



# *Tawhid of The Sky and Tawhid of The Earth: Theological Reflections of the People of Medan Post-Natural Disaster*

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the theological reflections of Medan city's residents following a natural disaster, focusing on the application of tawhid of the sky (the relationship between humans and God) and tawhid of the earth (the relationship between humans, others, and nature) in addressing ecological and social crises. It emphasizes the need for a holistic religious understanding to mitigate the impacts of increasingly frequent natural disasters and to enhance community ties with God and nature, thereby fostering social solidarity. The research uses a qualitative case study design with in-depth interviews with religious leaders, local officials, volunteers, and affected residents, supplemented by literature studies including the Qur'an, Hadith, and relevant Tafsir. Data analysis employs the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, with source triangulation to validate findings. Results reveal that the flood disaster in Medan prompted deep theological reflections, increasing awareness of the importance of spiritual relationships with God and responsibilities towards nature and others. The disaster is seen as a divine test and an opportunity to boost social and ecological awareness, also strengthening social solidarity through actions based on religious values. Challenges remain in implementing these principles in public policy and sustainable practices. Integration of tawhid values into disaster mitigation policies, environmental management, and community empowerment is recommended. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals in enhancing disaster response and resilience strategies, highlighting that effective multi-sector partnerships are crucial for comprehensive recovery and long-term community resilience.

**Keywords:** Tawhid, Theological Reflection, Sustainable Development, Natural Disaster.



## Introduction

Medan City, as one of the metropolitan cities in Indonesia, is once again facing a significant challenge related to flooding. On 27 November 2024, a flash flood struck the city due to the overflow of three major rivers: the Deli River, the Babura River, and the Sei Belawan River (CNN Indonesia, 2024). According to reports from the BPBD (Regional Disaster Management Agency) of Medan City, 24,874 people were affected, with 7,699 houses submerged, and most of the victims had to take refuge in places of worship, schools, or relatives' homes (Wismabrata, 2024). Not only did this cause material losses, but it also disrupted the democratic process, such as the delay in the implementation of local elections in more than 110 polling stations. This situation reflects how natural disasters can disrupt various aspects of urban life (Jackson, 2021; Sakurai & Chughtai, 2020).

The flooding phenomenon in Medan is not only triggered by high rainfall due to the influence of the Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO) and the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) but also reflects weaknesses in environmental governance and disaster mitigation (Sari, 2024). Medan Mayor Bobby Nasution emphasised that rainfall in upstream areas such as Deli Serdang and Karo regencies further exacerbated the situation (Wisely & Susanti, 2024). However, on the other hand, urban development patterns that disregard environmental carrying capacity, poor drainage management, and high levels of river sedimentation also cannot be overlooked (Andimuthu et al., 2019; Rafiei-Sardooi et al., 2021).

This recurring disaster illustrates the imbalance in the relationship between humans and the environment (*habl min al-nas* with nature as part of it) as well as the relationship between humans and God (*habl min Allah*). Amidst this tragedy, a reflective question arises: have the people, particularly Muslims in Medan, truly understood and practised the values of *tawhid* as a guide in maintaining harmony in these relationships? In this context, *tawhid* of the sky and *tawhid* of the earth become important theological frameworks for understanding how Islamic teachings provide comprehensive guidance on caring for nature and upholding social justice (Conradie, 2020).

On the other hand, the Qur'an provides guidance on the importance of maintaining ecological balance. Allah SWT says:

“Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by what the hands of people have earned, so He may let them taste part of [the consequence of] what they have done that perhaps they will return [to righteousness].” (QS. Ar-Rum: 41).

This verse affirms that natural disasters are not merely physical phenomena, but also have spiritual and moral dimensions (Manggola, 2023). Disasters serve as reminders for humans to evaluate their relationship with Allah and fellow creatures. In the context of Medan's community, this tragedy also presents an opportunity for theological reflection on how *tawhid* is not only understood as a transcendental concept but also as a foundation for social and ecological actions.

Field conditions show that many residents choose to stay in the floodwaters to protect their belongings, while others evacuate with limited facilities. This disparity reflects the need for stronger social solidarity, in line with the principle of *habl min al-nas*. However, until now, responses to disasters have been more reactive than preventive (Hawa et al., 2023; Kaur & Singh, 2022). In the perspective of *tawhid*, however, humans are required to be *khalifah* on earth, responsible not only to others but also to nature.

Looking ahead, there is an urgent need to integrate Islamic values into disaster mitigation policies, environmental management, and community empowerment. In addition to Islamic values, it is also important to consider integrating universal values from various religions and cultures embraced by Medan's diverse communities. Such integration would enhance interfaith and intercultural solidarity in disaster responses and improve the effectiveness of disaster mitigation policies. The principles of *tawhid* can serve as a foundation for building



collective awareness that fosters social and ecological responsibility (Fadhli & Fithriyah, 2021; Ihsan & Mudin, 2020). With this approach, communities are not only encouraged to survive in the face of disasters but also to establish more sustainable lifestyles.

The disaster that occurred in Medan must be seen as a momentum to revitalise the understanding of tawhid in a holistic way, encompassing both vertical (relationship with Allah) and horizontal (relationship with others and nature) dimensions. The integration of this understanding can create a more resilient and harmonious society in facing future challenges. This theological reflection can also drive the people of Medan to strengthen their relationship with God and fellow humans, as a concrete manifestation of the implementation of tawhid of the sky and tawhid of the earth (Atlas, 2015).

In the face of the escalating frequency and intensity of natural disasters, such as the recent flooding in Medan, it becomes imperative to strengthen partnerships across various sectors to enhance resilience and recovery strategies. SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals, highlights the critical role of collaborative efforts in achieving sustainable development, including disaster risk reduction and management. Effective partnerships, encompassing governments, civil society, and private sectors, are crucial for mobilising and sharing knowledge, expertise, technology, and financial resources. These collaborations are essential in designing and implementing holistic approaches that not only address immediate relief needs but also foster long-term recovery and resilience against future calamities. The integration of religious values into these partnerships can further enrich the strategies by aligning them with the local cultural and spiritual context, thereby enhancing community engagement and support. It is imperative to support societies from a range of perspectives and demonstrate real care (Nicolaidis & Vettori, 2019). This approach underlines the necessity of broad-based partnerships that leverage diverse resources such partnerships could involve key stakeholders, including government authorities, religious institutions, academic bodies, civil society groups, and private sector organizations and capabilities to tackle the complex challenges posed by natural disasters in urban settings like Medan.

