
RESPONSIBILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE: A Comparative Ethical Analysis of World Religion

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Abstract: This article develops a comparative normative convergence model as a foundation for climate justice. Through critical examination of normative corpora across Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, the study demonstrates that each tradition contains principles of trusteeship, interdependence, moderation, and justice that can be formulated as shared public ethical categories without erasing distinct theological commitments. This synthesis is achieved through dialectical engagement with internal tensions: between anthropocentrism and ecological responsibility, between personal ethics and structural justice, and between normative ideal and institutional practice. Islam emphasizes *amanah* (trusteeship) and moderation; Christianity advances stewardship and climate justice; Hinduism and Buddhism highlight cosmic interdependence and the transformation of consciousness; Confucian thought grounds ecological responsibility in relational self-cultivation and principled moderation (*Zhongyong*). The findings indicate that religion's contribution to climate governance depends less on doctrinal convergence at the theological level than on its capacity to translate particular values into structurally engaged, postcolonially aware, and politically courageous public action. The study concludes that the comparative normative convergence model advances the field by demonstrating that synthesis is not found but constructed.

Keywords: Climate change; Religious Ethics; Normative Convergence Model; Environmental Responsibility; Climate Governance.

Introduction

Climate change constitutes one of the most serious challenges confronting humanity in the twenty-first century. Its impacts extend far beyond the ecological sphere, permeating social, economic, political, and humanitarian domains. Rising global temperatures, ecosystem degradation, water scarcity, and the increasing intensity of natural disasters demonstrate that the climate crisis cannot be understood merely as a technical or scientific problem. Rather, it represents a normative crisis rooted in prevailing patterns of human–nature relations.¹ In this context, the ethical dimension becomes crucial, particularly in examining the position and responsibility of human beings as moral agents who shape the trajectory of ecological civilization. World religions, as systems of meaning and value influencing billions of adherents, hold a strategic role in framing these relationships and articulating a horizon of collective responsibility for the sustainability of the Earth.

Within the world’s religious traditions, nature is not construed as a neutral entity available for unrestricted exploitation, but as part of a cosmic order imbued with spiritual and ethical significance.² Concepts such as *khalifah* (vicegerency/stewardship),³ stewardship,⁴ *ahimsā* (principle of non-violence),⁵ *Ren* (humaneness), and *Tianren heyi*

¹ Md Abu Sayem, *Religion and Ecological Crisis: Christian and Muslim Perspectives from John B. Cobb and Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (London: Routledge, 2022).

² Carmelo P. Marollano, “Anthropocentrism as an Ecological Fallacy: Philosophical and Theological Musings on Laudato Si,” *Scientia - The International Journal on the Liberal Arts* 14, no. 1 (2025): 66–81, <https://doi.org/10.57106/scientia.v14i1.198>.

³ Munib et al., “Conservation Environmental Sustainability in The Perspective of Islamic Legal Philosophy,” *Samarab: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 6, no. 2 (2022): 556–72, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v6i2.12411>.

⁴ Mariana Rocca, “Christianity and Anthropogenic Climate Change: A Broad Overview of the Catholic Church’s Response and Some Reflections for the Future,” *Religions* 15, no. 6 (2024): 690, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15060690>.

⁵ Zon Vanel, “Representasi Hukum Kausalitas dalam Prajñā Pāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra (Studi Semiotika tentang Representasi Hukum Kausalitas dalam Prajñā Pāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra)” (Thesis, UNS (Sebelas Maret University), n.d.), accessed February 5, 2026, <https://digilib.uns.ac.id/dokumen/4852/Representasi-hukum-kausalitas-dalam-prajñ-pramit-hrdaya-stra-Studi-semiotika-tentang-representasi-hukum-kausalitas-Dalam-prajñ-pramit-hrdaya-stra>. See also, Damien Keown. *Buddhist Ethics:*

(the unity of Heaven and humanity)⁶ across diverse traditions reveal an ethical pattern that situates human beings as guardians rather than absolute rulers of the natural world. This common thread suggests that the environmental crisis is fundamentally a manifestation of moral failure. Nevertheless, the presence of such normative principles does not automatically generate transformative ecological praxis. The persistent gap between religious teachings and the lived social practices of faith communities remains a fundamental challenge in addressing the global climate crisis.

