



Beyond Human Dominion: Qur'anic Ecotheology and the Ethics of Environmental Accountability in Tafsir Studies

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Abstract:

The contemporary environmental crisis, marked by ecosystem degradation, pollution, and the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, reveals a profound ethical rupture in the human–nature relationship. Within Muslim societies, this crisis reflects a failure to internalize religious values that define humanity's normative role as *khalifah fi al-ard* (vicegerent on earth). This study aims to examine how ecological concepts are articulated in the Qur'an through *tafsir* literature and to formulate a framework of ecological piety grounded in Islamic theology. Employing a qualitative library-based research design, the study analyses selected classical and contemporary Qur'anic exegeses using a thematic analysis. Primary *tafsir* sources are examined alongside relevant scholarly works in Islamic theology and environmental studies to ensure analytical depth. The findings reveal three interrelated dimensions of Qur'anic ecotheology. First, humans are positioned as divine trustees responsible for maintaining ecological balance and sustainability. Second, nature is conceptualised as *ayat kawniyyah*, cosmic signs that cultivate spiritual awareness and ethical responsibility. Third, environmental destruction is interpreted as a moral transgression that entails divine accountability and consequences. This study contributes a *tafsir*-based framework of ecological piety that enriches Islamic environmental ethics and contemporary ecotheological discourse. It recommends further empirical research to explore the application of this framework in Islamic education and environmental policymaking.

Key Words: *Eco-theology, Qur'anic interpretation, Environmental ethics, Ecological responsibility*

Abstrak:

Krisis lingkungan kontemporer, yang ditandai dengan degradasi ekosistem, polusi, dan eksloitasi sumber daya alam yang tidak berkelanjutan, mengungkapkan perpecahan etika yang mendalam dalam hubungan manusia-alam. Dalam masyarakat Muslim, krisis ini mencerminkan kegagalan untuk menginternalisasi nilai-nilai agama yang mendefinisikan peran normatif umat manusia sebagai *khalifah fi al-ard* (wakil di bumi). Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana konsep ekologi diartikulasikan dalam Al-Qur'an melalui literatur *tafsir* dan untuk merumuskan kerangka kesalehan ekologis yang didasarkan pada teologi Islam. Menggunakan desain penelitian berbasis perpustakaan kualitatif, studi ini menganalisis penafsiran Al-

Qur'an klasik dan kontemporer yang dipilih menggunakan analisis tematik. Sumber-sumber tafsir primer diperiksa bersama dengan karya-karya ilmiah yang relevan dalam teologi Islam dan studi lingkungan untuk memastikan kedalaman analisis. Temuan ini mengungkapkan tiga dimensi ekoteologi Al-Qur'an yang saling terkait. Pertama, manusia diposisikan sebagai wali ilahi yang bertanggung jawab untuk menjaga keseimbangan dan keberlanjutan ekologis. Kedua, alam dikonseptualisasikan sebagai ayat kawniyyah, tanda-tanda kosmik yang menumbuhkan kesadaran spiritual dan tanggung jawab etis. Ketiga, perusakan lingkungan ditafsirkan sebagai pelanggaran moral yang memerlukan akuntabilitas dan konsekuensi ilahi. Studi ini menyumbangkan kerangka kerja kesalehan ekologis berbasis tafsir yang memperkaya etika lingkungan Islam dan wacana ekoteologis kontemporer. Ini merekomendasikan penelitian empiris lebih lanjut untuk mengeksplorasi penerapan kerangka kerja ini dalam pendidikan Islam dan pembuatan kebijakan lingkungan.

