

Qur'anic Ecotheology and the Ethics of Forest Protection in Indonesia

Ekoteologi al-Qur'an dan Prinsip Etis dalam Upaya Perlindungan Hutan di Indonesia

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Abstract

Indonesia's alarming rate of forest degradation, amounting to approximately 1.45 million hectares lost in the past five years, has far-reaching ecological, climatic, and socio-cultural consequences. Beyond the environmental dimension, this crisis raises profound theological concerns, especially within the Islamic worldview, which frames human beings as *khalifah* (stewards) entrusted with preserving the Earth. The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of ecological balance (*mizān*) and explicitly condemns destruction (*fasād*) on Earth, suggesting that environmental care is a moral and spiritual obligation. This study explores the relevance of Islamic Eco theological principles to Indonesia's Law No. 18 of 2013 on the Prevention and Eradication of Forest Destruction. Using a hermeneutic analysis of selected Qur'anic verses (Al-Baqarah [2]:164, Al-A'raf [7]:56, and Al-Ahzab [33]:72), combined with comparative legal analysis, the research highlights the alignment between religious ethics and statutory forest protection. While the law reflects procedural strength, it lacks integration with deeper Eco theological values that could inspire stronger public commitment. It is understandable that legal frameworks often rely on institutional enforcement, yet in religious societies such as Indonesia, faith-based approaches can enhance policy legitimacy and moral motivation. This study argues for the integration of Qur'anic values, such as stewardship, moderation, and accountability, into environmental education and legal application. Doing so may transform forest conservation from a mere regulatory task into an act of spiritual devotion and collective responsibility. Further empirical research is needed to examine how such integration plays out in practice within local communities, offering valuable insights for more holistic and culturally grounded environmental governance.

Keyword: *Environmental Theology, Qur'an, Deforestation, Law No. 18 of 2013, Ecological Ethics.*

Abstrak

Laju degradasi hutan di Indonesia terus meningkat secara mengkhawatirkan, dengan kehilangan sekitar 1,45 juta hektare hutan dalam lima tahun terakhir. Dampaknya tidak hanya mencakup kerusakan ekosistem dan ketidakstabilan iklim, tetapi juga mengancam kehidupan sosial-ekonomi serta warisan budaya masyarakat, terutama komunitas adat yang bergantung pada ekosistem hutan. Dalam perspektif Islam, krisis ini bukan sekadar isu lingkungan, tetapi juga menyentuh aspek teologis yang mendalam. Al-Qur'an memposisikan manusia sebagai *khalifah* (wakil Tuhan di bumi) yang diberi amanah untuk menjaga keseimbangan ekologis (*mizān*) dan mencegah kerusakan (*fasād*). Studi ini mengkaji relevansi prinsip-prinsip ekoteologi Islam terhadap Undang-Undang No. 18 Tahun



2013 tentang Pencegahan dan Pemberantasan Perusakan Hutan. Melalui pendekatan hermeneutika terhadap ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an pilihan (Al-Baqarah [2]:164, Al-A'raf [7]:56, dan Al-Ahzab [33]:72), serta analisis hukum perbandingan, penelitian ini menemukan titik temu antara nilai-nilai etika keagamaan dan kerangka hukum positif dalam perlindungan hutan. Meskipun UU 18/2013 memiliki kekuatan normatif dan sanksi hukum, penerapannya masih belum sepenuhnya menginternalisasi nilai-nilai ekoteologis yang dapat mendorong keterlibatan moral masyarakat secara lebih mendalam. Dapat dipahami bahwa sistem hukum cenderung berfokus pada aspek kelembagaan dan penegakan aturan. Namun, dalam konteks masyarakat beragama seperti Indonesia, pendekatan berbasis nilai keagamaan justru dapat memperkuat legitimasi dan efektivitas kebijakan lingkungan. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan integrasi nilai-nilai Al-Qur'an, seperti tanggung jawab, keseimbangan, dan amanah, ke dalam pendidikan lingkungan dan pelaksanaan kebijakan kehutanan. Dengan demikian, konservasi hutan tidak hanya menjadi kewajiban legal, tetapi juga bagian dari ibadah dan tanggung jawab spiritual kolektif. Studi lanjutan diperlukan untuk mengeksplorasi secara empiris bagaimana integrasi ini dijalankan oleh komunitas lokal, demi mewujudkan tata kelola lingkungan yang lebih holistik dan kontekstual.

Kata Kunci: Teologi Lingkungan, Al-Qur'an, Kerusakan Hutan, UU No. 18 Tahun 2013, Etika Ekologis.

Introduction

Environmental degradation in forested regions has become an urgent global concern, especially for Indonesia, which is home to the world's third-largest expanse of tropical rainforest. According to data from Global Forest Watch, Indonesia has lost approximately 1.45 million hectares of primary forest in just the past five years. This level of deforestation presents serious risks, not only to ecological stability, including biodiversity loss and greater climate unpredictability, but also to the cultural, social, and economic wellbeing of Indigenous communities whose lives are closely bound to forest ecosystems.¹ While awareness of this crisis has grown among scholars, civil society organizations, and environmental advocates, destructive practices such as illegal logging continue. These activities are driven by complex factors, including strong economic pressures, a general lack of public understanding of environmental issues, and insufficient institutional enforcement, challenges that are further complicated by compromised integrity within some segments of law enforcement.² In response to this reality, Islamic theological principles, as articulated in the Qur'an, offer a moral framework that affirms humanity's role as *khalifah* (stewards of the Earth), prohibits *fasād* (acts of corruption and destruction), and calls for the maintenance of *mīzān* (ecological balance).

1 Global Forest Watch, "Kehilangan Hutan Tetap Tinggi di Tahun 2021," Global Forest Watch Content, April 28, 2022, <https://research.wri.org/gfw/latest-analysis-deforestation-trends>.

2 WALHI, *Laporan Kondisi Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia 2022* (Jakarta: Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia, 2022).

From the perspective of Indonesia's positive legal system, particularly Law No. 18 of 2013 on the Prevention and Eradication of Forest Destruction, the prevailing approach has centered largely on punitive measures. The law emphasizes criminal sanctions for environmental violations but pays relatively little attention to the ethical and spiritual dimensions emphasized in Islamic teachings, which advocate for prevention, ethical stewardship, and moral responsibility.³ This disconnect raises an important scholarly question: how can the theological principles of Islamic environmental thought be translated into practical frameworks that inform both public participation and policymaking? Addressing this question remains a vital area for future research. Indonesia's legal response to accelerating deforestation, including the passage of Law No. 18/2013 and its subsequent amendment through the Omnibus Law on Job Creation, signals a formal commitment to curbing environmental harm. These regulations target both individual actors and corporate offenders through legal penalties. Yet their effectiveness in practice has been limited, hampered by inconsistent enforcement and a general lack of public legal awareness. In light of these challenges, there is a compelling need to move toward a more integrative legal model, one that moves beyond strict formalism and embraces ethical guidance drawn from religious traditions. Islamic ecotheology offers a valuable conceptual framework. It envisions humans as *khalifah* (guardians of the Earth), bearing the responsibility to preserve *mīzān* (balance) and to avoid *fasād* (corruption or destruction), as highlighted in Surah Al-Baqarah [2]:30. When reinterpreted in the context of today's ecological crisis, these scriptural principles can provide both the moral foundation and legal rationale for developing more sustainable and culturally grounded approaches to natural resource management.

While Islamic ecotheology has gained growing scholarly attention in recent decades, its integration with Indonesia's positive legal framework, especially in relation to Law No. 18 of 2013, remains a relatively overlooked area of inquiry. It is understandable, given the complexity of bridging spiritual worldviews with secular legislative systems. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, widely regarded as a foundational figure in Islamic environmental thought, has consistently advocated for a return to a traditional Islamic worldview that sees nature as sacred and assigns to humanity the role of custodian rather than conqueror. For Nasr, conservation efforts that are detached from spiritual and metaphysical foundations risk becoming ethically fragmented and directionless.⁴ Although Nasr does not specifically address the legal

3 Fazlun Khalid, *Islam and Ecology*, ed. Joanne O'Brien (London: UNKNO, 1997), 14; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, 1st edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 23.