Against this backdrop, a more precise research question emerges: In what ways—and under what analytical conditions—can interreligious ethical convergence be constituted as a normative framework for climate justice? This formulation deliberately resists the assumption that convergence is self-evident; rather, it treats convergence as something that must be argued for, constructed through a defined analytical process, and evaluated against specific criteria of public-ethical validity. The inquiry is thus both descriptive and normative: it maps existing principles and simultaneously constructs their potential articulation as shared ethical categories.

This approach differs from classical comparative studies that map thematic doctrinal parallels, as well as from ecotheological scholarship that typically focuses on a single religious tradition. The article advances a new conceptual category—the comparative normative convergence model—an analytical framework that identifies, evaluates, and reconstructs cross-religious ethical principles as a normative foundation for climate justice. In this model, religion is positioned not merely as a symbolic reservoir of values, but as an argumentative basis for the formation of global public ethics.

Accordingly, the contribution of this article is both theoretical and normative. Theoretically, it clarifies the analytical status of

A Very Short Introduction. (Oxford University Press, 2005), 14-15, and Peter Harvey. *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues*. (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 156.

⁶ Tu Weiming, “The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature,” in *Confucianism and Ecology: The Interrelation of Heaven, Earth, and Humans*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Berthrong (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press for the Harvard Center for the Study of World Religions, 1998), 105–21. On *Ren* as the expansive moral capacity grounding Confucian ecological ethics, see also Tu Weiming, *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness*, rev. and enlarged ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 9, 97.

interreligious ethical synthesis within the study of religion and ecology. Normatively, it shifts the discourse from the mere pursuit of harmony toward the construction of a cross-faith public ethical framework relevant to just climate governance. This approach seeks to enrich academic debates on religion and climate change while opening space for more reflective and transformative interreligious dialogue.

Scholarly attention to human responsibility for the environment and climate change within religious ethical perspectives has grown substantially in recent decades. Numerous studies position religion as a source of moral values for cultivating ecological awareness through normative, theological, and policy-oriented approaches. However, such studies remain largely partial—often confined to a single religious tradition or specific socio-cultural context—and thus have not yet articulated a comprehensive cross-religious ethical framework capable of addressing climate change as a global moral crisis.

For instance, Munib et al. explore environmental sustainability through Islamic legal philosophy, emphasizing *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (higher goals of Islamic law), *maṣlaḥah* (common good), and the human role as *khalīfah*.⁷ Their study demonstrates that Islam provides a robust ethical foundation for environmental conservation. Similarly, Moh. Mufid examines the institutional response of Nahdlatul Ulama to environmental crises through *green fatwas*, highlighting the role of religious authority in shaping ecological awareness.⁸ While these studies align with the present article in positioning human beings as primary moral subjects, they remain limited to a single tradition and localized or normative contexts.

A cross-religious perspective is offered by Arlind Kasa, who analyzes the influence of religious belief on the formation of history and culture through a comparative study of world religions. His findings affirm the significant role of religion in shaping collective values and human action.⁹ However, the analysis does not specifically

⁷ Munib et al., “Conservation Environmental Sustainability in The Perspective of Islamic Legal Philosophy.”

⁸ Moh Mufid, “Green Fatwas in Bahtsul Masāil: Nahdlatul Ulama’s Response to the Discourse on the Environmental Crisis in Indonesia,” *AL-IHKAM: Jurnal Hukum & Pranata Sosial* 15, no. 2 (2020): 173–200, <https://doi.org/10.19105/al-lhkam.v15i2.3956>.

⁹ Arlind Kasa, “The Influence of Religious Beliefs on the Formation of Historical Events and Cultural Traditions: A Comparative Analysis of World Religions,”

engage environmental or climate issues. Meanwhile, Iyad Abumoghli underscores the importance of religious values and spiritual responsibility in environmental governance and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, with emphasis on policy and sustainable development dimensions.¹⁰

This review indicates that scholarship on religion and the environment has indeed progressed, yet significant conceptual gaps remain. Much of the literature is fragmented across normative, institutional, comparative, and policy-oriented approaches, without an explicit cross-religious ethical synthesis centered on human responsibility for climate change as a global humanitarian concern. This article addresses that gap by constructing a systematic comparative analysis of world religious ethics that positions human responsibility as the central axis in responding to the climate crisis. Prior cross-religious ethics projects have pursued convergence through a different methodological route: the Parliament of the World's Religions' Declaration Toward a Global Ethic explicitly set aside doctrinal differences and internal tensions to concentrate on what the traditions already hold in common at the level of basic moral conduct.¹¹ The present study departs from this approach by treating internal tensions not as obstacles to be bracketed but as productive sites of critical inquiry. In addition, unlike previous sectoral studies, this research offers an integrative cross-religious ethical synthesis relevant to strengthening moral consciousness and informing global environmental policy discourse.

