

Theological Issues of Pandemic Covid-19 in Malaysia: The Views of the Muslims Theologians

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Abstract: The outbreak of the pandemic COVID-19 in Malaysia started in March 2020. has not only affected Muslims well-being in terms of socio-economic, emotional, and mental health, but it has also challenged their theological understandings, specifically relating to the issue of qada' and qadar and Human Freedom of Will. Consequently, some Muslims refused to observe the government order to contain the spread of COVID-19 and accused the observant of the order of committing polytheism. To clarify the issue, this study aims to identify the theological perspectives of the Muslim theologians on COVID-19 and the methods to prevent it. This study employed a qualitative descriptive method. Data was collected through Youtube videos that contain views and responses of the well-known Muslim theologians from the school of ahl sunnah wa al-jamaah on the theological issues related to the pandemic. The study found that the view of the Muslim theologians on COVID-19 shows that they uphold the Asha'rites understanding and teachings of the concept of Qada' and Qadar and human freedom of will. Therefore, they regarded the observant of the SOP or Islamic guidelines in preventing the spread of pandemic Covid 19 as a form of ikhtiyar and not as a form of polytheism.

Keywords: *Covid-19, Muslim theologians, theological issues, qada' and qadar.*

A. Introduction

Islamic theology (*akidah*) is the foundation of the Islamic religion that elucidates the concept of God in Islam, His attributes, and His actions. It also discusses the unseen matters such as the angles, the judgement day and the idea of *qada'* and *qadar* (predestination). Muslims have learnt Islamic theology as taught by the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) from the *ulama'*. The *ulama'*, singular 'ālim, are the Islamic religion's spiritual, moral, and intellectual guardians. This authority is derived from the prophetic tradition, which says, "the ulama are the heirs of the prophets" (Sunan Tirmidhi, Hadith: 2682).

The *ulama'* is also defined as those who possess the quality of 'ilm, "learning," in its broadest sense (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/ulama>). Their field of

study includes law, exegesis, theology, and traditions of the prophet. Thus, they serve as jurists, theologians, grammarians, teachers, mufassirin or writers of Quranic commentary, and *muhaddithin*¹. According to Kamal Hassan, the ulama must not only be knowledgeable, but they have to be someone pious and has a good character². The concept of ulama, however, is subjected to debate. This article will not elaborate on the discourse. In this paper, the term ulama' refers to the established and well-known Muslim theologians and jurisprudence in Malaysia.

According to the local media report, the first COVID-19 case in Malaysia can be traced to 3 Chinese tourists who travelled to Malaysia via Singapore on 24th January 2020 (Harits Asyraf Hasnan, 2020). However, reported COVID-19 cases grew relatively slowly until a religious event occurred in Sri Petaling Kuala Lumpur in March 2020³. The event was attended by 16,000 people, including participants from outside Malaysia. Within a week after the event, 513 participants were infected, and the cases increased to 553 on 16th March 2020⁴. This situation prompted the Malaysian government to impose a Movement Control Order effective on 18th March 2020 (Rohaniza Idris, 2020). The order required strict observance of social distancing, preventing people from travelling to other states or COVID-19-affected areas, and only one person from a family could leave home and go out to buy essential goods.

As of August 2020, the government managed to contain and prevent the spread of the virus. However, the virus hit back in September 2020 and infected many people. The daily new COVID-19 cases were around 800 to 1200⁵. The situation forced the government to re-impose the Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO) and Enhanced Movement Controlled Order (EMCO) in states severely affected by the pandemic (Daud Ridaudin, 2020). As of September

¹ Norshahril Saat, *The State, Ulama and Islam in Malaysia and Indonesia, The State, Ulama and Islam in Malaysia and Indonesia*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.5117/9789462982932>.

² Mohammed Nawab Mohamed Osman, "Religio-Political Activism of Ulama in Malaysia" (National University of Singapore, 2006).

³ Asita Elengoe, "COVID-19 Outbreak in Malaysia," *Osong Public Health and Research Perspectives Journal* 11, no. 3 (2020): 93–100.