4 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, 1st edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 23.

structures unique to Indonesia, his philosophical contributions have nonetheless inspired subsequent thinkers, including Wagiman Manik. Manik has worked to reinterpret Qur'anic ecological verses and construct strategies grounded in Islamic environmental ethics.⁵ Yet his work, while insightful, stops short of exploring how such theological insights might be embedded into national legal instruments like Law No. 18/2013. A similar pattern can be observed in the work of Evra Willy, who addresses environmental concerns through the lens of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), emphasizing *maslahah* (public interest) as a key theological foundation for advancing ecological welfare.⁶ However, Willy too does not examine how this concept could be systematically aligned with Indonesia's existing legal framework.

Building on the foundations laid by earlier scholarship, this study seeks to address environmental challenges through a Qur'anic hermeneutic lens, moving beyond descriptive and normative interpretations toward a more action-oriented and practical methodology. At its core, the research explores selected ecological verses of the Qur'an in relation to broader social and environmental realities, assessing how these sacred texts may inform Indonesia's positive legal framework, particularly Law No. 18 of 2013 on the Prevention and Eradication of Forest Destruction. Recognizing the urgent ecological issues facing the country, the study investigates whether and how Islamic Eco theological values can contribute constructively to the development of state legal responses, offering not just moral direction, but also practical insights into forest conservation policy. To support this aim, an integrative framework is proposed, bringing together Qur'anic exegesis, contemporary hermeneutic theory, and legal policy analysis.

This study adopts a qualitative, normative-interpretive methodology that draws from Islamic ecotheology and legal textual analysis. Central to this approach is a hermeneutic framework that enables a dynamic reading of selected Qur'anic verses, one that is attentive to their original historical contexts while remaining responsive to contemporary ecological challenges.⁷ Within Islamic legal theory, such an approach affirms that *shari'ah* is not static but continually evolves. This orientation is enriched by Jasser Auda's *Maqāsid al-Shari'ah* paradigm, which expands the classical aims of Islamic law beyond safeguarding religion (*hifz al-dīn*) and life (*hifz al-nafs*) to include environmental preservation (*hifz al-bi'ah*), grounded in the public interest

5 Wagiman Manik, "Reinterpretasi Ayat-Ayat Ekologi dalam Al-Qur'an: Perumusan Rencana Aksi Berbasis Konservasi Lingkungan, Masyarakat Cerdas Berkehidupan," *Jurnal Al-Fatih* 6, no. 2 (December 2023): 165–85.

6 Evra Willy, "Etika dan Prinsip Pengelolaan Lingkungan Dalam Perspektif Hukum Islam: Kajian Filosofis, Fenomenologis, Dan Normatif," *I'tisham : Journal of Islamic Law and Economics* 2, no. 1 (2022): 1–18.

7 Jazim Hamidi, *Hermeneutika Hukum: Sejarah, Filsafat, & Metode Tafsir* (Malang: Universitas Brawijaya Press, 2011), 75.

(*maslahah mursalah*).⁸

Methodologically, the study proceeds in three phases. First, it identifies several key Qur'anic passages related to ecological stewardship, including Surah Al-Baqarah [2]:30 and [2]:164, Al-A'rāf [7]:56, and Al-Ahzāb [33]:72. These verses are interpreted through engagement with both classical and contemporary exegetes such as al-Tabarī, al-Tha'labī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Marāghī, Sayyid Qutb, and Quraish Shihab. Second, these interpretations are recontextualized in light of present-day environmental concerns, such as deforestation, biodiversity loss, and climate instability, thereby expanding their normative relevance. Third, the theological insights extracted are examined through a comparative legal lens to assess their alignment with Indonesia's Law No. 18 of 2013 on the Prevention and Eradication of Forest Destruction.

The final stage of analysis involves a qualitative content comparison to uncover points of thematic convergence between Islamic Eco theological values, such as justice (*'adl*), stewardship (*khilāfah*), and ecological balance (*mīzān*), and the principles embedded in the statutory legal framework. Although largely theoretical in orientation, the study incorporates supporting empirical data (e.g., Global Forest Watch and BNPB) to underscore the urgency of the ecological crisis and the need for religious values to inform state policy. In doing so, the research aims to develop a constructive, integrative approach that enhances the relevance of theology in legal implementation, bridging normative principles with practical governance in pursuit of sustainable environmental ethics.

This study adopts a methodological framework that combines hermeneutic and *maqāsidī* approaches, grounded in the belief that both provide powerful analytical tools for deriving deep insights from scriptural texts while evaluating their relevance to contemporary ecological and legal contexts.⁹ By integrating these frameworks, the research aims to construct a conceptual bridge between divine revelation and the normative structures of state law. It addresses three core questions: (1) How is environmental theology in the Qur'an conceptualized in relation to forest conservation? (2) To what extent do these theological principles correspond with the legal standards in Indonesia's Law No. 18 of 2013? (3) How might the integration

8 The hermeneutical approach is also applied in Islamic law, based on the notion that Islamic jurisprudence is dynamic and capable of adapting to changing contexts. This is elaborated by Jasser Auda within the framework of Maqasid al-Shari'ah, which encompasses not only the protection of religion (*hifz al-din*) and life (*hifz al-nafs*), but also the protection of the environment (*hifz al-bi'ah*) as a vital component of human well-being, within the broader principle of *maslahah mursalah*. See Jasser Auda, *Maqasid Al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach* (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008), 27.

9 Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, 83; Auda, *Maqasid Al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law*, 65.

of Islamic environmental theology with positive legal norms enhance public legal awareness and ecological responsibility? These questions are explored through three interconnected areas: Qur'anic conceptions of ecological ethics, legal evaluation of Law No. 18/2013, and a synthesis of theological and legal perspectives to formulate a model of sustainable development that is both ethically grounded and legally actionable.

Qur'anic Environmental Theology on Forest Conservation

The Qur'an consistently emphasizes the profound interrelationship between humanity and the natural world, encompassing the vast cosmos as well as specific ecological systems such as forests. It not only fosters environmental consciousness but also affirms the moral imperative to preserve ecological harmony, an obligation entrusted to human beings in their divinely appointed role as *khalifah* (stewards) of the Earth. This stewardship entails a sacred responsibility (*amānah*) to safeguard and nurture the environment as a trust bestowed by God.

This theological principle is powerfully illustrated in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:164), which declares:

“Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, the alternation of night and day, the ships that sail the sea carrying benefits for people, the rain which Allah sends down from the sky, giving life to the earth after its death, and the diverse creatures He has scattered throughout it, the shifting of the winds, and the clouds suspended between the sky and the earth, are surely signs for those who reason.”

This verse presents a profound cosmological and ethical vision in which the signs of divine wisdom are intricately woven into the natural world. It invites human beings to reflect deeply, assume moral responsibility, and safeguard the environment as part of their spiritual and ethical obligations. Through vivid imagery, spanning the heavens and the earth, rainfall, living creatures, and the movements of wind, it conveys the grandeur of creation as a testament to divine authority. Notably, the reference to rain carries symbolic and ecological significance: it represents a vital force that revives the earth and nourishes interconnected ecosystems. In highlighting this cycle, the verse draws attention to the intricate balance that sustains life, a balance that humanity is called to honor and protect against disruption.

Within this ecological schema, forests occupy an indispensable role. They act as vital regulators of the environment by absorbing rainwater, sequestering carbon dioxide, producing oxygen, and serving as habitats for a wide range of biological species. As such, deforestation poses a direct threat to the ecological integrity described in the verse. The loss of forest cover not only compromises environmental

sustainability but also violates the spiritual and ethical obligation to safeguard the *āyāt*, the divine signs embedded in the natural order, that serve as reminders of God's presence and wisdom.

Al-Marāghī (1883–1952 CE) interprets this verse as an affirmation that the natural elements it references, such as rainfall, vegetation, and wind, are not random phenomena but integral parts of a divinely instituted order, underpinned by wisdom and intentionality. He asserts that these processes reflect God's mercy and generosity toward all forms of life, inviting human beings to engage in thoughtful reflection upon the natural world as a testament to divine benevolence.¹⁰ Al-Marāghī emphasizes that ecological systems are manifestations of a coherent and purposive design, rather than the result of chance. From this perspective, the degradation of forests and plant life constitutes a transgression against divine mercy, as it disturbs the balance and harmony infused in creation. The verse therefore concludes with an implicit moral imperative: urging humanity to contemplate the ecological order with sincerity and to avoid engaging in actions that inflict harm or introduce disorder into the environment.

