

## Navigating Pluralism: Wasathiyyah Pedagogy and the Construction of Religious Moderation in Multifaith Communities

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**Abstract:** Religious diversity in Indonesia requires proactive management to prevent social conflict, making religious moderation critical for interfaith harmony. This study analyzes the social construction of religious moderation through the lens of Islamic education in Wirotaman Village, Malang, a community where three religions peacefully coexist. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected via interviews, observation, and documentation, then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model. The findings reveal that religious moderation is manifested through mutual respect and cross-cultural cooperation. Crucially, Islamic education drives this harmony through specific pedagogical strategies, including the integration of wasathiyyah values into local pesantren circles and contextualized da'wah. This study concludes that the construction of moderation results from a synergy between educational internalization, religious leadership, and local wisdom, establishing a best-practice model for pluralistic societies.

**Keywords:** Islamic Education; Multireligious Community; Religious Moderation; Social Construction; Wasathiyyah Pedagogy

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with a very high level of diversity in terms of ethnicity, culture, language, and religion. As a pluralistic nation, Indonesia constantly faces the challenge of religious intolerance, making religious moderation a national priority for maintaining harmony (Fazillah 2024). In response to these conditions, the concept of religious moderation underscores a fair, balanced, and non-extreme attitude in practicing faith within the framework of humanity and peace. In a multicultural context, this moderation is not only the responsibility of the state but must be organically constructed through education. Islamic education, in particular, holds immense potential in instilling the values of *wasathiyyah* (moderation), tolerance, and justice (Arifin 2024).

Religious moderation in the perspective of Islamic Education emphasizes the rejection of extremism, respect for differences, and peaceful religious practices, in accordance with the teachings of Moderate Islam (Rahmah et al., 2024). While religious moderation has been widely studied, most existing literature focuses heavily on macro-level policy or institutional frameworks. Consequently, the specific pedagogical mechanisms within Islamic education that translate into organic, village-level harmony remain under-explored. This study addresses this research gap by focusing on the micro-level implementation of *wasathiyyah* in Wirotaman Village, Malang Regency. Designated as a model village for religious moderation by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Wirotaman presents a unique live-in model where three different places of worship coexist in extreme proximity less than 50 meters apart. (Fazillah, 2024).

What distinguishes Wirotaman from other designated "Moderation Villages" lies in the resilience and adaptability of its Islamic education model. While other regions often rely on top-down government mandates that risk friction when state monitoring fades, Wirotaman's Islamic educators employ a resilient, bottom-up approach. They successfully integrate *wasathiyyah* pedagogy not just as a classroom doctrine, but as a lived reality. This is achieved by embedding interfaith dialogue and collective cross-cultural social activities directly into local *pesantren* circles, formal schooling, and everyday communal practices. This micro-level construction reflects how Islamic education serves as a sustainable engine for building a moderate society from the grassroots up (Rahmah et al., 2024).

Recent scholarly discourse suggests that religious moderation has shifted from a mere top-down state policy into a grassroots social construction within pluralistic communities (Arifin, 2024; Nasruddin, 2025). However, a critical tension arises when examining the sustainability of these practices. (Mufridah, 2025) explored the concept of moderation from the Qur'an and Hadith, with PAI implications emphasizing contextual understanding without sacrificing basic Islamic beliefs. The fifth study by Luluul Maknun shows that the people of Bulu Lor Village construct moderation through interfaith tolerance and mutual cooperation, factors that parallel the dynamics of Wirotaman (Khasanah et al., 2023) describe a model of religious moderation practices in the Islamic education system in Indonesia. This study states that the core of religious moderation is a tolerant attitude that strives to be in the middle (*wasathiyah*) between various extreme understandings. This study also provides the concept of moderation, tolerance, and humanity, which are important in the development of Islamic education.

Religious moderation refers to a balanced, non-extreme, and mediating attitude and practice in understanding and practicing religious teachings (Mubarak 2024). Religious moderation emphasizes the values of tolerance, respect for differences, and rejection of extremism and fanaticism in a religious context. The Arabic term

wasathiyyah describes this principle of moderation, which is in line with Islamic teachings on fairness and proportionality. The main objective of religious moderation is to maintain harmony and peace in a pluralistic society, while also serving as a cultural strategy for preserving diversity in Indonesia (Zulkarnain, 2025).