The urgency of this research lies in the importance of integrating tawhid values in responding to the increasingly frequent natural disasters, especially in Medan and of course places with similar challenges. The flash floods that struck the area not only reflect ecological and social challenges but also demand a deep theological reflection to understand the relationship between humans and Allah (*habl min Allah*) and fellow creatures (*habl min al-nas*). In the context of the Muslim community, the concepts of tawhid of the sky and tawhid of the earth can serve as a relevant ethical and spiritual framework for building harmony between humans, the environment, and God. This research is urgent because there have been few studies connecting theological perspectives with a holistic approach to disaster management, thus providing a foundation for the formation of disaster mitigation policies based on religious values and social-ecological sustainability.

## Literature Review

This study describes how the people of Medan City respond to natural disasters through theological understanding related to the concepts of tawhid of the sky and tawhid of the earth in Islamic teachings. Tawhid of the sky refers to the relationship between humans and God, while tawhid of the earth emphasises the relationship between humans, fellow humans, and nature. Through the interpretation of the verses of *habl min Allah* (the relationship with God) and *habl min al-nas* (the relationship with fellow creatures), this study examines how disasters, such as floods, serve as points of reflection for society to strengthen their faith in God and their responsibility toward the environment and others. This research seeks to explore a deeper theological understanding of the importance of maintaining the balance between spiritual and socio-ecological dimensions in the face of environmental crises, as well as its



implications for disaster mitigation policies and environmental management based on religious values.

In this context, the author analysed 1,000 previous articles comprehensively and scientifically in a systematic review to identify research gaps. Once gathered, the author conducted a network and density analysis using VosViewer software. The results are as follows:

Previous research shows the interconnection between various actors involved in disaster responses, especially in terms of theological understanding of disasters. The network illustrates how actors such as religious leaders, volunteers, affected communities, and religious groups collaborate in disaster mitigation and recovery efforts while integrating deep theological values. Although each actor plays a different role—from providing physical aid to supporting emotional and spiritual recovery—this collective response is interwoven with the awareness that natural disasters are not just physical phenomena, but can also be understood as divine tests that examine the resilience of faith and social morality. As part of theological reflection, each interaction demonstrates how *tawhid of the sky* (relationship with God) and *tawhid of the earth* (relationship with fellow humans and nature) form an essential foundation for building solidarity and resilience in the face of disaster.

This study also highlights that natural disasters are rarely discussed from a theological perspective, despite the deep moral and spiritual dimensions they carry. Most studies and discussions about disasters focus more on the physical and technical aspects, such as disaster management and infrastructure recovery. However, the theological approach that combines *tawhid of the sky* and *tawhid of the earth* offers a new perspective that connects religious values with social and ecological responsibilities. This theological reflection provides a more holistic understanding, where disasters are not just viewed as calamities but also as opportunities to improve the relationship between humans and God, others, and nature. Therefore, this study contributes significantly to connecting theology with disaster mitigation policies, expanding the discourse on the importance of moral and spiritual awareness in addressing such events. Nicolaidis and Vettori (2019:1) assert that “...the ethical duty of all of us to drive ecological sustainability, ecotourism can be an inducement for conservation measures and education promotion on ecological issues, and it also serves to support local communities in enhancing their livelihoods”.

The previous research shows that while many actors are involved in responding to natural disasters, there is a pattern linking theological understanding with concrete social action. The data indicates a concentration of interactions between religious leaders, volunteers, and religious groups, who provide both material and moral support to affected communities. These interactions are not limited to providing physical aid but also involve offering spiritual support closely related to the concepts of *tawhid of the sky* and *tawhid of the earth*. This reflects how natural disasters, especially the floods in Medan, can provoke theological reflection on the relationship between humans and God, as well as their social responsibilities toward nature and others. Most of these interactions are driven not only by practical concerns but also by religious principles that underpin solidarity such as collective prayers, using places of worship as emergency shelters, and faith-based humanitarian assistance during disaster recovery efforts..

This study notes that it is rare for natural disasters to be discussed from a theological perspective, particularly one that integrates the concepts of *tawhid of the sky* and *tawhid of the earth* in disaster response and recovery. Most disaster studies focus on the physical and technical aspects, such as disaster planning, response, and infrastructure recovery. Therefore, the findings provide significant novelty by highlighting the theological dimension of understanding natural disasters as divine tests and opportunities to improve human relationships with God and others. With this approach, this study not only enriches the academic discourse on natural disasters but also offers an alternative, more holistic way of thinking that integrates both spiritual and ecological dimensions in addressing the impacts of



disasters. In addition to the above analyses, the author compares and critically evaluates several relevant previous studies.

Frijters et al. (2024), in their study, used a quantitative method with surveys to explore the relationship between religion and adaptation to difficulties after experiencing a disaster. The study's results showed that religion plays a crucial role in helping individuals cope with trauma and rebuild hope after a disaster. Religion is seen as a source of resilience, enabling individuals to rebuild their lives. The difference from this research lies in its more theological approach and focus on *tawhid of the sky* and *tawhid of the earth*, exploring religious understanding in the relationship between humans, God, others, and nature after a disaster, rather than solely focusing on individual resilience.

Nazaruddin (2024) used a cultural semiotics approach to analyse how natural disasters are understood within cultural and religious frameworks through the symbols present in society. The results showed that interpretations of disasters are heavily influenced by the symbols and meanings constructed within the religious context. This research places more emphasis on the symbolic and cultural aspects of understanding disasters, whereas this study focuses on *tawhid of the sky* and *tawhid of the earth* as theological foundations for viewing disasters as tests from God and responsibilities toward nature and others. In other words, this research prioritises the application of religious principles in a broader socio-ecological context.