Consistent with the perspective of al-Marāghī, Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 AH / 1373 CE) interprets this verse as an exhortation for human beings to engage their intellect in contemplating and drawing meaning from the signs of God embedded in the natural world.¹¹ Although Ibn Kathīr's commentary does not delve into the ecological systems and environmental processes highlighted by al-Marāghī, his exegesis nonetheless conveys a profound ethical message: humanity bears a moral and spiritual obligation to protect and preserve creation. While less focused on environmental mechanisms, Ibn Kathīr's interpretation affirms a central Qur'anic principle, that reflection upon nature is not solely an act of cognition, but a spiritual duty intimately connected to human accountability as *khalīfah* (stewards) of the Earth. His emphasis frames environmental stewardship within a broader theological paradigm, positioning it as an expression of moral responsibility and a fulfillment of the divine trust (*amānah*) placed upon humankind.

A foundational principle in Islamic environmental theology is the concept of *khalīfah* (vicegerency or stewardship), which is prominently articulated in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:30). In this verse, God proclaims: "And when your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed, I will appoint a *khalīfah* on the earth.'" This divine designation establishes a core theological framework for understanding humanity's role in relation to the natural world. As *khalīfah*, human beings are not sovereign proprietors of the Earth

10 Ahmad Mustafa al-Marāghī, *Tafsir Al-Marāghī* (Indonesia: PT. Karya Toha Putra, 1993), 381.

11 Ibnu Katsir, *Tafsir Ibnu Katsir* (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2008), 446.

but are divinely entrusted with the responsibility to govern, protect, and sustain it in alignment with God's commands. This mandate encompasses ethical and spiritual dimensions, requiring the exercise of responsible resource management alongside the preservation of ecological balance. Thus, environmental stewardship is not framed as a discretionary moral choice, but rather as an integral expression of humanity's divinely ordained function within the created order.

Imam al-Tabarī (d. 310 AH / 923 CE) interprets the notion of *khalīfah* as a divine commission, assigning humanity the responsibility to govern the Earth with justice and integrity, in accordance with God's will. He views this role as an *amānah* (sacred trust), wherein humans are obligated to implement divine law and prevent the spread of *fasād* (corruption) upon the Earth.¹² Al-Tabarī thus draws a direct connection between spiritual accountability and environmental responsibility. Nevertheless, his exegesis does not explicitly address ecological concerns such as forest preservation, an omission understandable given the historical context in which large-scale environmental degradation had not yet become a pressing issue.

From a hermeneutical standpoint, interpreting the concept of *khalīfah* within an ecological framework requires an interpretive approach that transcends literalism. It necessitates engaging with the verse's historical, social, and purposive dimensions. Hans-Georg Gadamer, in *Truth and Method*, posits that textual understanding is shaped by a dialogical process in which the reader's horizon interacts with the text's historical and linguistic context.¹³ This interpretive fusion enables contemporary readers to rearticulate the meaning of *khalīfah* in light of current environmental crises. Such a reading situates the concept within the discourse of ecological ethics and sustainability, allowing it to serve as a relevant and normative guide for addressing modern environmental challenges.

In line with al-Tabarī's interpretation, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH / 1209 CE) similarly underscores that the verse affirms the elevated status of humanity, while simultaneously highlighting the profound responsibility inherent in the role of *khalīfah*. For al-Rāzī, vicegerency entails not only spiritual accountability but also ecological stewardship, as it involves the duty to safeguard the integrity of God's creation. He emphasizes that the Earth serves as a domain of moral trial, wherein human beings will ultimately be judged based on their treatment of the natural world.¹⁴ Both al-Tabarī and al-Rāzī thus frame the concept of *khalīfah* as a

12 Abu Ja'far Muhammad Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan an Ta'wil al-Qur'an*, (Beirut: Dar Al-Fikr, 1995), 1:233.

13 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: A&C Black, 2013), 9.

14 Fakhruddin Al-Razi, *Tafsir Al-Kabir: Mafatih Al-Ghaib* (Kairo: Dar Al-Hadits, 2012), 335.

dual obligation, encompassing spiritual devotion and environmental responsibility. Nevertheless, their exegetical contributions remain largely normative, articulating theological and ethical mandates without advancing practical frameworks for ecological preservation. While foundational in articulating the moral dimensions of environmental care, their interpretations require further contextualization and methodological development to address the complex realities of contemporary environmental crises.

Drawing on Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework, the interpretation of sacred texts should not be restricted to their historical contexts but must also be re-engaged in light of present-day conditions and urgent global crises.¹⁵ Within this paradigm, the concept of *khalifah* (vicegerency) ought to be reinterpreted as a dynamic and context-sensitive principle, particularly in relation to pressing ecological challenges such as deforestation, climate change, and biodiversity loss. This recontextualization seeks to establish a theologically grounded rationale for Muslim participation in advancing environmental protection efforts, including the implementation of Indonesia's Law No. 18 of 2013 concerning forest conservation.

Forests, as manifestations of divine creation, play essential roles in maintaining ecological stability, they function as carbon sinks, oxygen producers, barriers against soil erosion, and habitats for a vast array of species. The human role as *khalifah* entails the responsibility to preserve these functions in order to ensure long-term environmental sustainability. In this regard, the contemporary exegete Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966) reinforces the active dimension of stewardship, emphasizing that the degradation of the natural environment represents a breach of the *amānah* (sacred trust) bestowed upon humanity by God.¹⁶ His perspective affirms that ecological neglect is not merely a physical failure, but a moral and spiritual transgression against the divine order.

The Qur'anic concept of *amānah* encapsulates a profound moral and spiritual responsibility conferred upon humankind for the guardianship of the natural world. This principle is powerfully expressed in Surah Al-Ahzāb (33:72), wherein God states:

“Indeed, We offered the trust (*amānah*) to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, but they refused to bear it and were apprehensive of it; yet man undertook it. Indeed, he is ever unjust and ignorant.”

This verse accentuates the immense gravity of the trust bestowed upon

15 Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge Eng. ; New York : Paris: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

16 Sayyid Quthub, *Tafsir Fī Zhilāl Al-Qur'ān* (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2000), 1:65.

humanity. The symbolic reluctance of the heavens, earth, and mountains to accept this burden signifies that *amānah* is not a trivial or superficial charge, but a deeply consequential moral obligation that requires ethical integrity, awareness, and accountability. Although the human condition is marked by fallibility, characterized here as unjust and ignorant, are nevertheless designated as the principal bearers of this divine trust. Consequently, they are tasked with upholding the integrity of the Earth, stewarding its ecological systems, and managing its resources with discernment and care. The verse thus frames environmental responsibility as a sacred duty, positioning ecological stewardship at the core of the human-divine relationship.

Ibn Kathīr interprets the *amānah* (trust) referenced in Surah Al-Ahzāb (33:72) as encompassing all divine injunctions and prohibitions, including the duty to protect the environment and refrain from actions that inflict harm upon the Earth. He asserts that in accepting this trust, humanity assumes full accountability for its outcomes. Therefore, acts of environmental neglect, such as deforestation, constitute a breach of this sacred trust entrusted by Allah.¹⁷ Quraish Shihab echoes this interpretation, viewing the verse as a cautionary statement regarding humanity's propensity to misuse its freedom and evade moral responsibility.¹⁸ He further expands the concept of *khalīfah*, interpreting it as an embodiment of *amānah* that extends beyond interpersonal ethics to encompass the human relationship with all components of divine creation, including the natural world.¹⁹ From this interpretive vantage point, human vicegerency entails not only adherence to legal norms but also the fulfilment of ethical and spiritual obligations toward environmental preservation. As such, forest conservation becomes a tangible enactment of the *amānah* articulated in Surah Al-Ahzāb (33:72), representing a form of *keshalehan ekologis* (ecological piety) rooted in theological consciousness and moral responsibility.

Broadly speaking, both classical and contemporary scholars have drawn upon foundational Qur'anic principles to develop an Islamic theology of the environment. Among them, al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī (d. 502 AH / 1108 CE) interprets verses related to the natural world as conveying a profound ethical message: that environmental preservation constitutes an act of gratitude toward Allah for His manifold blessings.²⁰ Al-Isfahānī's interpretation, along with the perspectives of other exegetes discussed previously, opens up a critical hermeneutical space for reengaging the Qur'anic text

17 Ibnu Katsir, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an al-'Azim* (Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah, 2000), 5:703–4.

18 M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2012), 10:112–14.

19 Shihab, 10:107.

20 Abu al-Qasim al-Husain ibn Muhammad ar-Raghib Ashfahani, *Al-Mufradat Fi Gharib al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-ma'rifah, 1995), 21.

in response to contemporary ecological crises. This perspective suggests that forest conservation should not be viewed solely through the lens of legal regulation or administrative policy, but rather as a moral and spiritual imperative that applies to individuals and communities alike. Within this ethical paradigm, environmental stewardship is framed as a form of worship, an expression of *shukr* (thankfulness) toward the Creator, and thus assumes a central role in the believer's relationship with the divine and with the created world.

From Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy, the act of understanding emerges through a dialogical interplay between the text and the interpreter's contemporary context. Applying this approach to Surah Al-Ahzāb (33:72), the concept of *amānah* (trust) gains renewed significance when situated within the current global ecological crisis. Interpreting *amānah* as encompassing ecological responsibility becomes especially salient in the face of challenges such as deforestation, climate change, and the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. Within this interpretive framework, ecological responsibility entails the preservation of environmental balance and the governance of the Earth in accordance with divine mandates. Hermeneutical analysis also reveals that humanity's acceptance of this trust signals an implicit recognition of the imperative to protect and sustain all forms of life. As Gadamer contends, textual understanding is shaped not merely by linguistic content, but by the fusion of the reader's historical horizon with that of the text.²¹ In this light, Surah Al-Ahzāb (33:72) may be read as a profound theological and ethical summons, one that calls upon humanity to regard *amānah* not simply as a legal obligation, but as a deeply moral and spiritual responsibility. This duty must be carried out with integrity, conscientiousness, and a sustained commitment to the preservation and flourishing of the natural world.

This interpretation finds further support in several Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad that underscore the ethical imperative of environmental stewardship. One widely cited narration, transmitted by both al-Bukhārī (d. 256 AH / 870 CE) and Muslim (d. 261 AH / 875 CE), states:

“If a person plants a tree or sows a seed, and a bird, animal, or human consumes from it, it is regarded as an act of charity (*Sadaqah*) for them.” (Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim)²²

21 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

22 Abū Abdillāh Muhammad ibn Isma'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, ed. Mushtafa Dīb al-Bughā, vol. 5 (Damascus: Dar al-Yamāmah, 1993); Abū al-Hussain Muslim ibn al-Hujāj ibn Muslim, *Al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Muhammad Dzahabī Afandī, vol. 4 (Turkiye: Dar al-Ṭabā'ah al-'Āmirah, 1334).

This Hadith highlights the profound spiritual value inherent in even the most modest acts of environmental care, such as the planting of a tree, by framing them as enduring charitable deeds (*Sadaqah jāriyah*) whose rewards persist over time. It reinforces the idea that ecological responsibility transcends normative obligation, serving instead as a concrete manifestation of both social commitment and spiritual devotion. When read alongside Surah Al-Ahzāb (33:72), this prophetic tradition establishes a robust theological basis for regarding environmental stewardship, including forest conservation, as an essential expression of Islamic faith.

Together, these sources affirm that the preservation of the natural environment is not ancillary to belief, but rather a vital enactment of the *amānah* (divine trust) bestowed upon humanity by God. Within this interpretive framework, ecological engagement assumes the character of *ibādah* (worship), grounded in ethical accountability and animated by a deep sense of spiritual awareness. Environmental action, therefore, becomes both a moral imperative and a devotional practice that reflects the believer's sincerity and responsibility before the Creator.

The preceding analysis underscores Islam's aspirational vision of environmental stewardship, particularly with regard to forest preservation. Yet, in practical terms, many Muslim-majority societies, including Indonesia, struggle to actualize this vision. The ongoing deforestation crisis in Indonesia exemplifies a persistent disjuncture between the ethical imperatives articulated in Islamic teachings and their concrete application in the governance of natural resources. This disparity arises from a confluence of factors, including competing economic interests, inadequacies in environmental regulation, and limited public awareness regarding ecological issues.²³

To bridge this gap, there is an urgent need to embed Islamic environmental theology more deeply within both policy structures and everyday social practices. A key strategy involves strengthening public education efforts that foreground forest conservation as a religious and ethical duty, rooted in Islamic conceptions of the sanctity and sustainability of the natural world. By fostering ecological literacy through a theological lens, Muslim communities can develop a more morally grounded and spiritually attuned model of environmental governance, one that aligns with both religious values and the pressing demands of ecological sustainability.²⁴

Furthermore, the integration of Islamic values into forest management can

23 Nia Kurniati and Hisan Mursalin, "Pandangan Islam Terhadap Upaya Pelestarian Lingkungan," *Mauriduna: Journal of Islamic Studies* 4, no. 2 (November 2023): 212–20, <https://doi.org/10.37274/mauriduna.v4i2.842>.

24 Abdul Karim, "Mengembangkan Kesadaran Melestarikan Lingkungan Hidup Berbasis Humanisme Pendidikan Agama," *Edukasia : Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Islam* 12, no. 2 (January 2018): 309, <https://doi.org/10.21043/edukasia.v12i2.2780>.

be practically realized through community-based initiatives that engage Muslim populations in environmental preservation.²⁵ A notable example involves leveraging *zakat* as a financial mechanism to support reforestation and ecological restoration projects. This model reflects the broader Islamic principle of social justice by expanding the traditional scope of *zakat* from poverty alleviation to encompass environmental remediation.²⁶ Within this conceptual framework, *zakat* emerges not only as a socio-economic duty but also as a viable instrument for combating ecological degradation. By allocating religious funds to support environmental objectives, Muslim communities can advance sustainable forest management practices while simultaneously fulfilling their spiritual and ethical obligations.

The Islamic mandate to protect forests finds compelling resonance within Western ecological thought. Notably, Aldo Leopold, in his seminal work *A Sand County Almanac*, articulates the concept of the “land ethic”, a moral framework that urges humans to assume ethical responsibility for the land and its ecological systems. This perspective parallels the Islamic view of environmental stewardship as an *amānah* (trust) bestowed by God, requiring careful guardianship and moral accountability. Leopold contends that humanity must learn to live in harmony with nature, rejecting exploitative attitudes in favour of respectful coexistence.²⁷ Although Leopold’s ethical paradigm is universalist and non-theocentric in orientation, it nonetheless aligns with core Islamic ecological values, particularly the principle of *mīzān* (balance), which calls for the equitable fulfilment of human needs while safeguarding environmental integrity.

The Qur’an provides a coherent theological foundation for environmental and forest conservation, anchored in the principles of *khalifah* (vicegerency), *amānah* (trust), and *mīzān* (balance). These core concepts articulate humanity’s divinely mandated role as stewards of the Earth and emphasize the ethical duty to maintain ecological equilibrium. For such values to exert meaningful influence, they must be systematically incorporated into both environmental policy frameworks and the lived practices of Muslim communities. Upholding these teachings calls for active engagement in environmental protection, particularly forest conservation, not solely as a pragmatic response to ecological crises, but as a manifestation of moral and spiritual commitment. In this context, environmental stewardship is elevated to a

25 Andi Muhammad Shaleh Alwi et al., “Pelestarian Lingkungan Sebagai Implementasi Dakwah Bi Al-Hal Dan Wujud Kesadaran Masyarakat,” preprint, Center for Open Science, August 18, 2020, 8, <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/vf6qm>.

26 Suud Sarim Karimullah, “Konsep Dan Implementasi Zakat Untuk Pelestarian Lingkungan,” *DIRHAM : Jurnal Ekonomi Islam* 6, no. 1 (January 2025): 51–65, <https://doi.org/10.53990/dirham.v6i1.396>.

27 Aldo Leopold and Barbara Kingsolver, *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There*, Illustrated edition (Oxford University Press, 2020), 203–26.

form of religious observance, an expression of faith that reflects accountability to God and concern for the welfare of present and future generations.

Integrating Environmental Theology into Forest Conservation Provisions of Law No. 18 of 2013

In Islamic thought, the human relationship with the natural world is not characterized by domination or exploitation, but is instead grounded in theological principles such as *amānah* (trust), *mas'ūliyyah* (responsibility), and *tawhīd* (the oneness of God). The doctrine of *tawhīd* serves as an ethical foundation, affirming that all elements of creation are integrally linked within a sacred divine order that must be respected, protected, and never subjected to harm or desecration.²⁸ Within this paradigm, environmental preservation transcends ecological and ethical dimensions to become a theological imperative, rooted in divine revelation and spiritual accountability. This theological perspective assumes heightened relevance in the face of escalating environmental degradation in Indonesia, a nation endowed with one of the world's largest expanses of tropical rainforest. The persistent challenges of deforestation, illegal logging, and the encroachment upon protected conservation zones present grave risks to ecological equilibrium and the long-term well-being of future generations.

