

A Constructive Theology of Art How the 27th National Tarjih Congress Decision Reads the Qur'an and Hadith

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DOI: 10.29240/alquds.v10i2.16602

Abstract. Muhammadiyah, a modernist Islamic movement in Indonesia, is often narrowly understood in both academic and public discourse as rejecting art. However, its official decisions actually build a positive theological foundation for art. This study examines how the 27th National Tarjih Congress Decision on Guidance for Islamic Art and Culture employs the Qur'an and ḥadīth to construct a constructive theology of art. Using a library-based qualitative approach with content analysis of the Tarjih document and al-Fārūqī's tawḥīdic aesthetics as a framework, this research finds that the decision constructs such a theology through five pillars: *fiṭrah*; reinterpretation of ḥadīths via *'illat al-ḥukm*; Sufi values through *iḥsān*; a cultural strategy balancing purification and accommodation; and *Al-Mā'ūn*'s social concern—challenging the narrow view of Muhammadiyah as anti-art. The decision thus formulates a theology of art that not only permits art legally but also positions it as part of Muslims' spiritual and social mission. This research offers a new reading of an official Muhammadiyah document and a theoretical framework for analyzing theology of art in contemporary Islam.

Keywords: Muhammadiyah, Constructive Theology of Art, Tawḥīdic Aesthetics, *Fiṭrah*, *Al-Mā'ūn*.

Introduction

As the largest modernist Islamic movement in Indonesia, Muhammadiyah has been known for its critical stance toward religious practices considered to lack a strong foundation in the Qur'an and Sunnah, including in the realm of art and culture.¹ This critical stance is often narrowly understood as a rejection of art altogether, giving rise to an image of Muhammadiyah as a movement that is "unfriendly" toward aesthetic expression and local cultural traditions.² However, in its development, Muhammadiyah through its *Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid* (Council for Tarjih and Renewal) issued an important decision at the 27th National Tarjih Congress that comprehensively provides guidance on Islamic art and culture. This decision is worth examining because it not only addresses the legal-formal aspects of *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*, but also potentially articulates a theological framework for art—a dimension that has received insufficient attention in existing scholarship on Muhammadiyah and art. The fundamental question that arises is: how does this decision employ the Qur'an and ḥadīth to construct a positive and productive theology of art?

¹ Ahmad Najib Burhani, "Pluralism, Liberalism, and Islamism: Religious Outlook of Muhammadiyah," *Studia Islamika* 25, no. 3 (December 4, 2018): 433–70, <https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v25i3.7765>; Azaki Khoirudin and Qaem Aulasyahied, "Reinterpreting Muhammadiyah's Purification and Its Implications for the Educational Philosophy," *Progresiva: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Pendidikan Islam* 12, no. 02 (December 7, 2023): 161–78, <https://doi.org/10.22219/progresiva.v12i02.29596>.

² Muhammad As'ad, "THE MUHAMMADIYAH CRITICISM AGAINST MAWLID TRADITION OVER CENTURIES," *JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAM* 13, no. 2 (December 1, 2019): 350, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2019.13.2.350-372>.

Discourse on art in Islam has often been trapped in jurisprudential (*fiqh*) debates that tend to be reactive and focused on black-and-white determinations of *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*. Such an approach frequently neglects the more fundamental theological dimension—namely, how art is understood within the framework of *tanḥīd* (monotheism) and human *fiṭrah*. Muhammadiyah, as the largest modernist Islamic organization in Indonesia, provides a crucial case for examining this very tension, since its official decision-making body—the *Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid*—has historically operated largely within jurisprudential frameworks yet recently issued a comprehensive ruling on art that potentially transcends these legal boundaries. In the context of Muhammadiyah, several studies have attempted to map the dynamics of this organization's thought regarding art and culture. Khoirudin and Aulassyahied³ and Junaidi⁴, for instance, have collectively examined these sociological shifts, documenting a "post-puritanism" era since 1995 and increased tolerance toward local religious traditions driven by pragmatic *da'wah* strategies and generational change. However, these studies predominantly address the sociological dynamics of Muhammadiyah's cultural adaptation. The underlying theological-hermeneutical method—how the Tarjih institution reads and reinterprets Scripture to legitimize this accommodation—has not yet been systematically investigated, leaving a notable gap in the ongoing scholarly debate.

From a theoretical perspective, a relevant approach to analyzing the theology of art in this decision is the *tanḥīdīc aesthetics* theory developed by Ismā'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī.⁵ Al-Fārūqī argues that *tanḥīd* is not merely a theological principle but also the fundamental structure shaping all expressions of Islamic culture, including art. For him, Islamic art is art that radiates awareness of God's oneness and serves as a window penetrating divine reality, not a wall that blocks it. Al-Fārūqī also emphasizes that beauty is *tajallī* (manifestation) of God's names and attributes, especially *al-Jamīl* (the Most Beautiful), so that human beings, by virtue of their *fiṭrah*, possess the capacity to apprehend that beauty and express it in works of art as part of *'amal ṣāliḥ* (righteous deed). This framework is chosen here not because it is the only possible lens, but because it offers a distinctly theological approach to aesthetics that aligns with the Tarjih document's explicit emphasis on *fiṭrah* and divine beauty—an emphasis that other frameworks, such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr's perennialist aesthetics or Oliver Leaman's analytical aesthetics, do not centrally address.⁶ In fact, while Nasr's approach tends toward universal metaphysics and Leaman's toward analytical philosophy, neither directly addresses the institutional-hermeneutical dimension of a modernist Islamic organization's fatwa. Furthermore, the Tarjih decision itself explicitly cites al-Fārūqī, making his framework institutionally relevant to understanding the document's theological logic.

Several previous studies have collectively established that Muhammadiyah's relationship with art and culture is neither monolithic nor static, but rather characterized by ongoing negotiation, selective appropriation, and evolving interpretations of Islamic norms. Siswantari, Ahimsa-Putra, and Maarif⁷, for instance, conducted research on artistic negotiation in Muhammadiyah dance and found

³ Khoirudin and Aulassyahied, "Reinterpreting Muhammadiyah's Purification and Its Implications for the Educational Philosophy."

⁴ Akhmad Arif Junaidi, "Muhammadiyah and the Shifting Interpretation of Local Religious Traditions," *Walisono: Jurnal Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan* 30, no. 2 (November 30, 2022): 169–94, <https://doi.org/10.21580/ws.30.2.16293>.

⁵ Isma'īl Raji Al-Faruqi and Lois Lamya Al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986).

