



# Holy Earth: Harnessing Religious Ethics and Faith-Based Action to Combat Climate Change

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Climate mitigation;  
Doctrinal principles;  
Environmental action;  
Religious values;  
Spiritual motivation.

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### Article history:

Received 2025-04-03

Revised 2025-04-14

Accepted 2025-04-14

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of religion in addressing climate change by examining religious teachings on environmental stewardship, the involvement of faith-based communities in climate mitigation efforts, and the broader social impact of religious perspectives on environmental issues. Employing a literature review approach with content analysis, this research systematically analyzes academic literature, religious texts, and environmental reports to uncover the ecological principles embedded within Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. The findings indicate that religious teachings provide a strong ethical foundation for environmental responsibility, while faith-based organizations actively engage in sustainability initiatives, including reforestation campaigns, carbon emission reduction programs, and ecological awareness education. The study concludes that religion plays a crucial role in fostering moral and spiritual motivation for environmental action. Consequently, fostering collaboration among religious leaders, policymakers, and scholars is essential to strengthening the integration of religious values into global climate change strategies for a more sustainable and equitable future.

**Contribution:** This study highlights the synergistic potential between religious frameworks and climate action, demonstrating how spiritual values can drive real environmental solutions. By analyzing doctrinal principles and grassroots efforts across major religions, the study provides a roadmap for integrating ethical imperatives into sustainability strategies.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Climate change is a global challenge that has broad environmental, social, economic and cultural impacts. The 2021 IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report states that global temperatures have increased by around 1.1 degrees Celsius compared to the pre-industrial period. If this trend continues, the world will face increasing risks, including the increasing frequency of natural disasters such as floods, droughts and storms (De Pryck, 2021). In this context, religious perspectives on climate change become increasingly relevant, considering that many religious teachings emphasize the importance of maintaining natural balance.

Various major religions in the world, such as Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism, have views that highlight the relationship between humans and the environment. Islam, for example, introduced the concept of the Caliph, which teaches that humans are stewards of the earth and are responsible for its preservation (Raziq., n.d.). In Christian teachings, the concept of stewardship emphasizes that the earth is a trust from God that must be looked after (Hitzhusen & Tucker, 2013). Meanwhile, in Hinduism and Buddhism, balance between humans and nature is considered part of dharma or moral and spiritual obligations (Gandhi, 2015).

Data shows that countries with high religious populations are often the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. According to a UNDP (United Nations Development Program) report, around 1.3 billion people living in extreme poverty are in areas most affected by climate change (Atapattu, 2021). This shows that climate change is not only an environmental problem but also an issue of social and moral justice that receives attention in many religious teachings. Therefore, a religion-based approach has the potential to make a significant contribution to mitigation and adaptation efforts to climate change (Leal Filho et al., 2021).

In recent years, various religious organizations have begun to take an active role in addressing climate change issues. For example, Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, called for global action to protect the environment and overcome the climate crisis, emphasizing that climate change is a moral issue that requires the participation of all parties (Tarzia & Iardi, 2024). In the Islamic world, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) and other Islamic organizations have issued environmental fatwas calling for reduced plastic use, reforestation and sustainable lifestyles.

As awareness of the impacts of climate change increases, it is important for religious leaders to play an active role in increasing environmental awareness and action among the congregation. Through religious teachings and practices, they can inspire communities to participate in environmental conservation (Massaro, 2023). Therefore, understanding religious perspectives on climate change is not only important for individual believers but also for building a broader global movement to fight the climate crisis.

This research aims to explore the role of religion in facing climate change through various religious perspectives and practices. The main focus of this research is to analyze religious teachings regarding the environment by identifying principles in Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism that emphasize human responsibility towards nature and examining how spiritual and moral concepts in religion can increase environmental awareness (Koehrsen, 2021). In addition, this research will investigate the involvement of religious communities in mitigating climate change by examining the role of religious leaders in increasing environmental awareness and identifying faith-based programs that have been implemented to reduce the impacts of climate change (Pihkala, 2025).

