



RELIGION AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION: An Interfaith Perspective to Address the Ecological Crisis

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Abstract

The growing global ecological crisis requires a multidisciplinary approach, including contributions from spiritual and religious dimensions. This study is important because it highlights the potential of world religions, through interfaith dialog and cooperation, in shaping environmental ethics and encouraging restorative action against natural destruction. This study aims to explore how an interfaith perspective can strengthen the contribution of religious communities in environmental restoration efforts, what forms interfaith collaboration can take in an ecological context, and how religious values from various traditions can converge to form an inclusive environmental ethic. Using qualitative methods based on literature study and discourse analysis, this research examines theological narratives and environmental praxis in religious documents, as well as interfaith initiatives that have been implemented in various local and global contexts. The main results show that there are universal values such as responsibility for creation, ecological justice, and simplicity of life that serve as common ground between religions in responding to the environmental crisis. In addition, faith-based collaborative practices are proven to strengthen the capacity of communities to manage and restore local ecosystems. The integration of religious perspectives in the environmental restoration movement not only enriches the ecological approach, but also broadens the base of public participation through a deep spiritual foundation.

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A. INTRODUCTION

The global ecological crisis is one of the most pressing challenges facing humanity in the 21st century. Climate disasters, ecosystem degradation, drought and biodiversity loss have occurred simultaneously and intensified over the past two decades. (Rangga Kala Mahaswa et al., 2023). According to the Intergovernment Panel on Climate Change report (IPCC, 2023), global temperatures have increased by more than 1.10 C since the pre-industrial era, and the impacts are felt in almost all aspects of social, economic and ecological life (Ullah et al., 2023). In this context, environmental restoration efforts become very important, both as a mitigation and adaptation strategy to increasingly complex crises.

So far, responsibility for addressing environmental issues has been seen as the domain of science and public policy. However, technocratic and secular approaches are not effective enough without a deeper transformation of values and ethical awareness. In this regard, world religions have great potential as a moral and spiritual source that can drive human behavior towards sustainability (Sovacool et al., 2022). Religious teachings, ranging from responsibility for creation, to the principles of simplicity and solidarity, offer a relevant ethical framework for responding to the environmental crisis. (Purnawanto, 2024).

Studies show that religious communities can play a significant role in nature conservation and ecological advocacy. For example, research shows that faith-based initiatives in forest conservation and water management in Asia and Africa make a real contribution to strengthening local ecosystems. (Walker, 1975). In some cases, religious institutions are even able to bridge the gap between local communities and the government in ecological restoration programs. Therefore, there is a need for more structured efforts to integrate religious values into environmental policy, education, and daily practices. (Romdloni & Sukron Djazilan, 2019).

One of the growing approaches in this field is interfaith collaboration. This approach prioritizes interfaith cooperation in addressing common problems, including environmental issues. Interfaith dialogue is not only a means of strengthening tolerance and peace, but also opens space for collective action based on universal values such as ecological justice, social responsibility, and love for the

earth as a common home (Al-Kassimi, 2024). For example, interfaith alliances such as the Green Faith International Network have brought together religious leaders from different countries in a global campaign for climate justice.

However, the involvement of religion in the environmental movement still faces various challenges. On the one hand, there is a dualistic and anthropocentric theological view, which positions humans as the center of creation and undermines the intrinsic value of nature. On the other hand, there is a lack of integration between theological thinking and practical environmental policy strategies. In fact, collaboration between theologians, scientists, economists and policy makers can produce innovative solutions that are more comprehensive and sustainable (R., & H. S. Walker, 2024). In some countries, there is even resistance from religious authorities to the environmental agenda because it is considered too political or contradicts doctrinal teachings.

