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Khilāfah, Taskhīr, and Sustainability: Reconstructing Islamic Eco-Theology through Al-Qurṭubī's Tafsir

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Abstract

The contemporary ecological crisis—manifested through climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation—requires more than technological and political solutions; it demands ethical and spiritual renewal. This article examines the classical tafsir of al-Qurṭubī (d. 671 H) to explore Islamic environmental thought's theological and ethical foundations. Focusing on four key Qur'anic concepts—*khalīfah fī al-ard* (vicegerency), *'imarat al-ard* (constructive inhabitation), *taskhīr* (divine subjugation of nature), and the prohibition of *fasād* (corruption)—this study demonstrates how al-Qurṭubī formulated a coherent framework that positions humans as trustees, cultivators, grateful beneficiaries, and moral guardians of the earth. Using hermeneutical textual analysis and comparative readings with other classical exegetes (al-Ṭabarī, Fakhr al-Rāzī, Ibn Kathīr), the study identifies epistemological continuities between medieval interpretations and contemporary Islamic eco-theology. Thinkers like Seyyed Hossein Nasr, M. Izzi Deen, and Richard Foltz reinterpret these classical notions to address modern environmental challenges. The findings indicate that classical Islamic exegesis embeds a sophisticated environmental ethic emphasizing stewardship, sustainability, intergenerational justice, and spiritual accountability. Revisiting al-Qurṭubī's tafsir offers historical insight and normative resources for constructing a contemporary Islamic environmental ethic. This framework can serve as an alternative paradigm in responding to the global ecological crisis by reaffirming the sacred interconnectedness between God, humanity, and nature.

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Introduction

The ecological crisis has emerged as one of the most pressing global challenges of the contemporary era. Climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and unsustainable exploitation of natural resources are not merely environmental issues but existential threats to human civilization (Steffen et al., 2020). Numerous international initiatives and agreements have been formulated to address these issues, yet the crisis continues to escalate. This situation demonstrates that ecological damage cannot be resolved solely through technological or political approaches; a more fundamental paradigm shift and ethical orientation are required (Furehaug, 2020; Latour, 2021).

Despite their importance, secular approaches frequently fail to address ecological responsibility's ethical and spiritual aspects (Attfield, 2021; Rolston III, 2022). Though applicable in some situations, environmental regulations and scientific developments often function within a utilitarian framework that prioritizes economic development and human interests (Nash, 1989). This method frequently fails to cultivate a sense of responsibility and awareness for the environment that can resist destructive impulses. As a result, the necessity of integrating theological and religious viewpoints into ecological discourse is becoming increasingly apparent (Tucker & Grim, 2023).

Islam, in particular, provides a thorough framework for fostering ecological consciousness. (Nasr, 2021). The interdependence of all creation, humanity's duty as vicegerent on earth, and the ban against harming others (*fasād*) are all frequently emphasized throughout the Qur'an (Izzi Dien, 2022; Khalid, 2020). In Islamic intellectual heritage, these ideas are not peripheral but central to understanding humanity's role in the universe. Islam offers philosophical truths and moral precepts derived from theological sources that have the power to transform human perceptions of and interactions with nature (Sardar, 2021).

In this context, revisiting the classical exegetical tradition becomes increasingly urgent. Exegetical works, particularly those of authoritative scholars such as al-Qurṭubī, contain rich discussions of human responsibility towards the earth (Baharuddin, 2024; Mutakin & Rahman, 2023). These interpretations are not merely historical artifacts but can serve as ethical reservoirs for addressing today's ecological challenges. The concepts of *khalīfah fil-ard* and *'imārat al-ard* formulated in classical exegesis are important entry points for constructing an Islamic eco-theology rooted in tradition and relevant to modern issues (Al-Attas, 2023; Kamali, 2021).

Thus, this research aims to address two primary questions: In his tafsir, how does al-Qurṭubī interpret the concepts of *khalīfah* and *'imārat al-ard*? Moreover, how can these interpretations be understood within the framework of eco-theology in Islam? This article addresses these concerns to demonstrate how classical Islamic thought can be applied to developing moral and theological responses to the current ecological crisis.