The social construction approach to religious moderation uses the social construction theory of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, which views social reality as the result of human interaction and interpretation in a social context. In this perspective, the values of religious moderation do not arise automatically, but are formed, internalized, and applied through social processes involving individuals, communities, and institutions (Fanani et al., 2025).

Based on this distinct framework, this study focuses on analyzing the social construction of religious moderation in the Wirotaman Village community from the perspective of Islamic education. The objectives of this study are: (1) to examine the distinct forms of religious moderation practiced by the community; (2) to analyze how Islamic pedagogical values structurally build and sustain interfaith harmony; and (3) to identify the implications of these findings for developing contextual, resilient Islamic education strategies in pluralistic societies.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design, grounded in an interpretive paradigm to analyze the social construction of religious moderation. The interpretive paradigm was selected to decode the subjective meanings and lived experiences of actors involved in Islamic educational practices. Rather than merely describing a phenomenon, this design allows for an in-depth investigation of a contemporary, contextual case within its real-world setting. (Syarifin et al., 2025).

The research locus was focused on Wirotaman Village, Ampelgading District, Malang Regency. Wirotaman was purposively selected not merely due to its official status as a "pilot village" designated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, but primarily because of its unique "triple-point" geographic proximity. In this village, a mosque, a church, and a temple stand less than 50 meters apart, serving as an exceptional living laboratory for interfaith social construction. To gather rich, nuanced data regarding direct involvement in moderation-based pedagogical and social activities, informants were selected via purposive sampling. The research subjects comprised [12] key informants, including [3] Islamic Education (PAI) teachers, [4] interfaith religious leaders (Islamic, Christian, and Hindu), and [5] local community members who actively participate in interfaith forums.

Data collection was executed through three synchronized techniques to ensure depth and empirical rigor:

1. Semi-structured In-depth Interviews: Conducted with all [12] informants using flexible interview guides to capture their perspectives on wasathiyyah pedagogy and interfaith harmony.
2. Participatory Observation: Focused on everyday interfaith social rituals, communal cooperation (gotong royong), and social interactions within the "triple-point" sacred spaces.
3. Documentation Review: Consisted of a systematic analysis of school instructional documents, PAI lesson plans, village demographic records, and official moderation village reports.

Data were systematically processed following the interactive model of (Miles et al., 2014), which encompasses three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction (thematic coding), data display (narrative matrix mapping), and conclusion

drawing/verification. To elevate the study's theoretical weight, the data analysis explicitly integrated Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's dialectic framework as the primary analytical lens. The interactive steps were executed as follows:

Data Reduction, Data Display, and Verification. To ensure scholarly validity and data credibility, this study established a strict data triangulation mechanism alongside prolonged field presence. Rather than treating data sources in isolation, the analysis deliberately "collided" and cross-verified different data streams. For instance, the verbal claims made by PAI teachers during interviews regarding their tolerant teaching methods were directly cross-checked against instructional documents (lesson plans) and verified through participatory observations of actual interfaith behavior during village social rituals. Any discrepancies were resolved through member-checking with the respective religious leaders.

## RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Research Result

#### The Phase of Externalization: The Role of Leadership and Pedagogy

In the externalization phase, the values of tolerance and wasathiyyah are actively projected into the social space by key actors, notably through what can be termed "The Pedagogy of Neighborliness." Islamic religious leaders and school teachers consciously externalize moderate doctrines through peaceful preaching and humanistic learning processes. An Islamic religious leader externalizes this collective ethos by stating:

*"Since long ago, the people here have been accustomed to living side by side. Worship is a personal matter, but when it comes to social affairs, we are always together. There has never been any conflict because of religion." (Informant M.RE, Islamic Religious Leader).*

These externalized ideas become objectified – institutionalized as objective social facts and shared cultural norms. In Wirotaman, this is manifested through the Tri Kerukunan Umat Beragama (Three Religious Harmony) institution and the joint socialization with local authorities to filter intolerant online content. Consequently, interfaith cooperation (gotong royong) during religious holidays (Eid al-Fitr, Christmas, Galungan) and community service to clean all places of worship have become non-negotiable social laws.