This study is a library-based qualitative-comparative investigation analyzing human responsibility for climate change within five religious traditions: Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. The selection of these traditions is based on (1) their demographic and historical significance in shaping global public ethics, (2) the availability of systematic normative corpora, and (3) their contributions to contemporary religion–ecology discourse.

Pharos Journal of Theology, no. 106.3 (May 2025),
<https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.106.3027>.

¹⁰ Iyad Abumoghli, "The Role of Religions, Values, Ethics, and Spiritual Responsibility in Environmental Governance and Achieving the Sustainable Development Agenda," *Religion and Development* 2, no. 3 (2024): 485–95, <https://doi.org/10.30965/27507955-20230008>.

¹¹ Hans Küng and Karl-Josef Kuschel, eds., *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions* (New York: Continuum, 1993), 65.

Primary sources include foundational normative texts: the Qur’an (Islam), the Bible (Christianity), the *Bhagavad Gītā* and *Upanishads* (Hinduism), the *Dhammapada* and principal *sūtras* (Buddhism), and the *Analects* (*Lunyu*) (Confucianism). Secondary sources consist of reputable journal articles and scholarly works on environmental ethics, political theology, and climate justice.

The analysis employs thematic content analysis through the construction of a comparative matrix based on ethical categories. These categories are determined both deductively—drawing from climate justice theory and environmental ethics—and inductively, through close textual reading.¹² The focus remains at the doctrinal and normative-ethical level, with socio-institutional implications addressed reflectively. Convergence is established according to two criteria: (1) the presence of normative principles affirming human responsibility for ecological sustainability, and (2) their relevance to contemporary climate justice frameworks. Convergence is understood as normative intersection rather than theological uniformity. To enhance methodological transparency, the following table summarizes the principal ethical categories employed in the analysis:

Ethical Category	Islam (Al-Qur’an)	Christianity (Bible)	Hinduism (Gītā/Upanishad)	Buddhism (Dhammapada)	Confucianism (Analects)
Human Responsibility	<i>Khalifah</i> (stewardship)	Stewardship	Cosmic Dharma	Karma Responsibility	<i>Ren</i> (Humaneness)
Justice & Balance	<i>‘Adl</i> , <i>Mizān</i> (justice/balance)	Justice & Care	<i>Rta</i> (Cosmic Order)	Middle Way	Social-Cosmic Harmony
Interdependence of Beings	Unity of Creation	Creation as Community	Unity with Brahman	<i>Pratītyasamutpāda</i> (Dependent Origination)	Relationality
Moderation &	<i>Iqtisād</i> (Moderation)	Simplicity	Self-Control	Non-Attachment	<i>Zhongyong/Chung-yung</i>

¹² On the deductive-inductive hybrid approach to thematic content analysis and the construction of categorical matrices in qualitative research, see John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009), chap. 9 and 10. On the methodological legitimacy of employing predetermined ethical categories in cross-traditional comparative religious analysis, see Paul Roscoe, “The Comparative Method,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. Robert A. Segal (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 25–46.

Consumption Limits (on)

(Balance)

Source: Author's analysis, 2026

Source triangulation, consistency of analytical categories, and cross-traditional reading were employed to ensure the validity and rigor of the interpretation. The structure of the argument is developed analytically, moving from normative mapping to the formulation of a synthetic model of convergent public ethics for climate justice.

Theoretical Framework: Human Responsibility in Environmental Ethics

Global climate change can no longer be understood merely as a geophysical phenomenon or a matter of energy policy. It is a relational crisis—a crisis concerning how human beings understand themselves within the web of life. Its far-reaching impacts across social, economic, cultural, and even spiritual dimensions reveal that what is at stake is not only the stability of ecosystems, but also the moral orientation of modern civilization. In this context, environmental ethics emerges not simply as a normative discourse on conservation, but as a fundamental reflection on the ontological position and ethical responsibility of humanity toward the Earth.