⁴ Elengoe.

⁵ Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia, "Status Terkini COVID19 Di Malaysia 26 Oktober 2020," 2020.

2021, the daily new COVID-19 cases are even worse, where between 4000 and 6000 people are reported infected by the virus

The pandemic COVID-19 has changed people's life drastically⁶. Students must attend virtual classes, employees are required to work from home or lose their jobs, and no mass gathering is permitted. Accordingly, many cases of economic and psychological distress were reported⁷. As for the Malaysian Muslims, the pandemic affected their socio-economic, emotional, and mental health and challenged their theological understandings, specifically relating to the issue of *Qada'* and *Qadar* and Human Freedom of Will. Consequently, some Muslims disregard the prevention methods initiated by the government. They argued that Allah SWT had decreed everything, and thus people must not worry about being affected by the virus⁸. In addition, they also regard the prohibition of performing congregational prayer in mosques as a form of *shirk* (polytheism). They emphasized that a Muslim must fear Allah, not the virus⁹.

The theological issues have prompted responses from the local scholars. Most believed the problem was rooted in a lack of understanding of Islamic theology. Therefore, they tried to elaborate on the concept of God's Will and human will¹⁰ and offered practical solutions based on the Quran, Sunnah¹¹ and Islamic theological perspectives^{12,13}. Nevertheless, very few past studies address the theological issue relating to COVID-19 in the Malaysian context. More studies

⁶ Rohaniza Idris, "COVID-19: 10,553 Jemaah Tabligh Diperiksa, 513 Positif," *Berita Harian Online*, March 2020.

⁷ Junaidi Mansor and Mohd Amirul Rafiq Abu Rahim, "Cabaran Dan Strategi Pasca-Pandemik Untuk Belia," *Khazanah Research Institute*, vol. 5, 2020.

⁸ Nor 'Asyikin May Hayin, "Takut Virus Atau Tuhan?," *MyMetro*, 2020.

⁹ Halim Mokhtar, "Takut Allah Atau COVID-19," *Majlis Agama Islam Selangor* (Selangor, 2020).

¹⁰ Adam Badhrulhisham and Md Fahama Shukri Dzulkarnain, "ANALISIS KONSEP AF AL ALLAH DAN AF AL AL-IBAD DALAM PENGURUSAN BENCANA WABAK COVID-19 MENURUT PERSPEKTIF AHLI SUNNAH WAL JAMAAH," *Jurnal Maw'izah* 3 (2020): 84–91.

¹¹ Mohd Sophian Ismail, Mohd Arif Nazri, and Najah Nadiah Amran, "Panduan Ulama Islam Berkaitan Amalan Pencegahan Penularan Pandemik: Satu Sorotan," *Journal of Contemporary Islamic Law* 6 (2021): 17–28.

¹² Norsaadah Din and Yusni Mohamad Yusak, "Peranan Akidah Dalam Menghadapi Penularan Pandemik Covid-19," *Isu-Isu Kontemporari Dalam Pengajian Dakwah Dan Usuluddin*, no. November 2020 (2020): 62–68.

¹³ Mohd Rosmizi Abdul Rahman, "Terapi Psikospiritual Akidah Islam Dalam Menghadapi Tekanan Dan Cabaran Kehidupan Akibat Covid-19," in *E-Prosiding Seminar Antarabangsa Islam Dan Sains 2021 "Wawasan Kemakmuran Bersama 2030"*, 2021, 89–107.

need to address and manage the theological problem¹⁴. Furthermore, the past studies limit their discussion on textual analysis and neglect the current view of the Muslim theologians on the issue.

Therefore, the main objective of this study is to identify the theological perspectives of the Muslim theologians on COVID-19. In doing so, this paper sought to analyze their understanding of the pandemic and the methods to prevent it. Hopefully, this study will provide guidelines to the Muslims in dealing with the theological provocation that may affect their belief during the pand.