Furthermore, this research will also explore the social impact of a religious perspective on climate change, including how religious communities understand the relationship between climate change and social justice and how religious values can encourage global solidarity in facing the climate crisis. Finally, this research will evaluate the effectiveness of religious teachings and practices in encouraging environmental action by measuring the impact of faith-based campaigns in reducing carbon emissions and increasing environmental sustainability, as well as identifying challenges and opportunities in integrating religious values with global environmental policy. Thus, it is hoped that this research can provide in-depth insight into how religious teachings can contribute to dealing with climate change and provide recommendations for religious leaders, governments and environmental organizations in building closer cooperation to face climate challenges more effectively.

## 2. METHOD

This research uses a literature study approach to analyze the role of religion in dealing with climate change. Literature study was chosen because it allows researchers to explore various academic sources, religious documents, and environmental organization reports to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between religious teachings and environmental action (Rahman, 2025). The data used in this research comes from various literature, including scientific journals, books, reports from global institutions such as the IPCC and UNDP, as well as religious documents such as encyclicals, fatwas and sacred texts. These sources were collected and analyzed systematically to identify religious principles that emphasize human responsibility towards the environment, the role of religious communities in mitigating climate change, as well as the social impact of a religious perspective on environmental issues. The data analysis technique in this

research was carried out using a content analysis approach, where each document was reviewed to find patterns, concepts and main themes that were relevant to this research. This research also uses a comparative approach to compare perspectives from various religions in responding to the issue of climate change so that a broader understanding can be obtained regarding the contribution of spiritual teachings in maintaining environmental sustainability (Kartodirdjo, 1982).

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Normative Teachings on Environment

The discussion regarding the role of religion in climate change is a multidimensional study that includes aspects of religious values, collective actions of religious communities, and their impact on environmental policy. Religion, as a social institution that has a major influence on people's thought patterns and behavior, can play a strategic role in driving collective action toward environmental protection (Öhlmann & Swart, 2022). This can be seen from various religious traditions which emphasize the importance of ecological balance and human responsibility as guardians of the earth.

In Hinduism, the concept of Dharma reflects human moral responsibility for the welfare of nature and all living creatures. This concept is parallel to the principle of stewardship in Christian teachings, which emphasizes that humans are given a mandate by God to look after the earth (Ehimuan et al., 2024). These principles show that in every religion, there is an ethical basis that supports environmental sustainability. Islamic teachings cannot be separated from this concept, as emphasized in the Koran that humans are caliphs on earth who are responsible for preserving the environment (Nasr, 2021a). This perspective strengthens the understanding that religion is not only a spiritual instrument but also a moral foundation for building ecological awareness.

Apart from normative teachings, the role of religion in climate change is also visible in the collective actions of religious communities. Many faith-based organizations have launched environmental initiatives, such as the Green Mosque movement, which has been implemented in various countries, including Indonesia. This movement integrates sustainability principles into mosque operations, starting from the use of renewable energy to more environmentally friendly waste management. In several churches and temples, a similar concept is also implemented with greening programs, the use of environmentally friendly technology, and ecological awareness campaigns for their congregations (Hitzhusen & Tucker, 2021).

In Indonesia, religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah are active in community-based greening and waste reduction movements. For example, NU, through the Eco Pesantren program, encourages students to adopt a more environmentally friendly lifestyle by recycling waste, saving water, and reducing the use of single-use plastic (Pujiyanto et al., 2021). Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah initiated the Green School program, which teaches students to care more about the environment from an early age (Ilham & Noviarita, 2024). These activities prove that religion has the capacity to shape collective, pro-environmental behavior.

From a policy perspective, the role of religion in climate change is increasingly evident with collaboration between religious organizations, government and non-governmental organizations. One clear example is the involvement of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in voicing the urgency of action on climate change through a declaration supporting the Paris Agreement (Francis, 2015). This organization emphasizes that the environmental crisis is not only a technical problem but also a moral and spiritual problem that requires collective awareness to act.

