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BUILDING SPIRITUAL RESILIENCE FOR MUSLIMS AMID ECOLOGICAL DESTRUCTION : RE-READING OF SURAH AR-RUM VERSE 41 THROUGH ENGAGEMENT WITH ECO-THEOLOGY

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Abstract

The escalating ecological crisis of the twenty-first century poses a profound challenge not only to the natural world but to the spiritual and psychological wellbeing of Muslim communities disproportionately concentrated in climate-vulnerable regions. This paper argues that al-Rūm (30): 41, long read by classical exegetes as a diagnosis of moral corruption and its material consequences, constitutes a remarkably coherent theological framework for engaging the contemporary ecological crisis. Through a qualitative approach combining tafsīr mawḍūʿī and contextual hermeneutics, the paper pursues three objectives: reinterpreting the verse as a theological diagnosis of anthropogenic ecological destruction; placing this reinterpretation in dialogue with Islamic eco-theology; and deriving from this dialogue a framework of spiritual resilience for contemporary Muslims. The analysis demonstrates that the verse's four-part structure acknowledgement of fasād, attribution of causality to human agency, experience of consequence, and the divine summons of yarjī'ūn, maps with precision onto the core concepts of Islamic eco-theology: tawḥīd, khalīfah, mīzān, and amānah. The resulting framework of spiritual resilience encompasses honest acknowledgement, ecological tawbah, the virtues of ṣabr and tawakkul, and collective action rooted in communal institutions. This framework equips Muslims to confront ecological destruction not with fatalism or despair, but with theologically grounded hope and purposeful agency.

Keywords: eco-theology; al-Rūm: 41; spiritual resilience; ecological crisis.

Abstrak

Krisis ekologi yang semakin parah di abad ke-21 menghadirkan tantangan mendalam, tidak hanya bagi alam semesta, tetapi juga bagi kesejahteraan spiritual dan psikologis komunitas Muslim yang secara tidak proporsional terkonsentrasi di wilayah-wilayah yang rentan terhadap perubahan iklim. Makalah ini berpendapat bahwa QS. al-Rūm (30): 41, yang telah lama ditafsirkan oleh para mufasir klasik sebagai diagnosis kemerosotan moral dan konsekuensi materialnya, merupakan kerangka teologis yang sangat koheren untuk menghadapi krisis ekologi kontemporer. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif yang menggabungkan tafsīr mawḍūʿī dan hermeneutika kontekstual, makalah ini mengejar tiga tujuan: menafsirkan ulang ayat tersebut sebagai diagnosis teologis terhadap kerusakan ekologi yang disebabkan oleh manusia; menempatkan penafsiran ulang ini dalam dialog dengan teologi ekologi Islam; dan menyimpulkan dari dialog ini sebuah kerangka ketahanan spiritual bagi umat Muslim kontemporer. Analisis menunjukkan bahwa struktur empat bagian ayat—pengakuan atas fasād, atribusi kausalitas pada agen manusia, pengalaman konsekuensi, dan panggilan ilahi yarjī'ūn—secara presisi selaras dengan konsep inti teologi ekologi Islam: tawḥīd, khalīfah, mīzān, dan amānah. Kerangka kerja ketahanan spiritual yang dihasilkan mencakup pengakuan yang jujur, tawbah ekologis, kebajikan ṣabr dan tawakkul, serta tindakan kolektif yang berakar pada institusi komunal. Kerangka kerja ini membekali umat Islam untuk



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menghadapi kerusakan ekologis bukan dengan fatalisme atau keputusasaan, melainkan dengan harapan yang berlandaskan teologi.

Kata Kunci: *ekoteologi; QS. Ar-Rum:41; resiliensi spiritual; krisis ekologi.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has witnessed an escalating ecological crisis of unmistakably anthropogenic origin. Climate change, deforestation, marine pollution, and the accelerating collapse of biodiversity are no longer distant projections but lived realities, ones that disproportionately afflict Muslim-majority regions across Southeast Asia, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa (Lee & Romero, 2023). For Muslim communities, this crisis is not merely a scientific or political problem; it is, at its core, a theological and spiritual one.