In response to the ecological crisis stemming from rampant illegal logging and the large-scale conversion of forest land, the Indonesian government enacted Law No. 18 of 2013 concerning the Prevention and Eradication of Forest Destruction. This legislation outlines specific prohibitions and corresponding legal sanctions, while also embodying broader moral and ethical commitments to environmental protection, commitments that resonate deeply with Islamic theological principles. From an Islamic perspective, forests represent a vital component of divine creation and possess intrinsic value that warrants preservation. Environmental stewardship is viewed as an essential element of the *amānah* (trust) conferred upon humanity in its role as *khalifah* (vicegerent), as articulated in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:30). This divinely mandated role encompasses both ethical responsibilities and spiritual accountability. Thus, Law No. 18 of 2013 may be interpreted not solely as a legal response to environmental degradation, but also as a theological and ecological commitment, a manifestation of human dedication to preserving the *mīzān* (balance) and sustainability of God's creation.

Yusuf al-Qaradawi contends that Islam does not dichotomize spiritual values from worldly responsibilities, including those related to ecological well-being. He

²⁸ Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, 5.

asserts that environmental preservation is a fundamental component of *maqāsid al-sharī'ah*, the overarching objectives of Islamic law, which encompass the protection of life (*nafs*), progeny (*nasl*), and property (*māl*).²⁹ Within this legal-ethical framework, the degradation of forests is not merely an environmental infraction but constitutes a violation of key Islamic legal objectives aimed at preserving human life and communal welfare.

Forests, as integral ecological systems, contribute significantly to climate regulation, biodiversity conservation, and the maintenance of environmental balance, conditions essential to human survival and flourishing. Their destruction has far-reaching consequences, including heightened vulnerability to natural disasters and the exacerbation of intergenerational poverty. As such, deforestation undermines both the ethical commitments of Islamic theology and the juridical aims of *sharī'ah*. Consequently, forest conservation emerges as a religious imperative, grounded in the protection of life, the promotion of justice, and the pursuit of environmental sustainability in accordance with Islamic legal and moral principles.

Law No. 18 of 2013 affirms the principle of sustainability through its emphasis on ecological justice, an approach that resonates strongly with Islamic teachings, which advocate for a balance between human entitlements and the rights of nature. Article 2 of the legislation explicitly mandates that efforts to prevent and eradicate forest destruction must be guided by the principles of justice and sustainability. In Islamic thought, the notion of justice (*'adl*) extends beyond the fair allocation of resources; it also encompasses the maintenance of equilibrium between human beings and the natural world. This expanded conception of justice reflects a moral imperative to safeguard ecosystems as a fulfilment of ethical responsibilities owed not only to creation but ultimately to the Creator. Within this framework, environmental care is understood as part of a divinely sanctioned moral order. Accordingly, the normative foundations of Law No. 18/2013 align closely with Islamic ecological ethics, both of which underscore the necessity of responsible stewardship and the pursuit of long-term environmental harmony.

Contemporary environmental ethics likewise emphasize the necessity of cultivating a moral relationship between human beings and the natural environment. Aldo Leopold, through his articulation of the *land ethic*, advocates for an expanded moral framework, one that extends ethical responsibility beyond interpersonal relations to include land, water, animals, and plant life.³⁰ This approach rejects a

29 Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, *Ri'ayah al-Bi'ah Fi al-Syari'ah al-Islamiyyah* (Kairo: Dar Al-Shuruq, 2001), 91.

30 Leopold and Kingsolver, *A Sand County Almanac*, 34.

narrowly anthropocentric worldview that reduces nature to an object of utilitarian exploitation. Instead, Leopold calls for a paradigm of mutual respect and ethical reciprocity between humans and the broader ecological community.

This ethical vision closely parallels Islamic theological perspectives, which affirm a spiritual and moral bond between humanity and the natural world as integral to God's creation. Both traditions regard the environment not merely as a resource for human use, but as a participant in a divinely established equilibrium that humanity is morally obligated to uphold and protect. The convergence of Western ecological thought and Islamic environmental ethics thus offers a compelling, shared moral foundation for promoting environmental stewardship and sustaining ecological harmony.

Within the broader framework of sustainable development, forest conservation embodies a profound sense of intergenerational responsibility. The Brundtland Commission's influential report, *Our Common Future*, defines sustainable development as development that satisfies present needs without compromising the capacity of future generations to fulfil their own.³¹ This formulation extends the principle of ecological justice beyond spatial dimensions to encompass *temporal justice*, the equitable distribution of environmental goods and responsibilities across generations.

In Islamic theology, this concept aligns closely with the doctrine of *amānah al-khilāfah*, the sacred trust of stewardship. Humanity is not the sovereign proprietor of the Earth, but rather a divinely appointed custodian, answerable both to God and to posterity. This ethical framework reinforces the view that environmental sustainability is not merely a strategic or policy-oriented concern, but a spiritual mandate. It affirms that safeguarding the integrity of the natural world over time is part of a sacred trust (*amānah*) that binds humanity to a moral covenant with both the Creator and future generations.

Islam articulated the principles of intergenerational and sustainable responsibility long before the emergence of modern environmental discourse, as exemplified by a well-known Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): "If the Day of Judgment comes and one of you has a seedling in his hand, then he should plant it." (Narrated by Ahmad).³² Imam al-Munāwī interprets this statement as a hyperbolic device intended to underscore the profound significance

31 World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

32 Ahmad Bin Muhammad Bin Hanbal, *Al-Musnad Imam Ahmad* (Lebanon: Muassasah al-Risalah, 1995).

of environmental responsibility, even in the face of existential catastrophe.³³ Yusuf al-Qaradawi builds upon this interpretation through the framework of *maqāsid al-sharī'ah*, maintaining that Islam calls upon humanity to act as cultivators of life, rather than agents of destruction. For al-Qaradawi, the act of planting a tree symbolizes *imārat al-ard*, the constructive inhabitation and cultivation of the Earth, and encapsulates the human role as *khalīfah* (stewards) entrusted with ensuring the continuity and flourishing of life.³⁴ Islamic scholars and thinkers have thus interpreted this Hadith not merely as a literal injunction, but as a potent moral emblem of resilience, accountability, and enduring hope. It affirms an unwavering commitment to ecological ethics and sustainable action, even under the most extreme circumstances. As such, the Hadith offers a compelling theological foundation for environmental ethics, asserting that care for the Earth is an enduring spiritual obligation and moral imperative in all contexts.

From a contemporary scholarly standpoint, Fazlun Khalid, one of the foremost voices in Islamic ecotheology, interprets this Hadith as a powerful articulation of forward-looking environmental ethics. He contends that Islam has embedded the principle of ecological stewardship within its foundational teachings, assigning humanity the role of guardian and caretaker of the natural world. For Khalid, the prophetic injunction to plant a tree even in the face of impending apocalypse serves as a moral testament: that environmental responsibility is unwavering and must be upheld regardless of circumstance.³⁵ This reflects a profound dedication to the ethos of sustainability.

In a complementary interpretation, Seyyed Hossein Nasr emphasizes that Islam perceives nature as a sacred manifestation of the Divine. The command to plant a tree, despite the absence of immediate human benefit, expresses a spiritual bond between humans and the environment. It affirms an ethical duty to protect ecological balance, grounded in the intrinsic value of nature rather than its utilitarian function.³⁶ Together, these perspectives underscore that the act of tree planting, within the Islamic worldview, embodies both symbolic and practical dimensions of sustainability. It constitutes a theological expression of moral care, ecological responsibility, and enduring commitment to the continuity of life, even when its outcomes lie beyond human foresight or benefit.

33 Muhammad Abdur-Rauf Al-Manawi, *Faid Al-Qadir* (Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah, 1994), 639.

34 Yusuf Al-Qardhawi, *Ri'ayah al-Bi'ah Fi al-Shari'ah al-Islamiyyah* (Kairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 2001), 215.

35 Fazlun Khalid, "Islam and the Environment – Ethics and Practice an Assessment," *Religion Compass* 4, no. 11 (November 2010): 707–16, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2010.00249.x>.

36 Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, 89.