⁶ Al-Faruqi and Al-Faruqi; Sayyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, 1st ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press (SUNY Press), 1987), <https://archive.org/details/islamicartspirit0000nasr/page/n4/mode/1up>; Oliver Leaman, *Islamic Aesthetics: An Introduction*, 1st ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), <https://archive.org/details/islamicaesthetic0000leam/page/n6/mode/1up>.

⁷ Heni Siswantari, Heddy Shri Ahimsa-Putra, and Samsul Maarif, "Artistic Negotiation, Religious and Cultural Values: An Islamic Dance Aesthetic in the Perspective of Muhammadiyah Tarjih Decision," *International Journal of Visual and Performing Arts* 6, no. 2 (December 26, 2024): 234–47, <https://doi.org/10.31763/viperarts.v6i2.1712>.

that artists make adaptations in content (movement patterns), performance aspects (costumes), and conceptual aspects (philosophical values) to create works that align with Islamic values without eliminating local cultural elements. This study is important because it shows that artistic practices within the Muhammadiyah environment are not static but continuously undergo processes of negotiation and adaptation. Meanwhile, Muttaqin, Hamsah, and Abror⁸, in their study on the search for Islamic spirituality in Muhammadiyah, show that the organization is developing a form of spirituality that emphasizes the authentic aspects of Sufism (*taṣawwuf*), namely *tanḥīd* and noble character (*akhlāq karīmah*) reflected in the concept of *iḥsān* (spiritual excellence). This finding is relevant because it indicates that Muhammadiyah does not entirely reject the spiritual dimension of Islam, including that which relates to aesthetic experience.

Other relevant research has been conducted by Bachtiar, Nurhakim, and Rohim⁹ on the concept of neo-Sufism in Muhammadiyah. This study shows that several socio-religious concepts developing in Muhammadiyah's intellectual thought have strong coherence with neo-Sufism, which emphasizes the relationship between Islamic spirituality and social transformation. These findings indicate that Muhammadiyah does not reject Sufism in toto but rather selects elements that align with the principles of Sharī'ah and modernity. In the context of art, this approach gives rise to an aesthetic form that does not merely pursue formal beauty but also contains a strong spiritual dimension and social orientation. Zubair et al.¹⁰ reinforce this finding by showing that the concept of *tajdīd* (renewal) that Muhammadiyah undertakes in the field of Sufism emphasizes the purification of teachings in accordance with modern life, differing from the meaning and practice of Sufism in the early period.

While these studies have significantly advanced our understanding of the sociological and practical dimensions of Muhammadiyah's engagement with art—such as how artists negotiate with local traditions or how Sufi values are selectively adopted—they have not systematically examined the theological-hermeneutical method underlying the official Tarjih decision itself. Specifically, none of these studies analyzes how the Tarjih institution reads and reinterprets the Qur'an and ḥadīth to construct a positive theological foundation for art. This gap is significant because the Tarjih decision represents Muhammadiyah's official, binding guidance for all its members and charitable endeavors, yet its scriptural reasoning remains unexplored. The present study addresses this gap by focusing specifically on how the 27th National Tarjih Congress decision employs the Qur'an and ḥadīth to construct a productive theology of art, thereby complementing the existing sociological literature with a focused theological-hermeneutical analysis.

In terms of religious thought methodology, Fanani et al.¹¹ conducted research on the evolution of Muhammadiyah's *Manhaj Tarjih* (Tarjih methodology) and found that the organization has integrated the *bayānī* (textual), *burhānī* (rational-logical), and *ʿirfānī* (spiritual-intuitive) approaches in the development of its jurisprudence (*fiqh*). This finding is important because it shows that Muhammadiyah does not merely read religious texts literally but also considers context and deeper meanings. This approach is relevant for understanding how the decision on art and culture reads the

⁸ Ahmad Muttaqin, Ustadi Hamsah, and Robby Habiba Abror, "Muhammadiyah, Sufism, and the Quest for 'Authentic' Islamic Spirituality," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 13, no. 1 (June 5, 2023): 199–226, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v13i1.199-226>.

⁹ Hasnan Bachtiar, Moh Nurhakim, and Fathor Rohim, "Purification, Spiritualism, and Reform: Muhammadiyah's Reception of Neo-Sufism," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawwuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 15, no. 1 (June 5, 2025): 84–112, <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2025.15.1.84-112>.

¹⁰ Zubair Zubair et al., "Muhammadiyah's Tajdīd and Sufism between Purification and Modernization," *Insaniyat: Journal of Islam and Humanities* 7, no. 2 (May 31, 2023): 113–27, <https://doi.org/10.15408/insaniyat.v7i2.31505>.

¹¹ Ahwan Fanani et al., "Muhammadiyah's Manhaj Tarjih: An Evolution of a Modernist Approach to Islamic Jurisprudence in Indonesia," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (October 28, 2021): 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6942>.

ḥadīth concerning the prohibition of statues and paintings, and how it develops a contextual methodology of *‘illat al-ḥukm* (legal cause). Nasir’s¹² comparative study of Muhammadiyah and the Izala movement in Nigeria also shows that although Muhammadiyah is inspired by the spirit of purification, it is not identical to Salafism because it remains open to contextualization and modernity. This reinforces the argument that Muhammadiyah has a distinctive character as a critical yet adaptive modernist-reformist movement.

Although the various studies mentioned above have made important contributions to understanding the dynamics of Muhammadiyah’s thought on art, culture, and spirituality, a gap remains unaddressed. Most existing studies focus more on artistic practices at the local level, on artists’ artistic negotiations, or on the general dynamics of organizational thought. No study has specifically and deeply examined how the official decision of the *Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid* at the 27th National Tarjih Congress employs the Qur’an and ḥadīth to build a positive and productive theological foundation for art. Yet this decision is an important document representing Muhammadiyah’s official stance and serves as a guideline for all its members and charitable endeavors (*amal usaha*). In other words, research that systematically analyzes the text of this decision using an adequate theoretical framework remains very limited. This gap is the main focus of the present study.

This study aims to examine how the 27th National Tarjih Congress decision uses the Qur’an and ḥadīth to construct a positive and productive theology of art. The academic contribution of this research lies in its effort to provide a new reading of an official Muhammadiyah document that has hitherto received insufficient attention in Qur’anic and ḥadīth studies, as well as to offer a theoretical framework that can be used to analyze the theology of art in the context of contemporary Islam. Thus, this research is expected to enrich scholarly knowledge, particularly in the field of Qur’anic and ḥadīth studies, and to contribute to the development of Islamic thought that is more contextual and adaptive in responding to the development of modern art and culture.