B. Islamic Theological Perspectives on Calamities

Islam's Calamities are regarded as Divine destiny/predestination (*Qada'*)¹⁵. This concept of Divine destiny explains that Allah SWT has predetermined all creations, including human actions. He manifests what he has decreed into the real world according to His Will (*Qadar*)¹⁶. This understanding is based on the Quranic verse, which clearly states that everything happens by Allah SWT's Permission and Will: And you do not will except that Allah wills. Indeed, Allah is ever Knowing and Wise. (QS. Al-Insan/76: 30).

However, theologians from the Asha'arite school affirm that Allah SWT cannot be compelled to execute whatever He has decreed¹⁷. He is free and powerful to do whatever He wants. Indeed your Lord does whatsoever He wills (QS. Hud/11: 107). None shall question Him about what He does, but they shall be asked.

In line with that view, Imam al-Ghazali (2011) claimed that no calamity or disaster could occur except by the Will of Allah SWT. This argument is based on the Quran: "No disaster strikes except by permission of Allah. And whoever believes in Allah - He will guide his heart. And Allah knows of all things." (QS. Al-Taghabun/64: 11)

¹⁴ Mohd Rosmizi Abdul Rahman, "Covid-19 Menurut Pandangan Akidah Dan Rawatan Islam: Satu Tinjauan Awal," *International Seminar on Islam and Science 2020 (Sais 2020)*, 2020.

¹⁵ Abu Hamid Muhammad. Al-Ghazzali, *Mutiara Ihya' Ulumuddin*, ed. Hasmah Isa. (Shah Alam: Shah Alam: Illusion Network, 2011).

¹⁶ Muhammad Yusuf Al-Sanusi, *Umm Al-Barahin* (Jordan: Dar An-Nur, 2016).

¹⁷ Al-Sanusi.

Imam al-Ghazali (2011) also emphasized that there are reasons behind any calamities. The reasons are:

1. Calamity or disaster is a form of blessing from Allah SWT. Allah SWT has promised to reward His Jannah to those who face calamities and sufferings but stay calm and remain faithful to Him. Allah SWT said: "Verily those who persevere shall be granted their reward beyond all reckoning" (QS. Az-Zumar/39:10.)
2. It is a form of divine punishment which is a consequence of the evil behaviour of human beings.

Allah sets forth the parable of (the people of) a secure and content town whose sustenance came in abundance from every quarter. But then the townspeople showed ingratitude towards Allah for His bounties, so Allah afflicted them with hunger and fear in punishment for their evil deeds.

Hence, all things, good and bad, happen with the Will of Allah SWT. However, theologians from the Asha'rite school affirm that human beings are not helpless. Allah SWT grants them free will to exercise their choice and be responsible for their actions (al-Ghazali, 2011). Had man had no freedom of choice, the prophethood and *Syariah* law would be meaningless¹⁸. Such a thing is absurd since it contradicts the Divine's Justice.

Allah does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity. It will have [the consequence of] what [good] it has gained, and it will bear [the result of] what [evil] it has earned. (QS. Al-Baqarah/2: 286)

Therefore, Muslims are not supposed to be pessimistic and surrender to *Qada'* and *Qadar*. They must work for their survival on the earth and at the same time obey the *syariat* and be hopeful that Allah SWT will accept their good deeds. Furthermore, the understanding that Allah SWT has the absolute power to change the Divine's destiny should motivate Muslims to appeal to God to spare him from whatever calamity God has decreed for him in the last ten years of his life.¹⁹

¹⁸ Yasien Mohamed, "The Concept of Predestination And Free Will in Iqbal And Nursi," *AFKAR-Jurnal Akidah & Amp; Pemikiran Islam* 7, no. 1 (2006): 93-120.

¹⁹ Abu-Rabi', *Islam at the Crossroads*, 1.

C. Methode

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method. Data was collected through Youtube videos to identify the Muslim theologians' perspectives on covid 19 and its prevention. The Boolean search was used as a filter to gain more accurate and related videos using the keywords '*akidah*, COVID-19 and *ulama*.' As a result, several Muslim theologians were chosen among the well-known and established Muslim theologians who belong to *Ahl Sunnah wa al-Jamaah*. They were found to respond to the theological issue of COVID-19. Hence, the selection is not limited to Malaysian Muslim theologians only. The data was analyzed manually using content analysis to identify the common themes.

