

Applications of
Wasatiyyah
in the Contemporary
Muslim World

Edited by
Ahmad F. Yousif



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Chapter 1

The Concept of *Al-Wasaṭiyyah* and the Place of Islamic Moderation

M. Kamal Hassan

Introduction

The term *wasatiyyah* is used in the context of the Qur'anic¹ expression "*ummatan wasatan*," which refers to the universal Islamic community or nation having the attributes of justice, excellence and balance in order to serve as Allah's trustworthy "witnesses over mankind" ("*shuhadā' 'ala al-nās*") in this world and in the Hereafter (Al-Baqarah: 143). It can also be translated as the "justly balanced quality" or "justly balanced nature" of Islam and the Islamic community. The more popular translation of the term is 'moderation.'

The term *wasatiyyah* as well as 'moderation' have become increasingly popular in Muslim public discourse, nowadays, as several Muslim national leaders grapple with the religio-political challenges posed by the emergent currents of religious extremism, radicalism and violence in their societies. But the primary focus on the dimension of religious 'moderation,' tolerance and inter-religious harmony by national leaders and Muslim NGOs, in this troubled world of ours, in the name of *wasatiyyah* can lead to the unintended consequence of Muslims and non-Muslims mistaking the part for the whole. Without

¹ The Qur'anic translations in this chapter are mostly based on Abdullah Yusuf Ali's version, while the meanings of Qur'anic verses (*ayat*) are cited from Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*. Online Qur'an and its translations sources are also used from the <http://quran.com>.