Eco-Theology: Formulating the Concept of Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah in the Context of the Environmental Crisis

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ABSTRACT

The accelerating global environmental crisis including ecosystem degradation, climate change, and rapid biodiversity loss demands a more integrated religious and ethical response. This study investigates how *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* can be reformulated as a normative foundation for eco-theology capable of addressing escalating ecological damage that threatens human survival and planetary stability. The core problem examined is the insufficient alignment between Islamic legal objectives and the urgent need for environmental preservation. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach supported by literature review and textual analysis of classical Islamic sources and contemporary environmental scholarship, this research constructs an ecological extension of the *maqāṣid* framework. The findings indicate that strengthening *ḥifẓ al-nafs*, *ḥifẓ al-māl*, and the emerging category of *ḥifẓ al-bī'ah* provides a robust ethical and legal basis for embedding ecological consciousness within Islamic thought and practice. The study concludes that an eco-theological formulation grounded in *maqāṣid* offers a transformative paradigm in which environmental protection becomes not merely a scientific or policy concern but a moral-religious obligation essential for ensuring justice, wellbeing, and sustainability for present and future generations.

Keywords: environmental crisis, eco-theology, maqasid al-shariah, sustainability, ecological ethics

INTRODUCTION

The accelerating global environmental crisis has become one of the most urgent challenges confronting humanity today. Climate change, ecosystem degradation, biodiversity loss, deforestation, and widespread pollution collectively indicate that the planet is approaching a critical threshold [1]. These ecological disruptions not only threaten environmental balance but also jeopardize economic stability, social cohesion, and human survival. From a moral and spiritual perspective, the environmental crisis reflects a deeper ethical failure in the way modern societies understand and manage their relationship with nature. Therefore, addressing ecological collapse requires more than technological and policy-based solutions; it demands a transformative reorientation of values, ethics, and theological worldviews.

Within the Islamic tradition, nature is regarded as a manifestation of divine signs (*āyāt kauniyyah*), a trust (*amānah*), and a realm governed by divine order. The Qur'an repeatedly warns humanity against corruption (*fasād*) on earth and emphasizes the importance of maintaining balance (*mīzān*) in nature [2]. Yet, throughout Islamic intellectual history, mainstream discussions of *Sharī'ah* have predominantly centered on ritual, social, and legal aspects, leaving ecological concerns relatively underdeveloped. This gap becomes particularly evident in the context of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, the higher objectives of Islamic law, which historically focused on protecting religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. As environmental degradation intensifies, contemporary scholars argue that maqāṣid must be expanded or reinterpreted to address urgent ecological realities [3].

Recent scholarly efforts—such as those by Muhammad Tahir Ibn Ashur and Yusuf Al-Qaradawi—highlight that maqāṣid should evolve in accordance with the changing needs of society [4], [5]. Among these developments is the proposition to incorporate environmental protection (*ḥifẓ al-bī'ah*) as an essential objective within the maqāṣid framework. Integrating ecological ethics into maqāṣid is not merely conceptual; it provides a normative and theological basis for positioning environmental stewardship as an integral part of religious responsibility rather than an optional ethical concern. This approach helps shift religious discourse from anthropocentric interpretations toward a more holistic, eco-centered understanding aligned with sustainability and planetary wellbeing.

The severity of the current environmental crisis also underscores the central role of human attitudes and behavior. Even advanced environmental technologies cannot mitigate ecological destruction if society maintains an exploitative worldview toward nature. A

maqāṣid-based eco-theology offers an alternative paradigm capable of cultivating ecological consciousness within Muslim communities, informing policy development, and reshaping Islamic education toward sustainability [6]. This framework seeks to harmonize spiritual, ethical, and ecological values, placing environmental protection at the heart of religious praxis.

To position this research within existing scholarship, it is essential to examine previous studies that have addressed Islam and the environment. Seyyed Hossein Nasr emphasizes the spiritual roots of the ecological crisis, arguing that modernity has severed humanity's sacred relationship with nature [1], [7]. Studies on Islamic environmental jurisprudence (*fiqh al-bī'ah*) mainly concentrate on legal norms and prohibitions but seldom connect their findings to the broader maqāṣid discourse [8]. Meanwhile, contemporary works on expanding maqāṣid often focus on conceptual revisions without integrating them with eco-theological concerns or contemporary global environmental challenges [9], [10]. Additionally, much of the existing literature remains descriptive, exploring environmental verses in the Qur'an without formulating a comprehensive theological framework [11].