This study employed a qualitative approach with a library-based research (*library research*) design focused on textual analysis. The primary data source was the official document *Keputusan Musyawarah Nasional Tarjih ke-27 tentang Tuntunan Seni Budaya Islam* (Decision of the 27th National Tarjih Congress on Guidance for Islamic Art and Culture), published by the *Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid* of the Muhammadiyah Central Board.¹³ The selection of this source was based on its institutional authority as an official decision that serves as a guideline for all Muhammadiyah members and its charitable endeavors (*amal usaha*), as well as its relevance to the research theme examining the use of the Qur’an and ḥadīth in constructing a theology of art.

¹² Muhammad Muhammad Nasir, “Weaving Modernity in Salafism: A Comparative Study of Muhammadiyah and Izala Movements,” *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 8, no. 3 (December 31, 2023): 100–125, <https://doi.org/10.55831/ajis.v8i3.619>.

¹³ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, *HIMPUNAN PUTUSAN TARJIH MUHAMMADIYAH* 3, 1st ed. (Yogyakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2018).

Secondary data included classical and contemporary Qur'anic exegeses (*tafsīr*) such as *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*¹⁴, *al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'an*¹⁵, *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-'Azīm*¹⁶, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*¹⁷, and *al-Kashshāf*¹⁸, as well as commentaries on ḥadīth (*syarḥ*) including *Syarḥ Shahīḥ Muslim*¹⁹, *Fath al-Bārī*²⁰, and *al-Mufḥīm*²¹. In addition, this study utilized reputable academic journal articles relevant to the themes of religious thought dynamics and cultural strategies in modernist Islamic organizations.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis combined with an interpretive approach. The analysis process encompassed three main stages: *first*, data reduction, which involved identifying and classifying the Qur'anic verses and ḥadīths cited in the document according to major themes such as *fiṭrah*, beauty, tawḥīdic aesthetics, and prohibitions related to visual arts; *second*, data display, which systematically organized the findings into analytical categories derived from Ismā'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī's²² theory of tawḥīdic aesthetics—namely, the concept of *tanḥīd* as an aesthetic principle, art as *tajallī* (manifestation), and art as *'amal ṣāliḥ* (righteous deed); *third*, conclusion drawing, based on an in-depth interpretation of the theological meanings embedded in the document's use of Qur'anic verses and ḥadīths.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the analysis, this study employed source triangulation by comparing the interpretations of verses and ḥadīth commentaries across various authoritative exegetical and *syarḥ* works, as well as theoretical triangulation by linking the findings from the document analysis with results from relevant previous studies.

Discussion

Aesthetic *Fiṭrah* as the Theological Foundation of Art

The decision of the 27th National Tarjih Congress builds the theological foundation of art by making the concept of *fiṭrah* its main starting point. The *Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid* of the Muhammadiyah Central Board states that art is explicitly defines art as an innate aesthetic consciousness embedded in human beings since birth, endowed by Allah through reason, conscience, and imagination, stating: "*Seni merupakan kesadaran estetis yang dikodratkan pada manusia dan karenanya melekat pada dirinya sejak lahir, karena ia dibekali oleh Allah SWT dengan kemampuan akal budi (karsa, cipta*

¹⁴ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr Al-Ṭabarī: Jāmi' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy Al-Qur'ān*, ed. 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-Muḥsin Al-Turkī, 1st ed. (Cairo: Dār Hajar lil-Ṭibā'ah wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī' wa al-I'lān, 2001), <https://shamela.ws/book/7798>.

¹⁵ Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Anṣārī Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' Li Ahkām Al-Qur'ān*, ed. Aḥmad al-Bardūnī dan Ibrāhīm Aṭṭīsh, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1964), <https://shamela.ws/book/20855>.

¹⁶ 'Imād al-Dīn Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar ibn Kathīr Al-Dimashqī, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'an Al-'Azīm*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Shams Al-Dīn, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1998), <https://shamela.ws/book/23604>.

¹⁷ Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn 'Umar ibn al-Ḥasan ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Taymī Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb: Al-Tafsīr Al-Kabir*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1420), <https://shamela.ws/book/23635>.

¹⁸ Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar ibn Aḥmad Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf 'an Haqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ Al-Tanzīl Wa 'Uyūn Al-Aqāwīl Fi Wujūh Al-Ta'wīl*, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Rayyān lil-Turāth, 1987), <https://shamela.ws/book/23627>.

¹⁹ Abū Zakariyyā Muḥyī al-Dīn Yahyā ibn Sharaf Al-Nawawī, *Al-Minhāj Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim Ibn Al-Ḥajjāj*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1392), <https://shamela.ws/book/1711>.

²⁰ Aḥmad ibn 'Alī ibn Ḥajar Al-'Asqalānī, *Fath Al-Bari Bi Sharḥ Al-Bukhārī*, 1st ed. (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Salafiyyah, 1390), <https://shamela.ws/book/1673>.

²¹ Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad ibn 'Umar ibn Ibrāhīm Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Mufḥīm Limā Ashkala Min Talkhīṣ Kitāb Muslim*, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1996), <https://shamela.ws/book/132524>.

²² Al-Faruqī and Al-Faruqī, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*.

dan rasa) yang berujud rasio, nurani, dan imajinasi".²³ This explicit formulation positions art not as a cultural import or permissible luxury, but as an innate human reality embedded in the very structure of creation. This foundation is derived from QS. At-Tin: 4,²⁴

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَن تَقْوِيمٍ

"Surely We have created man in the best form". (QS. At-Tin: 4)

In the Qur'anic exegesis *al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'an*, al-Qurṭubī²⁵ explains that *aḥsani taqwīm* refers to physical perfection as well as spiritual potential not granted to any other creature. Ibn Kathīr²⁶ adds that this perfection includes intellect, the ability to speak, and an upright posture—all of which are prerequisites for aesthetic expression. This decision explicitly employs this verse to demonstrate that aesthetic potential is part of the existential structure of human beings.²⁷

This reading can be productively analyzed using the framework of tawḥīdic aesthetics, which views beauty as a manifestation (*tajallī*) of God's names and attributes, particularly *al-Jamil* (the Most Beautiful).²⁸ The *Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid*²⁹ explicitly cites al-Fārūqī when it mentions that the three human potentials (creativity, reason, and feeling) are the "spirit of Allah" breathed into humanity (QS. Al-Ḥijr: 29),

فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ سَاجِدِينَ

"When I have shaped him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down before him in prostration". (QS. Al-Ḥijr: 29)

Therefore, all three must submit to their Owner. In al-Ṭabarī's³⁰ exegesis, the breathing of the "spirit" into humanity is a form of honoring that makes human beings capable of knowing and obeying their Lord. Al-Fārūqī³¹ expands this interpretation by asserting that aesthetic consciousness is part of tawḥīdic consciousness, because humans are created in the best form and given a divine spirit, they possess the capacity to create and enjoy beauty as a reflection of God's attributes. Thus, this collective fatwa positions art not as a tolerated secular activity, but as the actualization of humanity's highest potential, which must be oriented toward Allah.³²

Theological reinforcement also comes from a ḥadīth narrated by Muslim:³³

²³ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, *HIMPUNAN PUTUSAN TARJIH MUHAMMADIYAH* 3, 128.