Rafii et al. (2023) used a qualitative approach to examine local cultural wisdom in dealing with natural disasters in Probolinggo, Indonesia, highlighting how communities use religious teachings and local values to respond to and overcome disasters. The study found that religious and local cultural values play a key role in supporting the social and psychological resilience of communities. Unlike this research, which is more focused on theological reflection through the concepts of *tawhid of the sky* and *tawhid of the earth*, this study integrates local cultural wisdom into disaster management, leading to a more rooted approach based on local and traditional practices.

Ridho and Hudriansyah (2023) applied a social constructionist approach to understand religious attitudes toward disasters among disaster victims in Palu and Lombok. The study's results showed that religious attitudes toward disasters are shaped by social norms and social interactions within the communities of disaster victims, leading to solidarity and recovery. The difference from this research is its focus on the social construction of religious attitudes toward disasters, whereas this study emphasises the theological framework involving *tawhid of the sky* and *tawhid of the earth*, and how Islamic teachings influence social attitudes and actions post-disaster.

## Methods

This study employs a qualitative method with a case study approach to examine the theological reflection of the people of Medan City in the aftermath of a natural disaster, particularly in understanding the concepts of *tawhid of the sky* (heavenly oneness) and *tawhid of the earth* (earthly oneness) (Weyant, 2022). A case study approach is chosen because the study aims to deeply explore the phenomenon of the theological and social relationships formed in a specific context, namely the aftermath of the flash floods in Medan City (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2020). This study comprehensively examines how the community interprets the concept of *tawhid* in the face of disaster impacts, and how this can form the basis for social and ecological actions.

The primary data sources in this research include the Qur'an, Hadith, and relevant tafsir literature such as, *al-Mishbah*, *Jalalin*, *al-Maraghi* and other tafsir books as a foundation for analysing the concept of *tawhid* and its connection with environmental issues. These primary data were obtained through a systematic literature review of Qur'anic verses, particularly those related to *habl min Allah* (relationship with God), *habl min al-nas* (relationship with others), and



environmental preservation. Secondary data sources include official reports from the BPBD (Regional Disaster Management Agency) of Medan City, news reports from the media covering the flash floods in Medan, and previous studies related to disaster mitigation, environmental theology, and the social practices of communities post-disaster.

The data collection techniques in this study include three main methods: literature review, observation, and interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). A literature review is conducted to explore and understand the theological values contained in the Qur'an and other Islamic literature. Observation is carried out to observe the responses of the people of Medan City to the impacts of the disaster, including social activities, the use of places of worship as shelters, and interactions among residents during the crisis. Interviews are conducted with religious leaders, community figures, and affected residents to gain in-depth insights into how the values of *tawhid* are applied in daily life, particularly in the context of facing a disaster.

The data analysis technique uses the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Miles et al., 2021). The data collected from various sources are analysed in stages, starting with reducing the data according to the research focus, presenting it in narrative or matrix form, and drawing conclusions based on the relevant findings. To ensure the validity of the data, this study employs source triangulation, which involves comparing and confirming data obtained from the Qur'an, secondary literature, and the results of observation and interviews. This triangulation technique aims to enhance the validity and reliability of the research findings, thereby providing a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the theological reflection of the people of Medan City in responding to a disaster (Flick, 2022).

## Results and Disucssion

### The Qur'anic Literature on the Verses of *Habl min Allah* and *Habl min al-Nas*

The Qur'an, as the holy book of Muslims, provides comprehensive guidance in establishing a vertical relationship with Allah (*habl min Allah*) and a horizontal relationship with fellow human beings (*habl min al-nas*). These two dimensions are inseparable in the practice of a Muslim's life, as they complement each other in creating a harmonious life, both spiritually and socially (Azisi et al., 2024; Mibtadin, 2023). The vertical relationship emphasises obedience, submission, and worship to Allah, while the horizontal relationship highlights social responsibility, morality, and concern for the environment and others. In this context, the verses of the Qur'an contain values that serve as a foundation for humans to understand and fulfil their roles as both worshippers and khalifahs (stewards) on earth.

The concept of *tawhid of the sky* (heavenly oneness), representing the relationship with Allah, and *tawhid of the earth* (earthly oneness), symbolising the relationship with others, forms the main foundation of Islamic teachings in establishing a balance between spiritual and social dimensions. The Qur'an mentions many verses relevant to this theme, from the importance of worshipping Allah to the encouragement of upholding social justice and preserving the environment. Below are several verses that contain the values of *habl min Allah* and *habl min al-nas*, along with descriptions to illustrate the Qur'anic messages relevant to this discussion:

**Table 1. Verses of *Habl min Allah* and *Habl min al-Nas***

No.	Verse (Translation and Number)	Description
1	"And I did not create the jinn and mankind except that they should worship Me." (QS. Adh-Dhariyat: 56)	<i>Tawhid of the sky</i> (Heavenly Oneness): Emphasises the purpose of human creation to worship Allah as a form of vertical relationship.



2	"They are overwhelmed with disgrace wherever they may be, except when they hold fast to the rope (religion) of Allah and the bond (covenant) with mankind." (QS. Ali 'Imran: 112)	Integrating <i>tawhid of the sky</i> and <i>tawhid of the earth</i> (Earthly Oneness): The importance of relationships with both Allah and fellow humans.
3	"And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and transgression." (QS. Al-Maidah: 2)	<i>Tawhid of the earth</i> (Earthly Oneness): The importance of cooperation in goodness as a manifestation of a good horizontal relationship.
4	"Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by [reason of] what the hands of people have earned..." (QS. Ar-Rum: 41)	<i>Tawhid of the earth</i> (Earthly Oneness): A reminder for humans to maintain their relationship with the environment and others, avoiding corruption.
5	"And whoever holds firmly to Allah – then he has been guided to a straight path." (QS. Ali 'Imran: 101)	<i>Tawhid of the sky</i> (Heavenly Oneness): Emphasises a strong relationship with Allah as the source of guidance and salvation.
6	"And do good [to others] as Allah has done good to you..." (QS. Al-Qashash: 77)	<i>Tawhid of the earth</i> (Earthly Oneness): Urges humans to emulate Allah's goodness in their interactions with others.
7	"Indeed, my prayer, my rites of sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the worlds." (QS. Al-An'am: 162)	<i>Tawhid of the sky</i> (Heavenly Oneness): Total commitment of humans to Allah in all aspects of their life.
8	"And say to My servants, 'Say that which is best.'" (QS. Al-Isra': 53)	<i>Tawhid of the earth</i> (Earthly Oneness): Encourages humans to maintain ethical communication as part of a harmonious horizontal relationship.