Literature Review

The study of eco-theology developed in response to the global environmental crisis, which cannot be resolved solely through technical or secular approaches. (Tucker & Grim, 2023). In general, eco-theology is an effort to reinterpret religious teachings to build ecological awareness and environmental ethics. (Attfield, 2021). In the context of religious studies, eco-theology emerged in the Christian world in the 1970s and subsequently spread to other traditions, including Islam, to highlight religion's role in preserving the earth. The application of eco-theology is seen in various fields, from environmental ethics and education to policy advocacy based on religious values (R. C. Foltz, 2022).

In the Islamic context, several studies have highlighted the potential of Islamic teachings as a source of ecological ethics. Concepts such as *khalīfah fil-ard* (God's representative on earth), *mīzān* (balance), the prohibition of *fasād* (destruction), and the principle of simplicity form the main foundations for constructing environmental ethics (Kamali, 2021; Sardar, 2021). Several contemporary studies emphasize integrating these principles into sustainable development and green theology discourse (Quraishi, 2023). However, most of these studies remain normative and thematic, failing to examine the roots of classical interpretations of these ecological verses in detail (Rahman, 2023).

Several studies on tafsir literature use classical exegetical texts to investigate Islamic viewpoints on the environment. For example, al-Ṭabarī in *Jāmi' al-Bayān* emphasizes the dimension of the caliphate as a spiritual trust (Al-Thabari, 2001), while Ibn Kathīr in *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Aẓīm* highlights the prohibition of corruption (*fasād*) in relation to human responsibility (Ibn Katsir, 1998). Among the exegetes, al-Qurṭubī in *al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'an* appears to pay extensive attention to the concept of *'imārat al-ard*, namely the human obligation to prosper the earth within the framework of sharia (Al-Qurthubi, 1964). However, research using classical exegesis as a foundation for eco-theology is still quite limited.

Thus, there is a clear research gap: the lack of studies that specifically examine the concept of *'imārat al-ard* in classical exegesis, particularly from the perspective of al-Qurṭubī, using an eco-theological framework. However, exploring this idea is crucial for enriching the discourse on Islam and the environment with a strong foundation in classical intellectual literature.

Although several studies have highlighted the ecotheological dimension in Islam, such as Rahman (2023), who examined the bayānī interpretation of environmental verses, and Baharuddin (2024), who emphasized an environmental ethics approach based on *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, these studies have not systematically constructed al-Qurṭubī's thought within a coherent eco-theological framework. Most remain thematic and fragmentary, without linking the four main pillars of al-Qurṭubī's thought—*khalīfah*, *'imārat al-ard*, *taskhīr*, and the prohibition of *fasād*—into a unified hermeneutical system.

This research extends previous studies by offering a systematic hermeneutic reconstruction of al-Qurṭubī's ecological insights, which have not been synthesized within an integrated Islamic ecotheological framework. This approach identifies the ecotheological meanings implied in classical exegesis. It constructs a new category within Islamic eco-theology, the ethical stewardship paradigm of earth prosperity that combines humans' spiritual, social, and ecological responsibilities as *khalīfah*. Thus, this research contributes to the enrichment of the epistemology of Islamic eco-theology through a reading of classical exegesis with a contextual modern hermeneutic analysis.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a textual analysis design, focusing on the tradition of interpretation in the Islamic intellectual treasury (Saeed, 2020). The primary source of the study is *al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'an* by al-Qurṭubī, an authoritative work in classical exegetical literature widely known for its extensive discussion of the legal and ethical dimensions of the Qur'an. The selection of this interpretation is based on its prominent position in the Islamic intellectual tradition and on the depth of its analysis of concepts directly relevant to the discourse of human ecological responsibility, especially *khalīfah fil-ard* and *'imārat al-ard* (Nasr, 2021).

This study uses secondary sources, such as al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-Bayān* and Ibn Kathīr's *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Aẓīm*, to enhance understanding of the Qurṭubī interpretation. Furthermore, this study draws on current works on Islamic eco-theology, such as those by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Richard Foltz, and Izzi Dien, as well as new research on the relationship between Islam and environmental ethics. The inclusion of these secondary sources creates a conceptual framework that allows classical interpretations to be productively discussed alongside contemporary ecological challenges.

