ECOTHEOLOGY OF THREE CLASSICAL TAFSĪR FROM AL-ṬABARĪ TO AL-RĀZĪ: ACTUALIZING THE ABS-SBK PHILOSOPHY FOR URBAN MUSLIM SOCIETY IN WEST SUMATRA

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Abstract

The comparative study of classical Qur'anic exegesis seeks to trace how methodologically divergent hermeneutical traditions converge, or fail to converge, on shared ecological ethics. How al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, and al-Rāzī read the verses on vicegerency (*khalīfah*) and the mandate to cultivate the earth (*istiʿmār al-arḍ*) has not been systematically compared within a single ecotheological framework, nor connected to the practical concerns of urban Muslim communities; this study addresses both gaps. Its novelty lies in comparing three *tafsīr* chosen to represent three non-redundant currents, transmission-based (*riwāyah*), rhetorical (*balāghah*), and theological-philosophical (kalām), and in projecting the resulting principles onto the Minangkabau philosophy of Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah (ABS–SBK). Using a qualitative library-based method, the analysis applies close reading of the primary Arabic texts and thematic coding across five interpretive categories, followed by comparative synthesis. The findings reveal, first, that the three exegetes converge on four normative principles, vicegerency, ecological sin, active stewardship, and balance, despite arguing through entirely different paths; second, that this convergence cannot be taken for granted, since divergent theological commitments could plausibly have produced divergent ethics instead; and third, that the principles suggest conceptual pathways for actualization through the *adat*, *syarak*, and government institutions of ABS–SBK, not yet empirically tested. Its contribution is normative and conceptual rather than an empirically validated intervention: theoretically, it refines comparative method in Qur'anic eco-theology; practically, it offers conceptual directions for religious leaders, *adat* institutions, and local government addressing urban ecological challenges in Muslim-majority regions such as West Sumatra.

Keywords: Islamic Ecotheology; Classical *Tafsīr*; Comparative Exegesis; ABS–SBK; Urban Muslim Society

A. Introduction

The Qur'an, as the sacred scripture of Islam, addresses not only questions of worship and law but also the relationship between humanity and the natural world, a relationship that has acquired increasing urgency amid the ecological crises of the twenty-first century. West Sumatra illustrates this urgency through recurring landslides and flash floods, locally known as *galodo* (Honesti et al., 2024; Rozi et al., 2021), seasonal flooding (Umar & Dewata, 2018), and coastal abrasion (Aldian et al., 2022) point to environmental degradation that is cultural and spiritual as much as it is technical. This recognition underlies the growing field of ecotheology, an approach that unites Qur'anic values with environmental ethics (Kurniawan, 2012), in step with the wider global discourse advanced by Nasr (1996) Foltz (2000), Özdemir (2024), and Schliesser (2024) on the relationship between religion and the Sustainable Development Goals, and demonstrated in practice at both the individual level (Abdelzaher et al., 2017; Willms, 2021) and the institutional level (Helfaya et al., 2018).

In this study, Islamic ecotheology is understood as a reflective approach that examines the normative relationship between humanity, nature, and God through systematic engagement with revelation, with the aim of grounding environmental ethics in Islamic religious sources. This definition establishes the study's focus on Qur'anic interpretation while situating it within wider debates about the relationship between religion and environmental responsibility (White, 1967).