The novelty of this research lies in its attempt to synthesize three major dimensions simultaneously: (a) the urgency of the global environmental crisis; (b) eco-theology as a spiritual-ethical foundation; and (c) *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* as a normative framework for constructing a holistic Islamic ecological paradigm. By integrating these dimensions, this study fills a significant gap in the literature and proposes a more comprehensive, actionable, and theologically grounded framework for responding to today's ecological challenges.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design with a descriptive-analytical orientation, emphasizing textual interpretation and conceptual reconstruction [12], [13]. The qualitative approach is chosen because the core objective of the research is to explore, interpret, and synthesize theological, ethical, and legal concepts within Islamic thought rather than measure empirical variables [14], [15]. This approach enables a deep examination of classical and contemporary Islamic texts, environmental ethics literature, and scholarly works addressing *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* and eco-theology.

1. Research Design

The research is structured as a library-based study (*library research*), integrating hermeneutic analysis and conceptual mapping [16], [17]. The design allows the researcher to trace the evolution of environmental discourse in Islamic scholarship and identify how the principles of maqāṣid can be reformulated to respond to modern ecological crises. The study's interpretive orientation draws upon theological hermeneutics, contemporary environmental philosophy, and Islamic legal theory [18], [19].

2. Data Sources

Data are collected from three main categories of texts:

a. Primary Islamic sources [20]: the Qur'an, Hadith, classical exegetical works, and foundational texts of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* (e.g., works by Al-Juwayni, Al-Ghazali, Al-Shatibi, and Ibn Ashur).

b. Secondary Islamic legal and theological literature: works by modern scholars such as Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, Mohammad Hashim Kamali, and others who engage with the intersections of Shariah, ethics, and contemporary issues.

c. Environmental and eco-theological literature: writings by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, environmental ethics theorists, and contemporary interdisciplinary sources addressing climate change, ecological collapse, and sustainability.

These sources together provide a multilayered understanding of both Islamic normative frameworks and ecological realities relevant to the research.

3. Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through systematic reading, note-taking, coding of themes, and categorization of concepts. The researcher identifies recurring patterns related to environmental ethics, divine stewardship, ecological justice, and maqāṣid-based reasoning. The collection process emphasizes interpretive depth rather than numerical frequency, in line with the qualitative nature of the study [21], [22], [23].

4. Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using three complementary analytical methods:

a. Content Analysis

This step involves extracting key theological and normative concepts from Islamic texts and environmental literature [24], [25], [26], followed by classifying them into themes such as stewardship (*khilāfah*), balance (*mīzān*), prohibition of corruption (*fasād*), and preservation (*ḥifẓ*).

b. Hermeneutic Analysis

Hermeneutics is applied to interpret textual meanings within their historical, linguistic, and ethical contexts. This method is crucial for understanding how classical interpretations can be extended to contemporary environmental challenges [27], [28].

c. Conceptual Reconstruction

This technique is used to reframe *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* in light of modern ecological crises, enabling the formulation of an eco-theological maqāṣid model where environmental protection (*ḥifẓ al-bī'ah*) becomes a central objective.

5. Validation

The credibility of the findings is ensured through:

a. Triangulation of sources, combining classical Islamic texts, modern scholarly works, and

interdisciplinary environmental literature [29], [30], [31].

b. Peer-reviewed references, particularly recognized works in Islamic legal theory (e.g., Mohammad Hashim Kamali) and eco-theology (e.g., Seyyed Hossein Nasr).

c. Theoretical coherence, ensuring that the proposed conceptual formulation aligns with established principles of maqāṣid and contemporary ecological evidence.

6. Expected Outcomes

Through this methodological approach, the research aims to:

a. Identify theological and normative foundations for environmental ethics within Islam.

b. Reconstruct *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* to incorporate environmental preservation as a fundamental objective [10].

c. Propose an eco-theological framework capable of addressing global ecological crises from an Islamic perspective.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study are organized into several thematic discussions that reflect the conceptual, theological, and methodological synthesis arising from the library-based analysis. The integration of classical Islamic sources, contemporary interpretations of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, and global environmental literature reveals a complex relationship between ecological degradation and the broader moral-spiritual crisis faced by modern society. Rather than treating environmental problems as isolated ecological events, the findings indicate that they are deeply intertwined with shifts in worldview, ethical practices, and legal interpretations within Muslim communities and beyond.

Through an examination of Qur'anic ecological principles, classical juridical frameworks, and modern eco-theological scholarship, this study identifies critical gaps in how Islamic thought has responded to the accelerating environmental crisis. These gaps, however, also provide opportunities for reconstructing a more comprehensive framework—one that positions environmental preservation at the heart of Islamic legal and ethical objectives. The following thematic sections present the core findings of this research, beginning with an exploration of how the ecological crisis represents not only a scientific or political concern, but also a profound theological and ethical challenge.