The contemporary Muslim theologians' profile is as follows: 1). Tuan Guru Baba Ismail Sepanjang Al-Fathani. He is a prominent Muslim theologian from Pattani and a member of the Fathani council of Ulama; 2). Ustaz Engku Ahmad Fadzil Engku Ali. He is a member of the Syariah Advisory Council of Pahang State and a well-known Islamic preacher; 3). Tuan Guru Syeikh Muhd Zainul Asri Mohd Romli. He is the founder of Yayasan Mujamma' Darul Hadis Malaysia and a prominent Muslim preacher, and 4). Tuan Guru Ahmad Rozaini Abdul Rahman al-Hajari. He is the Mudir of Pondok Haji Shahrudin Al Mandili and a preacher.

D. Muslims Theologians' Perspectives on Covid-19

1. Pandemic COVID-19 is Divine Destiny

The Muslim theologians emphasized that, theologically, the pandemic COVID-19 happened by the Will of Allah SWT. According to Tuan Guru Baba Ismail Sepanjang Al-Fathani²⁰ :

Germes or viruses are nothing new. There are various types of germes. Where do they come from? They are from (created by) Allah. If we believe in Allah, we must believe in the Islamic pillars of faith, including qada' and qadar... Because the Quran states that *لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ* Allah who made all things. So everything that happens is from (created by) Allah.²¹

²⁰ His lecture at Masjid Fathoni Thailand was recorded by Tafsir Nurul Ihsan channel on 7th March 2020. After this, his name will be abbreviated as Tuan Guru Baba Ismail.

²¹ Tafsir Nurul Ihsan, "Baba Ismail Sepanjang - Bagaimanakah Pendirian Aqidah Mengenai Virus Corona," Youtube Video, 2020.

Furthermore, Allah SWT is the one Who does what He Wills. He creates the principle of cause and effect, and He also can deny those principles. There is none that can prevent Allah from doing as He Wills. This concept is well explained by Tuan Guru Baba Ismail Sepanjang Al-Fathani as follows:

"Allah is the one who does everything *إِنَّ رَبَّكَ فَعَالٌ لِّمَا يُرِيدُ* He creates what He wills. Because everything belongs to Him, He is the cause for everything.²²

Similarly, Ustaz Engku Ahmad Fadzil Engku Ali²³ (2020), also emphasized that Allah SWT created COVID-19. To justify, he cited the hadith where the prophet explained theological understanding of the origin of mange diseases to a Bedouin.

"The Prophet said "*la adwaa..*" which means no infection of the disease, no misfortune in the month of Safar, no misfortune on the owl, then said a Bedouin Arab. O Rasulallah, how come our healthy camels got infected when mixed with the scabies camel? Hence, it is not true what you have just said that there is no infection. Then the prophet asked, "If it is true that this disease is necessary for infection, then which camel infected the first camel? If you consider the disease can cause an infection, then from whom did the first camel become infected because he was the first?

Upon this explanation, the Bedouin began to understand that origin of the disease was from Allah Almighty. His misunderstanding was because he did not realize that Rasulallah was trying to explain the origin of conditions from the Tawhid perspective. That all diseases come from (created by) Allah.²⁴

However, Ustaz Engku Ahmad Fadzil²⁵ emphasized that knowing this fact does not mean we can ignore the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the Prevention, Containment and Management of COVID-19 or become like the Jabarites.

"English translation: However, we must be very cautious not to become like the Jabbarites when we say that Allah causes all diseases. The Jabbarites hold

²² Tafsir Nurul Ihsan.

²³ After this his name will be abbreviated as Ustaz Engku Ahmad Fadzil.