Departing from these complexities, important questions arise that become the focus of this paper; how can the interfaith perspective strengthen the contribution of religious communities in environmental restoration efforts? What forms of interfaith collaboration have proven effective in ecological contexts? How can religious values from various traditions be consolidated to form an inclusive environmental ethic? Theoretically, this study will enrich the study of the relationship between religion and ecology by adding an interfaith dimension as an analytical framework. This approach enables dialog across traditions that can produce a new paradigm in understanding ecological spirituality more broadly.

Practically, the findings of this study can be used to design environmental restoration programs that involve the active and structured participation of interfaith communities. Furthermore, examining the relationship between religion and the environment also contributes to efforts to decolonize epistemology in environmental studies. So far, knowledge about ecological crises has been dominated by secular and scientific Western narratives. Approaches based on spiritual values and local wisdom from various religious traditions can be an important alternative in building a more contextual and participatory narrative of sustainability (Nasrullah, 2023).

In situations of social fragmentation and ideological polarization that often make cross-sector collaboration difficult, religion can play a unifying role through

its moral strength and proximity to grassroots communities. The high public trust in religious leaders in many developing countries makes them strategic agents for spreading sustainability values and environmental behavior change (Nasrullah, 2023). In addition, religion has a strong dimension of rites, symbols and narratives in shaping the collective ecological imagination. Religious celebrations, collective prayers, and spiritual practices can be a medium to instill ecological awareness that is not only rational but also emotional and transcendental.

The study by Walker & Habib (2024) shows that environmentally themed interfaith rituals can increase interfaith ecological empathy and solidarity (R., & H. S. Walker, 2024). The urgency of this research is also based on the fact that the ecological crisis is a global issue that requires a multi-level and multifactor response. Therefore, interfaith collaboration based on common ethical values becomes very relevant to build transnational coalitions in facing this challenge. Through an interfaith approach, religion can play a role as a transformative moral force as well as an active partner in environmental policy.

Finally, this study seeks to address a gap in the academic literature that is still limited in systematically examining the intersection between interfaith dialogue and environmental restoration. By analyzing concrete experiences and theological reflections from various traditions, this study is expected to make a tangible contribution to the development of an interfaith framework for sustainable environmental action.

B. METHODS

This research uses a qualitative method with a case study approach and discourse analysis as the main basis in answering the problems studied. This qualitative method was chosen to enable a deep understanding of theological narratives and environmental praxis as reflected in religious documents from various faith traditions (Denzin, 2018). A case study approach is applied through the search and review of relevant literature sources, including scriptures, official documents of religious institutions, encyclicals, fatwas, and academic publications that discuss the relationship between religion and the environment. The research utilizes primary sources from major world religions – Islam, Christianity, Hinduism

and Buddhism, among others - with the aim of identifying and interpreting the theological principles underlying ecological commitments in each tradition.

Discourse analysis is used as an instrument to dissect the construction of meaning and narrative structure in religious texts, as well as to understand how ecological discourse is developed in different religious contexts (Creswell, 2013). In this case, the research seeks to reveal the relationship between ethological language and ecological praxis, and evaluate the transformative potential of interfaith perspectives in responding to the global environmental crisis. The content, rhetorical structure, and historical context of the narratives are analyzed by paying attention to how spiritual, moral, and ethical values are constructed to support environmental restoration efforts. The data obtained was analyzed thematically and interpretatively (Denzin, 2018), by identifying key themes related to environmental ethics, human responsibility towards nature, and faith-based collective strategies in addressing ecological degradation. Data validity was strengthened through source triangulation and critical dialogue with interfaith literature to ensure balance and representativeness of perspectives. With a combination of literature study approach and discourse analysis (Creswell, 2013), This research seeks to offer a conceptual contribution to the discourse of ecotheology and encourage interfaith collaboration in order to build a more inclusive and transformative ecological awareness.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Interfaith Perspectives can Strengthen the Contribution of Religious Communities in Environmental Restoration Efforts

The global environmental crisis is no longer merely a technical or scientific problem, but has transformed into a moral and spiritual issue. Amidst the growing complexity of ecological challenges, the involvement of religious communities in the environmental restoration agenda is becoming increasingly significant. However, the sectarian approach that has been used so far has proven to have limitations in reaching a cross-belief spectrum. It is in this context that the interfaith perspective comes as an alternative approach that is more inclusive and effective.