A Christian leader confirmed this objectified reality:

*"We feel safe living in Wirotaman. When there are village activities, everyone is involved regardless of religion. This has become a habit." (Informant HC, Christian Religious Leader).*

The internalization phase occurs when these objectified norms are re-absorbed by individuals, transforming into their personal identities. In Wirotaman, Islamic Education (PAI) serves as the primary structural vehicle for this internalization, establishing a "Curriculum of the Commons" across formal, non-formal, and family environments. In the formal school setting, PAI teachers do not merely transfer conceptual knowledge; they bridge text and context by integrating contextual verses (e.g., QS. Al-Hujurat: 13) and organizing direct experiential learning, such as cross-cultural visits to churches and temples.

A local PAI teacher explained this internalization mechanism:

*"We always instill that Islam is rahmatan lil 'alamin... We often take students to visit the GKJW church or Siwa Lingga temple with their Christian and Hindu friends so they can see firsthand interfaith cooperation... As a result, the children grow up without prejudice." (Informant SY, PAI Teacher).*

In non-formal spaces like majelis taklim (religious gatherings), Friday sermons consistently reinforce themes of interfaith friendship based on prophetic traditions

(hadith) regarding neighbors. This creates a synergy with domestic socialization, where parents internalize these values through simple daily habits, such as sharing food and participating in communal thanksgiving (tahlilan) across religious boundaries.

To visualize the interactive process of how moderation is constructed, the following table maps the empirical findings based on thematic coding and Berger's framework:

| No | Informant Code & Background                | Core Finding / Emerging Code                                                            | Dialectical Phase (Berger's Theory)                          |
|----|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Informant M. RE (Islamic Religious Leader) | Peaceful preaching; proactive conflict prevention; prioritizing social affairs.         | Externalization (Projecting values into space)               |
| 2  | Informant SY (Islamic Education Teacher)   | "Curriculum of the Commons"; cross-cultural site visits; Rahmatan lil 'Alamin doctrine. | Externalization & Internalization (Pedagogical transmission) |
| 3  | Informant HC (Christian Religious Leader)  | Mutual trust; institutionalized interfaith cooperation; zero social barriers.           | Objectivation (Solidifying into cultural habits)             |
| 4  | Informant S (Hindu Religious Leader)       | Absence of discrimination; structural equality in local traditions.                     | Objectivation (Shared social reality)                        |
| 5  | Informant AS (Village Apparatus)           | Regular dialogue; formal institutionalization (FKUB); unwritten policy protection.      | Objectivation (Political & structural defense)               |

### Forms of Religious Moderation in the Wirotaman Village Community

The main form is the tradition of interfaith mutual cooperation in daily activities such as community service to clean places of worship together, helping each other during harvests or disasters, and visiting each other on religious holidays such as Eid al-Fitr, Christmas, or Galungan, which involves communal prayers and sharing traditional dishes. Field observations identified 10 mosques, 4 churches, and 3 temples located close to each other without conflict for more than 20 years, with mutual respect as a social norm. This practice includes peaceful preaching by Islamic religious leaders and the tradition of "living in harmony without religious barriers."

This pattern of moderation is reinforced by the Tri Kerukunan Umat Beragama (Three Religious Harmony) institution (chaired by Islam, with Christian and Hindu representatives), which coordinates joint activities such as the inauguration of the "Desa Keberagaman" (Diversity Village) gate in 2017 and the launch of Kampung Moderasi

Beragama (Religious Moderation Village) by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2023, making this village a national model. Social interactions include interfaith marriages that are accepted without coercion, interfaith education for children in village schools, and a social harmony monument as a symbol of unity, where residents view differences as a blessing that enriches local economic and cultural life, such as the development of the durian icon. The peaceful preaching strategy by religious leaders emphasizes fairness and tolerance, in line with the Islamic value of *wasathiyah* and the Indonesian principle of togetherness.