Modern scholarship on religion and ecology has been significantly shaped by the controversial thesis advanced by Lynn White Jr. in 1967. White argued that the roots of the modern ecological crisis lie in the anthropocentric theology of medieval Christianity, particularly in interpretations of the dominion mandate in the Book of Genesis.¹³ This thesis sparked a prolonged debate: is religion—especially Western Christianity—a structural cause of the ecological crisis? Or does it instead provide theological resources for ecological renewal? Post-White debates reveal far greater complexity. Christian environmental theologians have insisted that dominative readings of sacred texts are not the only legitimate interpretations. The concepts of stewardship, incarnational theology, and Franciscan spirituality have been reclaimed as foundations for a relational ecological ethic.¹⁴ Religion thus appears as ambivalent: it can function

¹³ Lynn White Jr, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203–7.

¹⁴ Ryszard Sadowski, “The Role of Christianity in Ecological Awakening: Foundations for Christians’ Sustainable Behavior Toward Nature,” *Problemy Ekorozwoju* 20, no. 1 (2025): 15–24, <https://doi.org/10.35784/preko.6835>.

as a legitimation of anthropodominance, yet also as an internal critique of exploitative modernity.

This debate is not confined to Christianity. In Islam, the concept of *kehalifah* may be interpreted either as a mandate for domination or as a trust (*amānah*) of guardianship.¹⁵ In Hindu and Buddhist traditions, cosmologies of interconnection are often regarded as more inherently ecological; yet even there, social practices do not always align with cosmic ideals.¹⁶ Comparative analysis suggests that the fundamental issue is not any particular religion per se, but the manner in which theology interacts with modern economic and political power.

The Confucian tradition occupies a distinctive position within this comparative landscape. Unlike the Abrahamic traditions, Confucianism does not frame human-nature relations through a theology of creation, and unlike Hindu and Buddhist cosmologies, it does not ground ecological ethics in ontological interdependence. Instead, Confucian ecological ethics emerges from a relational social ontology: the conviction, expressed in *Ren* (humaneness), that moral cultivation must extend outward from the self toward the broadest community of relationships—ultimately encompassing Heaven-and-Earth (*tiān dì*) as the encompassing moral horizon. In the Analects (12.1), Confucius defines *Ren* as the capacity to ‘overcome the self and return to ritual propriety (*lǐ*)’¹⁷—a formulation that Tu Weiming reads as encoding a principle of self-limitation and conservationist ethics—what he describes as establishing ‘a pattern of mutual dependence and organismic unity between Heaven and humankind’—from which an ecological critique of over-consumption may be derived.¹⁸ The Confucian tradition’s ambivalence—its potential for both hierarchical

¹⁵ Afrizal Nur et al., “Qur’anic Ecotheology and the Ethics of Forest Protection in Indonesia,” *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur’an Dan Hadis* 26, no. 2 (2025): 351–82, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v26i2.6312>.

¹⁶ Vanel, “Representasi Hukum Kausalitas dalam Prajñā Pāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra (Studi Semiotika tentang Representasi Hukum Kausalitas dalam Prajñā Pāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra).” See also, Keown, *Buddhist Ethics*, 39–40.

¹⁷ Mark Csikszentmihalyi, “Confucius,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/confucius/> (accessed March 7, 2026).

¹⁸ On the ecological reading of Confucian ethics as a form of principled self-limitation and conservationist thought, see Tu, “The Continuity of Being,” 107, where Tu explicitly describes Confucian relational principles as “ecological” and “conservationist,” establishing “a pattern of mutual dependence and organismic unity between Heaven and humankind.”

legitimation and relational moral expansion—mirrors the ambivalence identified in the Abrahamic and Asian traditions, confirming a broader argument that no single tradition is unambiguously ecological.

Classical paradigms position humanity at the center of moral value, whereas biocentrism and ecocentrism expand the moral community to encompass all living beings and ecological systems. Critiques of religion frequently target anthropocentric tendencies within creation theology.¹⁹ However, closer comparative reading demonstrates that not all forms of anthropocentrism are synonymous with domination. In many traditions, human distinctiveness is accompanied by heightened ethical responsibility. The theoretical challenge, therefore, is not to dissolve anthropocentrism—which risks erasing the very moral agency that undergirds responsibility—but to reconstruct it: from dominative anthropocentrism, in which human singularity functions as a warrant for unlimited exploitation, to relational anthropocentrism, in which that same singularity is reconstituted as a moral burden of accountability toward the community of life.²⁰ This distinction is not merely semantic. It has direct consequences for how religious traditions are read and applied: a dominative reading of Genesis 1:28 or of *khalifah* yields an ethics of management; a relational reading yields an ethics of obligation—and it is the latter that this article argues is both textually defensible and morally adequate to the demands of the climate crisis.