²⁴ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 130.

²⁵ Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' Li Ahkām Al-Qur'an*, 114.

²⁶ Al-Dimashqī, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'an Al-'Azīm*, 420.

²⁷ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 130.

²⁸ Al-Faruqī and Al-Faruqī, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*.

²⁹ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 130.

³⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr Al-Ṭabarī: Jāmi' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Ay Al-Qur'an*, 144.

³¹ Al-Faruqī and Al-Faruqī, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*; Anna A. Stepanova and Ilona V. Dorohan, "AESTHETIC VS ARTISTIC CONSCIOUSNESS: TYPOLOGY OF AESTHETICS AND LITERATURE INTERACTION," *Alfred Nobel University Journal of Philology* 2, no. 26/1 (December 20, 2023): 22–32, <https://doi.org/10.32342/2523-4463-2023-2-26/1-2>.

³² Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 130–31.

³³ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 129.

"Indeed, Allah is Beautiful and loves beauty". (Narrated by Muslim)

In *Syarḥ Shabīḥ Muslim*, al-Nawawī³⁴ explains that "beauty" (*jamāl*) here encompasses the beauty of Allah's essence, attributes, and actions, while "loves beauty" means that Allah is pleased with His servants who manifest beauty within the bounds of Shari'ah. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī³⁵ in *Fath al-Bārī* adds that this ḥadīth serves as the basis for the recommendation to adorn oneself and appear well. Al-Fārūqī³⁶ reads this ḥadīth as a theological foundation that beauty is a divine value that must be actualized. For him, Islamic art is art that radiates awareness of God's oneness and serves as a window piercing through to divine reality, not a wall that blocks it. This decision adopts this view by making this ḥadīth one of its main arguments that art is not a realm separate from religion, but rather part of *'amal ṣāliḥ* (righteous deed) that holds religious merit.³⁷

The concept of *fiṭrah* also serves as a key element in constructing a positive theology of art. QS. Ar-Rūm: 30 states,³⁸

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

"Adhere sincerely to the true religion in all uprightness. This is the natural disposition with which Allah has created mankind. There is no change in Allah's creation. This is the straight religion, but most people do not know". (QS. Ar-Rūm: 30)

Al-Rāzī³⁹ in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* interprets *fiṭrah* as an innate potential to know God and a tendency toward truth and goodness. Al-Qarāḍāwī⁴⁰ extends this by arguing that *fiṭrah* also includes a natural inclination toward beauty and art. Al-Fārūqī⁴¹ aligns with this view: for him, the aesthetic drive is part of the *fiṭrah* bestowed by Allah, making it impossible for Islam to prohibit it absolutely. The *Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid*⁴² uses this logic to state that anything contrary to *fiṭrah* will be rejected by Islam, while anything that supports the purity of *fiṭrah* will be upheld. Thus, the theology of art constructed by this decision is not apologetic (defending art out of necessity), but positive and productive: art is part of humanity's spiritual mission as servants (*'ibād*) and vicegerents (*khulafā'*) of Allah.⁴³

³⁴ Abū Zakariyyā Muḥyī al-Dīn Yahyā ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, *Al-Minhāj Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim Ibn al-Ḥajjāj*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1392), 90, <https://shamela.ws/book/1711>.

³⁵ Al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī Bi Sharḥ al-Bukhārī*, 260.

³⁶ Ismail Ragi A. al Faruqi, "The Problem of the Metaphysical Status of Values in the Western and Islamic Traditions," *Studia Islamica*, no. 28 (1968): 29, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1595261>.

³⁷ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 129, 170.

³⁸ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 140.

³⁹ Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb: Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 98.

⁴⁰ Yūsuf Al-Qarāḍāwī, *Malāmīḥ al-Mujtama' al-Muslim Alladhi Nansbuduh*, 1st ed. (Mawsū'ah al-A'māl al-Kāmilah li-Samāḥat al-Imām Yūsuf al-Qarāḍāwī, 2001), 271, <https://qaradawibooks.com/book-6>.

⁴¹ Ismā'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī, *The Arts of Islamic Civilization*, ed. Anas S. al-Shaikh-Ali Shiraz Khan, 1st ed. (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), 2013).

⁴² Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 137, 155.

⁴³ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 155–157, 181.

Methodology of 'Illah and the Reinterpretation of Ḥadīths on Visual Arts

The decision of the 27th National Tarjih Congress demonstrates that a productive reading of religious texts is impossible without an adequate methodology. In responding to ḥadīths concerning the prohibition of statues and images of living beings, the *Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid*⁴⁴ applies the approach of *'illat al-ḥukm* (legal cause), which is an important instrument in *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of Islamic jurisprudence). The ḥadīths in question, such as those narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim, textually appear to prohibit the making of images of living beings. However, the decision text identifies the *'illah* of this prohibition as the concern about polytheism (*shirk*) and excessive imitation of Allah's creation.⁴⁵ The document articulates the underlying logic: "*Adapun larangan-larangan Islam terhadap kesenian tertentu seperti seni patung, seni lukis yang porno, seni tari yang menampilkan aurat dan lainnya, larangan-larangan tersebut ada 'illat atau sebabnya. Jika sebab tersebut tidak ada, maka tidak ada pula larangannya, sebagaimana bunyi kaidah usul fikih 'al-ḥukmu yadūru ma'a 'illatihi wujudan wa 'adaman*".⁴⁶ This explicit invocation of the *'illah* methodology demonstrates that the Tarjih council engaged in substantive *uṣūlī* reasoning rather than mere textual repetition. This approach aligns with the legal maxim *al-ḥukmu yadūru ma'a 'illatihi wujudan wa 'adaman* (the ruling revolves around its legal cause, existing and ceasing with it).⁴⁷

The Tarjih decision provides a nuanced three-tiered ruling based on this *'illah* analysis, stating: "*Dengan demikian dapat dipertimbangkan adanya fatwa yang menetapkan bahwa hukum gambar itu berlaku menurut 'illatnya, yaitu: a. Untuk sesembahan, hukumnya haram berdasarkan nash. b. Untuk sarana pendidikan, hukumnya mubah. c. Untuk perhiasan, bila tidak mendatangkan fitnah, hukumnya mubah, jika dikhawatirkan membawa maksiat, hukumnya makruh, jika dikhawatirkan membawa kemusyrikan, hukumnya haram*".⁴⁸ This differentiation of rulings based on function and context, rather than a blanket prohibition, represents a significant departure from literalist readings of the ḥadīths.