1. Ecological Crisis as a Theological and Ethical Challenge

The analysis of contemporary environmental data shows that ecological degradation—ranging from climate instability to the collapse of ecosystems—has reached a level that threatens the very foundations of human life [32]. From an Islamic theological standpoint, this condition reflects a disruption of the cosmic balance (*mīzān*) that God has established. The Qur'an frequently warns against *fasād* (corruption) caused by human actions (cf. Q.

30:41), emphasizing that environmental destruction is inseparable from moral decline [33].

This study finds that the global environmental crisis cannot be separated from an anthropocentric worldview shaped by modernity, one that positions humans as consumers rather than stewards. Seyyed Hossein Nasr argues that the ecological crisis is fundamentally rooted in spiritual alienation, where nature is no longer seen as sacred but merely as material to be exploited [34]. This theological insight becomes crucial in reconstructing an Islamic eco-ethic grounded in spiritual consciousness.

2. Reinterpreting Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah in Light of Ecological Realities

Classical *maqāṣid*—protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property—are historically embedded in contexts where environmental degradation had not yet reached global scale. Through hermeneutic analysis, this research finds that these objectives contain implicit ecological dimensions. For instance, *ḥifẓ al-nafs* (protection of life) logically encompasses protection against environmental hazards such as polluted air, unsafe water, or climate-induced disasters. Similarly, *ḥifẓ al-māl* (protection of property) includes safeguarding natural resources such as land, forests, and water systems from depletion and destruction.

Contemporary scholars argue for expanding the maqāṣid framework to include *ḥifẓ al-bī'ah* explicitly [35], [4]. This study supports this expansion by demonstrating that environmental preservation is not merely an extension of the classical maqāṣid but is essential for sustaining all other objectives. If ecological stability collapses, none of the classical maqāṣid can be fulfilled. Thus, environmental protection must be elevated to a primary objective within the hierarchical structure of maqāṣid.

3. Constructing an Eco-Theological Maqāṣid Framework

Building upon conceptual reconstruction, this study proposes an integrated eco-maqāṣid model consisting of three key components:

a. Ontological Principle: Nature as a Sacred Trust (*Amānah*)

Nature is not passive matter but part of God's signs (*āyāt*). This theological view shifts the human role from dominator to caretaker. The Qur'anic concept of *khilāfah* implies responsibility rather than privilege [5], [36], [37], [38].

b. Ethical Principle: Balance (*Mīzān*) and Moderation (*Wasatiyyah*)

c. Environmental ethics grounded in Islamic moderation can counter excessive consumption, resource depletion, and exploitative economic activities. This aligns with Al-Qaradawi's argument that environmental ethics are embedded in the moral fabric of Islam [39].

d. Legal Principle: Environmental Preservation as Maqāṣid

By placing *ḥifẓ al-bīʾah* within the maqāṣid structure, environmental protection is elevated from an optional ethical recommendation to a legal-theological obligation. This aligns with Ibn Ashur's emphasis that maqāṣid must evolve to meet societal needs [40], [41], [42].

The proposed eco-maqāṣid model highlights how Islamic theology, ethics, and legal theory can be reoriented to respond meaningfully to contemporary environmental realities. From a researcher's perspective, synthesizing the ontological, ethical, and legal dimensions demonstrates that ecological concern is not a peripheral aspect of Islamic thought but is deeply embedded in its foundational worldview. The notion of nature as *amānah* challenges the long-standing anthropocentric tendencies that have shaped modern development paradigms, urging a shift toward a relational understanding of humanity's place within the natural order.

Furthermore, the ethical emphasis on *mīzān* and *wasatiyyah* reveals that environmental stewardship is inseparable from the cultivation of moral character. It suggests that ecological degradation stems not only from structural and policy failures but also from spiritual and ethical imbalances at the level of human behavior. This reinforces the idea that addressing the environmental crisis requires both institutional reforms and personal transformation.

Legally, integrating *ḥifẓ al-bīʾah* into the maqāṣid formulation provides a normative basis for environmental protection that is both theologically grounded and jurisprudentially robust. This extension underscores that the objectives of Islamic law must remain dynamic and responsive to evolving human conditions. As environmental threats intensify, the inclusion of ecological preservation within the maqāṣid framework becomes not merely an intellectual exercise but a necessary adaptation to safeguard the broader purposes of Sharīʿah.