In an academic context, religion-based environmental ethical theories provide a philosophical foundation that clarifies how religious values can contribute to ecological protection. (White, 1968) in his work entitled *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis* criticizing that certain religious traditions have encouraged the exploitation of nature. However, this criticism has been answered by many theologians and academics who emphasize that religion actually has a great capacity to encourage ecological awareness (Luetz & Leo, 2021). This perspective is also strengthened by ecotheological theory, which emphasizes that religion has a role in building a holistic understanding of the relationship between humans and nature (Jenkins et al., 2018).

#### Climate Change and Its Implications

Climate change, characterized by increasing global temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, and extreme weather phenomena, has become a central issue in global discussions over the past few decades. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, global temperatures have increased by

approximately 1.1 degrees Celsius since the end of the 19th century, and if this trend continues, it is expected to reach or exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2030 (De Pryck, 2021). This increase in temperature has far-reaching implications, including an increase in the frequency and intensity of natural disasters such as floods, droughts and storms, which have a direct impact on human life and ecosystems.

The impact of climate change is not only limited to the physical aspects of the environment but also has multidimensional consequences that affect various sectors of life. One of the most significant impacts is on human health. Rising global temperatures have been linked to the increased spread of tropical diseases, such as malaria and dengue fever, as climate change creates conditions more conducive to the vectors of these diseases (Chandra & Mukherjee, 2022). In addition, increasingly frequent heat waves increase the risk of dehydration, heart attacks and respiratory diseases, especially for vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly.

Food security is also a major concern in the context of climate change. Changing rainfall patterns and rising global temperatures are disrupting agricultural cycles and reducing crop yields in many regions. For example, Sub-Saharan Africa experienced a decline in wheat and corn production due to prolonged drought, which resulted in increased food prices and reduced people's access to nutritious food (Noort et al., 2022). In developing countries, food security is increasingly exacerbated by limited agricultural infrastructure and dependence on water resources that are decreasing due to climate change.

The social implications of climate change also include increasing social inequality and resource conflicts. In many countries, competition for access to clean water and fertile land has fueled conflict between communities. Research shows that social tensions due to climate change are increasing in regions with high dependence on agriculture and fisheries, where natural resources are increasingly limited due to changes in extreme weather patterns (Onyenekwe et al., 2022). With increasing economic and social uncertainty due to climate change, it is important for the global community to adopt a more inclusive and sustainable approach to addressing this challenge.

Climate change is not just an environmental problem but a phenomenon that affects various aspects of human life holistically (Bandh et al., 2021). Therefore, responses to climate change must involve a variety of actors, including governments, the private sector, the scientific community, and religious groups. By understanding the multidimensional impacts of climate change, communities can take proactive steps to build resilience and reduce the risks they face in the future (Tsatsaris et al., 2021).

The role of religion in overcoming climate change is not only limited to theological teachings but also includes real actions in society. Religious organizations have great potential in mobilizing communities to engage in climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. For example, the World Council of Churches has played an active role in providing assistance and advocacy for communities affected by the climate crisis, such as those in the Sahel region, Africa, where changing rainfall patterns are causing a serious water crisis (Benedicte et al., 2022).

### **Religious Views on the Environment**

In ecotheological studies, the role of religion in environmental protection is becoming increasingly relevant in facing the challenge of global climate change. Major religions in the world have long had teachings that emphasize the importance of maintaining natural balance (Eilam, 2022). This concept is not only limited to moral discourse but can also be translated into concrete environmental policies. In Hinduism, the concept of Dharma includes the obligation to maintain the balance of nature, which means humans must live in harmony with the environment and respect all forms of life (Gandhi, 2015). This principle can be adapted to create spirituality-based environmental policies, which encourage a balance between resource exploitation and nature conservation. In practice, many Hindu communities have adopted a sustainability approach by managing natural resources wisely, for example in reforestation and conservation programs for the Ganges river, which is considered sacred by Hindus.