The relationship between humans and Allah (*habl min Allah*) and the relationship between humans and each other (*habl min al-nas*) are two complementary dimensions in Islamic teachings. Both reflect a balance between the vertical and horizontal aspects of a Muslim's life. In the Qur'an, there are verses that emphasise the importance of these two relationships, providing both theological and practical guidelines for humans to carry out their roles as servants and stewards on earth. However, often people fall into the misconception of considering the relationship with Allah as the only aspect of religiosity, neglecting the importance of maintaining harmonious relationships with fellow human beings. In fact, a person's religiosity is not only measured by their obedience to Allah but also by how they treat others. Furthermore, a comprehensive understanding of religiosity also involves the ethical stewardship and care of the natural environment, which is considered a sacred trust bestowed by Allah.

The first verse relevant to *tawhid of the sky* is QS. Adh-Dhariyat: 56, "And I did not create the jinn and mankind except that they should worship Me." Tafsir Muyassar explains that this verse emphasises the primary purpose of the creation of beings is to worship Allah (Al-Qarni, 2008). Worship in this context is not limited to formal rituals but encompasses all forms of obedience that demonstrate servitude to Him. The *tawhid of the sky* depicted here shows that the vertical relationship of humans with Allah is the foundation of all aspects of life. In worship, humans are directed towards closeness to Allah, who is the source of tranquillity and true happiness.

Next, QS. Ali 'Imran: 112, "They are overwhelmed with disgrace wherever they may be, except when they hold fast to the rope (religion) of Allah and the bond (covenant) with mankind," integrates the concepts of *habl min Allah* and *habl min al-nas*. Tafsir Hamka highlights that the relationship with Allah must be balanced with a good relationship with fellow humans (Hamka,



2012). This view is reinforced by Quraish Shihab, who explains that this verse emphasises the importance of maintaining commitment to Allah's religion while also preserving social agreements with others (Shihab, 2015). This indicates that a person's spiritual success also depends on their ability to live harmoniously within society (Fakhrurrazi et al., 2023; Tambak, 2021). Thus, spiritual success in Islam is intrinsically linked to both personal devotion and social harmony, reflecting the comprehensive nature of religious practice that involves engaging positively with one's community.

In QS. Al-Maidah: 2, Allah says, "And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression." Tafsir Al-Maraghi explains that this verse provides guidance for the horizontal relationship between humans, namely the importance of cooperation in matters that support righteousness and piety (Maraghi, 1910). Conversely, Muslims are prohibited from cooperating in sin and transgression. This strengthens the idea that human relationships should be based on moral principles and religious values (Litvinova, 2021; Mevlyutov & Gamzatov, 2023).

Furthermore, in QS. Ar-Rum: 41, "Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by [reason of] what the hands of people have earned," serves as a reminder of the importance of the relationship between humans and the environment as part of *tawhid of the earth*. Tafsir Jalalain interprets that this corruption includes both physical and spiritual aspects, which are caused by humans' violations of Allah's laws and their disregard for the environment (As-Suyuthi & Al-Mahally, 2015). This verse underscores human responsibility as stewards on earth to maintain the balance of nature.

In QS. Ali 'Imran: 101, "And whoever holds firmly to Allah – then he has been guided to a straight path," Zamakhsyari in his tafsir affirms that a strong relationship with Allah is the primary source of guidance in life (Al-Zamakhsyari, 1995). Ibn Katsir adds that "holding firmly" here includes deep faith and the practice of religious values (Katsir, 2018). This verse shows that *tawhid of the sky* forms the foundation for living a straight and safe life.

QS. Al-Qashash: 77, "And do good [to others] as Allah has done good to you," directs humans to take Allah's qualities as a model in their relationships with others. Tafsir Thabathabai emphasises that doing good to others is a reflection of Allah's mercy (Thabathaba'i, 1991). In the summary of the Ministry of Religious Affairs' tafsir, this verse is understood as a command to carry out social justice as part of worshipping Allah (Kemenag, 2016).

*Tawhid of the sky* is once again reinforced in QS. Al-An'am: 162, "Indeed, my prayer, my rites of sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the worlds." Fakhr al-Din al-Razi explains that this verse stresses the total devotion of a servant to Allah (Al-Razi, 2012). Every aspect of life, both physical and spiritual, must be directed towards seeking Allah's pleasure.

Lastly, QS. Al-Isra: 53, "And say to My servants, 'Say that which is best,'" emphasises the importance of maintaining ethical communication in horizontal relationships. Tafsir Al-Jazairi mentions that speaking ethically is part of a Muslim's character, while Baydhawi stresses that kind words can prevent conflict and support social harmony (Al-Jaza'iri, 2003).

In addressing the complex challenges posed by natural disasters such as the floods in Medan, it is vital to foster strong partnerships such as collaborations among local government agencies, international aid organizations, community-based NGOs, faith groups, and private sector stakeholders, all working together to enhance disaster preparedness and response strategies that extend across all sectors of society, as underscored by SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals. This goal emphasizes the necessity of collaborative efforts that integrate a wide range of stakeholders including government entities, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and religious communities. By establishing robust alliances, we can effectively share resources, knowledge, and expertise, thereby enhancing the capacity for disaster preparedness and response. Such partnerships are essential not only in mobilizing the necessary resources for immediate relief but also in implementing sustainable solutions that





address both the root causes and the long-term impacts of these disasters. Engaging religious communities in particular can also ensure that recovery efforts are culturally sensitive and spiritually supportive, thus aligning practical actions with the deeply rooted values and beliefs of the affected populations. This holistic approach, which aligns with the teachings of tawhid, ultimately fosters a more resilient and cohesive society.

From all these verses, it is clear that a person's religiosity is not only measured by their obedience in worshipping Allah but also by how they maintain good relationships with others. In daily life, humans often forget that maintaining relationships with others is just as important as maintaining a relationship with Allah. In fact, Islam teaches that both are complementary and determine the success of life in this world and the hereafter. The combination of *tawhid of the sky* and *tawhid of the earth* forms a holistic framework that can create a religious, harmonious, and just society.