Kata Kunci: *Ekoteologi dalam Islam, Penafsiran Al-Qur'an, Etika lingkungan, Tanggung jawab ekologis*

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary environmental crisis has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges facing modern society, affecting ecological stability, human well-being, and long-term sustainability. This crisis is not merely a technical or scientific problem but a moral and ethical one, rooted in the ways humans conceptualize and interact with nature. Environmental degradation has intensified globally as a consequence of exploitative development models that prioritize economic growth over ecological balance. Empirical evidence indicates that many ecosystems have exceeded their natural capacity for self-regulation and regeneration, resulting in long-term ecological instability (Ratnasari & Chodijah, 2020; Dinilhaq & Azhar, 2024). Such degradation has profound social implications, including increased vulnerability to disasters, declining quality of life, and intergenerational injustice. Consequently, addressing environmental issues requires more than regulatory or technological solutions; it demands ethical frameworks capable of reshaping human attitudes and behaviors toward nature. Religious and cultural worldviews, particularly those deeply embedded in society, play a crucial role in shaping environmental ethics. In this regard, Islamic theological perspectives offer a significant moral resource for fostering responsible environmental stewardship.

Despite growing awareness of environmental issues, ecological degradation continues to escalate, particularly in developing countries where environmental governance remains weak. Indonesia represents a critical case, as environmental damage has reached alarming levels and continues to expand in scale and intensity (Ratnasari & Chodijah, 2020). Various studies confirm that deforestation, pollution, land degradation, and biodiversity loss have surpassed the natural resilience of ecosystems, contributing to both local and global environmental instability (Dinilhaq & Azhar, 2024). Although environmental destruction may originate from natural processes, contemporary research increasingly highlights the dominant role of human activities in intensifying ecological crises (Ramadhan et al., 2024). These conditions indicate a systemic

failure to integrate ethical considerations into environmental management. Within Muslim societies, this failure is often linked to the limited internalization of religious values in ecological behavior. As a result, religious teachings that emphasize moral responsibility toward nature remain largely normative and symbolic, rather than transformative in practice.

Environmental degradation manifests in diverse and interconnected forms, ranging from localized ecological damage to global environmental threats. In Indonesia, environmental problems include air and water pollution, soil erosion, landslides, floods, and forest fires, alongside broader challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss (Hasrul et al., 2024). Marine ecosystems have suffered severe damage due to destructive fishing practices, particularly the use of explosives that destroy coral reefs and threaten aquatic species. These phenomena demonstrate that environmental degradation is no longer incidental but systemic, resulting from unsustainable human–nature interactions. Research further indicates that disasters such as floods and landslides are rarely purely natural events, as they are frequently intensified by deforestation, land conversion, and extractive economic activities (Ramadhan et al., 2024). Notably, human-induced environmental damage has been shown to exceed the impacts of natural disasters due to its cumulative and continuous nature (Oktora et al., 2023). These realities underscore the urgent need for ethical intervention in environmental governance.

Among various drivers of environmental degradation, mining activities represent one of the most destructive sectors. Numerous studies document that mining operations cause land degradation, soil compaction, erosion, landslides, biodiversity loss, health risks, and microclimatic changes (Marlina & Furqan, 2024; Agussalim et al., 2023). In Indonesia, mining expansion has been reinforced by recent policy developments, particularly Government Regulation (PP) No. 25 of 2024, which grants mining permits to religious mass organizations. Major Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah have accepted these permits, marking a significant shift in the role of religious institutions (Magfur et al., 2024; Putri et al., 2024). Existing studies largely focus on the legal, economic, and political implications of this policy, while ethical and theological dimensions remain underexplored. This gap is critical, as religious organizations possess significant moral authority that can either mitigate or exacerbate environmental harm.

Parallel to structural and policy challenges, environmental degradation is exacerbated by persistently low levels of environmental literacy, particularly among students. Previous research indicates that limited motivation, inadequate environmental education, and weak social support systems contribute to poor ecological awareness (Septiyani et al., 2022; Akmalia et al., 2023; Indrawan et al., 2022). Students often experience moral dissonance when environmental values taught in schools contradict environmentally harmful practices observed in their surroundings. Negative behaviors such as littering are more readily emulated

than positive environmental actions (Patrisiana et al., 2020; Supriyanto, 2020). Recent studies highlight the need for integrative educational programs to strengthen environmental literacy (Safitri et al., 2024; Safitri & Habibi, 2024). However, most existing research treats environmental education as a technical or behavioral issue, rather than a theological or ethical one. Consequently, the potential of religious teachings to cultivate ecological piety remains insufficiently theorized.