Data from the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (2025) shows that interfaith collaboration in preserving tropical forest areas in Indonesia and Brazil increases conservation effectiveness by up to 38% compared to single approaches based on community or non-religious institutions (Richardson, 2025). This shows that an interfaith

perspective has strategic power in building collective action for environmental protection, especially in regions with high religious diversity like Indonesia. Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world and home to a diversity of major religions, offers fertile ground for interfaith cooperation. However, the fragmentation of religious identities also poses its own challenges. In this context, the interfaith approach plays an important role in overcoming sectarian barriers that have long limited collaborative work on public issues, including the environment.

Field research conducted by McKim (2024) in the *Journal of Religious Studies*, it was found that religious communities involved in interfaith forums have a 27% higher level of environmental participation compared to communities that operate exclusively based on their respective internal religious teachings (McKim, 2024). This indicates that interfaith meetings are capable of overcoming social fragmentation and expanding the horizon of a more universal ecological ethics. Interfaith not only unites actions but also strengthens the theological narrative about the environment from various religious perspectives. For example, in Islam there is the concept of *khalifah* and *amanah*, in Christianity there is the idea of stewardship, while in Hinduism and Buddhism the concept of *ahimsa* (non-violence) towards all living beings is recognized. It can be said that when these values are brought into interfaith forums, a kind of moral convergence is formed that strengthens the legitimacy of collective action against the ecological crisis.

On the ground, interfaith approaches have shown concrete results. A study by LIPI and the Wahid Foundation (2023) found that the "Green Pesantren" initiative in East Java, which involves students, pastors, and monks in reforestation activities, successfully planted 50,000 trees in 18 months (LIPI & Wahid Foundation, 2023). This success is not only due to technical aspects but also because of the strong emotional and spiritual bonds formed between religious communities through an interfaith approach. Furthermore, the interfaith approach expands ecological awareness from merely an individual obligation to a collective responsibility. Interfaith forums create discussion spaces that not only bring together teachings but also experiences, concerns, and shared solutions to environmental issues. This awareness transforms into ecological solidarity – a form of commitment that transcends doctrinal boundaries.

However, the effectiveness of this approach highly depends on the intensity of interaction and the quality of the dialogue that is established. Not all interfaith forums succeed in building trust and avoiding the dominance of a single voice. Therefore, professional and neutral facilities, as well as a contextual ecological curriculum, are needed so that interfaith perspectives do not fall into symbolism without real action. On the other hand, it is also important to consider a critical perspective towards this approach. Some

academics like Patel (2006), reminding that interfaith forums are sometimes used as tools for political legitimization or symbolic diplomacy without substantive commitment to the environmental agenda (Patel, 2006). This requires us to distinguish between interfaith as an instrumental approach and interfaith as a transformative approach.

Academically, this approach demands a paradigm shift from exclusive theology to cross-religious ecological theology. This opens up new spaces in the study of religion, environment, and community sociology. Collaboration between environmental scientists, religious leaders, and community practitioners is becoming increasingly relevant to produce restoration strategies that are more rooted and have a broader impact. In the global context, an interfaith perspective aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda, particularly SDG 13 on climate change and SDG 17 on global partnerships. Interfaith forums have proven to strengthen cooperation from local to transnational levels on strategic issues such as forest protection, water management, and environmental education.

The practical implications are clear: the government, NGOs, and religious institutions need to integrate interfaith approaches into environmental conservation programs. This could be through interfaith ecological training, the creation of interfaith-environment study centers, or the development of collaborative digital platforms among religious communities. The interfaith perspective offers a strong middle ground between the diversity of beliefs and ecological urgency. It is capable of uniting communities that were previously fragmented by religious identities and transforming spirituality into collective actions for a more sustainable Earth. However, the sustainability of this approach heavily depends on consistency, critical reflection, and a commitment to substantive change rather than mere ceremonial gestures.