The literature connecting *tafsīr* to environmental concern has developed along four distinct lines, each valuable but each limited in scope. Some studies confine themselves to one or two exegetes, such as Aqil's (2024) comparison of al-Ṭabarī and al-Marāghī, Andini (2021) and Shahid (2020) reconstructions of a single meaning of khalīfah, Febriani's (2017) attention to gender, and Umami's Umami (2014) treatment of the purpose of human creation and its bearing on environmental sustainability. Others turn to modern exegetes, as in Zulfikar et al.'s (Zulfikar, Kusnadi, Halimatussa'diyah, & Azkiya, 2023) study of Hamka and Tamam's (2021) survey of ecotheology in contemporary *tafsīr*. A third line remains conceptual and descriptive without comparative analysis across classical *tafsīr*, exemplified by Nazar et al.'s (Nazar & Hakim, 2023) sustainable-development framework. A fourth line documents contemporary Islamic environmental activism and institutions in Indonesia: social movements (Fikri & Colombijn, 2021), Muhammadiyah's political advocacy (Efendi et al., 2021), fatwas issued by the Indonesian Council of Ulama (Mangunjaya & Praharawati, 2019) cross-institutional expert forums (Jannah, 2024), and practices in mosques, sharia hotels, and pesantren (Farabi & Fatharini, 2025; Wijaya Mulya & Salvi, 2025). None of these four lines, however, traces its ecotheological argument back to the roots of classical exegesis, and two gaps remain. No study has systematically compared classical *tafsīr* across genuinely distinct methodological currents within a single ecotheological framework, and, based on a literature search of Google Scholar, Scopus, and Sinta using the keywords "ecotheology," "comparative *tafsīr*," and "ABS-SBK" through early 2026, no attempt has yet connected such a theological synthesis to the practical dimension of urban Muslim life through the Minangkabau cultural framework of ABS-SBK.

This research responds to these gaps through a systematic comparison of three classical *tafsīr* across two interlocking clusters of verses. The first cluster concerns vicegerency (QS al-Baqarah [2]: 30 and al-Anʿām [6]: 165), answering the ontological question of humanity's standing before the earth. The second cluster concerns the

mandate to cultivate the earth, or istiʿmār al-arḍ (QS Hūd [11]: 61, al-Rūm [30]: 41, and al-Aʿrāf [7]: 56), answering the practical question of humanity's obligation toward it. Without vicegerency, the mandate to cultivate loses its theological foundation; without that mandate, vicegerency remains an unexercised trust. The three *tafsīr* selected represent three major currents in the classical taxonomy of *tafsīr* as mapped by al-Dhahabī (2000) : al-Ṭabarī's Jāmiʿ al-Bayān represents *tafsīr bi'l-maʾthūr*, grounded in transmitted reports; al-Zamakhsharī's al-Kashshāf represents *tafsīr bi'l-raʿy* in its rhetorical mode; and al-Rāzī's Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb represents *tafsīr bi'l-raʿy* in its theological-philosophical mode. This selection is deliberately restricted to three genuinely independent representatives of that taxonomy, rather than including more than one representative of the same current, so as to avoid methodological redundancy and to ensure that the diversity being compared reflects genuinely different exegetical practices rather than variation within a single practice.

This contextualization finds its testing ground in the urban Muslim society of West Sumatra, understood here as Muslim residents of administrative urban centers, particularly Padang, Bukittinggi, and Payakumbuh, characterized by participation in the formal market economy, detachment from the nagari customary system that governs collective land use, and urban modernizing pressures that weaken the internalization of ABS-SBK values in everyday ecological conduct. Minangkabau society is bound by the philosophy of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah*, which positions the Qur'an as the ultimate source of every configuration of local value (Wicaksono & Susetyo, 2023) expressed in the proverb alam takambang jadi guru (nature unfolding as teacher) and in customary institutions such as the zoning of communal forest, or hutan ulayat (Nopriyasman et al., 2024). Yet the penetration of urban modernity and the commodification of urban space have driven a desacralization of nature and severe environmental degradation (Rudy et al., 2021), a pattern of ecological alienation that reflects the very weakening of environmental ethics this study addresses.

Building on this rationale, the research pursues three questions. First, what ecotheological values are articulated in the interpretation of three classical exegetes regarding the verses of vicegerency and the mandate to cultivate the earth? Second, how does the pattern of methodological convergence and divergence among these exegetes enrich the turāth-based repertoire of environmental ethics? Third, to what extent can the resulting synthesis of classical ecotheology serve as a conceptual starting point for ecological ethics among urban Muslim society in West Sumatra, under the framework of ABS–SBK? These three questions guide the article's contribution toward strengthening the epistemology of comparative *tafsīr* while offering a conceptual foothold for discourse on the ecological ethics of urban Muslim communities.