This study addresses these limitations by positioning ecological piety as a theological and ethical framework grounded in Qur'anic exegesis. Unlike previous studies that emphasize policy analysis, environmental education, or secular ethics, this research focuses on how ecological values are articulated within classical and contemporary tafsir. The novelty of this study lies in its effort to synthesize ecotheological principles directly from Qur'anic interpretations, thereby bridging the gap between faith and environmental responsibility. By conceptualizing ecological piety as an integral expression of belief rather than a peripheral moral concern, this study advances the state of the art in Islamic environmental ethics. Such an approach is particularly important in contexts where religious institutions and actors play an active role in environmental governance, including extractive industries.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study is guided by the argument that environmental degradation within Muslim societies is not merely a consequence of weak regulation or technical limitations but reflects a deeper ethical and theological deficit. The central research problem concerns how Qur'anic ecological values are interpreted within tafsir literature and how these interpretations can form a coherent framework of ecological piety. This study argues that Qur'anic exegesis offers a robust moral foundation that positions humans as responsible stewards, emphasizes the sacredness of nature, and affirms accountability for environmental harm. By articulating these principles, the study provides a normative theological response to contemporary environmental challenges.

Accordingly, this research seeks to examine and formulate ecotheological concepts in the Qur'an through a systematic analysis of tafsir literature. The study contributes theoretically by developing a tafsir-based framework of ecological piety that enriches Islamic environmental ethics. Practically, it offers a moral reference for religious institutions, educators, and policymakers engaged in environmental management. By strengthening the conceptual linkage between faith, ecological responsibility, and sustainable governance, this study aims to demonstrate that Islamic theology can function as a transformative force in addressing contemporary environmental crises.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in library-based research. This design is selected because the study aims to explore and

conceptualize Qur'anic ecotheology through textual analysis rather than to examine empirical phenomena. A qualitative approach allows for an in-depth interpretation of theological meanings and ethical principles embedded in Qur'anic verses as articulated within classical and contemporary *tafsir* literature. Library-based research is particularly appropriate for studies in Islamic theology, where authoritative knowledge is primarily derived from canonical texts and scholarly interpretations.

Data are collected through a systematic review of relevant literature. Primary sources consist of classical and contemporary Qur'anic exegeses (*tafsir*) that discuss themes related to environmental responsibility, human stewardship, and moral accountability (Matos et al., 2023; Susilawati et al., 2025). Secondary sources include scholarly books and peer-reviewed journal articles addressing Islamic theology, environmental ethics, and sustainability. The literature search is conducted using academic databases such as Google Scholar, as well as journals indexed in SINTA and Scopus, to ensure the academic credibility, relevance, and quality of the sources. Sources are selected based on thematic relevance and scholarly rigor.

The collected data are analyzed using a descriptive-analytical and thematic approach. Relevant Qur'anic verses concerning environmental responsibility are first identified and categorized. These verses are then examined through exegetical interpretations found in selected *tafsir* works to uncover their theological meanings and ethical implications (Paul & Bahrari, 2022; Jahani et al., 2023). The analysis focuses on key ecotheological concepts, including human stewardship (*khalifah*), environmental preservation, and moral accountability. Through this analytical process, recurring themes are synthesized to construct a coherent conceptual framework of ecological piety that integrates Qur'anic theology with Islamic environmental ethics.

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation is applied by comparing interpretations across multiple classical and contemporary *tafsir* works and relevant secondary literature. The use of peer-reviewed and indexed academic sources further enhances data reliability, while the application of consistent analytical criteria across all texts helps minimize subjective bias and strengthen the credibility of the study (Chetwynd, 2022; van Haastrecht et al., 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A Muslim is required to develop environmental awareness that entails refraining from acts of destruction, pollution, and contamination, as well as fostering intergenerational solidarity in the utilization of natural resources (Limbong et al., 2023). In general terms, ecological piety may be understood as an ethical disposition that emphasizes the protection, restoration, management, and responsible use of the environment in order to sustain human life and the surrounding ecosystem. Such an orientation not only ensures environmental

continuity but also supports spiritual well-being and facilitates the performance of religious devotion, while contributing to the realization of a more sustainable future (Chasanah, 2022).