Forms of Interfaith Collaboration in an Ecological Context

Environmental issues are a global challenge that transcends geographical, ideological, and even religious boundaries. The increasingly complex ecological crises, such as climate change, pollution, and biodiversity degradation, demand a collective approach from various sectors of life, including religious communities. In this context, interfaith collaboration becomes a potential form of social and spiritual strategy in voicing and implementing environmental preservation values (Clooney, 2010).

Interfaith collaboration in the ecological context is not just a pragmatic approach, but also a reflection of universal moral principles embedded in many

religious teachings. Values such as responsibility towards creation, simplicity of life, and ecological justice become common ground that enables interfaith cooperation. This collaboration strengthens the position of religion as an agent of social change in addressing the environmental crisis (Ghazali, 2023). The forms of collaboration that can be undertaken vary, ranging from joint actions in reforestation, ecological awareness campaigns, community-based waste management, to environmental policy advocacy.

The Faith for Earth Initiative project by UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) serves as a tangible example where various religious communities join hands to create real actions for the sustainability of this planet (UNEP., 2022). The involvement of religious leaders in environmental issues is not new. However, interfaith collaboration offers a new dimension of inclusivity and universal solidarity. This is important because environmental issues require the formation of a shared narrative that transcends doctrinal differences. When religious leaders from various traditions voice a harmonious ecological message, they provide strong moral legitimacy in changing social behavior.

Sociologically, interfaith collaboration reflects a paradigm shift from exclusivity to inclusivity in response to global issues. This aligns with the approach of interfaith ecotheology, where theological discourse is developed in an interreligious context to strengthen shared ecological awareness (Cornille, 2010). Furthermore, this collaboration has a strategic function in building community-based socio-ecological resilience. Collaborative projects can bring together Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Protestant, Confucian, and local belief communities in the spirit of ecological mutual cooperation, as demonstrated by the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative in several tropical countries, including Indonesia (IRI (Interfaith Rainforest Initiative), 2023).

In practice, interfaith collaboration requires a strong foundation of dialogue. Interfaith dialogue becomes the starting point for forming a joint agenda and distributing roles in the ecological movement. Without open and honest dialogue, collaboration will easily get trapped in symbolism or merely superficial ceremonies. Therefore, strengthening the capacity of interfaith actors in cross-cultural communication becomes an important aspect. Criticism of interfaith collaboration on ecological issues often appears in two forms. First, the assumption that this

collaboration is utopian and ineffective due to fundamental doctrinal differences. Second, the potential for the instrumentalization of environmental issues for political interests or the legitimization of certain religious beliefs. This criticism should be taken into account to ensure that the collaboration continues within an ethical framework that is honest and oriented towards ecological justice.

However, empirical evidence shows that interfaith collaboration on environmental issues can have a concrete impact. Case studies in several regions of Southeast Asia show that interfaith-based conservation projects have a broader reach and are deeply rooted in the community (Suryawan et al., 2024). This is due to the closeness of religious leaders to the community and their ability to mobilize participation based on spiritual values. More than just an action, interfaith collaboration also gives rise to a new narrative of ecological spirituality. This narrative combines values of divinity, sustainability, and collective responsibility in caring for the earth. In other words, this collaboration touches not only on the practical aspects but also on the philosophical and moral dimensions.

In the context of Indonesia, interfaith initiatives on environmental issues have been seen in programs involving MUI, PGI, KWI, and other local religious organizations. The Green Faith and Eco Pesantren programs serve as examples of faith-based approaches synergized across traditions to address ecological challenges (Khotimah et al., 2024). The challenge ahead is to ensure that interfaith collaboration is not just temporary, but sustainable and transforms into an independent social movement. To achieve this, it is necessary to establish an interfaith institutional system specifically addressing environmental issues, which is not only ad hoc but also has a long-term framework.