B. Methods

This study employed a library research method, since all data were drawn from primary and secondary written sources without fieldwork (Moleong, 2013; Zed, 2008), a method fully suited to a material object consisting of classical *tafsīr* texts of an inherently bibliographic character. The principal method of analysis is *tafsīr* muqāran, or comparative *tafsīr*, chosen because the core object of the research is a comparison of how three exegetes, al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī , and al-Rāzī , interpret the same verses, following the operational definition of this method as formulated in the study of ʿulūm al-Qurʾān (Al-Dhahabī, 2000) and in general surveys of the methods, forms, and principles of Qurʾanic exegesis (Mibtadin, 2019). The theme of ecotheology functions as the frame for selecting and grouping verses, following the principle of *tafsīr* mawḍūʿī,

or thematic *tafsīr* (Nasruddin Baidan, 2012; Zulheldi, 2017). The two methods work hierarchically: mawḍūʿī selects and groups the verses, muqāran analyzes and compares their interpretation.

Data sources and reference editions. The three primary *tafsīr*, al-Ṭabarī's Jāmiʿ al-Bayān (2001), al-Zamakhsharī's al-Kashshāf (n.d.) , and al-Rāzī's Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb (2004) , are cited from the same editions used throughout this research line, for consistency. Direct quotations appear in the original Arabic followed by the author's translation, kept separate from analytical paraphrase.

Criteria and procedure for verse selection. Five verses, grouped in two complementary clusters, were selected by textual uniqueness rather than thematic proximity, so that the corpus can be replicated through a keyword search in any Qurʾanic concordance. The vicegerency cluster comprises QS 2:30, the only verse that uses the singular *khalīfah* in the context of humanity's creation, and QS 6:165, the only verse that joins *khalāʾif al-arḍ* with graded rank and trial (*ibtilāʾ*). The cultivation cluster comprises QS 11:61, the only verse containing *istaʿmarakum*; QS 30:41, the only verse describing *fasād* across both land and sea; and QS 7:56, the only verse that states the prohibition of *fasād baʿda iṣlāḥihā* as a general injunction rather than as part of a prophet's address to a specific people (cf. QS 7:85). Other ecologically relevant verses, such as QS 55:7–9 on *mīzān* and QS 7:31 on *isrāf*, fall outside these clusters and are excluded as a limitation of scope.

Unit of analysis and coding categories. The unit of analysis is the interpretive proposition, a single semantically self-contained statement or argument advanced by an exegete regarding one verse within a cluster. Each proposition was mapped onto five fixed coding categories, applied consistently throughout the comparison: the hermeneutical apparatus (the exegete's working method, whether linguistic analysis, tracing transmitted reports, or theological argumentation); the core argumentative construction (how the exegete formulates the verse's central meaning); the primary-source reference (the precise location of the citation within the text); the point of convergence (shared normative conclusions across exegetes despite differing methods); and the distinction between maʿnā and maghzā, following Syamsuddin's approach, which separates the textual meaning the exegete states (*maʿnā*) from the contemporary significance the researcher reads into it (*maghzā*) (Syamsuddin et al., 2020). This last category matters most for the paper's integrity: whenever the analysis connects an exegete's statement to a contemporary ecological issue, such as pollution, climate change, or waste management, the connection is marked explicitly as *maghzā*, the researcher's reading, not the exegete's literal intent.

Analytical procedure. The analysis proceeded in four steps: (1) extracting interpretive propositions from the Arabic text of the three sources; (2) coding each proposition; (3) mapping the codes comparatively to identify convergence, divergence, and tension for each verse; and (4) synthesizing the two clusters into ecotheological principles, which are then projected, at the level of *maghzā*, onto the ABS-SBK philosophy.

The hermeneutical analysis rests on the researchers' own reading and was not validated by an independent panel of *tafsīr* specialists, which limits confirmability (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The explicit coding categories and source references make the procedure traceable, but do not remove this limitation

C. Findings and Discussion

1. Findings

This section presents purely comparative findings drawn directly from the primary texts of the three exegetes, without contemporary interpretation or recommendation; both are addressed in the Discussion below.

Cluster I: The Verses of Vicegerency (QS 2:30 and QS 6:165)

QS 2:30. The three exegetes interpret the angels' question, "Will You place therein one who causes corruption?", through three distinct hermeneutical instruments, yet converge on a single conclusion regarding the trust-based nature of vicegerency.