While Abrahamic traditions may deepen the relational dimension of the human mandate, traditions grounded in cosmologies of interconnection—such as Hinduism and Buddhism—can enrich discourse on ontological interdependence.²¹ Such synthesis does not erase metaphysical differences; rather, it converges at the level of ethical orientation. One secular critique of religious environmental ethics contends that religion is too bound to particular metaphysical commitments to serve as a foundation for global public ethics. Moreover, religion is sometimes viewed as contributing to the

¹⁹ David Spring and Eileen Spring, *Ecology and Religion in History*, Harper Torchbooks (Harper & Row, 1974), <https://cir.nii.ac.jp/crid/1971993809804092188>.

²⁰ Marollano, “Anthropocentrism as an Ecological Fallacy.”

²¹ Sahmin Madina, “Teologi Ekologis: Peran Agama Dalam Menginspirasi Gerakan Lingkungan,” *Farabi* 18, no. 2 (2021): 193–206, <https://doi.org/10.30603/jf.v18i2.5028>.

crisis through theological legitimations of human domination over nature or through resistance to climate science.

Historically, Western modernity did indeed develop within a particular religious matrix that emphasized rationalization and control over nature.²² Yet reducing religion to a singular cause of the ecological crisis overlooks the decisive roles of industrial capitalism, colonialism, and the logic of unlimited growth. Indeed, many contemporary environmental movements draw moral energy from faith communities. Religion must therefore be understood as a field of internal contestation. It can become part of the problem when allied with exploitative power structures, but it can also serve as a source of ethical resistance against unjust systems. This ambivalence calls for analysis that is not simplistic, but dialectical.

The climate crisis is not merely a matter of personal ethics; it is also a question of structural justice. Climate justice theory emphasizes that nations and social groups contributing least to greenhouse gas emissions are often those most severely affected.²³ Within this framework, responsibility cannot be separated from historical and political dimensions. Political theology provides conceptual tools to interpret the crisis as an issue of power and resource distribution. Islamic concepts of justice (*'adl* and *maṣlahah*),²⁴ the Christian notion of the common good,²⁵ and principles of non-violence in Indian traditions can converge within a horizon of climate justice that demands a redistribution of global responsibility.²⁶ Here, interreligious ethical synthesis operates at a normative-structural level: it expands responsibility from individual repentance toward systemic transformation.

²² Todd LeVasseur and Anna Peterson, *Religion and Ecological Crisis: The "Lynn White Thesis" at Fifty* (London: Routledge, 2016).

²³ Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, "Religion and Ecological Destruction: Considering the 'White Thesis' in the Context of Indonesia," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 19, nos. 1–2 (2025): 21–44. DOI:10.1163/15697312-bja10074

²⁴ Yunita Yunita and Zahratul Idami, "Pengelolaan Lingkungan Hidup Menurut Perspektif Fiqih," *Jurnal Hukum Samudra Keadilan* 15, no. 2 (2020): 210–22, <https://doi.org/10.33059/jhsk.v15i2.2452>.

²⁵ Joseph Adeniran Adedeji and Roman Lenz, "Christian Eco-Theology and Urban Climate Adaptation in Yorubaland, Nigeria," *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening* 93 (March 2024): 128213, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2024.128213>.

²⁶ Jonathan D. Smith, "Connecting Global and Local Indonesian Religious Environmental Movements," *Jurnal Kawistara* 7, no. 3 (2018): 207–25, <https://doi.org/10.22146/kawistara.25908>.

This approach also opens space for postcolonial ecological ethics. Many regions experiencing ecological exploitation are former colonies whose resources were extracted to fuel industrial economic growth elsewhere. Postcolonial analysis reminds us that the discourse of “environmental protection” must not become a new form of global domination. Religious traditions in the Global South can function as prophetic voices, critiquing structural inequities in international climate governance. Secular critiques often question whether religiously grounded ethics can be received within a plural public sphere. The answer lies in the capacity of religious traditions to translate particular theological values into communicative and inclusive moral language. When concepts such as *amānah*, stewardship, or *ahimsā* are articulated as commitments to sustainability and justice, they enter the domain of public ethics without relinquishing their spiritual depth.

