

# **ECOTHEOLOGY IN RELIGIOUS TEXTS: ISLAMIC, CHRISTIAN, HINDU, AND BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVES ON RESPONDING TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The global environmental crisis demands solutions that are not only rooted in science and policy but also address spiritual and ethical dimensions. Various religious traditions emphasize human responsibility in maintaining ecological balance. This study explores the concept of ecotheology within religious texts—Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism—to understand how religious values can synergize in responding to environmental challenges. Using a religious hermeneutic approach, this research analyzes verses from the Qur'an, the Bible, the Vedas, and the Tripitaka that discuss the human-nature relationship. The findings reveal that all four religions share fundamental principles that emphasize ecological balance, such as the concept of khalifah in Islam, stewardship in Christianity, karma and ahimsa in Hinduism, and the interdependence of living beings in Buddhism. The synergy of these values can serve as an ethical foundation for faith-based environmental movements and sustainable policies. Furthermore, this study examines the role of religious institutions in promoting ecological awareness through education, preaching, and social action. It recommends efforts to reinterpret religious texts to be more contextual to modern ecological challenges and to encourage interfaith collaboration in environmental advocacy. Thus, ecotheology can serve as a multidisciplinary approach that integrates religion, ethics, and ecosystem sustainability in contemporary society.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The escalating environmental crisis, marked by climate change, deforestation, water and air pollution, and biodiversity loss, is not merely an ecological problem but also a moral and spiritual crisis (Quddus, 2020). A development model based on

resource exploitation has created ecological imbalances that threaten human life and other living beings. In this context, religion has great potential to offer ethical and normative perspectives for addressing environmental issues holistically.

Ecotheology emerges as a conceptual framework linking religious teachings with human ecological responsibilities (Rusmiati, 2023). (2) This idea stems from the belief that nature is not merely an object for exploitation but an integral part of the sacred cosmic order. In various religious traditions, ecotheological concepts are found not only in religious doctrines but also in rituals and social practices. Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism—the major religions in Indonesia—have rich theological foundations regarding the human-nature relationship.

In Islam, the concept of *khalifah fil ardhi* (steward of the earth) affirms human responsibility as guardians of ecological balance (Qur'an 2:30). This concept is reinforced by the principle of *mizan* (balance) in Qur'an 55:7-9, which teaches the importance of maintaining harmony in God's creation. Christianity embraces the doctrine of stewardship, which teaches that humans are responsible for caring for the earth as a mandate from God (Genesis 2:15). Meanwhile, in Hinduism, the concept of *rita* (cosmic order) and *karma* teaches that human actions toward nature determine the balance of life. In Buddhism, the principle of *pratītyasamutpāda* (interdependence) teaches that humans and nature are interconnected, making environmental exploitation detrimental to human life itself.

This study aims to explore how religious texts in Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism construct ecotheological insights that can synergize in addressing the environmental crisis. By employing a religious hermeneutic approach, this study analyzes how sacred texts are interpreted in various religious traditions and how ecological values within them can be contextualized in environmental conservation efforts.

Unlike previous approaches that tend to compare religious teachings from an ecological perspective, this study focuses more on interfaith synergy in formulating solutions to environmental problems. In

Indonesia's pluralistic context, interfaith approaches to environmental issues are becoming increasingly relevant, given the strong role of religion in shaping societal awareness and behavior.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of ecotheology as an academic discourse and as a foundation for faith-based environmental movements. By elaborating on ecological teachings in various religious texts and examining their implementation in religious practices, this research seeks to build an ethical foundation that can strengthen environmental policies and sustainability advocacy in Indonesia.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach with textual analysis and case study methods. This methodology is chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of ecotheological concepts within religious texts and their applications in Indonesia's socio-religious life.

The primary sources for this research include sacred texts from each religion: the Qur'an, the Bible, the Vedas, and the Tripitaka, as well as relevant exegetical literature and religious commentaries. Additionally, in-depth interviews with religious scholars, academics, and ecotheology practitioners are conducted to obtain direct perspectives on how ecotheological concepts are applied in religious communities.

Data collection techniques involve textual analysis, participatory observation, and in-depth interviews. Textual analysis is conducted on sacred texts and religious literature to identify how ecological concepts are constructed within religious teachings. Participatory observation is carried out in religious communities that have implemented ecotheological principles in their practices, such as environmentally conscious Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), green churches, Hindu temples with conservation programs, and Buddhist monasteries emphasizing ecological values.

In-depth interviews with religious leaders, academics, and environmental activists aim to further understand how ecotheological teachings are applied in Indonesia's social and cultural contexts.