Al-Ṭabarī follows a transmission-based path accompanied by active critique of the chains of transmission. He first presents a lengthy report concerning jinn who inhabited the earth before Adam and caused corruption there, only to explicitly reject it: "*lā khabar ʿindanā biʾlladhī qālūhu min wajhin yaqṭaʿu majīʾuhu al-ʿudhr*", meaning that no report reaches us on what they said from a path decisive enough to remove all doubt. He instead prefers the reading that God had already informed the angels beforehand that the vicegerent's descendants would commit corruption, so that the angels' question was not independent unseen knowledge but confirmation of information just received. On the meaning of khalīfah itself, al-Ṭabarī presents a plurality of reports without settling on a single preferred reading: Ibn Isḥāq takes it as an inhabitant-cultivator, Ibn Zayd as a vicegerent from God, and al-Ḥasan as a generation succeeding another.

Al-Zamakhsharī reads the question as *taʿajjub*, rhetorical astonishment rather than protest, arising from linguistic sensitivity to the contrast between obedience and disobedience, resolved through an argument from divine wisdom: vicegerency is oriented toward good because it is decreed by God the All-Wise.

Al-Rāzī, unlike either predecessor, rejects the reading of protest in a manner similar to al-Zamakhsharī, consistent with his theological tendency to secure every Qurʾanic proposition through rational as well as textual argument, yet he offers a considerably broader elaboration. For him, the question is astonishment at the perfection of God's knowledge and wisdom, hidden from human reason: "*kaʾannahu taʿajjubun min kamāli ʿilmi Allāhi taʿālā wa iḥāṭati ḥikmatihi bimā khafiya ʿalā kulli al-ʿuqalāʾ*" a formulation that accommodates both Muʿtazilite and philosophical perspectives. He adds a dimension absent from al-Zamakhsharī, namely vicegerency as collective responsibility, such that a community that allows corruption to persist likewise fails the trust of vicegerency. This point should be marked as a contemporary extension rather than al-Rāzī's own literal claim.

QS 6:165. On this supporting verse, the three exegetes converge far more closely. Al-Ṭabarī reads *khalāʾif al-arḍ* as generations succeeding earlier communities, with graded rank (*rafaʿa baʿḍakum fawqa baʿḍin darajāt*) serving as the instrument of trial (*li-yabluwakum fīmā ātākum*).

Al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī, somewhat surprisingly, hardly differ on this verse. Al-Rāzī offers three meanings of "successors on earth", a community succeeding earlier inhabitants, individuals succeeding one another, or vicegerents of God managing the earth, and reads graded rank together with trial as a framework of conditional, accountable vicegerency, an argument nearly identical to al-Zamakhsharī's.

The point of convergence for this cluster is the affirmation, reached through three different argumentative paths, that vicegerency is a trust under trial rather than absolute sovereignty.

Cluster II: The Verses on the Mandate to Cultivate the Earth (QS 11:61, 30:41, and 7:56)

QS 11:61. Al-Ṭabarī reads *wa-staʿmarakum fīhā* concisely as "*jaʿalakum ʿummāran fīhā*", meaning He made you its cultivators, citing Mujāhid's report that *istiʿmār* derives from *al-ʿumrā*, a lifetime usufruct. Al-Zamakhsharī sorts this cultivation into categories of legal obligation (obligatory, recommended, permissible, disliked) and records a similar reading of *ʿumrā*. Al-Rāzī proceeds through a two-stage framework: first, the ontological foundation of creation, that humanity was created from the earth; second, three meanings of istaʿmarakum, namely being made cultivators, granted long life, or given a lifetime usufruct that passes to another upon death. He affirms that this mandate itself constitutes evidence for the Creator's existence, *dalāla ʿalā wujūd al-ṣāniʿ*.