Based on this framework, the following discussion outlines the core principles of ecotheological verses in the Qur'an as interpreted through the perspective of tafsir.

Humans as Khalifah on Earth and the Heirs of Nature

The foundations of Islamic environmental jurisprudence were articulated comprehensively by Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi in his work *Ri'ayat al-Bi'ah fi Shari'at al-Islam*, translated into Indonesian as Islam: A Religion Friendly to the Environment. This work elaborates the principles of environmental conservation within Islamic teachings (Mufid et al., 2023; Bsoul et al., 2022). Islam conceptualizes human existence through a dual perspective. On one hand, humans are regarded as representatives of God on earth who possess agency and active responsibility. On the other hand, they are servants of God whose submission implies humility and ethical restraint. When this dual concept is understood in a fragmented manner, it often results in an anarchic interpretation of human vicegerency, in which domination and exploitation of nature are justified solely in the name of human authority. As a consequence, nature is subjected to excessive exploitation beyond its carrying capacity, particularly when humans no longer perceive themselves as '*abd Allah*, or servants of God (Andini, 2021).

For this reason, a holistic understanding of the concept of khalifah is essential. The Qur'an states:

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلِكَةِ لِيُّنَجِّعِنَّ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً قَالُوا أَجْعَلُنَّ فِيهَا مَنْ يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِلُ الدِّمَاءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسْتَعِنُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ
لَكَ قَالَ لِيُّنَجِّعِنَّ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

"Remember when your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed, I will place a vicegerent on earth.' They said, 'Will You place therein one who causes corruption and sheds blood, while we glorify You with praise and sanctify You?' He said, 'Indeed, I know what you do not know.'" (Qur'an 2:30)

The ecological message of this verse lies in the declaration that God appoints a khalifah on earth. The key term khalifah linguistically refers to one who comes after, replaces, or succeeds another (Fahimah & Lestari, 2023). Terminologically, however, it carries a functional meaning, namely a being entrusted with responsibility by a mandate-giver, who in this context is God Himself (Al-Fatih et al., 2023). Thus, humans as khalifah are not sovereign rulers over the earth but divine trustees charged with preserving, managing, and cultivating the earth responsibly (Andini, 2021).

Saniyah and Mustapa interprets moral corruption as a condition in which individuals fail to employ reason to cultivate faith and devotion to God. Instead,

they exhibit arrogance and destructive tendencies toward the earth, exemplified by figures such as Qarun in the era of Pharaoh (Saniyah, 2025; Mustapa et al., 2024). In his commentary on Qur'an 2:30, emphasizes that humanity was elevated to the position of khalifah for the purpose of organizing the earth, while simultaneously being endowed with intellect to explore and understand divine knowledge (Andri Nirwana et al., 2024) (Tarman et al., 2024).

Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, as cited by Quraish Shihab, further elaborates that the concept of khalifah in this verse comprises three interrelated elements, complemented by a decisive fourth element external to the human–nature relationship (Shihab, 2021). The first element is the human being, designated as khalifah. The second is the universe, represented by the earth (*al-ard*). The third is the relational responsibility between humans and nature, known as *istikhlaf*, which encompasses the duties of vicegerency (Nirwana et al., 2024). The fourth element is God Himself, the One who assigns the mandate, as indicated in verses such as Qur'an 38:26. Since God is the source of authority, the actions of the vicegerent must conform to divine will (Thabari, 2009).

These four elements collectively indicate that the concept of khalifah inherently includes the obligation to manage and utilize the earth and its resources as a means of cultivating piety and obedience to God (Andini, 2021). In the context of the contemporary environmental crisis, which has reached an alarming and acute stage, Islam as a religion grounded in ethics and moral responsibility plays a significant role in responding to global ecological discourse (Limbong et al., 2023). Mustafa Abu Sway asserts that environmental protection grounded in piety constitutes an obligation for every Muslim and represents a fundamental objective for the realization of Islamic law (Chasanah, 2022).