### **Theological Reflection: Phenomenon and Worship in the Natural Disaster Tragedy in Medan City**

In facing natural disasters, such as the floods that struck Medan City, theological reflection becomes one of the important aspects that helps the community interpret and deal with the situation in the context of their faith and spirituality. Worship, which is not only understood as a series of religious rituals but also as an expression of solidarity, care, and responsibility towards others as well as the environment, receives particular attention. To understand more deeply how the values of worship are manifested in actions and perceptions of the community post-disaster, interviews were conducted with seven informants directly involved in the response and recovery efforts. Below are the details of the informants who provided insights into the dynamics of worship and theological reflection that occurred during and after the flood disaster in Medan City:

**Table 2. Research Informants**

No.	Initial	Role
1	AZ	Religious Head
2	IP	Community Head
3	MRHH	Volunteer
4	MBC	Volunteer
5	TAP	Citizen/Victim
6	RB	Citizen/Victim
7	MLAM	Citizen/Victim

In responding to natural disasters, particularly the floods that frequently affect various regions, the theological phenomena that emerge become an important aspect that illustrates how communities interpret and respond to the situation through a religious lens. This theological reflection encompasses various aspects, from the strengthening of faith and religious-based solidarity to the understanding of tests and trials believed to be part of divine plans (Houston, 2023). Questions about God's will, the role of humans as khalifah (stewards) on earth, and the ethical implications of responding to disasters all form a framework of thought that guides action and community support. In the context of Medan City, here are some theological phenomena that occurred.



**Table 3. Theological Phenomena Post-Natural Disaster (Flood)**

No.	Theological Phenomenon	Description
1	Reflection on the power and will of God	Individuals and communities often reflect upon and question the role of God's will in natural disasters.
2	Strengthening of faith and spirituality	Many people find that their faith and spiritual activities become more intense in response to a disaster.
3	Understanding the concept of 'test' and 'trial'	In many religious traditions, natural disasters are viewed as tests or trials to be faced and overcome with patience.
4	Religious-based solidarity and mutual cooperation	Communities often activate religious networks to provide aid and support to those affected.
5	Reevaluation of life values	Natural disasters can motivate individuals to reassess their life priorities and the values they uphold.
6	The role of religion in recovery and rehabilitation	Religion often serves as a source of strength and a framework for the recovery and rehabilitation of communities post-disaster.
7	Changes in religious practices and rituals	Natural disasters may lead to changes in how individuals and communities perform religious worship and rituals.
8	Debate about theodicy	Natural disasters often trigger debates on theodicy, i.e., the question of how a benevolent God allows evil and suffering.
9	Encouragement for social and ecological action	Responses to natural disasters can inspire communities to become more active in social action and environmental conservation.

In facing natural disasters, such as the recent devastating floods in Medan City, the local community often engages in deep reflection regarding God's power and will. This theological phenomenon involves questions about God's role in the disaster. Such reflection triggers discussions about divine nature and justice in natural phenomena, encouraging individuals and communities to seek a deeper understanding of the theology and philosophy of the religion they follow (Harold & Wallace, 2023; Rumahuru & Kakiay, 2020).

Strengthening faith and spirituality also becomes a highly visible phenomenon among the people of Medan after the floods. Many find that this disaster deepens their spiritual practices, whether through prayer, meditation, or communal religious activities. This strengthening often functions as a coping mechanism to deal with the stress and uncertainty caused by the disaster, while also reinforcing the bonds within the community (le Roux & Lotter, 2021).

When facing a natural disaster, many people in Medan regard it as a 'test' or 'trial' from God. This view is common in many religious traditions, where natural disasters are interpreted as an opportunity to demonstrate resilience, patience, and steadfast faith (Khafidhoh, 2013; Mujib, 2015). In this context, the disaster is not only seen as a calamity but also as an opportunity for spiritual and moral growth.

Religious solidarity and mutual cooperation are vital in responding to the flood in Medan City. Religious communities are often among the first to provide assistance and support, not only in physical forms such as food, water, and shelter but also in emotional and spiritual support. The existence of these religious networks demonstrates how religious values are translated into real actions that support the survival and recovery of the community (Iskandar, 2019; Kotani et al., 2023).

Moreover, natural disasters often force individuals to re-evaluate the values they hold in life. In Medan, the flood disaster has pushed many people to reconsider what is most important in their lives, often leading to a greater emphasis on family, community, and spirituality over materialism. In addition to re-evaluating life values, the trauma from natural disasters often precipitates significant mental health issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety, due to the profound loss of homes, livelihoods, and loved ones.

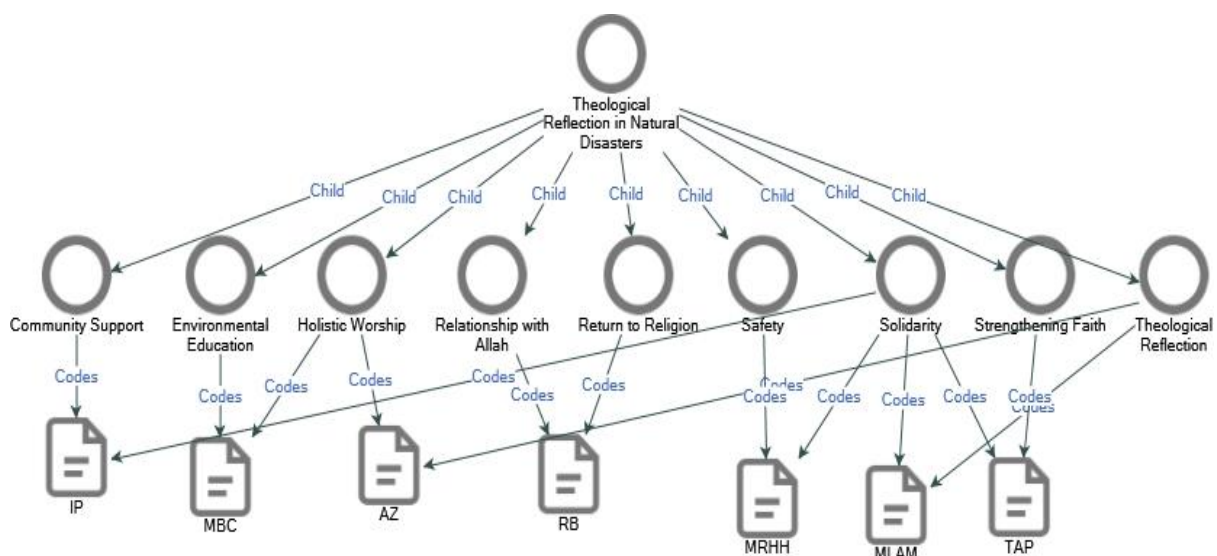
The role of religion in recovery and rehabilitation in the community post-disaster in Medan City cannot be overlooked. Religion provides a framework that not only supports physical and infrastructure recovery but also emotional and spiritual healing for individuals. Religious facilities are often used as centres for distributing aid and recovery activities, as well as places of shelter and counselling for those affected (Jaya & Izudin, 2023).