QS 30:41. Al-Ṭabarī reads fasād on land as drought and diminished vegetation, and at sea as diminished catch, categories that are climatic and material, without any narrative of cosmic physical transformation. Al-Zamakhsharī details fasād as concrete worldly calamity, drought, plague, and disrupted commerce, resulting from human sin. Al-Rāzī links fasād to shirk as the root of cosmic corruption, drawing on QS 21:22, while gathering classical readings of land-and-sea corruption, such as flooding, barren land, oceanic salinity, and the scarcity of fresh water, as an "environmental diagnosis" that should be marked as a contemporary interpretive bridge rather than al-Rāzī's own literal claim. On the causal clause *bimā kasabat aydī al-nās*, al-Rāzī, as an Ashʿarite theologian committed to the doctrine of *kasb*, cannot regard human action as a fully independent causal agent in the way al-Zamakhsharī does; for him, an act is created by God yet "performed" by the human being, who nonetheless bears full moral responsibility for it. What is striking is that the ecological implication of these two divergent metaphysical frameworks turns out to be identical. This verse fixes accountability for *fasād* (damage) on human moral agency, not on impersonal fate or natural necessity, a point of convergence that emerges precisely amid sharp theological divergence.

QS 7:56. Al-Ṭabarī offers a concise legal-theological gloss: a prohibition on associating partners with God and committing sin after God has rectified the earth through the sending of prophets. Al-Zamakhsharī asserts that corruption after rectification is more grievous than corruption from the outset: "*man wajada al-arḍa ṣāliḥatan thumma afsadahā fa-huwa aẓlamu mimman afsada mā lam yuṣlaḥ*". Al-Rāzī interprets the prohibition as an absolute ban on every form of corruption, extended to cover the five necessary interests, *al-ḍarūriyyāt al-khams*, namely life, property, religion, lineage, and intellect, from which he formulates a comprehensive juristic maxim: the default ruling on all forms of harm is prohibition unless specific evidence provides an exception (*al-aṣl fī al-maḍār al-taḥrīm*). The phrase "after its rectification" is itself read by al-Rāzī through two complementary possibilities: first, the moment God arranged the earth's balance for the benefit of all creation; second, the rectification of the earth's order through the coming of prophets, scripture, and revealed law. To corrupt the noble order thus established is, for him, contrary to reason itself, giving his juristic maxim an ecological reach far broader than individual transgression alone.

The point of convergence for this cluster is twofold: the mandate to cultivate is an active obligation bound by trust, and *fasād* is a serious transgression rooted in human moral action rather than an impersonal natural necessity. The three exegetes reach this conclusion through different argumentative paths: linguistic in al-Zamakhsharī, rational-theological in al-Rāzī, and transmission-based with active *isnād* critique in al-Ṭabarī.

2. Discussion

Synthesis of Four Ecotheological Principles: Convergence Enriched by Divergence

The findings on the clusters of vicegerency and the mandate to cultivate the earth can be synthesized into four normative principles arranged along two dimensions, an ontological dimension concerning who the human being is before the earth, and a practical dimension concerning the human being's obligation toward it, each with a positive pole of mandate and a negative pole of prohibition.

On the ontological dimension, the Principle of Vicegerency affirms humanity as the holder of a trust rather than the owner of the earth, argued by al-Zamakhsharī through the semantics of khalīfah as a delegated representative, by al-Rāzī through the argument from perfect divine wisdom, and by al-Ṭabarī through a critically weighed selection among transmitted reports. The Principle of Ecological Sin affirms *fasād* as a theological transgression of cosmic scale rather than a mere social problem, sustained by al-Rāzī's theological argument linking it to shirk, al-Zamakhsharī's linguistic argument, and al-Ṭabarī's historical reports on precedents of corruption.

On the practical dimension, the Principle of Active Stewardship renders the mandate to cultivate a real and proactive obligation rather than a merely passive usufruct, argued by al-Rāzī through his two-stage ontological-theological framework, by al-Zamakhsharī through his classification of legal obligation, and by al-Ṭabarī through the convergent report on *ʿumrā*. The Principle of Balance requires the preservation of the order of *iṣlāḥ* as the telos of environmental management, supported by al-Rāzī's comprehensive juristic maxim on the prohibition of harm, al-Zamakhsharī's moral argument on the double gravity of corruption after rectification, and al-Ṭabarī's legal-theological gloss.