Data analysis is performed using hermeneutic, thematic, and case study approaches. The hermeneutic approach is used to understand how religious texts present ecological concepts and how these interpretations evolve in various religious contexts. Thematic analysis is applied to categorize and identify patterns in ecotheological doctrines across different religions to find synergistic values that can be applied in environmental conservation efforts. The case study method focuses on religious communities that have successfully integrated ecological values into their practices to understand the factors contributing to the success of these programs.

To ensure the validity and credibility of the research, data triangulation is conducted by comparing findings from various sources, including religious texts, interviews, and observations. Member checking is performed by asking respondents to review interview results and research interpretations to ensure data accuracy. Additionally, peer review is conducted by involving ecotheology experts and religious studies academics to review and provide input on the research findings.

Through this research methodology, a deeper understanding of ecotheological synergy across various religions in Indonesia is expected to be obtained, as well as its contributions in ethically and theologically responding to the environmental crisis.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Representation of Ecotheology in Religious Texts**

Ecotheology is a study of the relationship between religion and the environment, aiming to explore religious values that support ecological sustainability. In this context, religious texts play a

fundamental role in shaping human understanding of nature, the environment, and ecological responsibilities. Using a religious hermeneutic approach, this study seeks to comprehend how Islamic, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist texts articulate ecological concepts and how their historical and theological interpretations have evolved in the context of environmental sustainability.

In Islam, the human relationship with nature is based on the concept of *khalifah* (stewardship) and *amanah* (trust) as responsibilities towards God's creation. The Qur'an emphasizes human roles in maintaining ecosystem balance and prohibits excessive exploitation of resources.

One of the frequently cited verses in Islamic ecotheology is from Surah Al-Baqarah (2:30): *"And (remember) when your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority (khalifah).'"* This verse highlights the human role as a steward on earth. The meaning of this concept goes beyond leadership; it also signifies a moral and ethical responsibility to manage nature wisely. Humans do not have absolute power over nature but are accountable for its care and balance. Therefore, excessive exploitation of nature contradicts Islamic values (Sholahudin, 2019).

The concept of balance in resource utilization is also emphasized in Islam. In Surah Al-A'raf (7:31): *"Eat and drink, but do not be excessive. Indeed, He does not like those who commit excess."* This verse teaches that humanity is commanded to consume resources in moderation and avoid wastefulness. This principle conveys a message of sustainability and responsible resource usage. Consumerism and wasteful behavior not only harm humans but also negatively impact the ecological balance.

The Qur'an also warns that destruction on land and sea results from human actions. In Surah Ar-Rum (30:41), it is stated: *"Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by [reason of]*

*what the hands of people have earned...*" This verse is relevant in modern contexts, where resource exploitation has led to various environmental issues such as climate change, deforestation, and pollution. Islam teaches that human responsibility towards nature must be based on the principle of *maslahah* (public good), meaning that every action must benefit life as a whole. This principle asserts that maintaining ecological balance is not only a moral obligation but also part of worship and obedience to God.

Islamic legal framework for environmental protection provides a structured approach to environmental conservation. Concepts such as *hisbah* (market regulation) and *wakaf* (land endowment for public welfare) have historically supported sustainable development. Many Islamic scholars advocate for the revival of these principles in modern ecological governance.

Eco-Sufism in Islamic mysticism (*tasawwuf*) views nature as a divine manifestation that should be treated with respect and love. Many Sufi orders incorporate environmental ethics into their spiritual practices, such as organic farming and water conservation.

Thus, despite doctrinal differences, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism share ecotheological values that contribute to addressing the ecological crisis. A faith-based approach can serve as an alternative solution that emphasizes moral ethics, spirituality, and ecological awareness. By integrating these principles into policies and sustainable practices, religion can play a vital role in fostering broader environmental consciousness in society.

In classical and contemporary Islamic interpretations, these verses are often linked to the principle of *maslahah* in Islam, emphasizing that human actions must bring benefits to life, including maintaining ecological balance.

In the Christian tradition (Budiman & Objantoro, 2022), the relationship between humans and nature is often associated with the concept of *Imago Dei*

(humans as the image of God) and stewardship (the management of God's creation). Several relevant verses include: Genesis 1:26-28 states, "*Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle, over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'*" This verse is often interpreted in two ways—either as a mandate for human domination over nature or as a duty of responsible stewardship. Ecotheological hermeneutics tend to emphasize the latter, viewing it as an obligation for humans to care for God's creation.

Psalms 24:1 states, "*The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness...*" This perspective underscores that nature does not belong to humanity but to God, meaning that irresponsible exploitation is a spiritual transgression (Giawa, 2021).