²⁴ (Engku Ahmad Fadzil, 2020)

²⁵ (2020)

that man has no will and power to act on his own choice or preference, and God had predetermined human life. Therefore, they tend to disobey the government orders to contain the spread of COVID-19 (the order to stay at home and minimize the number of people in mosques and shopping malls). They argued that if they left the house and God did not destine (them to be infected by the virus), they would not be sick. It is important for us to realize that the government does not allow gathering in mosques, shopping malls, as an effort to contain the spread of COVID -19".²⁶

Furthermore, scientific evidence shows that COVID-19 can be spread through droplets and human contact. Hence, he disapproved of the view that regards the observance to SOP as a form of polytheism. He said:

"Some people say you are more afraid of the virus than of God. They argued that if you are not fated to be infected by COVID-19, you will be safe even if you go to a mosque and shake hands with people. This argument confirms the Islamic understanding of the origin of disease. However, in dealing with the pandemic, we must not ignore the principle of cause and effect. Furthermore, scientific findings prove the contagious nature of COVID-19. The virus can be transmitted through human contact, such as shaking hands and huggings. An infected person can infect others from a causal point of view, and the infection can spread and be difficult to control.

He also emphasized that Muslims must have a balanced view of the concept of *Qada'* and *Qadar* to prevent them from being very distressed during the pandemic.

"When disaster strikes, some people will slip from one extreme to another extreme. For example, some people are very stressed, anxious and worried. They cannot sleep and constantly sanitizing their hand. People like this may be inclined to the Qadarites' faith. They think that they have total control over their action and fate. Thus, they become paranoid. They forgot the fact that all diseases occur by the will of God. (Engku Ahmad Fadzil, 2020)

Hence, Tuan Guru Baba Ismail and Ustaz Engku Ahmad Fadzil are of the view that Allah SWT has pre-destined the pandemic COVID-19.

²⁶ 2020)

On the contrary, Tuan Guru Syeikh Muhd Zainul Asri Mohd Romli²⁷ applied a different perspective about the origins of the pandemic of COVID-19. He appears to be influenced by the conspiracy theory, for he claimed that the political motive drove the pandemic. He also claimed that the virus was invented as a weapon to serve Western imperialism all over the world. He said:

"COVID- 19 is a pandemic. Similarly, cholera is a type of pandemic as well. The difference between them is that humans did not create cholera. "For us, this cholera comes from God". Today, people can create a virus as if he is more powerful than God." These people (the Western power) will eventually claim themselves as God. Their purpose is to rule the world and this universe²⁸."

It is uncertain why Tuan Guru Syeikh Muhd Zainul Asri resorted to such an argument. However, he appeared to believe that the virus was created to weaken the Muslims. The SOP of the World Health Organization (WHO), especially concerning Muslim religious practices, was also regarded as part and parcel of the political agenda of the West to erode the Muslims' faith and unity. He said;

"For example, we have been required to keep physical distance in mosques to contain the spread of COVID-19. However, such an order will disunite the Muslims because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: Keep straight, do not be irregular, for there would be dissension in your hearts." In another hadith, the prophet said, "close up the gaps". However, with the COVID-19 SOP being imposed, we cannot keep our practice based on the hadith. Why are they doing this? The reason is that the Muslim enemies purposely make such SOP to weaken Muslim unity to control and conquer us. You know, this SOP has been imposed in all mosques all over the world. Hence, as you can see, in the mosque, Muslims are required to keep a physical distance and wear facemasks. However, people can sit next to each other in an aeroplane and not have to put on their facemasks in restaurants.

²⁷ His lecture was recorded by Mahabbah Rasul TV in the year 2020. After this his name will be abbreviated as Tuan Guru Syeikh Muhd Zainul Asri.

²⁸ Mahabbah Rasul TV, "Fitnah Akhir Zaman Di Sebalik Penyakit COVID | Syeikh Zainul Asri," Youtube Video, 2020.

Do you know why there is a double standard (in implementing the SOP)? The reason is that they (the Muslim enemy) want to weaken us (our unity).²⁹

Although he claimed that the West invented the virus, he also emphasized the importance of the Muslims to understand that everything happened by the Will of Allah SWT. Thus, he asked Muslims to find the Divine Wisdom behind the pandemic.