The Qur'an offers a strikingly prescient diagnosis. Sūrat al-Rūm (30): 41 declares: *Ẓahara al-fasādu fī al-barri wa al-baḥri bi-mā kasabat aydī al-nāsi li-yudhīqahum ba'da alladhī 'amilū la'allahum yarji'ūn* "Corruption has appeared on land and sea as a result of what human hands have wrought, that He may cause them to taste something of what they have done, so that they might return." The verse's three-part structure; diagnosis, consequence, and invitation, renders it uniquely suited as a theological foundation for Muslim engagement with the ecological crisis. Classical commentators read *fasād* through a moral lens, encompassing polytheism, injustice, and their material consequences, including drought, scarcity, and the diminishment of blessings (Al-Ṭabarī, 2014). What is remarkable is not the distance of these classical readings from the present crisis, but their proximity.

This contextual re-engagement is what Islamic eco-theology seeks to provide. Grounded in the Qur'anic principles of *tawḥīd*, *khalīfah*, *amānah*, and *mīzān*, Islamic eco-theology articulates an environmental ethic that regards the stewardship of nature as an act of worship and a fulfilment of the divine trust (Abidin & Muhammad, 2020). In Indonesia, this project has gained considerable institutional traction, with the Ministry of Religious Affairs integrating eco-theological frameworks into Islamic education and mosque-based community programmes (Najihah et al., 2025). Indonesian and ASEAN scholars have produced a growing body of academic literature on Islamic environmental ethics, yet a significant lacuna remains: the question of how Muslims sustain spiritual and psychological wellbeing *amid* ecological destruction; not merely as a precondition for, but as an ongoing companion to, environmental action (Fata, 2014).

This is the domain of spiritual resilience. Research in the Indonesian context has demonstrated that Islamic spiritual practice constitutes a meaningful buffer against the forms of grief, anxiety, and despair now associated with ecological loss; what Western literature terms "eco-anxiety" or "eco-grief." (Subandi, 2012). The theological foundations for such resilience are already latent in the Qur'anic tradition; what is needed is their systematic articulation.

The present paper therefore pursues three interrelated objectives: to reinterpret Sūrat al-Rūm: 41 contextually as a theological diagnosis of the anthropogenic ecological crisis; to place this reinterpretation in dialogue with Islamic eco-theology; and to derive from this dialogue a coherent framework of spiritual resilience, one that equips Muslims to confront



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ecological destruction not with fatalism or despair, but with theologically grounded hope, purposeful action, and collective solidarity.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach grounded in library research (*al-baḥṭh al-maktabī*), drawing on textual analysis as its primary mode of inquiry. The interpretive framework combines two complementary methods: *tafsīr mawḍūʿī* (thematic Qur'anic exegesis), which gathers and analyses verses sharing a common theme, and contextual hermeneutics, which reads those verses in dialogue with contemporary realities (Zulaiha, 2017).

Primary sources consist of Sūrat al-Rūm: 41 alongside its classical exegetical treatments in the works of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Qurṭubī. Secondary sources encompass contemporary literature in Islamic eco-theology, environmental ethics, and Islamic psychology, drawn principally from peer-reviewed journals published in Indonesia and the wider ASEAN region, supplemented by relevant Western scholarship where necessary.

Data were collected through systematic documentation and thematic categorisation. Analysis proceeds through what Gadamer terms the *hermeneutic circle*: moving iteratively between the Qur'anic text and the contemporary ecological context, allowing each to illuminate the other. This dialogical movement, between classical *tafsīr* and modern environmental science, between scriptural prescription and lived Muslim experience, constitutes the methodological core of the paper.

Throughout, the study maintains a dual ethical commitment: fidelity to the integrity of the sacred text, and openness to the insights of contemporary interdisciplinary scholarship. The aim is not to subordinate scripture to science, nor science to scripture, but to allow a genuinely constructive conversation between the two, one capable of yielding practical and theologically grounded guidance for Muslim communities navigating the ecological crisis.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

a. *The Text and Classical Exegesis of QS. al-Rūm: 41*

The verse opens with the declaration *ḡahara al-fasādu*; corruption has become manifest, visible, undeniable. The verb *ḡahara* carries a sense of surfacing: what was latent has broken through to the level of perception, impossible to deny or ignore. The noun *fasād* itself is semantically rich in the Qur'anic lexicon, encompassing moral deviation, doctrinal error, social injustice, and the material disorder that flows from them. Its use here in conjunction with the spatial coordinates *al-barr* (land) and *al-baḥr* (sea) gives the term a distinctly physical, observable register; corruption that can be seen and suffered in the world.