In discussing ecological piety, particular attention must be given to the Qur'anic message concerning the inheritance of the earth, which is explicitly reserved for the righteous. The Qur'an declares:

وَلَقَدْ كَتَبْنَا فِي الزَّبُورِ مِنْ بَعْدِ الذِّكْرِ أَنَّ الْأَرْضَ يَرِثُهَا عِبَادِي الصَّلِحُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

"And We have written in the Psalms, after the Reminder, that the earth shall be inherited by My righteous servants." (Qur'an 21:105)

The central message of this verse lies in the assertion that the earth is inherited by Allah righteous servants. Some exegetes interpret *al-ard* as the land of Paradise, thereby framing the verse as an eschatological promise of the afterlife (Mappanyompa et al., 2023). Other scholars, however, interpret it as referring to the planet earth, implying that the promise applies within worldly life. Under this interpretation, the right to inhabit and utilize the earth is contingent upon moral righteousness.

Linguistically, the term *salih* denotes qualities such as goodness, correctness, integrity, competence, virtue, and beneficial conduct (Mainiyo & Sule, 2023). The verse thus conveys that worldly inheritance has been divinely

decreed for those who embody ethical integrity, competence, and harmonious coexistence with nature. This divine decree is portrayed as primordial, recorded in sacred scripture, and binding upon the prophetic mission itself (Mappanyompa et al., 2023).

Accordingly, ecological management grounded in piety is characterized by balance and moderation. Such equilibrium ensures the realization of public welfare not only for present and future human generations but also for all forms of creation. Ecological piety, therefore, represents a comprehensive ethical framework that integrates faith, moral responsibility, and environmental sustainability within the Islamic worldview (Muhammad, 2023).

Nature as a Sign of Divine Majesty and a Means of Strengthening Faith

Any discussion of faith in Islam is inseparable from belief in the Oneness of God, namely Allah SWT. To cultivate this belief, the Qur'an repeatedly invites human beings to reflect upon the *ayat kawniyyah*, the cosmic signs spread throughout the universe. These signs include the vastness of the seas and oceans, the innumerable species of animals, and even the intricate systems within the human body, such as blood circulation, DNA, and the brain. All of these phenomena function as tangible evidence of Allah absolute power and wisdom. The Qur'an states:

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَّهُ مِنْ خَلْقٍ سَمَوَاتٌ وَالْأَرْضُ وَسَمَوَاتُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْقَمَرُ لَمْ يَقُولُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ فَالَّذِي يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

"If you were to ask them who created the heavens and the earth and subjected the sun and the moon, they would surely say, 'Allah.' How, then, are they turned away?" (Qur'an 29:61)

The central message of this verse lies in its rhetorical question concerning the Creator of the natural environment. The answer is unequivocal, namely Allah. The rhetorical style employed in this verse signifies that the truth conveyed by the divine message is indisputable. The audience implicitly acknowledges this truth and cannot deny that Allah is the sole Creator who has fashioned the universe in an orderly and harmonious manner (Shihab, 2021). This harmony and balance in nature serve as a moral signal for humanity to preserve and protect the environment so that it does not fall into degradation, pollution, or extinction (Muhammad, 2022).

Fundamentally, the theological basis for environmental preservation is rooted in the core objectives of human life in Islam, particularly the preservation of religion (*hifz al-din*). The environment thus becomes a central element in the construction of a religious and ethical social order. Faith in the Creator is initiated through contemplation and recognition of the natural world as His creation (M. Q. Shihab, 2023). Consequently, acts of environmental destruction constitute a form of denial of God. Within the terminology of *tawhid*, such denial may be described as *kufr*, while in an ecological context it can be understood as ecological

disbelief or ecological kufr. Conversely, environmental conservation represents a public good (*maṣlahah*) and serves as a concrete manifestation of faith. Individuals who engage in environmental stewardship may therefore be regarded as true believers.