"English translation: God commands us to think of His creations because we will be able to comprehend His Attributes and Actions through His creation. Therefore, we have to find God's wisdom behind the pandemic. We also have to understand that before we manage to contain the virus because God Wills it. Today, the virus is striking again, and it also happens because God permits it to happen. Allah SWT said (in the Quran): I am the Almighty. He is al-Khaliq (the Creator), Who creates all things. Therefore, we must seek His Wisdom by pondering His creations.³⁰

Thus, in general, the Muslim theologians affirm that the pandemic of COVID-19 is *Qada'* and *Qadar* of Allah SWT. Muslims must deal with the pandemic but affirm that it will not cause any harm if God does not will it. This understanding is vital to prevent Muslims from experiencing psychological distress and having a misconception understanding of the issue of *qada'* and *qadar* that will affect their faith and eventually their religious worldview.

2. Divine Blessing and Wisdom

According to Tuan Guru Ahmad Rozaini Abdul Rahman al-Hajari^{31,32} and Ustaz Engku Ahmad Engku Fadzil (2020), the pandemic of COVID-19 should be seen as a form of blessing. Allah SWT has promised to grant His Heaven to the believers who do not try to run away and accept fate wholeheartedly. This claim

²⁹ Mahabbah Rasul TV.

³⁰ Mahabbah Rasul TV.

³¹ Ar-Rahman TV, "Ustaz Ahmad Rozaini - Hati Mati Lebih Bahaya Dari COVID-19," 2020.

³² His lecture at Masjid Jamek Al-Amin, Tambun, Ipoh, Perak was recorded by Ar-Rahman TV and was premiered on the YouTube on 19th Nov 2020. After this, his name will be abbreviated as Tuan Guru ustaz Rozaini.

is justified based on the Hadith of the Prophet narrated by Aishah (r.a) Volume 7, Book 71, Number 630:

"The wife of the prophet) She asked Allah's Apostle about the plague, and Allah's Apostle informed her that the plague was a punishment Allah used to send on whom He wished, but Allah made it a blessing for the believers. None (among the believers) remains patient in a land where a plague has broken out and considers that nothing will befall him except what Allah has ordained for him, but Allah will grant him a reward similar to that of a martyr."

According to Ustaz Engku Ahmad Fadzil,³³ the reward is not only granted to the Muslims who died due to the pandemic. It will also be granted to faithful Muslims who died not because of the plague.

However, the ability to appreciate and comprehend the pandemic as a blessing from Allah is determined by one's state of faith. According to Tuan Guru Ahmad Rozaini³⁴, only the pious can regard pain and misfortune as a flash of Divine wisdom. They will take the opportunity to repent and to enhance their spiritual attachment to Allah SWT. On the contrary, the people who follow their own *hawa'* cannot see the *hikmah*. Thus, they continue to fulfil their worldly interest. He said:

"As a person who is mature with a religious journey, whatever events happen around us, even if it looks like it is a disaster, but in fact, it is a blessing. The plague is a blessing because we return to Allah SWT, remember Allah, glorify Allah, recite dhikr to Allah, refer the matter to Allah, repent and pray to Allah. However, for people whose religion is immature, the good fortunes from God will be a disaster, for it makes them further astray from the right path."³⁵

According to Tuan Guru Ustaz Rozaini³⁶, the inability to appreciate the *hikmah* is because a more dangerous virus has inflicted them than Covid 19. He named the virus a few names, such as "*virus bodoh*", "*virus malas*", "*virus*

³³ (2020)

³⁴ Ar-Rahman TV, "Ustaz Ahmad Rozaini - Hati Mati Lebih Bahaya Dari COVID-19."

³⁵ Ar-Rahman TV.

³⁶ Ar-Rahman TV.

sombong", and "*virus syaitan*." In his view, those 'viruses' have made some Muslims stray from the right path.