In ḥadīth commentary, al-Qurṭubī⁴⁹ in *al-Mufhim* explains that the prohibition of making images in the early period of Islam was very strict because society was still in transition from idol worship. After *tawḥīd* was firmly established, scholars distinguished between images that are venerated and images that serve merely as decoration or education. Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī⁵⁰ in *Fath al-Bārī* also states that the prohibition in the ḥadīth is considered *ta'abbudī* (a devotional matter with no discernible reason) by some scholars, but for others its *'illah* is resembling Allah's creation (*muḍābah li khalq Allāh*). Within the *tawḥīdīc* aesthetic framework, this contextual approach finds further support. The framework emphasizes that true Islamic art is non-figurative or at least stylized (*distillation*) that distances itself from naturalism, not merely for jurisprudential reasons but due to an aesthetic methodological choice rooted in *tawḥīd*.⁵¹ Nevertheless, it acknowledges that figurative representation can be accepted if it does not lead to veneration. The *Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid*⁵² formulates three levels: for objects of worship, it is *ḥarām* (forbidden); for educational purposes, it is *mubāḥ* (permissible); and for decoration, it is *mubāḥ* as long as it does not cause *fitnah* (temptation or discord).

⁴⁴ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 146–147, 156–157.

⁴⁵ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 146.

⁴⁶ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 156.

⁴⁷ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 155–57.

⁴⁸ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 147.

⁴⁹ Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Mufhim Limā Ashkala Min Talkhīṣ Kitāb Muslim*, 430–33.

⁵⁰ Al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī Bi Sharḥ al-Bukhārī*, 383–384.

⁵¹ Al-Faruqī and Al-Faruqī, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*.

⁵² Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 147.

The use of the *'illah* approach is also supported by evidence from the Qur'an itself. The *Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid*⁵³ cites QS. Saba': 12–13, which recounts the statues in the palace of Prophet Sulaymān,

وَلِسُلَيْمَانَ الرِّيحَ غُدُوُّهَا شَهْرٌ وَرَوَاحُهَا شَهْرٌ وَأَسَلْنَا لَهُ عَيْنَ الْقِطْرِ وَمِنَ الْجِنِّ مَن يَعْمَلُ بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِ وَمَن يَزِغْ مِنْهُمْ عَنْ أَمْرِنَا نُذِقْهُ مِنْ عَذَابِ السَّعِيرِ. يَعْمَلُونَ لَهُ مَا يَشَاءُ مِنْ مَّحَارِبٍ وَتَمَاثِيلَ وَجِفَانٍ كَالْجَوَابِ وَقُدُورٍ رُسُوبًا اِعْمَلُوا آلَ دَاوُدَ شُكْرًا وَقَلِيلٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِيَ الشَّاكِرُونَ

"And to Solomon [We subdued] the wind: its morning course was a month's journey and its evening course was a month's journey. And We caused a stream of molten brass to flow for him, and there were some jinn who worked for him by his Lord's permission; whoever among them deviated from Our command, We made him taste the punishment of the Blazing Fire. They made for him whatever he wished of sanctuaries, images, basins as large as reservoirs, and huge fixed cooking pots. 'Do [good deeds] in gratitude, O household of David!' But few of My slaves are grateful." (QS. Saba': 12-13)

In al-Ṭabarī's⁵⁴ exegesis, it is mentioned that these statues were images of living beings made by the *jinn* with Sulaymān's permission, and there was no condemnation because their function was not for worship. Al-Zamakhsharī⁵⁵ in *al-Kashshāf* adds that the existence of these statues indicates that Islam does not prohibit statues as art objects as long as they are not used for ritual veneration. Al-Fārūqī⁵⁶ uses this verse to show that the issue is not the statue as an object, but the intention and function attached to it. Similarly, QS. Al-Anbiyā': 58 about Prophet Ibrāhīm, who did not destroy the largest idol precisely to leave one statue that could be used as a tool for *da'wah* (calling to monotheism),⁵⁷

فَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ جُذُأً إِلَّا كَبِيرًا لَهُمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ إِلَيْهِ يَرْجِعُونَ

"So he broke them into pieces, except the biggest of them, so that they might come back to it." (QS. Al-Anbiyā': 58)

This decision reads both verses as arguments that art can serve as an effective means of *da'wah* when directed toward a righteous purpose.⁵⁸

Research by Fanani et al.⁵⁹ on the evolution of Muhammadiyah's *Manhaj Tarjih* shows that the organization has integrated the *bayānī* (textual), *burhānī* (rational-logical), and *'irfānī* (spiritual-intuitive) approaches in the development of its jurisprudence (*fiqh*). This approach is evident in the decision on art and culture, where understanding ḥadīth is not sufficient with *bayānī* alone but also requires contextual analysis (*burhānī*) and the capture of deeper meanings (*'irfānī*).⁶⁰ This methodological pluralism resonates with the tawḥīdic emphasis on higher *maqāṣid* (objectives of Shari'ah), namely preserving *tawḥīd* and advancing civilization⁶¹. Nasir's⁶² study reinforces that although Muhammadiyah

⁵³ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 164.

⁵⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr Al-Ṭabarī: Jāmi' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Ay Al-Qur'ān*, 230–31.

⁵⁵ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf 'an Haqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ Al-Tanzīl Wa 'Uyūn Al-Aqāwīl Fi Wujūb Al-Ta'wīl*, 571–73.

⁵⁶ Al-Faruqī and Al-Faruqī, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*.

⁵⁷ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 156.

⁵⁸ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 156–57.

⁵⁹ Ahwan Fanani et al., "Muhammadiyah's Manhaj Tarjih: An Evolution of a Modernist Approach to Islamic Jurisprudence in Indonesia," *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (October 28, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6942>.

⁶⁰ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 159.

⁶¹ Al-Faruqī and Al-Faruqī, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*.