Conversely, secular critique can enrich religious reflection by prompting traditions to reexamine their theological assumptions and avoid uncritical moral claims.²⁷ This dialogue demonstrates that environmental ethics need not become an arena of competition between religion and secularity, but rather a space of normative co-production. From the entirety of this theoretical dialogue, it becomes clear that human responsibility in environmental ethics extends beyond individual moral obligation. It is intergenerational, structural, and global. The concept of moral agency underscores that the climate crisis results from human choices—and can therefore be transformed through ethical and political change.

An interreligious ethical synthesis becomes meaningful when it is willing to engage foundational debates—on anthropocentrism, on the ambivalence of religion, on structural justice—without losing its humanistic orientation. Climate change is not only about emissions and numerical targets; it concerns human dignity and the continuity of the community of life. Religion should not be relegated to the margins of climate discourse, but recognized as one of its most profound arenas of reflection on the meaning of responsibility. It is called not to defend doctrinal supremacy, but to participate in shaping a just and sustainable global ethic—an ethic born from critical

²⁷ Francesca Di Pillo and Fabrizio Rossi, *A Cross-Cultural Study on Countries' Environmental Performance: The Influence of Religion*, n.d., <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajes.12599>.

dialogue among traditions, theory, and the shared reality of crisis we collectively confront.

World Religions on Nature and Climate Change

The theoretical tensions identified in the preceding section—between anthropocentrism and ecological responsibility, between individual ethics and structural justice, and between religious ambivalence and prophetic potential—are not abstract philosophical puzzles. They are the very lines of fracture along which each of the world’s major traditions is currently being contested, reconstructed, and mobilized. What follows is not a doctrinal survey but a critical cartography: an examination of how each tradition’s normative resources and internal tensions position it—differently, yet potentially convergently—within the grammar of climate justice.

Post-White discussions have demonstrated that texts and traditions are far from monolithic. In Christianity, dominative interpretations of Genesis have been challenged by creation theologies emphasizing the goodness of creation, by the cosmic spirituality of Franciscan thought, and by the call to “ecological conversion” articulated in *Laudato Si’* by Pope Francis.²⁸ The encyclical introduces the concept of *integral ecology*, rejecting any separation between environmental degradation and social injustice. Religion, in this perspective, is no longer positioned as a source of legitimized domination, but as a prophetic force critiquing exploitative economic systems.

In Islam, ecological reflection is rooted in the concept of *tawhīd*—the unity of God, humanity, and nature within a single cosmic order. Nature is understood as *āyāt* (divine signs), such that ecological corruption (*fasād fī al-ard*) constitutes not merely a technical problem but a moral deviation.²⁹ Yet, as in Christianity, interpretations of the human role as *khalīfah* may move in two directions: as a trust (*amānah*) of guardianship or as a warrant for

²⁸ Singgih, “Religion and Ecological Destruction: Considering the ‘White Thesis’ in the Context of Indonesia.”

²⁹ Antar Abdellah, “The Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change; An Ideological Discourse Analysis,” *Middle Eastern Journal of Research in Education and Social Sciences* 1, no. 2 (2020): 77–93, <https://doi.org/10.47631/mejress.v1i2.66>.

control.³⁰ This ambivalence illustrates that religion always exists within a field of interpretation.

Hindu and Buddhist traditions offer more explicit cosmologies of interconnection. Concepts such as *ṛta* (cosmic order) and *dharma* (moral law or sacred duty) in Hindu traditions, and *pratītyasamutpāda* (Dependent Origination) and *ahiṃsā* (non-violence) in Buddhist thought, articulate visions of a deeply interdependent cosmos.³¹ Within these frameworks, the climate crisis can be understood as the consequence of disrupted harmony driven by greed (*tanhā*). Yet even such relational cosmologies do not automatically yield progressive ecological praxis; they too confront the pressures of modernization, nationalism, and market economies. Comparative analysis shows that each tradition holds both ecological potential and historical limitations.

The Confucian tradition offers a fifth and distinctive ecological voice—rooted not in soteriology or cosmological interdependence, but in relational social ethics and the cultivation of virtue across expanding moral circles. Central to Confucian ecological relevance is the concept of *Tianren heyi*, the unity of Heaven and humanity, which in the *Zhongyong* (Doctrine of the Mean) encodes a vision of human existence as embedded within and responsible toward the cosmic moral order, expressed in Chang Tsai’s formulation that “Heaven is my father and Earth is my mother... all things are my companions.”³² The concept of *Zhongyong*—principled moderation and contextual balance—speaks directly to patterns of over-consumption and ecological excess: to violate balance is to disrupt the relational harmony upon which both social and natural flourishing depend, for

³⁰ Sayem, *Religion and Ecological Crisis: Christian and Muslim Perspectives from John B. Cobb and Seyyed Hossein Nasr*.