3. COVID-19 as a Punishment

Tuan Guru Baba Ismail³⁷ also views the pandemic as a punishment for the people disobeying Allah SWT. According to him, Allah SWT creates the principle of cause and effect. Historically, it is evident that calamities such as drought and cholera occurred because of adultery issues and refusal to pay zakat. However, theologically the calamity will not only affect the sinners. It will also affect the pious people, as mentioned in the Quran al- Anfal verse 26: "Hence, to prevent calamities, Muslims must conduct the religious duty to enjoin the good and forbid the evil (Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Munkar)".

Tuan Guru Syeikh Muhd Zainul Asri³⁸ also regarded the reason for the rising cases of the pandemic in Malaysia due to people's disobedience to Allah SWT. He said:

"I think COVID-19 is coming back because people have forgotten God. Many people got favours and fortune but were not good at being grateful. When the government allows congregational prayers in mosques, people make excuses by saying that the SOP is still too strict (i.e., putting on the facemask and keeping physical distance).³⁹

His view in this regard is quite contradictory to what he has said about the root cause of the pandemic covid 19. He also mentioned that things happen in accordance with the Divine decree. He said:

"Before this, Allah SWT had relieved our country's pandemic (COVID-19). However, Today, the COVID-19 cases are rising again. This situation is a form of reminder from Allah. He wants us to realize that we are weak. We are nothing and not as wise as Him. Only He can do whatever He wills, and to Him, we must return and seek help"⁴⁰.

³⁷ Tafsir Nurul Ihsan, "Baba Ismail Sepanjang - Bagaimanakah Pendirian Aqidah Mengenai Virus Corona."

³⁸ Mahabbah Rasul TV, "Fitnah Akhir Zaman Di Sebalik Penyakit COVID | Syeikh Zainul Asri."

³⁹ Mahabbah Rasul TV.

⁴⁰ Mahabbah Rasul TV.

E. Methods to Prevent Covid-19

1. Accept the fate and Observe the Islamic Guidelines to Control the Spread of Pandemic.

According to Tuan Guru Baba Ismail,⁴¹ Muslims must find the reason that causes the spread of COVID-19. However, he emphasized that Muslims must affirm that theologically, the pandemic cannot affect anyone except by the will of Allah SWT. Our fate has been pre-ordained. Therefore, we must not run away from our destiny. Muslims must observe the Islamic guidelines to control the spread of disease as mentioned in the hadith. He said:

"However, in terms of religious teachings, we must not enter the village when we know that a pandemic has affected it. Similarly, we must not run away from our village if pandemics such as cholera have affected it. In other words, we must protect ourselves from the pandemic, but we must remember that we cannot escape from our fate .. *Qadarallahu wa ma sha'a fa'ala*. (Allah has decreed and whatever he wills, He does)".⁴²

2. Must act in conformity with Islamic Theological Understanding of Divine Destiny and Human Free Will.

Similarly, Ustaz Engku Ahmad Fadzil (2020) also emphasizes that Muslims must not be so arrogant to the extent that they think they have power over everything. However, by understanding Allah's Will of everything, they must not become very pessimistic and ignore the concept of ikhtiyar. Such doctrines do not confirm the Islamic concept of theology. Furthermore, there are scientific findings that prove the spread of the virus through human contact. Therefore, Muslims must respect and observe the government's decision since the SOP includes vaccination to preserve our life (*hifz-nafs*). The SOP is more efficient in avoiding and preventing the spreading of covid 19.

⁴¹ Tafsir Nurul Ihsan, "Baba Ismail Sepanjang - Bagaimanakah Pendirian Aqidah Mengenai Virus Corona."

⁴² Tafsir Nurul Ihsan.