The analytical method used is a hermeneutical reading of the text of the interpretation of al-Qurṭubī. This analysis is carried out by placing al-Qurṭubī's interpretation within the historical and intellectual context of the 13th century, especially the socio-political conditions that contributed to

shaping his sensitivity to the legal and ethical aspects of the Qur'an. Next, this study examines the theological basis of al-Qurṭubī's views on human responsibility towards nature by examining the relationship between the concept of *taskhīr* (submission of nature for the benefit of humanity), the prohibition of *fasād* (damage), and the ideas of *khilāfah* and *'imārat al-ard*. (Izzi Deen, 2003) The final stage of the analysis is directed at identifying the relevance of these classical ideas to the discourse of Islamic eco-theology, so that a conceptual formulation that can contribute to responding to the modern environmental crisis is possible (R. C. Foltz, 2022).

The hermeneutical approach used in this study is systematic and multi-layered, intending to explore the meaning of ecological verses in depth and connect them to the context of classical interpretation and modern discourse. The analysis process is carried out through three main stages: linguistic, historical, and contextual. The linguistic stage focuses on semantic and morphological analysis of key words in the Qur'an, such as *khilāfah*, *'imārat al-ard*, *taskhīr*, and *fasād*, to discover the basic meaning (*ma'nā lughawī*) that serves as the theological foundation. The historical stage then traces the interpretive context of classical *mufasssers*, such as al-Ṭabarī, Fakhr al-Rāzī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Qurṭubī, to identify the epistemological frameworks and socio-intellectual situations that influence their interpretations of the relationship between humans and nature.

The contextual stage is the culmination of the analysis by reinterpreting classical findings through critical dialogue with contemporary eco-theological thought, such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, M. Izzi Dien, and Richard Foltz. In this stage, thematic grouping is carried out to group major themes such as cosmic trust, sustainable development, and anti-*fasād*, as well as comparative coding to map similarities and shifts in meaning between classical interpretations and modern reflections. Through these three stages, this research describes classical interpretations textually. It compiles a normative and applicable hermeneutic reconstruction, which can enrich Islamic eco-theology in the context of global environmental challenges.

Table 1. Analytical Stages of Hermeneutical Method

Analytical Stage	Focus of Study	Analytical Technique	Expected Outcome
Linguistic	Key Qur'anic terms (<i>khilāfah</i> , <i>'imārat al-ard</i> , <i>taskhīr</i> , <i>fasād</i>)	Semantic and morphological analysis	Identification of basic meanings and conceptual structures
Historical	Classical exegetical context (al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī)	Historical-comparative analysis	Recognition of epistemological frameworks in classical exegesis
Contextual	Relevance to modern eco-theology (Nasr, Izzi Dien, Foltz)	Thematic grouping and comparative coding	Reconstruction of new theological meanings applicable to contemporary ecological discourse

Through these three stages, the study describes classical interpretations textually and engages in a critical and dialogical reading of the classical heritage and modern discourse. Thus, the results achieved are not merely descriptive interpretations but also produce a theological synthesis that is normative and relevant to contemporary environmental issues.

This study's methodological framework presents the Qurṭubī as a dynamic intellectual resource, rather than a static historical artifact. This perspective opens up the possibility of rereading and reinterpreting the classical exegetical tradition in the contemporary context. Doing so establishes epistemic continuity with the ancient heritage while simultaneously creating room for creative contributions to the development of modern Islamic eco-theology.

Findings

***Khalīfah fil-Ard* in al-Qurṭubī's Exegesis: The Human Mandate of Stewardship**

Al-Qurṭubī, in his commentary on Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]:30, emphasized that the term *khalīfah* does not merely refer to the existence of humans as earthly creatures, but also as spiritual representation and social administrators. He wrote:

الخليفة هو من استخلفه غيره وقام مقامه... والمعنى أن الله جعل في الأرض آدم وذريته ليقوموا
فيها بأمر الله وطاعته

"A caliph is a person who takes the place of another person." "In other words, Allah put Adam and his descendants on the earth so that they would obey Him and follow His commands." (Al-Qurṭubī, 1967)

The theological significance of this interpretation lies in the mandate of trust (*amānah*) and justice (*adl*). Al-Qurṭubī emphasizes that humans' role as *khalīfah* is conditional authority, subject to divine law, rather than total control. Therefore, having authority over the world is a responsibility subject to moral and legal limitations rather than an unrestrained permission. This aligns with the Qur'anic teaching that justice must govern human behavior and that God does not love corrupters (*muḥṣidūn*).