Classical exegetes offer several overlapping readings of what precisely this *fasād* entails. Al-Ṭabarī holds that the corruption of land and sea refers primarily to the consequences of human moral and theological deviation; *shirk*, disobedience, and injustice, manifested as drought, scarcity, and the withholding of rain (Al-Ṭabarī, 2014).



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Ibn Kathīr records the view of Zayd ibn Rāfi' that *ṣahara al-fasād* means the cessation of rain, bringing in its wake famine and barrenness; Ibn 'Abbās and 'Ikrimah, meanwhile, read *al-barr* as the empty wilderness and *al-baḥr* as riverine towns and coastal cities, an interpretation that broadens the scope of *fasād* beyond the natural environment to encompass human settlements themselves. Al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), in his *al-Kashshāf*, reads *fasād fī al-barr* as drought, pestilence, and fire, and *fasād fī al-baḥr* as the capsizing of ships and the plundering of maritime trade, physical catastrophes that follow moral collapse (Fadhlurrahman et al., 2025). Al-Qurṭubī synthesises these strands, noting that *fasād* encompasses both moral corruption and its material expression: diminished agricultural yield, ecological scarcity, and disorder in human affairs, all understood as a partial foretaste (*ba'da alladhī 'amilū*) of what full recompense would entail, reserved mercifully by God for the hereafter.

Two features of the verse deserve particular attention. The first is the unambiguous attribution of causality: *bi-mā kasabat aydī al-nās*; through what human hands have earned. The corruption is not attributed to fate, divine caprice, or natural cycles. It is explicitly and exclusively anthropogenic. This causal attribution is theologically significant: it rules out fatalism and establishes human agency, and therefore human responsibility, as the central axis of the verse's moral logic.

The second is the teleological phrase *la'allahum yarji'ūn* "so that they might return." The Arabic particle *la'alla* (perhaps, so that) expresses hopeful divine purpose: the suffering consequent upon *fasād* is not punitive finality but a summons. The word *yarji'ūn*, derived from the root *r-j-'* (to return), is read by the classical tradition as *rujū' ilā Allāh* return to God through repentance, amendment, and realignment with the divine order. Crucially, this *rujū'* implies a possibility of repair: the verse does not declare ruin irreversible. The divine intention embedded in ecological consequence is restoration, not annihilation (Kathīr, 2012). It is precisely this dimension of the verse, its insistence on the possibility and indeed the imperative of return, that renders it so theologically generative for the contemporary Muslim confronting the ecological crisis.

b. Contextual Reinterpretation

Read against the backdrop of the contemporary ecological crisis, Sūrat al-Rūm: 41 acquires a precision that is almost disquieting. The *fasād* diagnosed by the Qur'an maps with remarkable fidelity onto the anthropogenic disruption documented by modern environmental science: greenhouse gas emissions, industrial deforestation, microplastic contamination of marine ecosystems, and the accelerating loss of biodiversity. The phrase *bi-mā kasabat aydī al-nās*, through what human hands have wrought, prefigures by over fourteen centuries what the IPCC now quantifies with empirical precision.

Contemporary Indonesian scholarship has developed this contextual reading with notable rigour. Recent research operationalising the concept of *fasād fī al-arḍ* as a diagnostic framework for specific ecological crises, including sand mining, deforestation, and coastal degradation, demonstrates that the Qur'anic category is not merely analogous to modern environmental damage but constitutively descriptive of it. Environmental revitalisation, on this reading, must transcend technical solutions to encompass a paradigm shift centred on the principles of *khalīfah* and *mīzān* (Helmi et al., 2026). This integration of theological categories with empirical-contextual evidence is precisely what



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distinguishes contemporary Islamic eco-theology from earlier, more abstract treatments of the subject.