³¹ Vanel, “Representasi Hukum Kausalitas dalam Prajñā Pāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra (Studi Semiotika tentang Representasi Hukum Kausalitas dalam Prajñā Pāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra).” See also, Keown, *Buddhist Ethics*, 3–5, 30. Keown explains Dharma as the universal law governing both the physical and moral order of the universe, and *ahiṃsā* as the foundational Buddhist principle of non-harming rooted in a deeply positive respect for all living beings. On the doctrine of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) as encoding the metaphysical unity and interdependence of all phenomena, see *ibid.*, 39–40.

³² Rodney L. Taylor, “Companionship with the World: Roots and Branches of a Confucian Ecology,” in *Confucianism and Ecology: The Interrelation of Heaven, Earth, and Humans*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Berthrong (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 48, quoting Chang Tsai, “Western Inscription.”

as Tu Weiming renders the classical text, “to cultivate centrality and harmony with thoroughness is the way to bring heaven and earth to their proper place and all things their proper nourishment.”³³ Furthermore, the Confucian tradition’s understanding of humaneness (*Ren*) as intrinsically ecological—in Rodney Taylor’s formulation, “humaneness within the Confucian tradition is ecology because it is, in the words of Chang Tsai, companionship with the world”—implies a form of civic and political responsibility that extends outward from the self toward all living things, providing a moral basis for environmental stewardship structurally analogous to the Christian concept of the common good.³⁴ Nevertheless, the Confucian tradition’s historical association with hierarchical social structures and its complex relationship to industrial development in East Asian societies demonstrates that its ecological potential, like that of the other traditions, requires critical rather than celebratory appropriation.

One of the major debates within ecotheology concerns anthropocentrism. Secular critics frequently accuse theistic religions of centering humanity as the pinnacle of creation, thereby neglecting the intrinsic value of nature. Conversely, some religious thinkers resist radical biocentrism on the grounds that it erases human moral distinctiveness. A more nuanced theoretical dialogue reveals that the central question is not simply whether a tradition is anthropocentric, but what kind of anthropocentrism it articulates. Dominative anthropocentrism—placing humanity as the absolute ruler—is clearly problematic. Yet relational anthropocentrism, which interprets human distinctiveness as ethical responsibility, opens the possibility of synthesis. In Islam and Christianity, human distinction can be understood as a moral trust to care for creation. In Hindu and Buddhist thought, ontological interconnection reinforces ethical limits on exploitation. Interreligious synthesis becomes viable when human uniqueness is situated within networks of ecological interdependence.

The climate crisis is not only a matter of ecological spirituality, but also of power distribution and global justice. Climate justice theory emphasizes that historically industrialized nations bear greater responsibility for emissions, while impoverished communities and

³³ Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 8.

³⁴ Taylor, “Companionship with the World,” 56. On the conservationist character of this civic responsibility and its roots in the recognition of human embeddedness in nature, see also Berthrong, “Motifs for a New Confucian Ecological Vision,” 242.

Indigenous peoples suffer disproportionate impacts. In this context, theological reflection must move beyond personal ethics toward political theology. Islamic concepts of justice (*'adl*), the Christian notion of the common good, principles of non-violence in Indian traditions, and ideals of cosmic harmony in Confucian thought may converge within a horizon of climate justice demanding structural transformation.

In particular, the Confucian concept of *Tianxia* (“all under Heaven”)—which envisions a cosmopolitan moral community whose concern extends across all peoples—offers a non-Western philosophical framework for grounding global climate responsibility that is neither individualistic nor confined to national interest.³⁵ In Tingyang Zhao’s influential reconstruction, *Tianxia* carries a trinity of meanings: the geographical world, the psychological world of the hearts of all peoples, and a world institution committed to the common good of all—a model of global governance that explicitly prioritizes “world-ness” over the competing national interests that have structurally constrained international climate negotiations.³⁶ Whether the concept can bear the full weight of a cosmopolitan climate ethic remains contested: Bell cautions that the *Tianxia* ideal must make room for cultural diversity and legitimate national interest, and that the Confucian web of obligations—extending from family outward with diminishing intensity—does not straightforwardly generate equal concern for distant others.³⁷ Nevertheless, the concept functions productively within a comparative normative convergence framework as a non-Western voice demanding structural transformation of the global order, whose logic of shared stewardship parallels—without being reducible to—the Abrahamic traditions’

³⁵ On *Tianxia* (天下) as a framework for cosmopolitan moral community and world governance, see Tingyang Zhao, “Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept ‘All-under-Heaven’ (Tian-xia, 天下),” *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture* 12, no. 1 (2006): 29–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630600555559>.