From an empirical perspective, Indonesia has witnessed significant deforestation over the past several decades. Data from Global Forest Watch indicate that since 2001, the country has lost over 9 million hectares of primary forest. This extensive loss has resulted in dire consequences, including the erosion of biodiversity, substantial contributions to global climate change, and the disruption of Indigenous communities whose livelihoods are intricately tied to forest ecosystems. Within this context, Law No. 18 of 2013 should be interpreted not merely as an administrative or regulatory measure, but as a moral and spiritual instrument situated within the broader framework of environmental protection. An eco-theological approach provides a critical link between formal state policy and the religious sensibilities of the public, thereby fostering a more integrated and value-driven commitment to ecological conservation.³⁷

Contemporary Islamic legal scholars contend that environmental degradation may be classified as a *jarimah* (punishable offense) when it results in the loss of life or poses a threat to public welfare. In *al-Abkām al-Sultāniyyah*, al-Māwardī asserts that a core duty of governance is the preservation of the public good (*maslahah 'āmmah*), which includes the stewardship and protection of natural resources. In the modern era, this responsibility has been institutionalized within the apparatus of the state, which fulfils it through the enactment and enforcement of legal frameworks, such as Indonesia's Law No. 18 of 2013. Accordingly, the implementation of this legislation may be viewed as a contemporary expression of *shari'ah*-based principles within the domain of environmental governance. It represents an effort to harmonize the authority of the state with the ethical mandate to safeguard the environment as a collective trust (*amānah*) and a vital component of public interest.

The integration of theological values into the implementation of Law No. 18 of 2013 is essential for ensuring its long-term effectiveness. A strictly legalistic approach, devoid of spiritual engagement, is inadequate to address the depth and complexity of environmental degradation. There is an urgent need to develop religion-based ecological education capable of fostering a transformative societal paradigm, one in which forest destruction is not only regarded as a legal offense but also as a moral and spiritual transgression. Such a reorientation strengthens legal compliance by rooting it in internalized ethical consciousness, rather than relying solely on deterrence through external sanctions.

The practical realization of environmental theology within the framework of forest protection, as stipulated in Law No. 18/2013, requires the internalization of faith-based values throughout all stages of policy implementation. Educational and

37 Mawil Izzī Dien, *Environmental Dimensions of Islam* (Cambridge: Letterworth Press, 2000), 87.

outreach initiatives related to forestry should move beyond merely conveying legal content and actively incorporate religious teachings that highlight the human role as *khalīfah* (steward) of the Earth. In this manner, acts such as illegal logging are reframed not only as violations of civil law, but also as offenses against the principle of *taḥwīd* (the oneness of God) and the sanctity of divine creation.

This integrative model can be institutionalized through community-based environmental education programs and awareness campaigns in areas vulnerable to deforestation, with religious leaders engaged as key facilitators of change. When communities begin to understand forest conservation as an expression of *ibādah* (worship) and a spiritual obligation, the enforcement of Law No. 18 of 2013 is likely to gain deeper resonance, anchored in moral conviction and internal motivation, rather than maintained solely through punitive enforcement mechanisms.

Theological Implications for Forest Conservation in Islam and Indonesian Law No. 18 of 2013

Islamic environmental theology emerges from the fundamental recognition of the necessity for a balanced and respectful relationship between human beings and the natural environment. Within the Islamic worldview, the Earth and all its elements are creations of Allah, designed not merely as a habitat for humanity but also as an *amānah* (trust) that must be safeguarded and cultivated with care. The Qur'an and the Hadith collectively provide a robust theological foundation for environmental responsibility, encompassing explicit prohibitions against ecological harm and commands to act with justice toward all forms of life.

This ethical commitment is powerfully articulated in Surah Al-A'rāf (7:56): *"And do not cause corruption on the Earth after it has been set in order."* The verse reinforces the moral imperative to maintain ecological harmony and denounces any actions that lead to environmental degradation after the Earth has been divinely ordered. As such, it serves as a cornerstone of Islamic ecological ethics, positioning environmental stewardship not only as a moral responsibility but also as an expression of obedience to God and a fulfilment of humanity's spiritual obligations.

The phrase *"ba'da islābihā"* ("after it has been set in order") in Surah Al-A'rāf (7:56) suggests that the Earth was originally created in a state of equilibrium, functionality, and accordance with the divine will. Any act of environmental degradation, whether through deforestation, pollution, or the excessive exploitation of natural resources, constitutes a breach of *sunnatullāh*, the divinely established order of creation. Classical exegetes such as al-Tha'labī interpret *fasād* (corruption) in this verse as encompassing all forms of injustice and wrongdoing, extending not

only to human interactions but also to transgressions against the natural world. Similarly, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, in *Mafātīh al-Ghayb*, broadens the understanding of “corruption on Earth” to include both social misconduct and the disruption of the ecological harmony that God has meticulously arranged.

This classical interpretive tradition is further developed by modern scholars such as Sayyid Qutb, who argues that environmental degradation stems from human greed and the neglect of the divinely appointed role of *khalīfah* (steward). When humans pursue material gain without regard for ecological consequences, they actively dismantle the *islāh* (order and restoration) that God has embedded within creation. This perspective aligns closely with the Islamic doctrine of *tawhīd*, which asserts the indivisible unity of God and provides the ethical foundation for environmental responsibility. Under this theological framework, all aspects of nature are viewed as sacred manifestations of divine creation, and humanity bears the obligation to protect them with spiritual consciousness and moral integrity. Thus, environmental preservation emerges not only as a social and ecological necessity but also as a religious imperative rooted in the oneness of God and the sacred trust entrusted to humankind.

The insights of both classical and contemporary exegetes offer a solid intellectual foundation for the development of Islamic ecotheology, which situates environmental stewardship as a central element of Islam’s ethical and spiritual worldview. In the Indonesian context, the values embedded in Qur’anic ecotheology find partial expression in Law No. 18 of 2013 on the Prevention and Eradication of Forest Destruction, particularly in Article 2, Chapter II, which articulates key principles such as justice, legal certainty, sustainability, state responsibility, and community participation. These principles resonate closely with Islamic ecological ethics, including *‘adl* (justice), *khilāfah* (stewardship), and communal obligation.

Despite this alignment, the law’s implementation remains largely detached from the ethical-spiritual dimensions articulated in the Qur’an. For instance, Article 6 outlines a comprehensive strategy for forest preservation that includes preventive mechanisms such as inter-agency coordination, resource distribution, incentive structures for environmental actors, legal demarcation of forest areas, infrastructure support, and public engagement. While these provisions reflect a strong policy framework emphasizing proactive prevention, legal enforcement, and collaborative governance among governmental, civil, and private sectors, they lack integration with the theological and moral imperatives of Islamic teachings.

This absence represents a missed opportunity to enhance the law’s normative power and societal resonance. The incorporation of Qur’anic Eco theological values,

such as moral accountability before God, the sanctity of creation, and the sacred trust (*amānah*) entrusted to humanity, could elevate the legal mandate for forest conservation into a spiritually grounded ethical imperative. Such integration would reinforce compliance not merely as a legal duty but as an expression of religious commitment, deepening the societal legitimacy and transformative potential of environmental governance in Indonesia.

Therefore, integrating theological values into the implementation of Law No. 18 of 2013 is not only desirable but imperative for strengthening its impact. This integration can be effectively operationalized by embedding faith-based principles into every stage of policy enforcement. Forestry education and public outreach initiatives, for instance, should move beyond a narrow focus on formal legal provisions to include religious teachings that highlight the human role as *khalifah* (vicegerent) entrusted with the care and preservation of the Earth. Under this framework, offenses such as illegal logging are not solely treated as legal violations, but also as breaches of *tawhīd* (the oneness of God) and transgressions against the sanctity of God's creation. Such an approach may be institutionalized through the development of community-based environmental education curricula and public awareness programs, particularly in deforestation-prone areas, by actively involving religious leaders as influential agents of social transformation. When local communities come to perceive forest protection as an act of worship and a spiritual responsibility, the implementation of Law No. 18 of 2013 is likely to gain stronger resonance, rooted not just in fear of legal penalties, but in a deep moral and theological commitment.

The ecological underpinnings of Islamic thought have long been articulated by classical scholars, notably Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah in *Islām al-Muwaqqi'in*. He asserted that justice (*'adl*) extends beyond interpersonal relations to encompass the human relationship with the natural environment. Within this framework, the destruction of forests constitutes not merely a violation of positive law but also a breach of Islamic ethical and spiritual mandates.³⁸ Such actions fall under the category of *fasād fī al-ard* (corruption on Earth), a term the Qur'an repeatedly associates with divine disapproval and retribution.³⁹ Consequently, environmental preservation in Islam is not presented as an optional moral ideal, but as a theologically mandated duty.