⁶² Nasir, "Weaving Modernity in Salafism: A Comparative Study of Muhammadiyah and Izala Movements."

is inspired by the spirit of purification, it is not identical to Salafism because it remains open to contextualization and modernity. Thus, this decision represents a form of *ijtihad* that does not merely read *ḥadīths* literally but engages in profound *maqāṣidī* reasoning to build a productive theology of art.⁶³

Sufism and Aesthetics: Toward Art as Divine *Tajallī*

The decision of the 27th National Tarjih Congress shows that Muhammadiyah does not reject Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) in its entirety but rather selects elements that align with Shari'ah and modernity. The *Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid*⁶⁴ states that Muhammadiyah views Sufi orders (*ṭarīqah*) positively as long as they are based on the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah, but rejects philosophical concepts such as *ittiḥād* (union with God), *ḥulūl* (incarnation), and *wahdat al-wujūd* (unity of existence) because they are considered to contain pantheism. This stance aligns with the findings of Muttaqin, Hamsah, and Abror (Muttaqin et al., 2023) that Muhammadiyah is seeking authentic Islamic spirituality through an emphasis on *iḥsān* (spiritual excellence) and noble character (*akhlāq karimah*). Within the tawḥīdic framework, *iḥsān* functions as the pinnacle of spirituality that gives rise to the highest aesthetic consciousness, for it teaches humans to worship as if they see Allah—an experience filled with transcendental beauty.⁶⁵

Al-Fārūqī develops the concept of *tajallī* (manifestation) as a framework for understanding the relationship between divine beauty and human art. For him, beauty is *tajallī* of God's names and attributes, especially *al-Jamīl* (the Most Beautiful). Human beings, by virtue of their *fiṭrah*, have the ability to apprehend that beauty and express it in works of art⁶⁶ (Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi, 1986). The *Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid* reflects this understanding when it states that the experience of beauty through art can lead humanity to "penetrate the skin of phenomena" toward "the island of Allah's truth." It elaborates on this transformative experience: "*Pengalaman keindahan melalui berkesenian menyebabkan manusia mampu menerobos kulit gejala, dapat diibaratkan sebagai suatu pelayaran, yang bertolak dari suatu pantai menuju 'pulau kebenaran Allah Swt.'*"⁶⁷ This statement aligns with al-Fārūqī's concept that art is a window piercing through to divine reality, not a wall that blocks it.

The integration of Sufi values and art is also evident in the decision's recognition of Qur'anic recitation arts, calligraphy, and religious music. The *Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid* mentions that the religious command to recite the Qur'an gave rise to various forms of Qur'anic recitation art, and love for the Prophet Muhammad gave rise to various forms of praise poetry such as *al-Barzanji*. It observes: "*Perintah agama membaca kitab suci al-Qur'an melahirkan berbagai bentuk seni baca al-Quran. Perintah agama menutup aurat menjadi inspirasi bagi para perancang mode Muslim (Muslimah)... Kecintaan orang kepada Nabi Muhammad saw telah melahirkan berbagai bentuk puisi yang berisi pujian kepada beliau, semisal karya puisi al-Barzanji*".⁶⁸ Ibn al-Jazari⁶⁹ in *al-Nasr fi al-Qirā'at al-'Ashr* affirms that reciting the Qur'an with a beautiful voice is a recommended *sunnah*. Al-Fārūqī⁷⁰ describes calligraphy as the most perfect art because it directly reminds one of God's words and does not compete with His creation. Research by

⁶³ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 151.

⁶⁴ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 142–43, 159; Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, *Berita Resmi Muhammadiyah Nomor 06/2010-2015/Ramadhan 1435 H/Julai 2014 M* (Yogyakarta: Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2014), 130.

⁶⁵ Al-Faruqi and Al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*.

⁶⁶ Al-Faruqi and Al-Faruqi.

⁶⁷ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 139.

⁶⁸ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 161.

⁶⁹ Abū al-Khayr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Jazari, *Al-Nasr Fi Al-Qirā'at Al-'Ashr*, ed. al-Sālim Muḥammad Maḥmūd Al-Shanqīṭi, 1st ed. (Madinah: Majma' al-Malik Fahd li-Tibā'at al-Muṣḥaf al-Sharīf, 1435).

⁷⁰ Al-Faruqi and Al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*.

Siswantari, Ahimsa-Putra, and Maarif⁷¹ on Muhammadiyah dance shows that artists negotiate aspects of movement, costume, and ideas to create works that align with Islamic values without eliminating local cultural elements—a form of cultural *tajallī* directed toward tawhīdic consciousness.

Research by Zubair et al.⁷² reinforces that Muhammadiyah's concept of *tajdid* (renewal) in Sufism emphasizes purification in accordance with modern life. In the context of art, this approach gives rise to an aesthetic that does not merely pursue formal beauty but contains a profound spiritual dimension. Al-Fārūqī⁷³ states that true Islamic art is art capable of awakening awareness of the divine presence. The *Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid*⁷⁴ adopts this view by stating that engaging in art correctly, supported by proper ways of thinking and morality, will greatly encourage a proper religious attitude. Thus, the integration of Sufism and art in Muhammadiyah discourse is not merely about preserving tradition but also revitalizing the ethical and spiritual values that constitute the core of a productive theology of art.

Cultural Strategy: Purification, Accommodation, and the Project of Civilization

The decision of the 27th National Tarjih Congress explicitly formulates a cultural strategy that unites the dimension of "Returning to the Qur'an and Sunnah" with *ijtihad* and socio-religious *tajdid*.⁷⁵ This formulation shows that Muhammadiyah does not separate textual normativity from social reality. As explained in the text, "norms must be able to provide solutions to the realities faced, while reality must refer to and be guided by norms and not contradict them".⁷⁶ For al-Fārūqī⁷⁷, this dialectical approach is the hallmark of true Islamic civilization: it never separates ideal values (*al-qiyam al-muṭlaqah*) from historical reality (*al-wāqī' al-tārīkhī*). This decision adopts this view by establishing a strategy of coexistence and pro-existence that appreciates traditional art as long as it aligns with the parameters of Shari'ah.⁷⁸

The decision candidly acknowledges Muhammadiyah's historical image problem regarding the arts. It states: "*Dalam perjalanan dakwahnya, Muhammadiyah lewat program atau gerakan pemurnian ajaran Islam, pernah dituduh sebagai organisasi atau gerakan yang tidak ramah terhadap seni*".⁷⁹ This self-critical acknowledgment provides the context for the strategic reorientation that follows.

Junaidi's⁸⁰ research on the shifting interpretation of Muhammadiyah toward local religious traditions shows that the organization has begun to tolerate local traditions and emphasizes the redefinition of the concept of purification. Contributing factors include a less effective *da'wah* strategy in rural areas and the emergence of a younger generation supportive of religious moderation. This finding aligns with al-Fārūqī's⁸¹ view that purification (*taṭhīr*) should not be understood as the destruction of local culture but as a filtering process that preserves noble values aligned with *tawhīd*. The *Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid*⁸² reflects this view when citing the example of the *Wali Songo* (Nine Saints) who modified wayang (shadow puppetry) with Islamic teachings, as well

⁷¹ Siswantari, Ahimsa-Putra, and Maarif, "Artistic Negotiation, Religious and Cultural Values: An Islamic Dance Aesthetic in the Perspective of Muhammadiyah Tarjih Decision."