Changes in religious practices and rituals are also often observed after a disaster. In Medan, some religious activities are adapted to meet the practical and emotional needs that arise from the flood. For example, the time and place of worship may be adjusted, and the messages delivered in sermons often focus more on themes of resilience, hope, and recovery.

Debates on theodicy, the question of why a good God allows suffering and evil, often arise in the context of natural disasters. In Medan, this disaster has triggered intense theological discussions about God's nature and divine justice. The public and religious leaders are working to answer these difficult questions in an effort to provide comfort and understanding to those affected.

Furthermore, responses to disasters often inspire broader social and ecological action. In Medan, many religious groups and civil communities have taken initiatives in environmental preservation and preventive activities to reduce the impact of future disasters. This reflects the recognition that maintaining the environment is part of moral and spiritual responsibility (Fahyuni et al., 2020; Mohidem & Hashim, 2023).

From all these theological phenomena, it is clear that natural disasters such as floods not only have physical impacts but also profoundly affect the spiritual and social dimensions of the community. Medan City, with all its challenges and responses, provides an example of how natural disasters can influence and transform the theological and religious context of a community. In this regard, the author has gathered several theological reflections from the informants described in the previous narrative. The results of the interviews obtained by the author are as follows:



**Figure 3. Map of Post-Disaster Theological Reflection Interviews**



Post-flood in Medan City, various theological phenomena emerged as responses from the community to the event. These phenomena show how natural disasters not only affect the physical aspects of life but also influence religious understanding and practices. Interviews with several informants provided insights into how the people of Medan responded to this disaster in ways closely related to theological values, including reflections on God's power, the strengthening of faith, and the role of religion in strengthening solidarity and recovery.

First, the Religious Leader (AZ) emphasised the importance of theological reflection in facing natural disasters. AZ stated, "In the context of Islam, worship is not only limited to formal rituals but also includes interactions with all of creation, including nature. When disasters like floods occur, it is a time for us to reflect on our relationship with Allah and nature. This is a test but also an opportunity to apply theological values in protecting nature, which is one of the most fundamental forms of worship to Allah." This shows that the disaster is not only viewed as a misfortune but also as an opportunity to strengthen the spiritual relationship with God and with the environment.

On the other hand, the Community Head (IP) spoke about the importance of solidarity in facing the disaster. IP said, "We truly feel helped by the quick and effective response from various volunteer groups and non-governmental organisations. They brought assistance not only in material forms but also the moral and spiritual support that the people really needed." This solidarity is not only physical but also emotional and spiritual, showing how religious principles serve as the foundation for strengthening social bonds in the face of adversity (Kaya, 2021).

The volunteers also played an important role in providing assistance. Volunteer (MRHH) emphasised the importance of unity and safety in their efforts, saying, "We always try to prioritise the safety and security of the community. We also emphasise the importance of unity and cooperation among all parties involved. This is the practice of the Islamic values we follow, where every action we take in the field is also a form of worship." This shows that, in the context of a disaster, social actions like helping and protecting others are real expressions of worship in daily life.

Volunteer (MBC) also spoke about the importance of environmental education as part of the response to the disaster. "Facing this disaster has brought a new awareness for us to be more active in educating the community about the importance of environmental preservation. We believe this is part of our responsibility as Muslims to protect the earth, which is entrusted to us by Allah," said MBC. This shows how a disaster not only triggers physical recovery but also prompts deeper thinking about how to preserve the environment as part of worship (Akhir, 2018).

For the Flood Victim (TAP), the disaster taught valuable lessons about humanitarian and religious values. TAP shared, "This flood is indeed tragic, but it also brings many lessons about solidarity and religious values. The solidarity shown by many parties gave us strength to endure and strengthened our faith." This social solidarity based on religious values shows how a disaster can strengthen relationships between individuals and reinforce spiritual beliefs.

Meanwhile, the Flood Victim (RB) also noted that the disaster brought them closer to Allah. "This is a very trying time for all of us, but it also brings us closer to Allah. Many of us found comfort and strength in increasing our religious activities, such as prayers and group supplications," said RB. This shows how the disaster triggered a closer relationship with God and increased worship activities as a means of overcoming difficulties.

Another phenomenon was observed in the Flood Victim (MLAM), who stated that this tragedy taught the importance of togetherness and concern for others. "Through worship and collective prayers, we feel stronger and more united. This is a reflection of the tawhid of the sky and tawhid of the earth that we have learned and practised," said MLAM. This illustrates how the disaster strengthened social bonds and increased awareness of responsibility towards nature and others (Makhovskaya, 2022). From these various interviews, it can be accumulated that

the flood disaster in Medan City was not only a physical event but also a moment to deepen theological reflections about the relationship between humans, God, others, and nature. This is reflected in the understanding that worship encompasses more than just rituals but also actions that support life and the environment. This theological reflection emphasizes that human beings are stewards of creation, and in facing disasters, they must practice solidarity and responsibility, as well as strengthen their faith and worship through action. In addition to the role as stewards and practices of solidarity, this theological reflection also invites us to consider the broader socio-economic impacts of disasters, the development of inclusive public policies, and efforts to build sustainable community resilience grounded in religious values.