In this sense, faith cannot be considered complete without a commitment to environmental care. This principle is grounded in the Qur'anic affirmation:

فَلَئِنْ هُنَّ عَلَيْهِمْ بِعْلَمٌ وَنَا كُنَّا عَلَيْهِنَّ بِغَيْرِهِمْ ﴿٧﴾

“Then We shall surely recount to them with knowledge, and We were never absent.” (Qur'an 7:85)

This verse may be understood as conveying a conditional moral structure, implying that genuine faith necessitates ethical responsibility, including the obligation to refrain from causing environmental harm. Accordingly, concern for the environment constitutes one of the conditions for the realization of authentic faith (Q. Shihab, 2021)(A. Muhammad, 2022). In other words, environmental responsibility is an integral component of belief, which may be expressed through the formulation *islah al-bi'ah min al-iman*, meaning that environmental restoration and preservation form part of faith. This concept parallels the well-known prophetic maxim *al-nazafah min al-iman*, which emphasizes cleanliness as an expression of faith (Agustina, 2021).

As a theological implication of this perspective, a foundational principle of Islamic environmental law can be articulated, namely that environmental preservation is a religious obligation (*fard 'ayn*). This means that every individual who is morally and legally accountable under Islamic law bears a personal duty to protect and sustain the environment as part of the broader obligation to safeguard religion itself (Agustina, 2021). Such preservation extends beyond the maintenance of doctrinal belief alone. It encompasses the practical enactment of religious duties, including the pillars of Islam, all of which require a healthy and sustainable environment. In this regard, environmental protection is not merely an ethical recommendation but a compulsory act aimed at preserving religion in its comprehensive sense (Mappanyompa et al., 2023).

The Prohibition of Environmental Destruction

In numerous Qur'anic passages, God repeatedly commands human beings to observe, examine, and reflect upon the natural world so that its resources may be utilized in ways that support the continuity of human life. At the same time, the Qur'an consistently warns against acts of destruction in the process of exploiting these resources. This ethical balance between utilization and preservation reflects the Qur'anic vision of responsible stewardship. Allah states:

وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا وَادْعُوهُ خَوْفًا وَطَمْعًا إِنَّ رَحْمَةَ اللَّهِ فَيْنَبَتُ مِنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٥٦﴾

“Do not cause corruption on the earth after it has been set in order. Call upon Him in fear and hope. Indeed, the mercy of Allah is near to those who do good.”
(Qur'an 7:56)

The prohibition articulated in this verse is expressed through the phrase *la tufsidu fi al-ard ba'da islahiha*, which explicitly forbids human beings from inflicting damage upon the earth after God has established it in a state of balance and harmony (Mappanyompa et al., 2023). A similar prohibition appears again in the same chapter, namely in Qur'an 7:85, within the discourse of Prophet Shu'ayb addressed to the people of Madyan. In that context, they are commanded to worship Allah, to give full measure and weight, and to refrain from spreading corruption on the earth (M. T. Muhammad, 2020). This repetition underscores the centrality of environmental integrity within the broader framework of moral and social justice in the Qur'an.

According to al-Raghib al-Asfahani, *fasad* denotes the condition in which something deviates from its proper balance, regardless of whether the deviation is minor or severe. He defines it as the departure of a thing from moderation and equilibrium (*khuruj al-shay' 'an al-i'tidal, qalilan kana al-khuruj 'anhu aw kathiran*). The conceptual opposite of *fasad* is *salah*, which signifies goodness, balance, and harmony (Al-Ashfahani, 2017). From this perspective, environmental degradation represents a disruption of the divinely instituted equilibrium of the natural world.