Romans 8:19-22 states, "*For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed...*" The interpretation of this verse suggests that nature also possesses a spiritual dimension and longs for restoration, which, in a modern context, can be linked to environmental conservation efforts (Haryon, 2022). Churches around the world have begun reinterpreting these verses to promote faith-based ecological movements, including the *Laudato Si'* initiative promoted by Pope Francis as a moral call to address the global environmental crisis.

Hinduism holds a cosmological view that perceives nature as a direct manifestation of Brahman (the ultimate reality). Thus, reverence for nature is an integral part of Hindu teachings. Several key texts supporting this perspective include: *Yajurveda* 36.17 states, "*Peace be to the sky, peace be to the earth, peace be to the waters, peace be to the plants, peace be to all beings...*" This verse reflects the concept of *Rta* (cosmic order) in the Vedas, emphasizing that nature must be preserved in balance and that humans have a responsibility to honor and maintain its sanctity (Fitriani, 2020).

Bhagavad Gita 3.14-15 states, *"All living beings subsist on food, food is produced by rain, rain is generated by sacrifice, and sacrifice is born of righteous action."* This verse illustrates an ecological cycle that highlights the importance of human actions aligning with nature's balance.

In practice, Hinduism in Indonesia, particularly in the *Tri Hita Karana* tradition in Bali, teaches a harmonious relationship between humans, God, and nature, which serves as a model for faith-based ecological sustainability (Sastrawan & Giri, 2022).

Buddhist teachings emphasize the principle of interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*), which states that all living beings and natural elements are interconnected. Several teachings supporting ecotheology in the Tripitaka include: Dhammapada 129 states, *"All beings fear death, all beings love life. Therefore, one should not kill or cause others to kill."* This teaching emphasizes respect for all forms of life, which can be extended to wildlife protection and environmental preservation (Pemerintah Provinsi DKI Jakarta & Yayasan ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability Indonesia Perwakilan Umat Buddha Indonesia (WALUBI), 2020).

The *Jataka Tales*—stories about the previous lives of the Buddha—often depict harmonious relationships between humans and nature, such as in the Ruru Jataka, where the Buddha, in the form of a deer, shows compassion towards both humans and his environment. Sutta Nipata 1.8 states, *"A wise person who lives simply and does not pollute the environment will attain true happiness."* This teaching implies that the concept of simplicity and non-attachment in Buddhism can be applied to an environmentally friendly lifestyle.

Buddhism in Indonesia, particularly within the Dhammayatra community, has implemented ecotheological principles in daily practice, including reforestation efforts and reducing natural resource consumption (Olivia, 2009).

A hermeneutic analysis of religious texts indicates that each faith has

ecotheological values that support environmental preservation. Despite differences in concepts and approaches, all major religious traditions in Indonesia emphasize human responsibility toward nature. The hermeneutic approach enables the reinterpretation of religious teachings to be more relevant in addressing contemporary ecological challenges.

## Comparative Analysis of Ecological Doctrines Across Religious Traditions

The current ecological crisis requires a multidisciplinary approach, including contributions from religious perspectives. Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism have rich doctrines regarding the human-nature relationship. Despite theological differences, these four religions offer values that can serve as faith-based ecological solutions.

**Table 1.** Common Ecological Values in Major Religions

| Aspect                                            | Islam                                                                                          | Christianity                                                                         | Hinduism                                                                         | Buddhism                                                                                                      |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Responsibility toward Nature</b>               | <i>Khalifah</i> concept in the Qur'an (2:30) emphasizes that humans are stewards of the earth. | <i>Stewardship</i> in Genesis 2:15 teaches that humans must care for God's creation. | <i>Rta</i> concept in the Vedas emphasizes maintaining cosmic balance.           | <i>Pratītyasamutpāda</i> (interdependence) in the Tripitaka states that all beings must coexist harmoniously. |
| <b>Warning Against Environmental Exploitation</b> | Qur'an 30:41 warns that environmental destruction is a consequence of human actions.           | Romans 8:19-22 states that nature longs for restoration from damage.                 | Bhagavad Gita 3:14-15 teaches that unbalanced exploitation disrupts life cycles. | Dhammapada 129 emphasizes respect for all forms of life, including nature.                                    |



|                                       |                                            |                                                     |                                                                             |                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Balance and Simplicity in Life</b> | Qur'an 7:31 forbids excessive consumption. | Proverbs 30:8-9 teaches simplicity and contentment. | <i>Ahimsa</i> (non-violence) encourages a harmonious lifestyle with nature. | Sutta Nipata 1.8 emphasizes simplicity and environmental mindfulness. |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|