**Figure 4. Word Cloud of Post-Disaster Interview Results**

The word cloud that appears in the figure is highly relevant in the context of monotheism and theology, particularly in the understanding of spirituality and social dynamics following a natural disaster. Terms such as "tawhid of the sky" (sky monotheism) and "tawhid of the earth" (earth monotheism) emerge as representations of theological perspectives that link a monotheistic understanding of God (Allah) to the relationship between humans, others, and the environment. In the Islamic monotheistic tradition, "tawhid" refers to the belief in the oneness of God, which encompasses not only the vertical relationship between humans and Allah but also how this doctrine governs humanity's responsibilities towards others and the environment (Romdloni & Sukron Djazilan, 2019).

"Tawhid of the sky" refers to the vertical dimension of the relationship with God, while "tawhid of the earth" refers to the horizontal dimension, that is, the relationship between humans, nature, and others. These terms emerge after natural disasters, such as the flooding in Medan, because such events often provoke theological reflections on the meaning of the tests and trials imposed by God. In monotheistic theology, natural disasters are often regarded as forms of tests or warnings from God, inviting believers to reflect, refine their character and strengthen their relationship with Him, and recover through religious values that teach the importance of maintaining harmony with nature as part of humanity's responsibility (Nugraha & Naupal, 2019). This perspective aligns with the broader religious context where suffering and calamities, as seen in Christianity and Judaism, are also interpreted as divine tests or calls for repentance, intended to refine one's character and deepen trust in God's plan, even in times of uncertainty.

In this context, natural disasters serve as a means to test the steadfastness of faith (tawhid of the sky) while simultaneously reinforcing collective awareness of responsibilities towards the environment and others (tawhid of the earth). Thus, the term "tawhid" and the concept of monotheism do not only carry transcendental meaning but also lead to practical dimensions in the social and ecological life of the community. In the post-disaster reflection, these terms emerge as theological foundations that emphasise the importance of balance between worshipping God and fulfilling social and ecological responsibilities as part of a holistic monotheistic practice.

Furthermore, in the wake of the devastating floods in Medan City, the imperative role of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17: *Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable*



*development*, the notion of Partnerships for the Goals becomes clear, emphasizing the necessity for robust collaborations across governments, private sector entities, NGOs, and religious groups. Such partnerships are crucial not only for pooling resources and expertise for effective disaster response but also for integrating community-specific religious and cultural values into the recovery processes. These multi-stakeholder partnerships enhance the resilience of the community by ensuring that both material and spiritual needs are addressed, thereby supporting a holistic recovery that aligns with the deep-rooted beliefs and practices of the affected populations.

Globally, this phenomenon illustrates how the teachings of monotheism in the Islamic tradition encompass both dimensions of relationship, and how natural disasters trigger a deeper search for spiritual meaning through theology that is not only vertical but also horizontal. This word cloud reflects the effort to integrate monotheistic beliefs with social and ecological actions, using natural disasters as a momentum to renew religious understanding and practices that are more sustainable and harmonious.

## Discussion

In the aftermath of the natural disaster that occurred in Medan, the theological phenomenon post-disaster not only affects the community's understanding of God but also invites profound reflection on the relationship between humans, nature, and others. The flash floods that struck on November 27, 2024, made the community realise the importance of spiritual values that are not only limited to the vertical relationship between humans and God (tawhid of the sky) but also to the horizontal relationship between humans, the environment, and others (tawhid of the earth). In this context, natural disasters are not only considered as physical events, but also as reminders to renew one's spiritual relationship with God and to strengthen social solidarity and care for the environment as part of human responsibility.

The concepts of "tawhid of the sky" (sky monotheism) and "tawhid of the earth" (earth monotheism) that emerged in post-disaster theological reflections demonstrate the importance of understanding Islamic teachings in a holistic context, that is, maintaining a balance between the vertical relationship (relationship with God) and the horizontal relationship (relationship with others and nature). "Tawhid of the sky" emphasises obedience and servitude to Allah, represented by pure acts of worship, while "tawhid of the earth" directs our attention to social and ecological responsibilities, reminding humans to protect and preserve the environment and to act justly towards others (Fathil et al., 2015; Kurniawan, 2012). These two concepts complement each other in creating a balance between the spiritual and social dimensions in the life of a Muslim.

However, despite the familiarity of these values, there remains a gap between theological understanding and practical implementation in the field. In interviews with several informants, it was revealed that although many residents felt motivated to improve their relationship with God and nature, significant challenges still exist in applying these values in public policy and individual actions. This indicates that disasters not only trigger personal reflection but also demand structural changes in the approach to environmental management and disaster response. Affected residents, as expressed by the Religious Leader (AZ), conveyed that the disaster was not just a misfortune, but an opportunity to deepen their relationship with Allah and become more concerned about the environment.

A relevant theory in this discussion is the theory of liberation ecology, which emphasises that social justice and ecological justice cannot be separated in religious practices (Jahnel, 2023). In the context of Medan, the flood disaster showed that environmental damage due to poor management directly impacts the poor, who tend to be the most vulnerable group. This theory highlights that humanity's responsibility as khalifah (steward) on earth includes not only ritual worship but also an active role in maintaining the sustainability of nature. Thus, natural



disasters should be seen as a moment to rethink the human relationship with nature, not just as a trial to be endured with patience but also as a collective responsibility to care for the earth (Meguro & Kim, 2021).

Furthermore, within the framework of the theory of social responsibility in Islam, this is highly relevant in explaining the role of religion in post-disaster recovery (Lauta, 2014; Saltman, 2023). In Islam, each individual is seen as a khalifah with the task of protecting nature and creating social harmony. In Medan, the response to the flood not only involved physical recovery efforts, such as infrastructure repairs, but also strengthened social solidarity through religious activities and cooperation among communities. The Community Leader (IP) emphasised that the solidarity shown by various parties, whether volunteers or non-governmental organisations, was a concrete manifestation of the religious values that underlie togetherness. This is an example of how the principles of Islam regarding tawhid of the earth can be actualised in real action to help others.