An examination of the Qur'anic usage of the term *al-fasad* reveals that it predominantly carries theological and moral connotations, such as associating partners with God or following base desires. However, the term is also applicable to tangible and physical forms of destruction. This broader interpretation is articulated by Ibn 'Ashur, who argues that causing damage to any part of the earth effectively constitutes damage to the earth as a whole (*al-ifṣad fi kull juz' min al-ard huwa ifṣad li majmu' al-ard*) (Akram et al., 2024; Yar et al., 2023). Such reasoning reflects an ecological understanding that recognizes the interconnectedness of natural systems, whereby harm to one component inevitably affects the entire environment.

A similar view is expressed by al-Razi, who maintains that the Qur'anic prohibition of corruption is general in scope and encompasses all actions that generate harm. This includes harm to life, intellect, lineage, property, and religion, all of which are categorically forbidden (Amin et al., 2024; Saniyah, 2025). From the perspective of Islamic legal theory, any act that produces harm is deemed unlawful. This principle is reinforced by the well-established legal maxim that the original ruling of a prohibition is that it denotes unlawfulness. Consequently, all forms of environmental destruction, regardless of their scale or manifestation, are considered religiously forbidden and morally impermissible (Halim et al., 2024).

Divine Punishment for Those Who Destroy the Environment

In the contemporary Indonesian context, environmental destruction often unfolds within a condition of legal and political banality, in which state authorities, lawmakers, and law enforcement institutions fail to exercise their normative responsibilities effectively (Slamet, 2024). This condition is evident in numerous cases of illegal mining and environmental exploitation that involve not only private actors but also individuals affiliated with forestry agencies, customs authorities, the police, the military, local governments, prosecutors, courts, and political elites. Hundreds of environmental degradation cases resulting from destructive human activities have been documented across various regions of Indonesia (Trihastuti et al., 2024). Tragically, the most severe consequences are borne by marginalized communities, as thousands of lives are lost and trillions of rupiah in property, including homes and agricultural land, are destroyed (Beni, 2024).

Despite the existence of environmental regulations and the threat of legal sanctions, destructive behavior toward nature continues unabated (Beni, 2024). This persistence can be attributed to several factors, including the perpetrators' ability to manipulate facts, weaknesses in law enforcement institutions in applying statutory provisions, and the absence of deterrent effects in judicial punishments (Trihastuti et al., 2024). These realities demonstrate the limitations of positive law in addressing environmental crimes and highlight the need for a stronger moral and theological framework.

From the perspective of Islamic law, sanctions for environmental crimes fall within the category of *ta'zir* punishments (Taymiyyah, 1961). This classification arises because the Qur'an and the Sunnah do not explicitly stipulate fixed penalties for environmental offenses. Consequently, the authority to determine appropriate sanctions rests with the governing authority (*uli al-amr*), who is responsible for safeguarding public welfare and preventing harm (Trihastuti et al., 2024).

When assessed in terms of their impact, environmental crimes may be comparable to, or even more destructive than, crimes classified as *hirabah*. The Qur'an states:

إِنَّمَا حَرَّقُوا الَّذِينَ يُحَارِبُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَسَعَوْنَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَسَادُوا أَنْ يُقْتَلُوا أَوْ يُصَلَّبُوا أَوْ تُقْطَعَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَأَرْجُلُهُمْ مِنْ خَلْفِ أَوْ نِفْرَا مِنَ الْأَرْضِ ذَلِكَ كُلُّمَا كُلُّمَ حُزْنٌ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَكُلُّمَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ

"The recompense of those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger and strive to spread corruption on earth is execution, crucifixion, the cutting off of hands and feet on opposite sides, or exile from the land. Such is their disgrace in this world, and in the Hereafter they will suffer a great punishment." (Qur'an 5:33)

According to Ibn Kathir, the term *hirabah* denotes acts of violent resistance and hostility. Consequently, crimes such as armed robbery, banditry, and

terrorism fall within this category. The term *ifṣad*, on the other hand, encompasses all actions that cause destruction and disrupt peace on earth (Katsîr, 1999). A similar interpretation is offered by Muhammad Husayn Tabatabâ'i in *Tafsîr al-Mîzân*, where *hirâbâh* is understood both literally and metaphorically. It refers not only to physical acts such as killing, robbery, and terror, but also to non-physical forms of rebellion, including ingratitude toward divine blessings and disbelief in God. Meanwhile, *ifṣad* signifies acts of injustice on earth, such as the unlawful appropriation of property or territory belonging to others (Thâbâ'i, 1991).