Religion-based environmental education is also an important element in strengthening this collaboration. A curriculum that incorporates ecological values into religious education will foster ecological awareness from an early age. This effort will strengthen the social and ideological basis for interfaith collaboration in the future. In this regard, the role of interfaith youth is very strategic (Herdiansyah et al., 2019). They have a high adaptive capacity and a tendency to think beyond identity boundaries. The active involvement of interfaith youth in the ecological movement will ensure the sustainability of this movement in the long term. Theoretically, interfaith collaboration in the ecological context can be understood

as a form of interfaith environmentalism, which is an approach that combines religious ethics with collective ecological responsibility. This is a manifestation of public theology practice that targets socio-ecological spaces as a field for shared moral struggle.

Although complex, the potential of this collaboration is significant in building a social ecosystem that is environmentally conscious and rooted in spiritual values. Structural and cultural challenges remain, but with a systematic, critical, and inclusive approach, interfaith collaboration can become an important force in the global sustainability agenda. Therefore, research and public policy need to pay more serious attention to the religious dimension in environmental issues. Interfaith collaboration is not just about tolerance, but about how spiritual values can serve as an ethical foundation in building a just ecological future. It is important to note that interfaith collaboration in the ecological context is not an alternative to scientific or technological approaches, but a much-needed complement. When science and spirituality walk hand in hand, the shift towards sustainability can occur more comprehensively – both structurally and culturally.

Religious Values from Various Religions to Form an Inclusive Environmental Ethics

Global awareness of the environmental crisis has created an urgent need for a more holistic approach in building environmental ethics. One of the approaches that is gaining increasing attention in academic discourse and policy is the role of religion and its values in shaping inclusive ecological awareness and actions (Tucker, 2023b). The world's religions, with their millions of followers, have great potential in shaping a collective attitude towards nature, including an environmental ethic that transcends theological and cultural boundaries. Inclusive environmental ethics demand recognition of diverse perspectives in understanding and responding to environmental degradation. This ethics not only emphasizes universal ecological principles but also values the diversity of values, traditions, and spirituality that exist within society (White, 2023).

In this context, religion cannot be separated from environmental discourse due to its significant role in shaping the ethos and practices of humanity towards nature. The history of the interaction between religion and nature shows a complex

relationship. Although some criticisms, such as those put forward by Lynn White Jr., state that certain religions, like Christianity, have contributed to the exploitation of nature, contemporary approaches actually show a resurgence of ecological spirituality in various religious traditions (Kearns, 2007). This narrative requires a critical reading of sacred texts and a reinterpretation of religious values to align with contemporary ecological demands.

In Islam, the concept of caliphate emphasizes the responsibility of humans as fair and wise stewards of the earth (QS Al-Baqarah: 30). Principles such as *tawazun* (balance), *maslahah* (public interest), and *amanah* (trust) form a strong normative foundation for building an Islamic-based environmental ethics (Ghazali, 2023). This approach is not only spiritual but also applicable in the sustainable management of natural resources. Contemporary Christian tradition shows a transformation in understanding the relationship between humans and nature. The eco-theology movement emphasizes the importance of appreciating creation as a manifestation of God's love. Pope Francis in the encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015) emphasizing that damaging nature is the same as damaging God's creation. This thinking has been adopted by various churches and Christian communities to encourage collective action in addressing climate change (Fowler, 2023).

In Hindu tradition, nature is not viewed as a passive entity, but as a divine manifestation. The concepts of *Dharma* and *Ahimsa* teach respect for all forms of life as part of *Brahman*, the highest reality. Hindu ceremonies and rituals involving elements of nature reflect a deep ecological awareness (Patel, 2006). These principles support the development of a holistic and spiritual environmental ethic. The Buddha's teachings on *paticca samuppada* (dependent origination) provide a strong foundation for ecological awareness. Every being is interdependent and connected within the web of life. The concept of *karuna* (compassion) and *sati* (mindfulness) also reinforces an environmental ethic based on empathy and moral responsibility towards all forms of life (Clooney, 2010).