Contemporary scholars such as Fazlun Khalid and Seyyed Hossein Nasr have reinforced the call for an eco-centric worldview within Islamic theology. Khalid posits

38 Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah, *I'lam al-Muwaqqi'in 'an Rabb al-'Alamin* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 2013), 25–60.

39 Munib Munib et al., "Conservation Environmental Sustainability in The Perspective of Islamic Legal Philosophy," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 6, no. 2 (October 2022): 2, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v6i2.12411>.

that the environment is an extension of the *tawhīdic* system, wherein all elements of creation are interconnected and governed by divine harmony.⁴⁰ The excessive exploitation of natural resources, including forests, constitutes *isrāf*, a Qur'anic condemnation of extravagance and imbalance. Nasr echoes this sentiment, arguing that the root of the modern ecological crisis lies in humanity's spiritual estrangement from nature, which has been relegated to a utilitarian economic object.⁴¹ In light of these insights, it is imperative to internalize Qur'anic Eco theological values within the preventive mechanisms outlined in Law No. 18 of 2013. This integration can be effectively realized through coordinated efforts among governmental bodies, religious scholars, and civil society actors across sectors. Such collaboration would help to instill environmental ethics not only within the legal apparatus but also within the spiritual consciousness of Muslim communities, ensuring that forest preservation is upheld as a sacred trust and a manifestation of obedience to divine will.

Thus, although formulated within the context of a secular legal system, Law No. 18 of 2013 embodies a normative spirit that aligns closely with foundational Islamic principles. Article 2 of the legislation affirms key values such as sustainability, justice, and public participation, principles that strongly resonate with the concept of *maslahah* (public benefit) in Islamic jurisprudence. The destruction of forests poses significant threats to the five essential objectives of *maqāsid al-sharī'ah*: the preservation of religion (*hifz al-dīn*), life (*hifz al-nafs*), intellect (*hifz al-'aql*), progeny (*hifz al-nasl*), and property (*hifz al-māl*). For example, environmental degradation caused by deforestation may result in water scarcity, natural disasters, and public health emergencies, thereby directly compromising *hifz al-nafs*, the protection of human life. In this light, the convergence between Islamic legal ethics and the regulatory goals of Law No. 18/2013 illustrates the significant potential for faith-based values to complement and strengthen secular environmental governance.

Although Law No. 18 of 2013 incorporates values that are congruent with Qur'anic principles of ecotheology, Indonesia continues to grapple with persistent and severe challenges related to forest degradation. Data from Global Forest Watch reveal that between 2002 and 2021, the country lost approximately 1.45 million hectares of primary tropical forest, ranking it among the nations with the highest deforestation rates globally.⁴² This extensive loss is primarily driven by the expansion of palm oil plantations, illicit mining operations, and the widespread practice of forest burning.

40 Khalid, "Islam and the Environment – Ethics and Practice an Assessment," 707–16.

41 Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, 80-102.

42 Global Forest Watch, "Kehilangan Hutan Tetap Tinggi di Tahun 2021."

While the law is intended to fortify legal mechanisms for prosecuting environmental offenses and mitigating ecological damage, its practical enforcement faces substantial limitations. Among these are weak institutional capacity, inconsistent law enforcement, and limited public awareness of the environmental and moral ramifications of deforestation. These structural and societal challenges underscore the necessity of adopting a more comprehensive approach, one that integrates legal accountability with the cultivation of ecological consciousness. Such an approach would benefit from the incorporation of religious, educational, and community-based strategies rooted in Islamic environmental ethics, thereby reinforcing the law's objectives through moral engagement and spiritual responsibility.

In light of the ongoing environmental crisis, there is a pressing need to further develop and institutionalize eco-fatwas, religious rulings oriented toward ecological concerns.⁴³ While the Indonesian Council of Ulama (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*, MUI) has issued several environmentally focused fatwas, such as Fatwa No. 4 of 2014 on Waste Management and another addressing the protection of endangered species,⁴⁴ a significant gap remains: the absence of a comprehensive fatwa specifically dedicated to forest conservation. The issuance of such a ruling could serve to reinforce state-driven environmental enforcement by imbuing it with additional moral authority and religious legitimacy. Moreover, the adoption of an eco-theological perspective has the potential to enrich the conceptual foundations of sustainable development. Dominant development paradigms are often grounded in anthropocentric and materialist assumptions, viewing nature primarily as an economic resource to be exploited.⁴⁵ In contrast, Islam offers an alternative ethical model rooted in the principles of *ta'wāzun* (balance) and *hikmah* (wisdom), which emphasize the necessity of aligning human welfare with ecological preservation. This approach reflects the broader vision of ecotheology, which situates the environment within a sacred relational framework between humanity and the Divine.⁴⁶

Furthermore, the Eco theological principles articulated in the Qur'an hold significant relevance for contemporary efforts in climate change mitigation.

43 Moh. Mufid, "Green Fatwas in Bahtsul Masā'il: Nahdlatul Ulama's Response to the Discourse on the Environmental Crisis in Indonesia," *AL-IHKAM: Jurnal Hukum & Pranata Sosial* 15, no. 2 (December 2020): 173–200, <https://doi.org/10.19105/al-lhkam.v15i2.3956>.

44 Majelis Ulama Indonesia, "Fatwa Mui No.47 Tahun 2014 Tentang Pengelolaan Sampah Untuk Mencegah Kerusakan Lingkungan," MUI, 2014, https://mui.or.id/baca/fatwa/pengelolaan-sampah-untuk-mencegah-kerusakan-lingkungan?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

45 Alim Roswanto, "Refleksi Filosofis Atas Teologi Islam Mengenai Lingkungan Dan Pelestariannya," *Al-Tahrir: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 12, no. 2 (2012): 2, <https://doi.org/10.21154/al-tahrir.v12i2.55>.

46 Muhammad Qomarullah, "Lingkungan Dalam Kajian Al-Qur'an: Krisis Lingkungan dan Penanggulangannya Perspektif Al-Qur'an," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 15, no. 1 (January 2014): 1, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.2014.1501-07>.

According to data from Indonesia's National Disaster Management Agency (*Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana*, BNPB), as cited by Fakhrudin, approximately 90% of disasters occurring in the country over the past five years have been associated with extreme weather events and environmental degradation, including floods and forest fires.⁴⁷ In this context, forest conservation assumes a dual role: it serves not only as a preventive strategy to reduce environmental risk but also as a moral obligation to safeguard the wellbeing of future generations. This ethical commitment is underpinned by the Qur'anic principle of *isti'mār*, the divine injunction to cultivate and develop the Earth responsibly, as stated in Surah Hūd (11:61): "He has produced you from the Earth and settled you therein."

Surah Hūd (11:61) clearly articulates that human beings are divinely entrusted with the responsibility of *isti'mār*, the duty to cultivate, prosper, and maintain the Earth. This obligation transcends mere physical or economic engagement; it constitutes a spiritual vocation intimately connected to humanity's role as *khalīfah* (steward) of the Earth. Within this framework, environmental sustainability is not solely a secular policy objective but a fundamental aspect of *'ibādah* (worship) and an expression of servitude to God. The term *isti'mār* derives from the Arabic root *'amara-ya'muru-'imārah*, which conveys meanings such as "to inhabit," "to build," and "to care for." Al-Rāghib al-Asfahānī interprets *isti'mār* as "a divine request to cultivate or develop," signifying that God not only provided humanity with a dwelling place but also commanded them to preserve its order and functionality.⁴⁸ This theological foundation underscores that environmental degradation and unchecked exploitation represent violations of the divine trust (*amānah*). Thus, the preservation and responsible use of natural resources emerge as spiritual imperatives, deeply embedded in the Qur'anic ethos of balance (*mīzān*), moral accountability, and sustainability. Viewed through this lens, environmental ethics are inextricably linked with faith. Caring for the Earth is not merely a moral or ecological concern, but a sacred duty and integral dimension of human existence as envisioned in the Qur'anic worldview.

Al-Tabarī interprets *isti'mār* as encompassing all human activities that serve the collective good and sustain the divine order embedded in creation. He frames it as a divine mandate, one that calls upon humanity to care for the Earth in alignment with submission to God's will, rather than reducing it to physical construction or material development alone.⁴⁹ Expanding on this foundation, Ibn Kathīr emphasizes

47 "Climate Change, Disaster, and Social Work in Indonesia," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Social Problems*, by Adi Fahrudin, Tria Patrianti, and Husmiati Yusuf (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 1–14, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-68127-2_77-1.