The absence of religious-based conflicts for hundreds of years is supported by internal factors such as a long-standing culture of harmony, the role of the village FKUB, and high religious literacy, although challenges such as intolerant online content are overcome through joint socialization with the police and religious counselors. As a result, Wirotaman Village was recommended as a role model of tolerance by the Malang Police Chief and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, proving that religious moderation is not just a discourse but a sustainable organic practice, where diversity actually becomes a unifying force within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. The research results show that religious moderation in Wirotaman Village is formed through intense and continuous social interaction. Residents are accustomed to working together in community activities such as mutual assistance, national holiday celebrations, and village social activities regardless of religious background. This pattern of interaction indirectly shapes attitudes of tolerance, inclusiveness, and mutual trust among religious communities.

### **The Role of Islamic Education in Shaping Religious Moderation**

From an Islamic educational perspective, the values of religious moderation are internalized through formal and non-formal education. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is taught in local elementary and secondary schools, where the PAI curriculum emphasizes the values of *wasathiyah*. In the family environment, parents instill values of mutual respect and non-exclusivity in their children from an early age. In educational institutions and religious assemblies, Islamic teachings are conveyed with an emphasis on the principles of moderation, tolerance, mutual assistance, and social justice. In addition to formal education, non-formal education such as regular recitation and *majelis taklim* (religious gatherings) in Wirotaman mosques are effective platforms for instilling moderation, with Friday sermons and evening studies often raising the theme of interfaith friendship based on the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW about neighbors (even if they are of different religions). Research has found that participants in *majelis taklim*, especially housewives, apply these teachings in their daily mutual cooperation, such as rotating social gatherings involving non-Muslim residents, so that the value of tolerance is internalized naturally without coercion.

Mrs. SY, a PAI teacher at an elementary school in Wirotaman Village, emphasized that "I always include tolerance in my PAI lessons, for example, teaching children QS Al-Hujurat verse 13 about superiority based not on religion but on piety. We often take students to visit the GKJW church or Siwa Lingga temple with their Christian and Hindu friends so they can see firsthand interfaith cooperation, such as cleaning the mosque together. As a result, the children grow up without prejudice, participate in social gatherings with families of different religions, and understand that Islam is *rahmatan lil alamin*, which means loving all neighbors." Not only relying on teachers at my school, children in Wirotaman Village are also taught by their parents at home. One of the mothers, Mrs. R, who is a local villager, shared her opinion "Every day, moderation can be seen in simple patterns, such as borrowing salt from neighbors of

different religions, participating in tahlilan or thanksgiving together. The Islamic Religious Education teachers at school teach our children to respect temples and churches, while the mosque discussions address radical hoaxes."

The results of the study show that religion teachers consciously integrate interfaith tolerance material into their teaching, for example through discussions about harmony with Christian and Hindu neighbors, so that students grow up understanding plurality as a blessing from God, not a threat, which is in line with the diverse composition of the village. This approach is not only about transferring knowledge but also character building, where students are invited to visit churches or temples to practice empathy, strengthening the organic harmony in the village with 10 mosques, 4 churches, and 3 temples side by side.

### **The Role of Religious Leaders and Village Officials**

In addition, religious leaders and village officials in Wirotaman play a central role in maintaining social harmony through regular and informal interfaith dialogue. The village head and Islamic, Christian, and Hindu religious leaders often meet at local cafes or village events to discuss religious issues without barriers. The Village Head actively facilitates these meetings through the Tri Kerukunan Umat Beragama (Three Religious Harmony) Institute, where they agree on an unwritten norm of rejecting outside provocation, so that dialogue is not a formality but a daily practice that strengthens harmony in the village with 10 mosques, 4 churches, and 3 temples side by side. As a result, residents imitate this pattern, creating a culture of organic tolerance. The delivery of peaceful religious messages has become the main strategy of religious leaders.

Islamic leaders emphasize Islam wasathiyah (moderate Islam) and hadiths about neighbors (including non-Muslims) in their recitations and Friday sermons, while Christian and Hindu leaders convey similar messages of universal love in churches and temples. Village officials support this by disseminating anti-radical hoaxes through mosque loudspeakers and neighborhood meetings, ensuring that messages of peace permeate all levels of society. This approach is effective in preventing conflict, as evidenced by local research that found zero incidents of intolerance over decades.