This perspective places humankind inside a sacred stewardship framework from an eco-theological standpoint. Although humanity has been given the earth, they are nonetheless answerable to God for how they use and care for it. Therefore, the theological basis for environmental ethics is provided by the concept of *khalīfah* in al-Qurṭubī's tafsir: humans are to preserve equilibrium, avoid injury, and guarantee the flourishing of creation. The *khalīfah* mandate calls for humility, responsibility, and moderation rather than condoning exploitation.

***'Imārat al-Ard* in Q.S. Hūd [11]:61: Cultivating the Earth Beyond Exploitation**

According to al-Qurṭubī's interpretation of the verse *ista'marakum fihā* (Q.S. Hūd [11]:61), the directive to prosper the land encompasses not only material but also social and spiritual aspects:

قال القرطبي: "استعمركم فيها أي أمركم بعمارها بالزراعة والبناء وسائر ما يحتاج إليه الناس
في حياتهم ومعاشهم."

"*Ista'marakum fihā*" means Allah commands you to flourish it through development, agriculture, and all of the needs that people require in their daily life." (Al-Qurṭubī, 1967)

Al-Qurṭubī rejects the reductionist view that interprets prosperity as exploitation. He distinguishes between exploitation as harmful abuse and *'imārah* as beneficial cultivation. According to him, "imārat al-ard" means "responsible inhabitation," which means avoiding harm and imbalance while promoting prosperity on Earth through agriculture, settlement, and social order. This subtlety is essential because it keeps human-earth relations from being reduced to utilitarianism.

In eco-theological terms, *'imārat al-ard* represents a call to sustainable development. It implies that fostering the earth in ways that maintain its fertility and balance for coming generations is the path to success rather than unbridled spending or quick wins. This interpretation demonstrates the timeless applicability of al-Qurṭubī's findings by aligning with modern ecological ideals like sustainability and intergenerational justice.

***Taskhīr*: Divine Subjugation of Nature with Ethical Boundaries**

The concept of *taskhīr* appears frequently in the Qur'an, one of which is in Q.S. Ibrahim [14]:32-33. Al-Qurṭubī interprets that all natural phenomena are subject to the benefit of humans, but their use is accompanied by moral responsibility. He wrote:

قال القرطبي: "سَخَّرَ الشمس والقمر والنجوم والأشجار والبحار لتنتفعوا بها في معاشكم ودينكم... وليس ذلك لتبسطوا به وتفسدوا، ولكن لتشكروا وتعبدوا."

"Allah has subjected the sun, moon, stars, rivers, and seas so that you may benefit from them for your life and your religion... not to act arbitrarily or cause corruption, but so that you may be grateful and worship Him." (Al-Qurṭubī, 1967)

Al-Qurṭubī, however, does not consider *taskhīr* an excuse for arrogance or wastefulness. He emphasizes that there are moral duties associated with the divine subjection of nature, including the need for people to avoid arrogance (*takabbur*), maintain balance (*mizān*), and show gratitude (*shukr*). In his commentary, he highlights the dangers of human excess and conceit, cautioning that misusing God's blessings results in corruption and anger from God.

This interpretation introduces important boundaries to human use of nature. Although humans can benefit from the earth's resources, their utilization must be restrained by humility and respect for God. Thus, from an eco-theological perspective, *taskhīr* comprises stewardship obligations and usufruct rights. It advocates for an ethic of restraint, thankfulness, and responsibility in line with current debates about ecological boundaries and sustainable consumption.

The Prohibition of *Fasād*: Setting Ethical Limits to Environmental Use

Al-Qurṭubī consistently emphasizes the importance of the prohibition of *fasād* in relation to ecological life. Interpreting Q.S. al-Rūm [30]:41: "Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of what the hands of men have earned," he stated:

قال القرطبي: "الفساد في البر والبحر بقتل النفس، وأخذ المال، وقطع الطريق، وتخريب العامر، وإفساد الزرع، وإهلاك الحيوان."