3. Repent and Strengthen Faith in Allah.

To prevent the spread of the pandemic, Tuan Guru Ahmad Rozaini⁴³ advised Muslims to repent and to struggle to enhance their spiritual connection with Allah SWT. This can be done through *istighfar*, *selawat* and *zikrullah*. He claimed that people feel disturbed by the pandemic because they do not totally believe in God (*waham*). Thus, they see covid as more powerful than God. If they do not have *waham*, they will realize that everything is the creation of Allah that has no power at all against Him. He also associates the implication of *waham* to people who claim that God is more powerful than covid 19. In his view, such perception is due to the people having *waham* in the existence of the virus. However, such an attitude has created trouble for others and infected others. Nonetheless, he rejected the vaccination program because, in his view, the vaccine has Syariah compliance issues. He said:

"There is no emergency to take the (COVID-19) vaccine because there were cases where some people who did not take the vaccine and got infected observed self-quarantine and recovered. Furthermore, the vaccine contains illegal substances such as pork. If alcohol becomes vinegar with no intervention, there is no problem, but pork gelatin for medicine is still pork. The pork fat processed in the laboratory is still pork. Something with pork elements is not halal".⁴⁴

4. Develop an Islamic SOP and Consider vaccination.

In line with his perspective that the pandemic is a political weapon, Tuan Guru Syeih Muhd Zainul Asri urged Muslims to strengthen their faith but to establish an Islamic SOP based on the Islamic methods of *Kitab Al Thibb al-Nabawi*. Interestingly, Tuan Guru Syeikh Muhd Zainul Asri has changed his perspective on the vaccine. He said he considered a change of mind after discovering that so many people were affected and impacted by the pandemic. He emphasized that the previous ulama muktabar also does the change of fatwa. Furthermore, he believes that Muslims must not worry about sinning (if the vaccine contains non-halal substances) since the government has appointed

⁴³ Ar-Rahman TV, "Ustaz Ahmad Rozaini - Hati Mati Lebih Bahaya Dari COVID-19."

⁴⁴ Ar-Rahman TV.

those who have the authority to issue a fatwa. He also emphasized that the government's decision must be observed since it is regarded as *syariat*⁴⁵.

Thus, Muslim theologians agree that Muslims must find ways to prevent the spread of the pandemic COVID-19. However, the approaches are more on methods to purify the soul and enhance spiritual connection with Allah SWT. There are also views that the SOP to contain the virus must be in accordance with the hadith. As such, they view the implementation of SOP keeping physical distancing as acceptable. Regarding vaccination, most Muslim theologians agree that vaccination is an individual option.

F. Discussion

The qualitative data shows that the Muslim theologians' perspectives on COVID-19 are in line with the view of the Asha'rites concerning the concept of *Qada'* and *Qadar*. Muslim theologians generally believe that the pandemic COVID-19 has been pre-destined. Therefore, Muslims must remain calm and patient for the pandemic, be it a form of test or punishment; it contains Divine Wisdom and Mercy to those who repent and stay faithful to the Divine Will.

They also emphasized that the virus has no causal effect except by the Will of Allah SWT. However, they urged Muslims to observe the SOP or Islamic guidelines to prevent the spread of the virus and take necessary actions and precautions to avoid getting inflicted by COVID -19. Hence, they reject the view of those people who appear to be influenced by the pessimistic ideologies of Jabarites.

The finding shows that none of the Muslim theologians regarded the observant to the SOP, especially concerning the prohibition of performing congregational prayer in mosques as a form of *shirk*. The observation of the SOP is viewed as a form of *ikhtiyar* to prevent the spread of the virus. This view reflects the understanding of Asha'rites that human beings have freedom of will and are not supposed to surrender to fate.

⁴⁵ Mahabbah Rasul TV, "Fitnah Akhir Zaman Di Sebalik Penyakit COVID | Syaikh Zainul Asri."

G. Conclusion

The view of the Muslim theologians on COVID-19 shows that they uphold the Asha'rites understanding and teachings of the concept of *Qada'* and *Qadar* as well as human freedom of will. It is also important to note that the Muslim theologians also consider scientific evidence to justify the importance of observing the SOP or Islamic guidelines in preventing the spread of pandemic Covid 19. Thus, none of the Muslim theologians approve of the views that regard the observant to the SOP as unnecessary or a form of polytheism. []

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