⁷² Zubair et al., "Muhammadiyah's Tajdid and Sufism between Purification and Modernization."

⁷³ Al-Faruqi and Al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*.

⁷⁴ Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, *Berita Resmi Muhammadiyah Nomor 06/2010-2015/Ramadhan 1435 H/Juli 2014 M*, 130; Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 142–43, 159.

⁷⁵ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 159–65.

⁷⁶ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 147.

⁷⁷ Al-Faruqi and Al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*.

⁷⁸ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 162.

⁷⁹ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 161.

⁸⁰ Junaidi, "Muhammadiyah and the Shifting Interpretation of Local Religious Traditions."

⁸¹ Al-Faruqi and Al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*.

⁸² Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 161.

as *Sekaten* in Yogyakarta as a transformation of the Prophet's birthday commemoration whose substance is *tawhīd* (the word *syahadatain* becoming *sekaten*).

In al-Fārūqī's⁸³ perspective, accommodation of local culture is not a compromise on the purity of teachings but part of the Islamic civilizational project aimed at building societies rooted in their own traditions yet directed toward tawhīdic values. The *Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid*⁸⁴ adopts this view by stating that "Islam is open to accepting other cultures, which after being integrated produce Islamic culture." Examples given are *wayang*, *gamelan*, and various forms of dance that were accepted without much difficulty, as long as they did not contradict tawhīdic values. It elaborates: "*Islam terbuka dalam menerima kebudayaan lain, yang setelah dipadu kemudian keluar sebagai kebudayaan Islam. Contoh yang dapat dikemukakan adalah dalam konteks Indonesia, yang bersamaan masuknya Islam ke Indonesia, kebudayaan lokal diterima tanpa banyak menemui kesulitan, seperti wayang, gamelan, berbagai macam tari, musik dan beberapa macam adat istiadat, selama semuanya itu tidak bertentangan dengan nilai-nilai taubid*".⁸⁵ This approach is also reflected in Sila's⁸⁶ research in Bima, where reformist Muhammadiyah groups actually supported the *Maulid* ritual because it was considered aligned with local wisdom.

This reflects a dynamic relationship that continues to undergo negotiation. For al-Fārūqī,⁸⁷ such negotiation is inevitable in the process of civilizational development. Khoirudin, Baidhawiy, and Nor⁸⁸ add that Muhammadiyah education is based on *Islam Berkemajuan* (Progressive Islam), which aims to reconstruct the old social order toward a more advanced society. In this context, *Islam Berkemajuan* is not understood monolithically but as a concept that encourages social reconstruction in the fields of economy, politics, and culture according to the times—a project aligned with al-Fārūqī's vision of the *Islamization of knowledge* and the development of contemporary Islamic civilization.

Theology of *Al-Mā'ūn* and Art as Socially Oriented Righteous Deed

One of the most important theological foundations developed by Muhammadiyah in relation to art and culture is the theology of *Al-Mā'ūn*, which originates from K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's interpretation of Sūrat Al-Mā'ūn. The *Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid*⁸⁹ mentions this theology as inspiration for the commitment to integrate religious understanding with rationality in social movements. Research by Arifin, Mughni, and Nurhakim⁹⁰ shows that the concept of *Islam Berkemajuan* (Progressive Islam) has theological foundations in the exegesis of Sūrat Al-'Aṣr and Sūrat Al-Mā'ūn. In classical exegesis, Sūrat Al-Mā'ūn (107) condemns those who "repulse the orphan" and "do not encourage feeding the poor":

أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يُكَذِّبُ بِالْإِيمَانِ. فَذَلِكَ الَّذِي يَدْعُ الْيَتِيمَ. وَلَا يَحْضُ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمُسْكِينِ

⁸³ Al-Faruqi and Al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*.

⁸⁴ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 167.

⁸⁵ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 167.

⁸⁶ Muhammad Adlin Sila, "Revisiting Nu-Muhammadiyah in Indonesia: The Accommodation of Islamic Reformism in Bima," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 48, no. 142 (September 1, 2020): 304–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2020.1823150>.

⁸⁷ Al-Faruqi and Al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*.

⁸⁸ Azaki Khoirudin, Zakiyuddin Baidhawiy, and Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor, "EXPLORING MUHAMMADIYAH'S HISTORICAL CIVILIZATIONAL DIMENSION OF EDUCATION IN INDONESIA: PHILOSOPHY AND ETHOS OF HUMANITARIAN AND COSMOPOLITAN," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 15, no. 1 (June 15, 2020): 183–97, <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol15no1.13>.

⁸⁹ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 175.

⁹⁰ Syamsul Arifin, Syafiq A. Mughni, and Moh Nurhakim, "The Idea of Progress: Meaning and Implications of Islam Berkemajuan in Muhammadiyah," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 60, no. 2 (December 19, 2022): 547–84, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2022.602.547-584>.

"Have you seen the one who denies the Recompense? Such is the one who repulses the orphan harshly, and does not urge others to feed the needy." (QS. *Al-Mā'un*: 1–3)

Al-Fārūqī⁹¹ reads this sūrah as a critique of religious formalism devoid of social concern. For him, '*amal ṣāliḥ*' in Islam cannot be separated from ethical and social dimensions. This decision adopts this view by positioning art as part of '*amal ṣāliḥ*' that must have a clear social orientation.⁹²

The theology of *Al-Mā'un* in the context of art, provides a framework that art should not develop detached from social concern. The *Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid* affirms that the function of *khalifah* (vicegerent) is to prosper the world (*i'mār*), and art is part of that prospering. The document explicitly links art to the vicegerency mission: "*Kesenian yang dikembangkan adalah bentuk-bentuk kesenian yang mampu mengantarkan manusia meningkatkan derajat dan martabatnya dalam mengemban amanah sebagai khalifatullah fi al-ard*".⁹³ It further states: "*Seni Islami sebagai perwujudan amal shaleh, fungsi kekhilafahan, tugas ibadah, ungkapan dzikir, doa dan syukur*".⁹⁴ Al-Fārūqī⁹⁵ expands the meaning of *i'mār* (prospering) beyond the physical-material dimension to include the spiritual and social dimensions. For him, true art is art capable of elevating human dignity and strengthening social solidarity. The *Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid*⁹⁶ aligns with this view when it states that the art to be developed consists of "forms of art capable of guiding humanity to elevate their status and dignity in carrying out the trust as *khalifatullah fi al-ard* (God's vicegerent on earth)."