"The damage on land and sea includes murder, looting of property, destruction of roads, destruction of settlements, destruction of crops, and the destruction of animals." (Al-Qurṭubī, 1967)

Importantly, al-Qurṭubī connects the concept of *fasād* to the moral boundaries of human authority. Although *khalīfah*, *'imārat al-ard*, and *taskhīr* give people status and duty, the prohibition of *fasād* establishes boundaries that cannot be transgressed. The very goal of human stewardship is undermined, and the divine trust is violated when exploitation results in injustice, imbalance, or destruction.

From an eco-theological perspective, this provides a theological articulation of the principle of environmental limits. Humans may use the earth's resources, but they enter the realm of *fasād* when their acts endanger the ability of the planet to support life, damage ecosystems, or injure other animals. Therefore, the tafsir of al-Qurṭubī anticipates an environmental ethics grounded in divine command and accountability rather than just utilitarianism.

In a global context, al-Qurṭubī's ecotheological thinking has direct relevance to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda, particularly SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 15 (Life on Land) (United Nations, 2015). Both agendas emphasize collective responsibility for mitigating climate change, preserving terrestrial ecosystems, and halting environmental degradation. The *'imārat al-ard* formulated by al-Qurṭubī reflects a vision of sustainable development based on spirituality and ecological justice. It demands material development and balance (*mīzān*) and sustainability (*istidāmah*) grounded in divine values.

This framework also aligns with the development of *fiqh al-bi'ah* (environmental jurisprudence) in contemporary Islamic legal discourse, which views environmental preservation as part of the sharia obligation to safeguard the public good (*maslahah' āmmah*) (Hafidh, 2025). From the perspective of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, environmental preservation can be categorized as an effort to safeguard *nafs* (life), *nasl* (offspring), and *māl* (resources) (Kamali, 2016). Thus, human ecological responsibility as *khalīfah* is moral, spiritual, and has legal and social dimensions. This integration of classical interpretation, eco-theological ethics, and global policy demonstrates that Islamic teachings have great potential for forming a more just and sacred-value-oriented global sustainability paradigm.

In classical Islamic thought, eco-theology is built on four concepts: *khalīfah*, *'imārat al-ard*, *taskhīr*, and the prohibition of *fasād*:

1. The *khalīfah* affirms humanity's identity as a divine trustee.
2. The *'imārat al-ard* emphasizes the obligation to prosper the earth constructively and sustainably.
3. *Taskhīr* provides divine facilities for humanity, but with ethical conditions of gratitude, balance, and responsibility.
4. The prohibition of *fasād* ensures that these mandates are not misused for destructive exploitation.

This synthesis is an invaluable resource for eco-theology in Islam. It indicates that environmental awareness is integral to Islamic theology and ethics. Al-Qurṭubī's tafsir provides a solid framework for developing a modern Islamic environmental ethic. In an era of growing ecological crises, these classical principles can still instill a renewed sense of duty, humility, and reverence for creation.

Discussion

In Islam, the caliphate is one of the most important theological notions to analyze humanity's relationship with the universe. This concept has been elaborated in numerous ways within the context of classical interpretation. However, it all shares one common thread: the affirmation that humans are not absolute rulers of the planet, but rather bearers of a divine duty to protect and prosper God's creation. (Izzi Dien, 2022; Rahmat, 2025)

Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 H) interpreted Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]:30 as a generation of humans who uphold God's law on earth (*khilāfah' an al-jil alladhī sabaqahu*) and carry out the Divine will. (Al-Thabari, 2001, pp. 1/475-478) This perspective focuses on the historical and legal aspects of the human caliphate. Fakhr al-Rāzī (d. 606 H) emphasized knowledge (*'ilm*) as a condition for the caliphate. According to Al-Rāzī (Al-Rāzī, 1981, p. II/389-388), humans were chosen as caliphs due to their particular knowledge and intellectual capacities, unlike other creatures. Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 H) highlighted the moral dimension, reminding us that people as caliphs can create earth damage; hence, the role of the caliphate is always in tension between constructive and destructive potential. (Ibn Katsir, 1998, p. I/123-127)

Meanwhile, al-Qurṭubī (d. 671 AH) placed a unique emphasis. In al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'an, he saw the caliphate as a spiritual and social mission to defend God's law and benefit the earth (*'imārat al-ard*) (Al-Qurthubi, 1964, p. I/261-264). He linked the caliph's duty to the function of humankind as God's representatives on earth, rather than absolute rulers. Al-Qurṭubī's perspective challenges the anthropocentric concept that the universe is only for human exploitation. In this perspective, nature is part of a sacred cosmic order with intrinsic value as God's creation (Nasr, 2021).