Inclusive village deliberations were used as a participatory forum by officials, where every decision, such as the budget for places of worship or village anniversary activities, involved representatives of the three religions through deliberation and consensus, led by the village head who acted fairly without discrimination. Religious leaders act as advisors, for example during the 2017 "Diversity Village" declaration attended by the Malang Police Chief and Deputy Regent, where deliberations resulted in a social harmony monument as a symbol of unity. This process strengthens a sense of belonging across religions, making deliberation a glue for harmony. Overall, the synergy between religious leaders and village officials through dialogue, messages of peace, and inclusive deliberation has made Wirotaman a model for the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Religious Moderation Village, where their active role is not only reactive but proactive in building religious social resilience amid diversity.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The Dialectics of Social Construction: Identifying the Dominant Pedagogical Phase**

When analyzed through Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's social construction framework, the organic harmony in Wirotaman Village is not a static reality but a dynamic product of a multi-generational dialectic. However, unlike standard secular social constructions, the primary engine driving this framework at the grassroots

level is Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Within this dialectical triad, this study identifies Internalization as the most dominant phase orchestrated by the PAI teacher. While village ancestors initiated externalization by establishing peaceful norms, and the Tri Kerukunan Umat Beragama formalized these into objectified social institutions, the PAI teacher acts as the critical bridge that transforms these external, objectified village traditions into the personal, psychological identity of the younger generation.

Through what has been conceptualized as the "Curriculum of the Commons," the PAI teacher actively translates abstract theological texts into lived experiences (e.g., cross-cultural visits to the GKJW church and Siwa Lingga temple). By doing so, the teacher ensures that the objectified village norm of *guyub rukun* (harmony and unity) is deeply internalized. Without this deliberate pedagogical internalization, the externalized traditions would remain fragile artifacts of the past; instead, they are sustained as active, modern social habits.

### **Islamic Education as an Instrument of Religious Moderation**

From an Islamic education perspective, religious moderation in Wirotaman Village can be understood as a process of value education that takes place contextually. Islamic values that emphasize *rahmatan lil 'alamin* are manifested in an open attitude towards differences, dialogue, and interfaith cooperation. This is in line with previous research stating that Islamic education has a strategic role in building tolerant and moderate attitudes in a multicultural society. Islamic education in Wirotaman Village serves as a means of shaping moderate religious attitudes through the formal Islamic education curriculum in schools and non-formal studies in *majelis taklim* (Islamic study groups), which consciously integrate the principle of *wasathiyah* to instill a middle ground between extremism and excessive liberalism. Islamic education teachers and *majelis taklim* instructors use interactive discussion methods on harmony with Christian and Hindu neighbors, such as friendly visits to churches or temples, so that residents and students understand plurality as *sunnatullah* that must be respected. As a result, this moderate attitude is evident in daily practices such as interfaith mutual cooperation without coercion, which is reinforced by previous research on Islamic religious education in Indonesia's pluralistic society, which is effective in shaping tolerant character.

Regular studies at the mosque discuss hadiths about the rights of non-Muslim neighbors, internalized through rotating social gatherings and communal prayers during holidays, so that the value of universal love becomes the cultural identity of a village with 10 mosques alongside 4 churches and 3 temples. Previous research confirms that this approach has succeeded in changing residents' perceptions from exclusive to inclusive, in line with *rahmatan lil 'alamin* as the foundation of moderation. Islamic education also serves as an instrument to prevent extremism and intolerance through critical religious literacy taught in school Islamic education and religious lectures, such as analyzing radical hoaxes from social media with reference to authentic sources from the Qur'an and Sunnah.

The habit of peaceful coexistence in Wirotaman Village also shows that religious moderation is not only formed through formal education, but also through local culture and social practices. The traditions of mutual cooperation and deliberation are effective media for instilling the values of religious moderation in a sustainable manner. Thus, the results of this study confirm that the construction of religious moderation in the perspective of Islamic education in Wirotaman Village is the result of synergy between religious teachings, the role of community leaders, family education, and local culture. The model of religious moderation that has developed in this village can be used as an

example of best practice in strengthening religious moderation in other multireligious communities.