The most generative reinterpretation, however, lies in the verse's closing phrase: *la'allahum yarji'ūn*. Where classical *tafsīr* reads *rujū'* principally as moral and spiritual repentance from sin, a contextual reading extends this to *ecological tawbah*: an active, embodied return to right relationship with the natural order. This is not a departure from the classical reading but its deepening. In Islamic ethics, *tawbah* has always carried both an inward and an outward dimension, the turning of the heart must be expressed in the turning of conduct.

Applied ecologically, *tawbah* translates into concrete acts of restoration: reforestation, rehabilitation of coastal ecosystems, reduction of consumption, and the reorientation of daily life around sufficiency rather than excess. Recent scholarship in Islamic eco-theology confirms that *tawbah* functions not merely as the forgiveness of individual sins, but as a transformative process with genuine ecological consequences, a bridge between inner spiritual renewal and the restoration of the natural order (Erol, 2025).

Crucially, the verse does not declare *fasād* irreversible. The particle *la'alla* carries a tone of hopeful divine purpose: the ecological crisis is framed not as eschatological finality but as a corrective summons. This is theologically significant. Whereas secular environmental discourse frequently slides into a determinism of catastrophe, wherein the scale of damage overwhelms the capacity for hope, the Qur'anic framework insists on the openness of the future. Human hands have wrought destruction; human hands, guided by conscience and *taqwā*, can begin to repair it. The verse thus functions as an expression of what might be called *divine ecological optimism*: a conviction, embedded in scripture, that return is always possible and that the natural world remains, in principle, restorable. It is this conviction that forms the first and most indispensable foundation of Muslim spiritual resilience in the face of ecological destruction (Hidayat, 2023).

c. *Dialogue with Islamic Eco-theology*

The exegetical and contextual analysis of Sūrat al-Rūm: 41 in the preceding sections reveals a verse whose internal structure already carries the essential architecture of Islamic eco-theology. The dialogue between the two is therefore not a case of imposing an external framework onto scripture, but of drawing out what is already latent within the verse itself.

The opening phrase *zāhara al-fasādu fī al-barri wa al-baḥr* establishes the ecological register immediately: corruption is not merely inward or social but physically manifest in the land and sea, the two domains that together constitute the totality of the inhabited natural world. Islamic eco-theology, grounded in the principle of *tawḥīd*, reads this manifestation theologically: since the natural world is a domain of divine signs (*āyāt*), its degradation is simultaneously an ecological and a theological event. The *fasād* of land and sea is not only an environmental datum but a disruption of the order through which God makes Himself known in creation (Helmi et al., 2026). The verse thus provides eco-theology with its most direct Qur'anic warrant: ecological destruction is not a peripheral concern but a central theological problem.



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The causal phrase *bi-mā kasabat aydī al-nās* then locates the source of this disruption squarely in human agency, and in doing so, it directly engages the eco-theological concept of *khalīfah*. The Qur'anic designation of the human being as God's vicegerent on earth carries an implicit accountability: if the human being is entrusted with the stewardship of creation, then *kasb*, the earning, the acquiring, the accumulating, that produces *fasād* constitutes a fundamental betrayal of that trust. Contemporary eco-theological readings of *Tafsīr al-Miṣbāḥ* confirm this: *khalīfah* is not a licence to exploit but a mandate to preserve, and the ecological crisis is, in theological terms, the visible consequence of humanity's failure to honour it (Bashyroh & Mahmud, 2021). The verse's attribution of causality is thus not only empirically apt, prefiguring what the IPCC now documents with scientific precision, but theologically diagnostic: it names the misuse of human agency as the root of ecological *fasād*, and in doing so calls the concept of *khalīfah* back to its proper meaning.

The phrase *liyudhīqahum ba'da alladhī 'amilū* introduces the eco-theological principle of *mīzān*; divine balance, through the logic of consequence. The disruption of ecological equilibrium is not arbitrary but proportional: what human hands have done, human beings are made to taste. This is not retributive punishment but the natural expression of a moral-ecological order in which transgression (*tughyān*) and consequence are structurally linked. Islamic eco-theology reads the contemporary ecological crisis through precisely this lens: rising temperatures, disappearing coastlines, and crop failures are not random misfortunes but the measurable consequences of a civilisational pattern of *isrāf* (excess) and *fasād* that has violated the *mīzān* of creation (Nur et al., 2025). The verse thus supplies eco-theology with a causal grammar that connects human moral conduct to ecological outcome, a connection that is both scripturally grounded and empirically verifiable.