What deserves emphasis is that these four principles converge in conclusion yet diverge in argumentative path, and this divergence, far from weakening the framework, extends its reach. Al-Ṭabarī's transmission-based foundation speaks to audiences who privilege the authority of chains of transmission; al-Rāzī's theological elaboration opens a channel of dialogue with rational-argumentative reasoning; and al-Zamakhsharī's rhetorical emphasis offers linguistic clarity. These three argumentative paths are methodologically independent, yet converge on the same normative conclusion. This reading aligns with the urgency of spiritual-ecological connection advanced by Foltz (2000) and Nasr (1996), while adding textual-comparative detail rarely elaborated within that broader global ecotheological discourse.

This convergence should not be treated as a mere logical inevitability, and at least three reasons argue against accepting it uncritically. First, theological difference might reasonably be expected to produce genuine ethical difference: al-Zamakhsharī's Muʿtazilite emphasis on human free will could plausibly incline toward an activist, anthropocentric posture inclined to dominate nature, while al-Rāzī's Ashʿarite emphasis on divine agency in causation could plausibly incline toward passive resignation before disaster. That both instead construct an active stewardship ethic closing the door to exploitation is a hermeneutical achievement, not an automatic consequence of the theology each holds. Second, an anti-exploitative reading is not the only interpretive possibility available; twentieth-century modernization recorded uses of the term *khalīfah* to legitimize widespread exploitation of natural resources, so the fact that three authoritative exegetes from three distinct schools chose the opposite reading is a substantive finding rather than something to be taken for granted. Third, this convergence does not stop at the level of a basic principle such as "do not corrupt the earth," but reaches the level of argumentative architecture itself: through different

paths, the three arrive at the same specific proposition, that ecological destruction betrays humanity's ontological identity as vicegerent, that active stewardship is an obligation rather than a dispensable license, and that the order of *iṣlāḥ* must be preserved rather than destroyed. Convergence at this level carries implications considerably more significant than a mere coincidence of final conclusions.

This claim must nonetheless be stated proportionately, with one important caveat. Agreement among exegetes living in relatively close historical periods, with al-Ṭabarī as the chronological exception who nonetheless inherited the same linguistic and ethical framework, does not by itself prove that this reading is inherent in the Qurʾanic text in itself. All three also inherited the same linguistic and ethical foundation, classical Arabic semantics and a shared moral vocabulary in which *fasād* is definitionally reprehensible. This shared historical context may well explain part of their agreement. The finding is therefore best stated moderately: an anti-exploitative reading is robustly available across mutually opposed traditions and is not the product of a single school. The stronger claim, that this paradigm is inherent in the text independent of any tradition, would require a sample considerably larger than three exegetes and five verses.

Contemporary Significance (*Maghzā*): Relevance to the Environmental Crisis in West Sumatra

This section reads the four principles above at the level of maghzā, the researchers' reading of contemporary significance, rather than claiming that the three classical exegetes foresaw or literally addressed twenty-first-century environmental problems in West Sumatra. The West Sumatran cases selected below are bounded by three criteria: first, direct relevance to one of the four principles above; second, occurrence in the study's three focal cities, Padang, Bukittinggi, and Payakumbuh; and third, support from academic sources or official government data rather than media reporting alone.

The expansion of commercial districts that reduces green open space in West Sumatran cities, well below the 30 percent threshold mandated by Law No. 26/2007 on Spatial Planning, can be read as a betrayal of the Principle of Vicegerency: humanity, incapable of replicating the ecosystem God has built, ought to adopt tawāḍuʿ, humility, in spatial regulation rather than marginalizing ecological considerations for the sake of physical development. Pollution of watersheds from domestic waste in densely populated areas of Bukittinggi (Armansyah et al., 2024) resonates with the Principle of Ecological Sin, a betrayal of the mandate of vicegerency that, within al-Rāzī's framework, constitutes a failure of collective responsibility. The waste management crisis is likewise relevant here: the city of Padang leaves roughly 100 tons of uncollected waste daily (Azzahra et al., 2023) and the regional landfill serving Payakumbuh has exceeded capacity since 2023. Both facts resonate with al-Rāzī's Principle of Balance, the maxim that the default ruling on all harm is prohibition, in the absence of specific exempting evidence.