Meanwhile, in the Christian tradition, the principles of environmental management have long been embedded in the teachings of scripture. In the Book of Genesis 2:15, humans are commanded to cultivate and care for the earth, a concept that later developed into Christian environmental theology (Hessel, 2013). This view places humans as guardians of creation, not just users of natural resources. Churches are increasingly active in environmental movements such as Green Church, which aims to reduce carbon footprints, increase energy efficiency, and encourage congregations to engage in environmental conservation. This movement

shows how religious teachings can be applied in real, community-based environmental policies (Nazarian et al., 2022). By encouraging Christians to see the environment as an integral part of their faith, the church contributes to mitigating climate change through collective actions such as the use of renewable energy and the reduction of plastic waste. In addition, the principle of ecological justice in Christian teachings is increasingly being discussed in various theological forums, emphasizing that environmental damage is not only a scientific problem but also a moral and ethical problem that must be handled with deeper spiritual awareness.

In Buddhism, the concept of interconnectedness emphasizes that all living creatures depend on each other (Relief, 2020). This teaching shows that human actions that damage the environment not only have an impact on nature but also on human welfare itself. In the context of climate change, many Buddhist practitioners are active in environmental conservation movements, such as Buddhist Global Relief, which focuses on food security and the impact of climate change on poor communities. The main principle in Buddhism is non-violence or *ahimsa*, which, in an environmental context, is translated as an effort not to damage the ecosystem (Upreti, 2023). Therefore, many Buddhist communities have developed organic farming, reforestation and environmental education programs based on their religious values. This approach shows that religious teachings are not only relevant in the spiritual aspect but can also be the foundation for sustainable environmental policies. In some Buddhist traditions, the practice of environmental meditation is also growing in popularity, where communities engage in deep reflection on humans' relationship with nature and the importance of living in harmony with the environment.

Islam also has many teachings that emphasize the importance of taking care of the environment. The concept of *tazkiyah* in Islam refers to the purification of the soul and the environment, which reflects the human responsibility to take care of the earth. The Qur'an explicitly mentions the importance of the balance of nature and the prohibition against environmental damage (QS. Al-A'raf: 56). In practice, many Islamic organizations, such as Green Muslim, seek to increase Muslim awareness of environmental issues and encourage participation in sustainability efforts (Muslim, 2019). Several Muslim countries have begun implementing policies based on Islamic ecotheology, such as waste management based on Islamic principles of cleanliness and reforestation programs that are integrated with religious values. For example, in Indonesia, the concept of eco-mosque has been implemented in several large mosques to reduce the use of fossil energy and increase environmental awareness among Muslims (Poderati, 2021). Furthermore, in several Middle Eastern countries, environmental fatwas have been issued by clerics to emphasize that protecting nature is part of religious obligations, showing how Islam can be a force that drives positive change in mitigating climate change.

From the perspective of social theory analysis, the ecotheological approach can be studied through the environmental ethics theory developed (Leopold, 1949) in the concept of land ethic. This concept emphasizes that humans are not the masters of nature but are part of a wider ecological community. This perspective provides a basis for religious communities to understand that environmental responsibility is not just a practical issue but also part of a deep moral and spiritual ethic. In line with this thinking, the ecological systems theory of (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) offers a more comprehensive approach in understanding how religious values shape the ecological awareness of individuals and communities. This model shows that individuals are influenced by various social systems, from family and community to public policy. Therefore, religion has great potential to form social norms that support environmental sustainability.

In this context, religion not only functions as a source of moral values but also as an agent of social change capable of directing collective behavior towards sustainable practices. Many religious traditions have teachings that emphasize the importance of maintaining the natural balance (Nurdin, 2022). In Islam, the concept of a caliph on Earth (*fi al-ard*) emphasizes that humans are responsible as guardians of the earth, while in Christianity, there is a doctrine of stewardship that teaches people to care for God's creation. These principles show that religion has long taught the values of sustainability, although their implementation in modern life still requires further strengthening.