Besides major religions, local beliefs such as animism and dynamism also hold high ecological values. Indigenous communities in Indonesia, such as the Dayak and Baduy tribes, practice environmental ethics through rituals, taboos, and spiritual relationships with nature. The integration of local wisdom into the discourse of environmental ethics is important for creating a more contextual and

inclusive approach. Interfaith dialogue on environmental issues has become an important strategy in reconciling spiritual values and collective action. Forums like the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative prove that cooperation among religious communities can promote the protection of forests and biodiversity (Tucker, 2023a).

This dialogue is not only an effort to harmonize doctrines but also a search for concrete solutions to ecosystem damage. Religious values have the potential to influence public policy. In several countries, religious institutions play an active role in environmental advocacy and the formulation of sustainable policies. In Indonesia, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) has issued a fatwa on environmental preservation, demonstrating that religious values can serve as a normative basis to support ecological policies (MUI, 2023).

The role of religion as an agent of social change also includes the transformation of the ecological awareness of society. Religion-based education that integrates environmental values can create a generation with spiritual and ecological responsibility. Initiatives like "eco-pesantren" in Indonesia are real examples of the synergy between spirituality and environmental conservation (Khotimah et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the integration of religious values into environmental ethics is not without challenges. Narrow textual integration, resistance to science, and inter-religious polarization can hinder the formation of an inclusive environmental ethics. Therefore, a critical and inclusive hermeneutic approach is necessary to avoid theological exclusivism.

Religious education needs to transform into a space for dialogue between spirituality and environmental science. A curriculum that integrates religious teachings and ecological issues will broaden students' horizons while also fostering the development of an environmentally conscious character (Herdiandyah et al., 2019). In many religious traditions, women play an important role in preserving ecological values. The perspective of religious ecofeminism highlights that women often serve as guardians of nature and sources of local ecological knowledge. Strengthening the role of women in religious communities can also bolster environmentally based movements rooted in spiritual values (Khotimah et al., 2024).

The digital era opens new opportunities for the dissemination of religious values that support environmental ethics. Social media and digital platforms have been used by religious leaders and spiritual communities to educate their followers about ecological responsibilities. This strategy is effective in reaching the younger generation who are more familiar with the digital world (Clooney, 2010). Religious values from various religious traditions show great potential in shaping an inclusive, contextual, and spiritual environmental ethics. However, this potential can only be realized through a critical, interdisciplinary, and transformative approach that balances doctrine, science, and local wisdom. Religious-based environmental ethics are not an alternative to science, but rather a complement that enriches the moral and spiritual dimensions of efforts to save the Earth.

D. CONCLUSION

This research highlights how religious values from various faith traditions can serve as an ethical and practical foundation in supporting environmental restoration efforts, particularly in the context of the global ecological crisis. The main findings indicate that there are points of convergence in values across faiths—such as a sense of responsibility towards creation, ecological justice, and the principle of sustainability—that can significantly strengthen the narrative and collective action in addressing environmental degradation. The interfaith perspective has proven capable of opening transformative dialogue spaces that not only enrich ecological understanding but also expand the base of social participation in the sustainability agenda. The main contribution of this research is to emphasize the importance of interfaith approaches as an innovative strategy in ecotheology studies and sustainable development. By combining the framework of religious and ecological analysis, this study expands the interdisciplinary horizon in formulating value-based solutions for the complex environmental crisis. The relevance of these findings lies not only in scientific discourse but also in practical application. In an era of increasingly urgent climate change and ecological inequality, this research emphasizes that interfaith collaboration is not merely a moral utopia, but a real potential to build global solidarity grounded in spiritual and humanitarian values for the preservation of the Earth.

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