jakarta: Lembaga Ta'lif wan Nasyr PBNU, 2015).

<sup>50</sup> Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, *Manhaj Tarjih dan Tajdid Muhammadiyah* (Yogyakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2018).

<sup>51</sup> Usamah Al Turki et al., "Rethinking Da'wah Strategy as a Basis for Mitigating Conflict Involving Muslim Minorities: Insights from Bali and Peniwen Malang, Indonesia," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 15, no. 1 (June 2025): 36–58, <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2025.15.1.36-58>.

<sup>52</sup> Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Moderasi Beragama* (Jakarta: Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, 2019).

<sup>53</sup> James A. Banks, *Cultural Diversity and Education: Foundations, Curriculum, and Teaching* (Routledge, 2015); Syahraini Tambak, "The Method of Counteracting Radicalism in Schools: Tracing the Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Learning,"

Methodologically, this study integrates theological, philosophical, and sociological perspectives within a dialogical and inclusive epistemological orientation. By rejecting both exclusivism and relativistic pluralism, the framework affirms spiritual unity while respecting religious diversity.<sup>54</sup> In doing so, it addresses a persistent gap in international Islamic studies, which has often prioritized doctrinal difference over theological reconciliation.<sup>55</sup>

In sum, the inclusive theo-philosophical frameworks articulated in this study demonstrate that post-sectarian Islamic theology is neither utopian nor merely rhetorical. By grounding theological reflection in convergence, ethical inclusivity, and lived social realities, this framework offers a rigorous and practical response to sectarian fragmentation in contemporary Muslim societies. Beyond its contribution to Indonesian Islamic discourse, it provides a transferable conceptual model for broader contexts in which religious diversity demands dialogue, humility, and shared moral commitments.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This study demonstrates that the theological differences between Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama are not grounded in substantive doctrinal opposition but are primarily methodological and interpretive in nature. Across core theological domains within the Sunni tradition, both organizations exhibit a significant degree of epistemological convergence, revealing that intra-Sunni plurality in Indonesia functions less as a source of conflict than as a resource for intellectual and ethical enrichment. At the level of lived religious practice, the rational-reformist orientation commonly associated with Muhammadiyah and the spiritual-cultural orientation characteristic of Nahdlatul Ulama operate in a complementary rather than antagonistic manner, enabling an adaptive and moderate configuration of Sunni theology. In this sense, post-sectarian Sunni theology emerges not as an abstract ideal but as an empirically observable mode of theological coexistence embedded in every communal life.

From a theoretical standpoint, this article advances an inclusive theo-philosophical approach that integrates revelation, reason, and

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*Miqot: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 45, no. 1 (August 2021): 104, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v45i1.761>.

<sup>54</sup> Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

lived faith as a coherent framework for theological reconciliation. Drawing on the integrative epistemology of Amin Abdullah, the faith-centered hermeneutics of Hassan Hanafi, and John Hick's reflections on pluralism, the study formulates a dialogical model grounded in epistemic humility, historical consciousness, and ethical inclusivity—without requiring doctrinal uniformity or institutional homogenization. Within this framework, *'post-sectarian'* does not signify the negation of *madhhab*-based traditions or organizational identities, but rather their reorientation toward dialogical engagement and shared ethical horizons. By situating theological reconciliation within everyday social practice rather than elite or state-centered discourse, this model demonstrates the viability of post-sectarian Sunni theology as a constructive response to contemporary polarization. Rooted in the Indonesian Islamic experience, the philosophical paradigm articulated here offers broader implications for global Islamic discourse by reimagining theological diversity as a foundation for a more humane, rational, and dialogically oriented religious future.

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