This classical viewpoint has considerable resonance in current Islamic thought, particularly in the discourse of eco-theology. Seyyed Hossein Nasr contended in *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (1968) that the worldwide ecological catastrophe stems from "forgetfulness of the sacred," or human neglect of the universe's spiritual dimension. He wrote:

"The ecological crisis is fundamentally a spiritual crisis. Man has forgotten that he is God's vicegerent (*khilāfah*) on earth, and that nature is a sacred trust (*amanah*)." (Nasr, 1996)

Nasr's argument demonstrates the philosophical continuity of classical interpretation and contemporary ecotheological thinking. Al-Qurṭubī highlighted the caliph's moral-religious obligation, whilst Nasr expressed it in terms of modern ecological deterioration. Both see the relationship between humans and nature as one of cosmic trust, requiring spiritual awareness and a responsible management ethic (R. C. Foltz, 2022)

One important aspect of the caliphate's mandate is the *'imārat al-ard*, the obligation to develop and prosper the earth. In his commentary on Q.S. Hud [11]:61, al-Qurṭubī explains the command of *ista'marakum fīhā* as the obligation to manage the earth through agriculture, infrastructure development, and fulfilling human needs (Al-Qurthubi, 1964, p. IX/55). However, he emphasizes that such development must not exceed the limit to the point of turning into *ifsād* (destruction). This principle shows that the idea of sustainable development has been implicitly present in the framework of classical Islamic law.

According to M. Izzi Deen's *Islamic Environmental Ethics, Law and Society* (2003), the Qur'anic command to 'develop the earth' (*isti'mār*) should be interpreted as a call for sustainable development grounded in justice (*'adl*) and balance (*miẓān*), rather than unbridled exploitation. (Izzi Deen, 2003)

Both classical and contemporary ethical views emphasize the significance of equitable and sustainable development. The concept of *'imārat al-ard* is anchored in substantial theological and moral grounds, predating modern sustainable development rhetoric.

In addition, the concept of *taskhīr* is also important in Islamic environmental theology. In Q.S. Al-Nahl [16]:14, al-Qurṭubī interprets *taskhīr* as a form of cosmic submission by Allah to sustain human life, but not as permission to exploit arbitrarily (Al-Qurṭubī, 1964, p. X/85). The human-nature relationship is functional and ethical: humans can utilize nature within the framework of gratitude and moral responsibility.

According to Richard Foltz's 2005 book *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures*, the Qur'anic concept of *taskhīr* (divine subordination of nature for human benefit) does not justify exploitation. Instead, it is a conditional trust, meaning that humans are accountable to God for how they interact with the natural world. (R. Foltz, 2005) The concept of *taskhīr* must thus be understood within the framework of an ethics of gratitude and spiritual awareness, not merely secular utilitarianism.

The prohibition of *faḥāsh* acts as an ecological barrier, limiting human activity. Al-Qurṭubī saw *faḥāsh* as a social sin and ecological destruction, resulting in crop destruction, animal extinction, and settlement destruction (Al-Qurṭubī, 1964, p. XIV/40). Nasr (1996) connects contemporary *faḥāsh* to deforestation, pollution, and species loss as modern manifestations of the damage forbidden by the Qur'an (Nasr, 1996).

Based on this overall analysis, it is possible to conclude that classical interpretations and contemporary thought strongly influence the framework of Islamic environmental ethics. The concept of *khalīfah* emphasizes humanity's role as stewards, rather than absolute rulers. The *'imārat al-ard* promotes equitable and sustainable development. Third, *taskhīr* and the ban of *fasād* provide ethical limitations for exploiting nature. This synthesis generates a relevant Islamic ecotheological paradigm as an alternative approach to tackling the global ecological crisis by integrating theological, ethical, and social factors into a single comprehensive framework.