Recurrent flooding in Padang and Bukittinggi, closely tied to the conversion of upstream water-catchment land (Harvia et al., 2024), and the significant shrinkage of agricultural land in Bukittinggi, both resonate with the Principle of Active Stewardship: *istiʿmār* as a proactive obligation to cultivate land, not merely to neglect or exploit land. The Sustainable Food Yard and Sustainable Home Food Garden programs already operating in parts of West Sumatra (Armansyah et al., 2024) can be read as a form of *istiʿmār* already moving, independently of this theological framework, in a direction consonant with it.

These readings are illustrative and correspondential rather than causal. This study does not claim that West Sumatra's environmental crisis is caused by neglect of classical *tafsīr*, but rather that the normative framework drawn from that *tafsīr* offers one lens, among possible others, for reading and responding to it.

Conceptual Projection onto the ABS–SBK Philosophy

The Minangkabau philosophy of Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah positions the Qur'an as the ultimate source of every configuration of local values (Wicaksono & Susetyo, 2023); thus, the projecting the four ecotheological principles onto it is not the addition of a foreign element but the tracing of roots already structurally embedded. Three institutional pathways already existing within urban Minangkabau social structure, collectively known as Tigo Tungku Sajarangan, offer conceptual points of entry for this projection. It must be emphasized that the pathways below are conceptual directions this research proposes for further examination rather than institutional interventions whose effectiveness has already been empirically tested.

Along the *adat* pathway, the Kerapatan Adat Nagari (customary village council) could adopt the Principle of Vicegerency as normative grounding for revitalizing the concept of *hutan larangan* (forbidden forest) in an urban form, granting customary legitimacy to prohibitions on exploitation within green buffer zones vulnerable to conversion, such as the Ngarai Sianok landscape, complementing formal local government regulation. Along the syarak pathway, religious councils and mosque preachers could integrate the Principle of Ecological Sin into sermons and religious instruction, linking flood and landslide disasters to collective negligence as argued by al-Rāzī and al-Zamakhsharī, an approach already empirically tested through water-conservation-themed sermons delivered across ten mosques and nine pesantren in West Sumatra (McKay et al., 2014) , consistent with the national precedent of environmental fatwas issued by the Indonesian Council of Ulama (Mangunjaya & Praharawati, 2019). Along the government pathway, the Principles of Balance and Active Stewardship could become the theological basis for local regulations on waste management and spatial planning grounded in local values.

The synergy of these three pathways offers an institutional model already structurally available for operationalizing *turāth*-based ecotheology at the level of the urban Muslim community. Yet how effectively, how acceptably, and how sustainably this model would function in practice remains an empirical question beyond the scope of this text-based comparative study, and stands as an open agenda for future research.

Positioning This Study within Related Literature

Compared to prior studies, this research differs in scope and in its treatment of divergence. Aqil (2024) compares al-Ṭabarī and al-Marāghī but is limited to two exegetes from a closely related riwāyah current, producing no map of convergence across genuinely distinct methodologies. Andini (2021) and Shahid (2020) reconstruct the meaning of *khalīfah* in depth but monographically, confined to one or two sources without a multi-principle framework tested across verse clusters. Febriani (2017) opens the dimension of gender, a perspective left untouched here and open for future research. Zulfikar et al. (2023) turn to a modern exegete, Hamka, completing the genealogy of Qurʾanic ecotheology but outside the classical *turāth* this study focuses on. This research also complements the growing literature on Islamic environmental activism in Indonesia (Fikri & Colombijn, 2021; Gade, 2023; 2015), which generally addresses contemporary practice without tracing its argument to classical exegesis,

precisely the gap this study fills from the opposite direction. What distinguishes it methodologically is treating divergence among exegetes not as noise but as an indicator that an anti-exploitative reading persists across three genuinely distinct epistemologies, riwāyah, balāghah, and kalām, rather than resting on a single school. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, this cross-epistemological scope combined with a systematic projection onto ABS-SBK has not previously appeared in the literature; the novelty claim is limited to that combination, not to any element taken separately.