It is, however, the final phrase; *la'allahum yarji'ūn*, that reveals the most distinctive contribution of QS. al-Rūm: 41 to Islamic eco-theology. Where much of the contemporary environmental discourse, secular and religious alike, risks sliding into a posture of either denial or despair, the verse insists on the possibility and imperative of *return*. Ecological *tawbah*, as derived from this phrase, is not merely a pietistic gesture but a theologically grounded programme of restoration: the realignment of human conduct with the *amānah* of stewardship, expressed in both inward repentance and outward action. This dimension of the verse positions Islamic eco-theology not as a theology of lament but as a theology of agency, one that mobilises rather than paralyses, that transforms the ecological crisis from a verdict into a summons (Erol, 2025). In this sense, Sūrat al-Rūm: 41 does not merely support Islamic eco-theology; it provides its most coherent single-verse statement.

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e. *A Framework of Spiritual Resilience*

The four-part structure of Sūrat al-Rūm: 41 *ḡahara al-fasādu, bi-mā kasabat aydī al-nās, liyudhīqahum ba'da alladhī 'amilū, la'allahum yarji'ūn*, is not merely a diagnosis of ecological ruin. Read through the lens of Islamic eco-theology, it also constitutes the structural blueprint of a framework of spiritual resilience. Each phrase of the verse corresponds to a distinct dimension of the Muslim response to ecological destruction: acknowledgement, accountability, consequence, and return. The framework proposed here follows this internal logic.

1) *Unflinching acknowledgement (ḡahara)*

The verse does not invite Muslims to minimise, aestheticise, or spiritualise away the reality of ecological destruction. *Fasād* has appeared, it is visible, undeniable, and severe. Spiritual resilience in the Islamic sense begins not with consolation but with honest reckoning: the willingness to look at the full scale of ecological collapse without retreating into denial on one side or paralysis on the other. This is theologically grounded in the Qur'anic virtue of *tafakkur* sustained, purposeful reflection on the signs of God in the natural world. The Muslim who practices *tafakkur* in the context of ecological crisis is not indulging in despair but fulfilling a Qur'anic obligation: to see the world as it is, to register its suffering, and to hold that registration within a framework of meaning. *Tawhīd* performs the crucial function here, it situates the ecological crisis within divine sovereignty, preventing the disorientation and nihilism that frequently accompany secular confrontations with environmental catastrophe (Rahmat et al., 2025). The world is not abandoned; it remains, at every moment, held within the care and governance of God.

2) *Moral accountability (bi-mā kasabat aydī al-nās)*

The verse locates the source of ecological *fasād* unambiguously in human agency, and in doing so calls Muslims to an honest examination of their own patterns of consumption, complicity, and conduct. This is the *khalīfah* dimension of resilience: the recognition that stewardship has been betrayed, and that recovery requires its restoration. Resilience, here, is not the capacity to endure a crisis passively but the moral courage to name one's own role in it individually, communally, and civilisationally. This dimension moves naturally into ecological *tawbah*: the three-fold movement of recognition (*idrāk*), remorse (*nadm*), and resolve (*'azm 'alā al-iṣlāḥ*). In classical Islamic ethics, *tawbah* is never merely inward; it always demands an outward expression commensurate with the wrong committed (Erol, 2025). Applied ecologically, this translates into concrete acts of restoration; reforestation, waste reduction, advocacy for just environmental policy, which become, in this framework, not merely civic duties but dimensions of *'ibādah*.