### Religious Actions in Facing Climate Change

In facing global challenges such as climate change, religious communities have played a significant role in building collective awareness and encouraging real action for environmental sustainability. Various faith-based initiatives have emerged in response to the worsening ecological crisis, reflecting the active involvement of faith communities in environmental issues (Khaira & Ranti, 2024). One concrete example is the formation of the Interfaith Climate Change Network, which functions as a forum for various religious leaders to share

perspectives and develop joint strategies in dealing with climate change. This network not only plays a role in spiritually based environmental education but also facilitates interreligious dialogue in fighting for sustainable policies based on moral values and religious ethics (Benedicte et al., 2022).

The importance of interreligious collaboration on environmental issues can be explained through ecotheological theory, which highlights how religious teachings can be a basis for building ecological awareness (Costanza et al., 2007). Ecotheology emphasizes that environmental sustainability is not only the responsibility of science and technology but also has a deep spiritual dimension. Through this perspective, religion is not only a source of environmental ethics, but also an effective instrument of social change. For example, the Creation Care program launched by many Christian churches around the world emphasizes the importance of caring for the earth as part of the responsibility of faith. This program not only focuses on increasing awareness of environmental issues but also encourages congregations to take concrete steps such as reducing plastic consumption, increasing energy efficiency, and better waste management (Sadouni, 2022). This approach emphasizes that religious teachings can be a strong moral basis in shaping responsible ecological behavior.

Apart from that, religion also has the power to influence public policy on the issue of climate change. Religious organizations such as the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism in the United States are actively involved in policy advocacy related to renewable energy and reducing carbon emissions. By leveraging their extensive networks and large social influence, religious communities are able to become key actors in pushing for more progressive environmental policies (Center, 2020). This phenomenon can be analyzed using resource mobilization theory, which explains how social groups, including religious communities, can organize their resources to achieve collective goals (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). In this context, religion not only serves as a moral guide for individuals but also has the potential to drive structural change through political pressure and policy.

Not only in advocacy, religion-based education also plays an important role in building sustainable ecological awareness. For example, the EcoSikh initiative has succeeded in integrating sustainability principles into the spiritual practices of the Sikh community (Hermawan et al., 2024). This program emphasizes the need for environmental preservation as part of religious teachings and encourages individuals to implement environmentally friendly practices in daily life, such as greening, use of clean energy, and more responsible consumption (EcoSikh, 2019). When viewed from the perspective of the theory of planned behavior, this approach is very effective because it combines internal motivation factors (religious beliefs) with external factors (community support) in forming environmentally friendly behavior (Kohlberg & Row.Ajzen, 1981). Thus, religion-based education can be a powerful tool in instilling ecological values in a deep and sustainable manner.

Furthermore, the involvement of religious communities in environmental issues can also be linked to community-based sustainability theory, which emphasizes the importance of collective action in building long-term ecological resilience (Pretty & Ward, 2001). In many cases, religious communities not only act as moral drivers but also as actors who provide real solutions for society. For example, many Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia have adopted eco-Islamic boarding school practices, which teach students to live in harmony with nature through wise resource management, organic farming, and water conservation (Nur et al., 2023). This initiative shows that religious action in dealing with climate change is not only limited to theological discourse but also has a real impact in creating sustainable practices that can be applied in everyday life.

On the other hand, the role of religion in environmental issues also faces various challenges. One of them is the difference in interpretation of religious teachings regarding human responsibility towards nature. Some conservative groups still see the exploitation of natural resources as part of the divine mandate to conquer the earth, while progressive groups emphasize the importance of humans' role as caliphs who are responsible for the sustainability of the ecosystem (O'Brien & Abdelhadi, 2020). These differences in interpretation often influence the level of involvement of religious communities in environmental action. However, with the growing development of the ecotheological movement and increasing awareness of the urgency of the climate crisis, more and more religious communities are beginning to adopt a more inclusive and sustainability-oriented ecological perspective.