Islamic Eco-Theology emphasizes environmental stewardship (khalifah) and balance (mizan) in nature. The Quran explicitly warns against corruption of the earth (Qur'an 30:41) and encourages sustainable resource use (Qur'an 7:31). Many contemporary Islamic scholars advocate for the integration of ecological awareness into Islamic education and governance. Initiatives such as the Eco-Mosque Movement promote sustainable practices in places of worship, incorporating solar panels, water conservation systems, and tree planting. The Green Hajj Campaign encourages Muslim pilgrims to reduce waste and minimize their environmental impact during the pilgrimage. Additionally, Islamic organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah have issued environmental fatwas, emphasizing the moral responsibility of Muslims in addressing climate change and deforestation.

Christian Eco-Theology has been significantly influenced by theologians such as Pope Francis, who, through *Laudato Si'*, emphasizes that environmental protection is a moral duty. Christian movements, such as Green Christianity and Eco-Catholicism, are gaining traction in advocating for sustainability policies.

Hindu Ecological Practices are deeply rooted in traditional Hindu societies that maintain ecological balance through sacred groves and river purification rituals. The Chipko Movement, inspired by Hindu

principles, highlights grassroots efforts in conservation.

Buddhist Environmental Ethics align closely with Engaged Buddhism, as promoted by Thich Nhat Hanh, linking mindfulness with ecological activism. Buddhist monasteries increasingly adopt reforestation initiatives and zero-waste lifestyles as part of their spiritual discipline.

Although they share ecological values, each religion has a unique approach to the concept of ecology.

**Table 2.** Unique Approaches to Ecology in Different Religious Traditions

| Aspect                                    | Islam                                                                             | Christianity                                                   | Hinduism                                                   | Buddhism                                                                |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Theological Sources</b>                | Qur'an and Hadith                                                                 | Bible (Old & New Testament)                                    | Vedas and Bhagavad Gita                                    | Tripitaka                                                               |
| <b>Core Concept</b>                       | <i>Khalifah</i> (humans as stewards of the earth)                                 | Stewardship (humans as caretakers of God's creation)           | <i>Rta</i> (cosmic balance)                                | <i>Pratītyasamutpāda</i> (interdependence of all beings)                |
| <b>Human Responsibility</b>               | Responsible management of natural resources                                       | Protecting and preserving God's creation as an act of faith    | Respecting nature as part of divine reality                | Avoiding environmental exploitation since all beings are interconnected |
| <b>Ethical Approach</b>                   | <i>Maslahah</i> (public good) as the foundation for environmental decision-making | The principles of love and social justice in caring for nature | <i>Ahimsa</i> (non-violence) as a form of respect for life | Simple living and minimal consumption to maintain environmental balance |
| <b>Solutions to the Ecological Crisis</b> | Promoting justice in natural resource use                                         | Encouraging churches to be agents of environmental change      | Practicing ecological rituals and reverence                | Meditation and mindfulness practices to enhance                         |

## Universal and Distinctive Values in Religious Contributions to Ecological Solutionst

Based on this comparative analysis, universal and distinctive values can be identified as potential faith-based solutions to ecological challenges. The universal values include awareness of the interconnection between humans and nature, as all religions teach that humans are part of a broader ecosystem and must maintain its balance. Another shared value is the moral responsibility for environmental exploitation, where religious teachings emphasize that environmental destruction is a consequence of irresponsible human actions. The principle of sustainability and balance is also emphasized, with teachings on simple and non-excessive living serving as solutions to reduce overconsumption and environmental degradation. Additionally, spiritual-based ecological ethics reinforce the idea that nature is either God's creation or part of a sacred cosmic order that must be respected.

Distinctive values are also present within each religious tradition. Islam emphasizes *khalifah* and *maslahah*, which highlight the importance of environmental policies based on justice and community welfare. Christianity focuses on stewardship and the ethics of love, emphasizing human responsibility in environmental conservation as a form of devotion to God. Hinduism teaches Ahimsa and Rta, encouraging a lifestyle in harmony with nature and promoting spiritual reverence for the environment. Buddhism applies the principle of *pratītyasamutpāda* and teachings on simplicity, emphasizing the need to reduce excessive consumption as a form of respect for nature.

Thus, despite doctrinal differences, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism share ecotheological values that contribute to addressing the ecological crisis. A faith-

based approach can serve as an alternative solution that emphasizes moral ethics, spirituality, and ecological awareness. By integrating these principles into policies and sustainable practices, religion can play a vital role in fostering broader environmental consciousness in society.