3) *Patient endurance through consequence (liyudhīqahum ba'da alladhī 'amilū)*

The verse acknowledges that consequence cannot be entirely avoided: some measure of what human hands have wrought must be tasted. This honest theological realism, neither promising an easy escape nor declaring ruin total, is the soil in which *ṣabr* and *tawakkul* grow. *Ṣabr*, in classical Islamic psychology, is not passivity but active, disciplined perseverance in the face of difficulty, sustained engagement in the work of restoration even when outcomes are uncertain and progress is slow. *Tawakkul*; reliance



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on God, liberates the Muslim from the paralysis of eco-anxiety precisely because the burden of ultimate outcomes is returned to its rightful Owner: the human obligation is sincerity and effort, not guaranteed success. Research on Islamic spiritual values and psychological wellbeing consistently confirms that these two virtues are empirically associated with reduced anxiety, enhanced emotional regulation, and greater capacity for sustained purposeful action in the face of adversity (Subandi, 2011). In the ecological context, they function as the psychological immune system of the resilient Muslim; enabling engagement without exhaustion, grief without despair.

4) *The fourth dimension is collective return (la'allahum yarji'ūn)*

The plural form of *yarji'ūn* is theologically significant: the return envisaged by the verse is communal, not merely individual. Spiritual resilience in the face of ecological crisis cannot be sustained in isolation. The Muslim community (*ummah*) is constitutionally oriented toward collective responsibility, and the mosque, the *pesantren*, and the Islamic educational institution constitute natural sites where theological conviction, communal solidarity, and practical environmental action converge. In the Indonesian context, the *eco-pesantren* movement offers the most developed institutional expression of this convergence: integrating Qur'anic formation with ecological literacy, waste management, and community outreach, these institutions embody the logic of *la'allahum yarji'ūn* as a communal programme of return (Subaidi et al., 2023). Research on this model confirms that the integration of ecological literacy with Islamic character formation produces greater environmental resilience and more sustained pro-environmental behaviour than either dimension achieves in isolation; suggesting that, in the Qur'anic framework, the spiritual and the practical are not complementary but constitutive of one another (Makrufah & Abror, 2026).

What distinguishes this framework from purely secular resilience models is its refusal to sever the psychological from the theological. The four dimensions are not coping strategies layered onto a pre-existing crisis; they are expressions of a coherent theological vision in which the ecological crisis is already understood, already interpreted, and already, through the final phrase of the verse, already answered. *La'allahum yarji'ūn* is the Qur'an's wager on the human capacity for return: not a guarantee, but a hope grounded in the character of God. It is this wager, held communally, practised daily, embodied institutionally, that constitutes the deepest resource of Muslim spiritual resilience amid ecological destruction.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that Sūrat al-Rūm: 41 constitutes not merely a classical Qur'anic commentary on moral corruption, but a remarkably coherent theological framework for the contemporary ecological crisis, one whose internal structure maps with precision onto the central concerns of Islamic eco-theology and spiritual resilience. The verse's four-part movement from the acknowledgement of *fasād*, through the attribution of its causes to human agency, to the experience of consequence, and finally to the divine summons of *yarji'ūn* offers Muslims a scripturally grounded language with which to name, interpret, and respond to ecological destruction without succumbing to either denial or despair.



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The dialogue between the verse and Islamic eco-theology is not, as this paper has demonstrated, an exercise in retrofitting modern concerns onto ancient scripture. The interpretive scaffolding was already in place, in the classical readings of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Qurṭubī, awaiting the contextual reactivation that the present ecological crisis demands. What *tawhīd*, *khalīfah*, *mīzān*, and *amānah* supply is the theological grammar through which the verse's diagnosis becomes a vocation: the Muslim is summoned not merely to lament *fasād* but to participate actively in its reversal.

The framework of spiritual resilience derived from this analysis is fourfold: honest acknowledgement grounded in *tafakkur* and *tawhīd*; moral accountability expressed as ecological *tawbah*; patient perseverance through consequence sustained by *ṣabr* and *tawakkul*; and collective return embodied in communal institutions such as the *pesantren* and the mosque. Together, these dimensions constitute a resilience that is not merely psychological but prophetic a sustained, faith-grounded refusal to abandon either the natural world or the God who created and sustains it.

Further research is needed to explore the practical implementation of this framework across diverse Muslim communities in Indonesia and the wider ASEAN region, particularly in examining how *eco-pesantren* models and mosque-based environmental programmes translate theological conviction into measurable ecological and psychological outcomes.

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