Examined pillar by pillar, the study's contribution can be mapped more specifically. On Vicegerency, the finding both reinforces and narrows Wahyudi's (Kurniawan, 2012) claim on human environmental responsibility in the Qur'an: rather than one sweeping generalization, it holds specifically across three distinct argumentative paths, not merely as a loose thematic conclusion. On Ecological Sin, al-Rāzī's linking of *fasād* to shirk provides sharper theological grounding than the secular ethics White (1967) critiques for lacking transcendent authority to prohibit harm. On Active Stewardship, the three exegetes' reading of *istiʿmār* as proactive rather than passive usufruct resonates with the shift from individual repentance to institutional advocacy documented in Efendi et al. (2021) on Muhammadiyah's environmental movement, though this study shows that shift already implicit in classical *tafsīr*'s own logic, not merely a modern innovation. On Balance, al-Rāzī's maxim that all harm is prohibited by default offers a more explicit normative basis than contemporary environmental fatwas (Mangunjaya & Praharawati, 2019) , generally built from *maṣlaḥah* rather than derived directly from a specific verse's exegesis.

The transfer of these principles to urban West Sumatra nonetheless has limits. All three exegetes wrote within a medieval agrarian context, at a scale of damage and technology entirely different from contemporary urban crisis, spatial planning, industrial waste management, and the formal market economy. These principles supply a normative framework at a high level of generality; their operationalization into concrete policy demands additional translation beyond this textual study's scope.

D. Conclusion

This study has examined the interpretation of three classical exegetes, al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, and al-Rāzī, on five verses across two mutually necessary clusters: vicegerency (QS 2:30, 6:165) and the mandate to cultivate the earth (QS 11:61, 30:41, 7:56). The three were deliberately chosen to represent three genuinely independent exegetical currents, *riwāyah, balāghah*, and *kalām*, as mapped by al-Dhahabī (2000)), in order to avoid redundancy of methodological category. This comparison yields four normative principles that converge in conclusion yet diverge in argumentative path: vicegerency and Ecological Sin on the ontological dimension, Active Stewardship and Balance on the practical dimension. Methodological divergence among the exegetes is not a weakness requiring resolution into uniformity, but rather an indicator that an anti-exploitative reading of the earth persists across exegetical epistemologies that stand at considerable methodological distance from one another.

The novelty of this research lies in two interconnected contributions: a systematic comparison spanning three methodological currents within a single ecotheological framework, and a conceptual projection of that framework onto the Minangkabau philosophy of ABS-SBK for urban Muslim society in West Sumatra. This projection, as emphasized in the Discussion, is normative and conceptual in nature, offering a direction that future empirical research may examine further, rather than an institutional intervention that has already been tested.

This study carries limitations that must be transparently acknowledged. Its scope of five verses and three exegetes does not represent the entirety of the Qur'an's ecological corpus or of the *tafsīr* tradition as a whole, so its findings cannot be generalized beyond the cases examined. The hermeneutical analysis rests on the researchers' own interpretive reading without validation by an independent expert panel. The projection onto ABS-SBK remains conceptual and has not been empirically tested for acceptance in the field. The transfer of classical exegetical concepts, born of a medieval agrarian context, to a twenty-first-century urban context also carries a risk of anachronism whose limits cannot be fully determined without further empirical research. In light of these limitations, future research is encouraged to engage an independent panel of *tafsīr* specialists for triangulation of interpretation, to incorporate the gender-justice perspective left untouched here, to trace how these principles are received in the succeeding generation of *tafsīr bi'l-maʾthūr*, such as al-Baghawī or Ibn Kathīr, to map a diachronic dimension beyond this study's synchronic design, and to test empirically, through interviews or institutional case studies, the extent to which the three proposed ABS-SBK pathways can be adopted and operationalized by the Kerapatan Adat Nagari, religious councils, and local government in West Sumatra.

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F. Author Contributions Statement

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All authors contributed significantly to this study. Afdilla Nisa (AN), as the lead author, designed the research, conducted the hermeneutical analysis, and drafted the manuscript. Marwan Ilhami (MI) and Abdul Farel (AF) contributed to the literature review and manuscript revision. Stemi Petria Nadin (SPN), an undergraduate student, assisted with data collection. All authors approved the final manuscript.

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