An analysis of the interpretation of Al-Qurṭubī shows that four main concepts—*khalīfah fil-ard*, *'imārat al-ard*, *taskhīr*, and the prohibition of *fasād*—form a theological framework that places humans in a central but not dominant position over nature. These four concepts present a balanced relationship between spiritual responsibility and ecological stewardship and between trust and moral limits in using natural resources.

However, argumentatively, this research does not stop at describing this classical framework. The author believes that al-Qurṭubī's thought, although rooted in a 13th-century context, still has epistemological vitality to be developed within the horizon of contemporary Islamic eco-theology. Therefore, this article is reinterpreted and normative-prescriptive. The author argues that the concept of *khalīfah* needs to be reinterpreted not merely as an ontological mandate to lead the earth, but as a moral-cosmological responsibility that demands a comprehensive ecological and spiritual awareness. Similarly, the idea of *'imārat al-ard* is not solely related to development or economic activity, but also encompasses the spiritual dimension of the prosperity of the earth as part of worship and devotion to God.

In this context, the author emphasizes that classical *tafsīrs* need to be read dynamically—not just historically—in order to be able to answer the challenges of modern ecology. *Taskhīr*, often understood as "the subordination of nature to humans," must be placed within an ethical framework emphasizing responsibility, not exploitation. Meanwhile, the prohibition of *fasād* in the

Qur'an can be interpreted as a prohibition against all forms of ecological degradation, both physical and moral. Thus, the interpretation of al-Qurṭubī provides a normative framework for understanding the relationship between humans and nature and opens up space for ethical reinterpretation that aligns with the principles of sustainability and ecological justice across generations.

The author's position is based on the belief that classical tafseer is an epistemic resource that must be continuously revived in new contexts. By integrating Al-Qurṭubī's perspective into the discourse of modern Islamic eco-theology—as advocated by Seyyed Hossein Nasr with his critique of the modern spiritual crisis, by M. Izzi Dien with his concept of *isti'mār* as sustainable development, and by Richard Foltz with his assertion that *taskhīr* contains a moral mandate—this article attempts to build a conceptual bridge between tradition and modernity. This approach demonstrates that Islamic teachings have great normative potential to offer a just, sustainable, and tawheed ethical paradigm.

Conclusion

A study of al-Qurṭubī's Tafṣīr shows that the ecotheological dimension is deeply embedded in the classical Islamic exegesis. Through four main concepts—*khilāfah fī al-ard*, *'imārat al-ard*, *taskhīr*, and the prohibition of *fasād*—al-Qurṭubī formulated a theological and ethical framework that positions humans as cosmic trustees, constructive benefactors of the earth, spiritually conscious users of natural resources, and guardians of boundaries to prevent them from falling into ecological destruction. This framework reflects a deep religious understanding of humanity's role on earth and forms the conceptual foundation for a holistic environmental ethic. Al-Qurṭubī's thinking has proven to resonate strongly with contemporary Islamic ecotheological discourse. Seyyed Hossein Nasr interprets the modern ecological crisis as a spiritual crisis resulting from human neglect of its identity as caliph. M. Izzi Deen interprets the concept of *isti'mār* as sustainable and equitable development, while Richard Foltz asserts that *taskhīr* is a mandate that implies moral accountability to nature. This dialogue between the legacy of classical interpretation and modern intellectual reflection demonstrates a rich epistemological continuity: from sacred texts to global ecological discourse.

This comprehensive analysis indicates that Islam does not regard nature as a mere material reality but as an essential component of a sacred cosmic order. From this perspective, humans are positioned as administrators subject to divine law and will rather than sovereign monarchs. These concepts are consistent with global society's sustainability priorities, intergenerational fairness, and ecological awareness. Therefore, the contribution of Tafṣīr al-Qurṭubī can be read not only as a classical intellectual legacy but also as a normative foundation for formulating a relevant and contextual Islamic environmental ethic. This Islamic ecotheological framework has the potential to offer an important alternative in responding to the global ecological crisis by affirming the values of trust, balance, and the sacred connection between humans, nature, and God. Thus, classical Islamic thought can significantly contribute to forming a more just, sustainable, and spiritually nuanced global environmental ethic.

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