48 Ashfahani, *Al-Mufradat Fi Gharib al-Qur'an*, 538.

49 Abu Ja'far Muhammad Ibn Jarir al-Tabarī, *Jami' al-Bayan Fi Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar Al-Fikr,

that the role of *khilāfah* entails the just and ethical management of natural resources, regulated by the principles of *shari'ah* and grounded in Islamic moral teachings.⁵⁰

In a contemporary interpretive context, Sayyid Qutb underscores that human beings are endowed with both intellectual and spiritual faculties that enable them to build a civilization in harmony with the natural world. He explicitly repudiates exploitative attitudes and proposes an ecological ethic rooted in *ta'wḥīd*, the doctrine of divine unity, as the central theological foundation for environmental responsibility in Islam.⁵¹ Quraish Shihab adds a contextual layer to this discourse by asserting that the duty to cultivate and sustain the Earth is part of the *amānah ilāhiyyah* (divine trust), which requires the prudent and equitable use of natural resources, especially with regard to safeguarding the interests of future generations. His emphasis on intergenerational equity links ecological responsibility directly to social justice. Taken together, these interpretations deepen the Qur'anic notion of *isti'mār*, situating it within an integrated ethical framework that binds spiritual consciousness to environmental care. This multi-faceted exegetical tradition provides a compelling lens through which contemporary ecological crises, such as deforestation and climate change, may be addressed, grounding environmental action in both classical and modern currents of Islamic thought.

A constructive interpretation of the Qur'anic concept of *isti'mār* positions it as a critical point of intersection between spirituality and public policy. In the context of the global ecological crisis and the ongoing degradation of forest ecosystems, the mandate of *isti'mār* offers a normative framework that is highly relevant to the shaping of environmental governance. Islamic environmental theology, in this regard, extends beyond metaphysical reflection on creation; it provides a compelling moral and ethical foundation for the implementation of regulatory frameworks, such as Indonesia's Law No. 18 of 2013 on the Prevention and Eradication of Forest Destruction. In the Indonesian policy landscape, where secular paradigms often dominate legislative processes, religious values tend to be sidelined. Yet, considering the nation's predominantly Muslim demographic, an Eco theologically informed approach has the potential to enhance the legitimacy, resonance, and motivational force of environmental policy. By incorporating Islamic principles into the domain of positive law, the state moves beyond a purely punitive model and fosters a collective ecological consciousness rooted in spiritual ethics and religious duty. In this light, *isti'mār* may be understood as a transformative paradigm, one that unites spiritual

2000), 12:233.

50 Ibnu Katsir, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an al-'Azim* (Riyadh: Dar Thayyibah, 1999), 4:444.

51 Sayyid Quthub, *Tafsir Fī Zhilāl Al-Qur'ān*, Juz 4 (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2000), 2109.

reflection with social responsibility. It serves as a theological catalyst for reimagining environmental governance, whereby faith-based values play a vital role in promoting ecological stewardship and sustainable development.

The integration of faith-based principles into environmental governance can be effectively operationalized through their systematic incorporation at all stages of forestry policy implementation. This requires moving beyond purely legalistic approaches and incorporating spiritual strategies that nurture ecological consciousness within the broader society. For instance, forestry education and public outreach initiatives should not be limited to disseminating information about legal statutes and administrative penalties; they should also include religious narratives that underscore the human responsibility as *khalifah* (steward) of the Earth. A practical example of such an approach involves engaging religious leaders in anti-logging awareness campaigns, enabling forest protection messages to be delivered through *da'wah* (Islamic preaching) and religious discourse that is culturally resonant and widely accessible to grassroots communities. Additionally, religious rituals, such as the *khutbah al-jumu'ah* (Friday sermon), offer strategic platforms for embedding environmental ethics into collective spiritual practice. By framing forest conservation as a form of *ibādah* (worship) and a moral obligation, these efforts help to internalize environmental values as part of everyday religious life. Such initiatives not only enhance the societal reach and effectiveness of state environmental policy but also foster greater alignment between legal enforcement and the deeply rooted spiritual norms that shape communal behaviour.

Nevertheless, this study is not without its limitations. Firstly, the interpretation of the Qur'anic verses under examination is inevitably influenced by the researcher's methodological orientation. While efforts have been made to adopt a comparative approach, the resulting interpretations remain context-dependent and are limited by the availability and scope of existing scholarly literature. Secondly, the analysis is not fully supported by empirical data drawn from Muslim communities that have successfully integrated theological and legal values in environmental conservation initiatives. These limitations underscore the need for future research that employs a more integrative methodology, one that bridges normative theological analysis with empirical fieldwork. Such an approach would offer a more holistic understanding of how Islamic Eco theological principles are operationalized at the community level, and how these principles contribute to the development of more effective, culturally embedded models of environmental governance.

Ultimately, the discourse of environmental theology in Islam holds profound significance not only for shaping individual ethical consciousness but also for

informing broader structural reforms in environmental policy. It offers a holistic paradigm of development that moves beyond the narrow imperatives of economic growth and instead nurtures a spiritually grounded relationship between humanity and the natural world. Within this framework, sustainability is not defined solely through technocratic means but is *theomorphic* in essence, reflecting divine attributes such as justice, balance, and moral responsibility. Islam's theological worldview thus reorients environmental governance toward principles that affirm the sanctity of creation and underscore the ethical obligation to safeguard it. The Qur'anic imperative of *isti'mār*, to cultivate and sustain the Earth, positions the planet not merely as a site of human activity but as a sacred domain of devotion. In this view, environmental care is elevated to an act of worship, deeply rooted in the recognition of divine trust (*amānah*) and the moral responsibilities it entails. This integrative vision underscores that protecting the environment is not only a civic duty but also a spiritual imperative within the Islamic tradition.

Conclusion

The Qur'an presents not only a normative basis for ecological balance (*mīzān*), but also offers a compelling theological vision in which humans are entrusted with a complex role, as *khalīfah* (vicegerents), bearing the responsibility to sustain environmental harmony. Verses such as Surah Al-Baqarah [2]:164, Al-A'rāf [7]:56, and Al-Ahzāb [33]:72 lay the groundwork for an ethical framework that challenges purely human-centered worldviews. Instead, they invite a shift in how we perceive nature: not as a resource to be dominated, but as a sacred partner in a divinely ordered system of sustainability. In this light, the human-environment relationship is understood as deeply spiritual, guided by a sense of accountability before God and future generations.

Applying these values within the realm of formal legal systems, such as Indonesia's Law No. 18 of 2013 on forest destruction, offers a promising starting point for aligning religious insights with environmental policy. Yet, legal instruments alone cannot fully address the intricacies of ecological decline if not accompanied by a transformation in societal awareness. Here, Islamic ecotheology can play a vital role: offering not only ethical depth, but also inspiring community engagement through spiritual motivation. By appealing to inner moral convictions rather than external compulsion, it encourages a more holistic and participatory approach to forest governance.

This study therefore highlights the urgency of embedding theological principles into the operationalization of Law No. 18/2013. Such efforts might include outreach

programs that emphasize the sacred duty of *khalifah*, framing illegal logging not only as a legal offense but as a breach of *tawhīd* (divine unity). Practical implementation can take the form of community-based education, particularly through the involvement of religious leaders who help translate environmental responsibility into a form of worship (*‘ibādah*). In doing so, the law is no longer seen merely as a set of regulations, but as part of a greater spiritual mission.

While this research contributes to the growing discourse on the integration of theological principles with environmental law in faith-based societies such as Indonesia, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. Most notably, the study does not include empirical inquiry into how religious communities engage with or respond to these integrative approaches in practical, lived contexts. This gap is both understandable and significant, given the complexity of translating normative ideals into grassroots realities. Future research would benefit from participatory methodologies that involve local religious leaders and community members, allowing for richer insight into the operationalization of Islamic ecotheological ethics. Such efforts could play a vital role in shaping contextually grounded educational curricula and policy frameworks that more effectively respond to the ecological challenges of our time.

Authors' Contributions

Afrizal Nur proposed the title and the method used to write this article. Hayati bin Husin compiled the material and outline, while Alwizar and Muhammad Yasir reviewed and edited the methodology of the manuscript. In addition, cross-checking and suggestions for submission to a suitable journal were made by Afrizal Nur, who finally suggested that the article should be submitted to *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadith* for its reverend and quality publication. That was how the article was finally arranged and submitted for consideration and publication.

Data Availability Statement

No new data were generated or analysed in this study. Therefore, data sharing is not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest. There are no financial or personal relationships that could have inappropriately influenced the content of this article.

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