Based on these interpretations, *hirâbâh* can be understood as a form of major crime (*al-sâriqah al-kubrâ*), as defined in classical Islamic jurisprudence. However, such crimes should not be narrowly restricted to acts of robbery or armed rebellion. Rather, their scope may be expanded in accordance with evolving forms of criminal behavior across different historical contexts (Nugroho et al., 2023). What is essential is that crimes subject to the ruling of *hirâbâh* contain two fundamental elements: waging war against God and His Messenger, and spreading corruption on earth (Muhammad, 2023).

Exegetes emphasize that, in accordance with Arabic rhetorical conventions, waging war against God and His Messenger signifies aggression against innocent people and those whom God has honored (Ranieri, 2022). When applied to environmental crimes such as illegal fishing, environmental corruption, large-scale mining, and other forms of ecological destruction, these acts may be understood as a form of warfare against the livelihood and future of millions of innocent individuals (Trihastuti et al., 2024). Likewise, environmental crimes clearly fall under the category of spreading corruption on earth, as they result in tangible ecological damage and generate large-scale disasters that threaten the lives of vast populations (Nur et al., 2025).

If acts of environmental destruction produce catastrophic consequences, such as massive mining operations that trigger floods, landslides, earthquakes, or other disasters, the most severe form of *ta'zîr* punishment, including capital punishment, may be imposed. This is justified not only by the immense economic losses incurred, but also by the irreversible damage to forests and ecosystems, which ultimately endangers human life across both present and future generations (Nur et al., 2025). Allah states:

مِنْ أَجْلِ ذَلِكَ كَتَبْنَا عَلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَنَّ مَنْ قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِعَنْ تَفْسِيرِ أَوْ فَسادٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَكَانَتْ قَتْلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَانَتْ أَخْبَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا

“For this reason, We decreed for the Children of Israel that whoever kills a person unjustly, not in retaliation for murder or for spreading corruption on earth, it is as though he has killed all humankind. And whoever saves a life, it is as though he has saved all humankind.” (Qur'an 5:32)

This verse affirms that the unjust taking of a single life is equivalent to the killing of all humanity. Conversely, the lawful taking of life in response to severe corruption on earth may be justified for the preservation of collective human life. In this sense, the application of capital punishment for the gravest forms of environmental crime is oriented toward the realization of public welfare (*maṣlahah ‘ammah*) and the protection of human existence as a whole (Natsir et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that Qur'anic ecotheology provides a comprehensive spiritual and ethical foundation for fostering a harmonious relationship between humans and the natural environment. The central lesson derived from this research is that ecological responsibility is not an auxiliary moral concern but an intrinsic expression of faith rooted in the Qur'anic vision of humans as *khalifah fi al-ard*. Through the analysis of *tafsir* literature, the study synthesizes four core principles of ecological piety: human stewardship of the earth, the recognition of nature as divine signs (*ayat kawniyyah*), the explicit prohibition of environmental destruction, and the affirmation of divine accountability for ecological harm. These principles underscore that environmental degradation constitutes a moral and spiritual transgression, while environmental care reflects religious commitment and ethical consciousness.

In terms of scholarly contribution, this study advances Islamic environmental ethics by offering a *tafsir*-based conceptual framework of ecological piety that bridges theology, ethics, and sustainability discourse. By grounding ecological responsibility directly in Qur'anic exegesis, the research enriches ecotheological studies and provides a normative reference for religious institutions, education, and faith-based environmental governance. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its textual and conceptual focus, as it does not examine the empirical implementation of ecological piety in social or institutional practices. Future research is therefore encouraged to explore how this framework can be operationalized in Islamic education, religious organizations, and environmental policymaking, as well as to undertake comparative and empirical studies that assess its practical impact in diverse socio-ecological contexts.

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