### **The Role of Religion in Building Awareness and Collective Action**

One clear example of religious involvement in environmental issues is the global Faith for Climate initiative, which invites various religious groups to unite in facing climate change (Climate, 2020). This campaign

not only focuses on education but also emphasizes real actions such as reducing carbon emissions, conserving natural resources, and advocating for environmental policies. In this context, religion not only acts as a spiritual vehicle but also as a social driving force that can connect individuals and organizations in a joint effort to protect the earth.

Apart from global campaigns, religious communities also carry out collective actions in the form of religious events and rituals oriented toward environmental awareness. For example, many churches, mosques and temples hold a Day of Prayer for the Earth, which not only serves as a spiritual reflection but also as a momentum to instill ecological awareness among the faithful (Federation, 2018). Religious rituals linked to environmental awareness can strengthen a sense of collective responsibility in protecting the ecosystem. In a theoretical framework, an ecotheological approach becomes relevant in understanding how religious teachings can encourage pro-environmental actions. Ecotheology examines the relationship between religious beliefs and environmental ethics, highlighting how spiritual values can encourage responsible ecological behavior (Hitzhusen & Tucker, 2021). Based on this perspective, religious actions related to environmental issues are not only pragmatic but also reflect deeper moral principles.

From the perspective of the sociology of religion, the collective action theory can be used to analyze how religious communities form ecological awareness (Durkheim, 2023; Weber & Kalberg, 2013). Durkheim argued that religion has a social function in forming group solidarity, while Weber highlighted how religious ethics can influence economic and social actions (Smith, 2020). In the context of climate change, religious communities act as social agents that build collective awareness and encourage real action through moral and spiritual values. Apart from its role in community mobilization, religion also influences public policy related to the environment. One example is the *Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism* in the United States, which is actively pushing for legislation supporting renewable energy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions (Center, 2020). By harnessing the power of their collective voice, religious communities have great potential to influence policies that impact the environment.

The psychology of religion highlights how religious beliefs and practices shape individuals' mindsets in responding to environmental challenges. The theory about value structures shows that individuals who prioritize universalistic values—such as social welfare and environmental protection—tend to be more active in nature conservation efforts (Schwartz et al., 2006). In Islamic teachings, for example, the concept of the caliph or humans as guardians of the earth is a strong theological basis for building ecological awareness (Nasr, 2021b). Likewise, in the Christian tradition, Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* emphasizes the importance of human responsibility in protecting the environment as a form of worship to God (Lemay & Doleck, 2022). Studies in the psychology of religion also find that higher religious involvement often correlates with pro-environmental actions due to feelings of moral responsibility instilled through religious teachings (Preston, 1997).

Thus, the role of religion in building awareness and collective action on climate change shows that environmental issues cannot only be resolved through scientific and technical approaches alone. A multidimensional approach is needed that involves spiritual, social and cultural aspects in creating a more sustainable world. By combining spiritual values with concrete action, religious communities can make a significant contribution to mitigating and adapting to climate change. In the future, religious involvement in sustainability efforts needs to continue to be strengthened through inter-religious dialogue, cross-sector collaboration, and innovation in environmental advocacy and education strategies.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Religion has a significant role in forming environmental awareness and encouraging collective action in facing climate change. Various religious teachings, including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism, contain ecological values that can be a moral and ethical basis for people in maintaining the balance of nature. More than just spiritual beliefs, religious communities have also contributed to real actions, such as greening movements, environmental policy advocacy, and sustainability education based on religious teachings. This research provides new insight into how religious teachings can be integrated with climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies and shows that environmental sustainability is not only the responsibility of scientists and governments but is also a moral and spiritual issue that must be responded to collectively. Therefore, a collaboration between religious leaders, academics and policymakers is very necessary to build an environmental movement based on religious values that is more inclusive and has a broad impact.

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