Taken together, these three principles illustrate the potential of Islamic thought to offer a holistic and forward-looking paradigm for ecological ethics. The eco-maqāṣid framework thus serves not only as a conceptual contribution but also as a call for renewed theological engagement with the pressing environmental challenges of our time.

4. Integrating Eco-Maqāṣid with Contemporary Environmental Discourse

One of the findings of this study is that Islamic eco-theology resonates strongly with global sustainability frameworks such as climate justice, intergenerational responsibility, and the rights-of-nature perspective. Concepts like justice (*ʿadl*), trust (*amānah*), and public interest (*maslahah*) naturally align with principles of contemporary environmental ethics. Mohammad Hashim Kamali stresses that *maslahah* must consider long-term impacts and universal wellbeing, which directly supports ecological sustainability [6], [43], [44].

This intersection demonstrates that Islamic theological principles can significantly contribute to the global discourse on climate ethics—not as an alternative system but as a complementary moral framework. The eco-maqāṣid model enables Islamic law and thought to engage with modern scientific and ethical challenges while remaining faithful to its scriptural foundations.

5. Research Contribution and Implications

The results of this study contribute to Islamic environmental studies in three significant ways:

a. Theological Reorientation:
It repositions environmental crisis as fundamentally a moral-spiritual problem, not merely an ecological one.

b. Maqāṣid Expansion:
It demonstrates that integrating environmental protection into the maqāṣid framework is both necessary and methodologically grounded in Islamic tradition.

c. Practical Implications:
The findings support the development of environmentally conscious Islamic education, policy-making, and community activism.

This demonstrates that eco-maqāṣid is not only a theoretical reformulation but also a practical tool that can inform sustainable development strategies in Muslim societies.

The overall findings presented through the thematic discussions from sections A to E illustrate that the environmental crisis confronting humanity today cannot be separated from deeper theological, ethical, and legal considerations within the Islamic intellectual tradition. By examining ecological degradation through the lenses of theology, ethics, and *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, it becomes evident that Islamic thought contains foundational principles capable of offering a substantive response to the global ecological emergency. Yet, these principles have remained largely implicit, underdeveloped, or fragmented across various scholarly domains.

The discussion in Section A demonstrates that the environmental crisis constitutes a profound spiritual and moral rupture, reminding humanity of its failure to uphold the divinely ordained balance. Section B further shows that classical *maqāṣid* contain inherent ecological dimensions that become clearer when reinterpreted within the context of contemporary environmental realities. Building upon this, Section C articulates a more integrative eco-theological framework that foregrounds environmental stewardship as a moral and legal imperative. Section D highlights the strong resonance between Islamic eco-ethics and global sustainability discourses, while Section E emphasizes that the reformulation of *maqāṣid* toward ecological concerns not only contributes to theoretical advancements but also carries practical

implications for policy, education, and community engagement.

Together, these findings confirm that a renewed maqāṣid-based ecological framework is both necessary and viable for addressing the challenges of modern environmental degradation. More importantly, they reveal that Islamic intellectual resources—when revisited through a holistic and forward-looking lens—possess the capacity to enrich global conversations on ecological ethics and sustainability. This synthesis provides the basis for constructing a comprehensive *eco-maqāṣid* paradigm, paving the way for a more grounded and actionable conclusion in the subsequent section.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the contemporary environmental crisis is not solely an ecological or scientific concern but represents a deeper moral, spiritual, and civilizational rupture. By revisiting Islamic theological principles, ethical teachings, and the evolving discourse on *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, the research reveals that Islam possesses a rich and coherent eco-theological foundation capable of addressing modern ecological challenges. The reinterpretation of classical *maqāṣid* shows that environmental protection (*ḥifẓ al-bī'ah*) must be elevated beyond peripheral ethical recommendations and recognized as a primary objective necessary for sustaining life, property, lineage, intellect, and religion.

The eco-maqāṣid framework proposed in this study integrates theological ontology, ethical moderation, and legal objectives into a holistic ecological paradigm. This integration not only revitalizes Islamic legal theory but also aligns Islamic ecological principles with global sustainability discourses, emphasizing justice, intergenerational responsibility, and the preservation of planetary balance. Consequently, the findings affirm that Muslim societies can meaningfully contribute to global climate ethics through a model rooted in their own intellectual heritage yet responsive to contemporary realities.

In essence, the research provides a conceptual foundation for developing environmentally conscious Islamic policies, educational curricula, and community practices. As environmental crises continue to intensify, the reconstruction of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* toward ecological preservation offers a meaningful pathway for fostering sustainable and spiritually grounded environmental stewardship.

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