The implementation of the theology of *Al-Mā'un* in art and culture is reflected in Rahman, Syukur, and Jumadi's⁹⁷ research on poverty alleviation in Bulutellue, where the values of *Al-Mā'un* were internalized in community empowerment practices. In the context of art, this approach can be translated into forms of art that are not merely entertaining but also educational and empowering. Research by Qodir, Nashir, and Hefner⁹⁸ on Islamic moderation from the perspective of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* shows that Muhammadiyah plays a role as a guardian of moderate Islam through various inclusive activities. Al-Fārūqī⁹⁹ states that the highest *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* are *al-'adl* (justice) and *al-maṣlahah* (public interest), both of which must be the orientation of all human activities, including art. The *Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid*¹⁰⁰ implicitly adopts this view by positioning art as a means of *da'wah* and social transformation.

Ichsan's¹⁰¹ research on Muhammadiyah philanthropy in handling COVID-19 shows that the consistency of philanthropy is rooted in theological and social values. The same values can be actualized in the development of art oriented toward public welfare. Al-Fārūqī¹⁰² emphasizes that the Islamic civilizational project cannot succeed without the integration of spiritual, intellectual, and social

⁹¹ Al-Faruqi and Al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*.

⁹² Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 170.

⁹³ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 148.

⁹⁴ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 148.

⁹⁵ Al-Faruqi and Al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*.

⁹⁶ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 148.

⁹⁷ Abdul Rahman, Muhammad Syukur, and Jumadi Jumadi, "Implementation of Al-Ma'un Theology: The Movement of Muhammadiyah Educated Groups in Poverty Alleviation in Bulutellue Village, Sinjai Regency," *INFERENSI: Jurnal Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan* 15, no. 1 (May 31, 2021): 25–50, <https://doi.org/10.18326/infsl3.v15i1.25-50>.

⁹⁸ Zuly Qodir, Haedar Nashir, and Robert W. Hefner, "Muhammadiyah Making Indonesia's Islamic Moderation Based on Maqāṣid Sharī'ah," *Ijtihad: Jurnal Wacana Hukum Islam Dan Kemanusiaan* 23, no. 1 (June 26, 2023): 77–92, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijtihad.v23i1.77-92>.

⁹⁹ Al-Faruqi and Al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*.

¹⁰⁰ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 177–81.

¹⁰¹ Muchammad Ichsan, "Islamic Philanthropy and Muhammadiyah's Contribution to the Covid-19 Control In Indonesia," *Afkaruna* 16, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.18196/aifj.2020.0116.114-130>.

¹⁰² Al-Faruqi and Al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*.

dimensions. This collective fatwa, by integrating the theology of *Al-Ma'ūn*, implicitly positions art as an instrument of *'amal ṣāliḥ* that not only beautifies life but also strengthens social solidarity and encourages the transformation of society toward a more just and progressive order.¹⁰³

Comparison of Findings, Follow-Up, and Research Limitations

The findings of this study indicate that the decision of the 27th National Tarjih Congress on Guidance for Islamic Art and Culture successfully constructs a positive and productive theology of art using the Qur'an and ḥadīth as its primary sources.¹⁰⁴ By adopting al-Fārūqī's¹⁰⁵ theoretical framework of tawḥīdic aesthetics, this study finds that the text positions art as part of human *fiṭrah*,¹⁰⁶ develops a contextual methodology of *'illah* in understanding ḥadīth,¹⁰⁷ integrates authentic Sufi values,¹⁰⁸ balances purification with accommodation of local culture,¹⁰⁹ and orients art toward social concern through the theology of *Al-Ma'ūn*.¹¹⁰ These findings align with research by Khoirudin and Aulassyahied¹¹¹ on the expanded reinterpretation of purification toward a post-puritanism era, as well as research by Bachtiar, Nurhakim, and Rohim¹¹² on the coherence of Muhammadiyah's thought with neo-Sufism. However, this paradigm shift is not linear and still faces internal challenges from conservative groups, as identified by Burhani¹¹³ and Jubba et al.¹¹⁴ The necessary follow-up includes strengthening the socialization of this decision to all Muhammadiyah cadres and members, as well as developing an art education model that integrates the values formulated into the Muhammadiyah curriculum at all levels. Further research is needed to examine the extent to which this decision is implemented in artistic practices within Muhammadiyah communities across various regions, as well as how the community responds to the policy.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the decision of the 27th National Tarjih Congress on Guidance for Islamic Art and Culture has successfully constructed a positive and constructive theology of art by employing the Qur'an and ḥadīth as its primary sources. Through a theological approach centered on the concept of *fiṭrah* (QS. At-Tīn: 4, QS. Ar-Rūm: 30) and the ḥadīth on beauty (narrated by Muslim), this document positions art as the actualization of the aesthetic potential divinely endowed by Allah, as well as a *tajallī* (manifestation) of the attribute *al-Jamīl* (the Most Beautiful), as formulated in Ismā'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī's theory of tawḥīdic aesthetics. In responding to the ḥadīths concerning the prohibition of statues and paintings, this decision applies a contextual approach of *'illat al-ḥukm* (legal cause), resulting in a differentiation of rulings based on function and purpose rather than an absolute

¹⁰³ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 170.

¹⁰⁴ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah

¹⁰⁵ Al-Fārūqī, *The Arts of Islamic Civilization*.

¹⁰⁶ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 162.

¹⁰⁷ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 156.

¹⁰⁸ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 160, 162.

¹⁰⁹ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 159.

¹¹⁰ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 169–70.

¹¹¹ Khoirudin and Aulassyahied, "Reinterpreting Muhammadiyah's Purification and Its Implications for the Educational Philosophy."

¹¹² Bachtiar, Nurhakim, and Rohim, "Purification, Spiritualism, and Reform: Muhammadiyah's Reception of Neo-Sufism."

¹¹³ Burhani, "Pluralism, Liberalism, and Islamism: Religious Outlook of Muhammadiyah."

¹¹⁴ Hasse Jubba et al., "The Contestation between Conservative and Moderate Muslims in Promoting Islamic Moderatism in Indonesia," *Cogent Social Sciences* 8, no. 1 (December 31, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2116162>.

prohibition. The integration of authentic Sufi values through the concept of *iḥsān* (spiritual excellence) and a cultural strategy that balances purification with accommodation of local culture further strengthens an inclusive theological foundation, while the theology of *Al-Mā'ūn* orients art toward social concern and societal transformation.

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