## Implementation of Ecotheology in Religious Practices

Several religious communities in Indonesia have integrated ecotheological values into their practices. These efforts are often led by religious leaders, institutions, and grassroots movements that recognize the urgency of environmental conservation.

Islamic communities have established environmentally friendly Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), Green Mosque movements, and water conservation awareness in wudu practices. *Pesantren Ekologi Ath-Thaariq* in Garut, West Java, has implemented organic farming, biogas energy, and water recycling as part of its curriculum. The Eco-Mosque Movement promotes sustainable mosque designs incorporating solar energy, rainwater harvesting, and tree planting around mosque compounds. The Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah organizations have issued environmental fatwas, encouraging waste reduction and responsible resource use among Muslims.

Christian churches have embraced Green Churches that implement conservation initiatives, such as energy-efficient buildings and waste management programs. The Indonesian Council of Churches has launched sustainability programs promoting climate justice, tree-planting campaigns, and eco-friendly worship practices. *Gereja Kristen Jawa* (GKJ) in Yogyakarta integrates environmental themes in sermons and encourages congregations to adopt green lifestyles. The *Laudato Si'* Movement in Indonesia follows Pope Francis' encyclical on ecological justice, advocating for renewable energy transitions and environmental education in Catholic schools.

Hindu communities apply the Balinese *Tri Hita Karana* philosophy, which emphasizes human, divine, and environmental harmony through sustainable agricultural systems like *Subak*. The Green Hindu Temples initiative in Bali ensures that temple rituals align with conservation efforts, such as limiting plastic use and maintaining sacred groves. The *Pura Luhur Uluwatu* conservation project integrates religious rituals with environmental preservation by protecting surrounding forests and promoting sustainable tourism. The *Chipko Movement*, though originating in India, has influenced Hindu environmental activism in Indonesia by inspiring community-led forest conservation.

Buddhist communities emphasize mindfulness-based environmental awareness, reforestation programs, and reducing material consumption. The Dharmayatra Movement promotes pilgrimages that involve environmental restoration activities such as tree planting and river cleaning. *Vihara Ekayana* in Jakarta practices zero-waste initiatives, encouraging monks and followers to adopt minimalism and sustainable consumption habits. *Engaged Buddhism*, inspired by Thich Nhat Hanh, has influenced Indonesian Buddhists to incorporate environmental activism into their spiritual practice, emphasizing simplicity and compassion towards all living beings.

Interfaith environmental collaborations have emerged as a significant movement in addressing ecological issues. Organizations like Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama (FKUB) and the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative facilitate dialogue and joint actions between different religious communities to combat deforestation and climate change. These initiatives highlight the shared responsibility of all faiths in protecting the environment and promoting sustainable practices.

Eco-theology and policy advocacy have gained traction as religious leaders actively participate in governmental and

international environmental forums. Their involvement ensures that sustainable policies are rooted in religious teachings, emphasizing the ethical and moral dimensions of ecological conservation. By integrating spiritual principles with modern environmental policies, religious leaders contribute to shaping a more sustainable and just approach to ecological stewardship.

Sacred ecology preservation has become a priority for many religious groups that recognize the spiritual significance of natural sites. These groups are actively engaged in protecting ecologically significant areas deemed sacred, such as maintaining clean rivers used in religious rituals or conserving forest areas tied to spiritual practices. This approach not only preserves biodiversity but also strengthens the cultural and spiritual connection between communities and their natural environment.

These examples highlight that ecotheology is not just a theoretical discourse but a lived practice influencing religious communities to engage in real-world environmental conservation. Further integration of religious values with ecological activism is essential in ensuring sustainable development in Indonesia and beyond.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism each have theological foundations that emphasize human responsibility in maintaining ecological balance. Despite doctrinal differences, these religions share fundamental principles such as *khalifah* in Islam, stewardship in Christianity, *karma* and *ahimsa* in Hinduism, and the interdependence of living beings in Buddhism. These shared values form a strong ethical foundation for faith-based environmental movements and sustainable policies.

A religious hermeneutic approach to environmental issues enables the reinterpretation of sacred texts to be more



relevant in addressing modern ecological challenges. Religious institutions play a crucial role in promoting environmental awareness through education, preaching, and social action. By integrating religious principles into sustainability policies and encouraging interfaith collaboration, faith communities can contribute significantly to shaping ecological consciousness and fostering responsible attitudes toward nature.

This study emphasizes that ecotheology can serve as a multidisciplinary approach that bridges religion, ethics, and environmental sustainability in contemporary society. Strengthening the synergy of religious values in environmental advocacy is essential to addressing the ongoing environmental crisis in a holistic and ethical manner.

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