One important aspect of the disaster response is the strengthening of faith and spirituality, which was clearly observed among the community post-disaster. Volunteers (MRHH) and affected residents (TAP) expressed that the disaster had deepened their religious activities, whether through prayers, supplications, or community gatherings. These more intense religious practices not only functioned as coping mechanisms to deal with uncertainty but also reinforced collective awareness of the importance of improving relationships with God and with others. This shows that spirituality in Islam is not just limited to religious rituals, but also includes efforts to maintain social solidarity and care for the environment, in accordance with the principle of tawhid of the earth.

Additionally, the re-evaluation of life values also became a significant phenomenon. Natural disasters often prompt individuals to reconsider their priorities in life. In Medan, many people realised that values they previously deemed important, such as materialism or luxury, needed to be replaced with a focus on family, community, and spirituality. This aligns with the principle of tawhid, which teaches that this worldly life should be seen as part of the journey towards the afterlife, marked by social good and concern for the environment.

The role of religion in recovery and rehabilitation post-disaster in Medan also cannot be overlooked. Religion provides a profound spiritual framework for emotional and social recovery (Bright et al., 2019; Tammar et al., 2020). Mosques, churches, and other places of worship became centres of assistance activities, both in terms of logistics distribution and emotional support. Here, we see that tawhid of the sky and tawhid of the earth not only govern the relationship with God but also underpin how humans work together to help and care for one another, as part of a broader form of worship.

On the other hand, changes in religious practices and rituals also became an interesting phenomenon. The people of Medan, post-flood, adapted various rituals and religious activities to fit the emergency conditions. Some mosques altered the schedule for congregational prayers, and sermons in many places of worship focused more on themes of resilience, hope, and unity. This illustrates how religious traditions can be flexible and adaptive in the face of crises, and how Islamic teachings remain relevant in providing moral and spiritual guidance amidst adversity.

The response to natural disasters also triggers debates about theodicy, questioning how a benevolent, omnipotent, and omniscient God allows suffering and evil to occur. This theological question, central to discussions of natural disasters, challenges us to explore deeper philosophical and theological explanations about why a benevolent and omnipotent God permits such suffering. In Medan, many residents interpreted the disaster as a test from God, intended to remind them of the importance of a harmonious relationship with nature and others. This highlights the significance of theological reflection in understanding disasters not just as tragedies, but as a way to enhance moral and spiritual awareness.



Natural disasters also inspire social and ecological actions, further strengthening solidarity among residents. Many religious-based organisations in Medan initiated environmental preservation and disaster prevention programs to mitigate future impacts. This shows that natural disasters can be a turning point for building more resilient and sustainable communities, integrating religious values with more just social and ecological practices (Maglajlic, 2019; Mao & Agyapong, 2021).

The theological reflections following the flood disaster in Medan demonstrate that natural disasters have a profound impact not only in physical terms but also in the spiritual and social dimensions of society. By integrating the values of tawhid of the sky and tawhid of the earth, which reminds people that they are stewards (Khalifah) of the earth and are entrusted with the responsibility of caring for and preserving it, the people of Medan can create a more harmonious, just, and sustainable society that reflects Islamic principles in caring for nature and others. Essentially then the values of Tawhid of the Sky and Tawhid of the Earth underscore that humanity is a part of a divine, interconnected system that covers the heavens and the earth.

Incorporating SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals into the context of Medan's post-disaster recovery is crucial for fostering effective collaboration across various sectors. This approach involves engaging a diverse range of stakeholders, including local communities, religious groups, NGOs, government agencies, and international partners, to create a unified response to the challenges posed by natural disasters. Such partnerships can enhance resource allocation, ensure the sharing of knowledge and best practices, and facilitate the integration of sustainable development goals into the local recovery and rebuilding efforts. By working together, these entities can address both the immediate needs of the affected population and the longer-term resilience and sustainability of the community.

Furthermore, SDG 17 emphasizes the importance of leveraging global partnerships that can bring additional resources and innovative solutions to local challenges. For Medan, this means accessing international aid, technology, and expertise that can assist in building more robust infrastructure, implementing effective disaster risk reduction strategies, and promoting environmental sustainability. These partnerships also provide a platform for Medan and also others who are at times in dire straits, to share its experiences and lessons learned with other regions facing similar challenges, thereby contributing to a global exchange of knowledge and strategies that support mutual growth and understanding in disaster management and resilience building. This collaborative approach not only accelerates recovery but also strengthens the community's ability to face future challenges in a more integrated and sustainable manner.

The novelty of this study lies in the development of the concepts of tawhid of the sky and tawhid of the earth in the context of theological reflection post-natural disaster, specifically the floods that struck Medan. This research reveals that disasters not only serve as spiritual tests (tawhid of the sky) but also as reminders of the importance of social and ecological responsibility towards nature and others (tawhid of the earth). This concept provides a new perspective in interpreting the relationship between humans, God, the environment, and others in the context of ecological crises.

More than just a religious principle, tawhid of the earth in this study emphasises that environmental preservation and social justice must become an integral part of worship and the practice of tawhid, which is expected to inspire policy and preventive actions based on religious values in disaster mitigation. Thus, these findings open a new discourse for linking theology with ecological and social policies in addressing the growing challenges of natural disasters.





## Conclusion

This study shows that natural disasters, particularly the floods in Medan, not only impact the physical aspects of the community's life but also provoke deep theological reflection. The concepts of tawhid of the sky and tawhid of the earth provide an important framework for understanding how the community integrates the spiritual and ecological dimensions in responding to disasters. Tawhid of the sky, which refers to the vertical relationship between humans and Allah, and tawhid of the earth, which emphasises the horizontal relationship with others and nature, demonstrate that worship in Islam involves responsibility for the environment and others. This phenomenon reveals that natural disasters serve as reminders for Muslims to improve their relationships with God and nature, while also strengthening social solidarity in the face of crises.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that the values of tawhid of the sky and tawhid of the earth be more deeply integrated into disaster mitigation policies and environmental management at both local and national levels. Public policy should consider these theological dimensions by encouraging active community participation in environmental preservation, which can also be seen as part of worship and social responsibility. Moreover, religious education that teaches the harmonious relationship between humans, God, and nature should be strengthened, both in schools and community forums. By doing so, the formation of collective awareness about the importance of social and ecological sustainability can reinforce the resilience of communities in facing future disasters.

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