### **Local Wisdom as a Strengtheners of Religious Moderation**

Local wisdom in Wirotaman Village, Ampel Gading District, Malang, plays a role in strengthening religious moderation through a culture of mutual cooperation, which serves as a medium for teaching tolerance in a contextual and effective manner. This tradition is manifested in daily activities such as community service to clean places of worship together, including mosques, churches, and temples, or helping each other during durian harvests and disasters, involving Muslim, Christian, and Hindu residents regardless of their differences in belief. The discussion shows that mutual cooperation is not merely a physical activity, but a process of socializing moderation in which residents learn to appreciate interfaith contributions, so that the value of togetherness takes root as a social habitus that rejects exclusivism.

Inclusive village deliberations strengthen religious moderation by involving Islamic, Christian, and Hindu religious leaders in decision-making, such as the allocation of development budgets or religious celebrations, led by the Village Head through the Tri Kerukunan Umat Beragama (Three Religious Harmony) Institution. This consensus-building process reflects the Javanese local wisdom of “guyub rukun” (harmony and unity), which emphasizes deliberation for harmony, where every religious voice is valued, resulting in unwritten norms against external provocation. The uniqueness of this research lies in how these deliberations become contextual informal education, different from formal approaches, so that moderation is formed organically without conflict over hundreds of years. Village solidarity, as another form of local wisdom, functions as a medium for teaching the value of moderation through practices of mutual assistance during times of personal hardship, such as rotating social gatherings or visits during Eid al-Fitr, Christmas, and Galungan, accompanied by the exchange of prayers and special dishes. This culture internalizes solidarity as a form of rahmatan lil alamin, where the diversity of 10 mosques, 4 churches, and 3 temples is seen as the economic and social strength of the village. The local wisdom of Wirotaman as “life education” is more effective than theoretical instruction, creating a unique resilience of moderation that has been replicated as a model by the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

### **Implications of Islamic Education in a Multireligious Society**

Islamic education in a multireligious society such as Wirotaman Village has strategic implications in shaping social harmony through the integration of wasathiyah values into everyday life, where formal and non-formal Islamic education not only conveys doctrine but also encourages interfaith empathy. The main implication is the formation of a tolerant younger generation, such as PAI students who are accustomed to visiting churches and temples, thereby understanding plurality as a blessing from Allah. In addition, this education strengthens local identity through the study of rahmatan lil alamin, where Muslim residents learn to appreciate the contributions of non-Muslim neighbors in mutual cooperation, creating sustainable social resilience.

A further implication is seen in the prevention of extremism through critical literacy in majelis taklim and pengajian (religious gatherings), where religious leaders teach the analysis of radical hoaxes with authentic references, so that the multireligious community of Wirotaman remains harmonious without incidents of intolerance. Islamic education also serves as a bridge for dialogue through the Tri Kerukunan Umat Beragama (Three Religious Harmony Institutions), producing inclusive norms that support village deliberation and interfaith solidarity, as exemplified by the Village Head.

This enriches the local economy, such as the iconic durian, where diversity actually increases shared productivity. Islamic education must be contextual by adapting wasathiyah material to the realities of Wirotaman, such as interactions between Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism. Religious moderation cannot be taught theoretically because values such as tolerance are only instilled through real experiences of mutual cooperation; the exemplary behavior of religious leaders and social practices are crucial to success, as evidenced by the absence of conflict in this Ministry of Religious Affairs pilot village.

## CONCLUSION

The social construction of religious moderation in Wirotaman Village, Malang Regency, demonstrates that sustainable interfaith harmony is driven by a deep-rooted dynamic between grassroots practices and structured Islamic education. This study concludes that the peaceful coexistence of three distinct religious groups is achieved through the structural internalization of wasathiyah (moderation) values across formal, non-formal, and domestic environments. Rather than relying on fragile, top-down policy mandates, Wirotaman's model thrives on a bottom-up pedagogical framework where theological depth facilitates, rather than hinders, organic interfaith social cohesion and mutual cooperation.

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