³⁶ Zhao, “Rethinking Empire,” 30. The three meanings of *Tianxia*—the earth, the hearts of all peoples, and a world institution—are defined at 30–31; the concept of “world-ness” as a principle higher than internationality at 39.

³⁷ Daniel A. Bell, *China’s New Confucianism: Politics and Everyday Life in a Changing Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 42–45. Bell engages Zhao’s proposal directly and argues that a *Tian Xia*-inspired political institution risks downgrading non-Confucian moral systems; he proposes instead a “Golden Mean” between utopian cosmopolitanism and state sovereignty as the more defensible Confucian position.

concept of common good and the Buddhist concept of interdependence.

Laudato Si' explicitly links environmental degradation with global economic inequality, demonstrating how theology can function as a critique of unrestrained capitalism. At the same time, postcolonial ecological ethics reminds us that discourses of “saving the planet” must not replicate colonial patterns of domination. Many regions subjected to ecological extraction are former colonies. Religious traditions of the Global South—including Islam, Hinduism, and Indigenous religions—offer critical perspectives on power relations embedded in international climate governance. Religion, therefore, can serve as an ethical voice calling for ecological reparations and historical recognition.³⁸

Secular critiques of religious environmental ethics argue that theological foundations are too particular to sustain a global public ethic. Religious institutions are also often perceived as slow to act, confined to normative rhetoric, or entangled with political and economic interests harmful to the environment. Such critiques deserve acknowledgment as part of healthy academic dialogue. Yet reducing religion to an obstacle ignores its distinctive capacity for moral mobilization and communal formation. Religion provides not only narratives, but also social networks and ritual practices capable of shaping collective consciousness. The challenge lies in internal transformation—through contextual theology and engaged spirituality—so that normative values move beyond symbolism into policy advocacy, lifestyle change, and interfaith solidarity.³⁹

Comparatively, the world’s religions share the conviction that nature is not a mere commodity, but a meaningful reality connected to divine or cosmic dimensions. This shared intuition, however, must not obscure ontological and historical differences. A credible synthesis arises not from doctrinal homogenization, but from honest acknowledgment of each tradition’s ambivalence and a willingness to learn critically from one another. From an interreligious perspective, climate change is both a crisis of meaning and a crisis of justice. It calls for bold theological reconstruction, sustained dialogue with

³⁸ Dina Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonization to Standing Rock* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2019).

³⁹ Budhy Munawar-Rachman, “Dialog Agama Dan Ekologi,” *Jurnal Peradaban* 4, no. 1 (2024): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.51353/jpb.v4i1.1092>.

climate justice theory, and engagement with postcolonial ethics. Religion, therefore, should not be relegated to a spiritual ornament at the margins of policy debates. Rather, it stands as one of the most profound arenas of moral reflection on our shared future.

The Human Role in Environmental Action: From Principle to Practice

The transition from ethical principle to concrete action constitutes the most decisive test of religion's relevance in addressing the climate crisis. If theological discourse provides a normative horizon concerning human responsibility, ecological praxis becomes its arena of social verification. Within the study of religion and ecology, the central question is no longer whether religions possess environmental teachings, but how such teachings are translated into forms of action capable of responding to the scientific, political, and moral complexity of the global ecological crisis.

In religious ethical traditions, faith without works is often regarded as incomplete. The concept of *ethical praxis* underscores the intrinsic connection between value and action. In the context of climate change, this means that theological awareness of *amānah*, stewardship, or cosmic harmony must be embodied in transformed lifestyles, economic orientations, and political courage.⁴⁰ At this juncture, however, the classical debate on anthropocentrism reemerges. Does emphasizing the “human role” merely reproduce problematic anthropocentrism? Radical ecological critiques argue that even narratives of human responsibility continue to center humanity. Yet from a comparative interreligious perspective, the human role can be reconstructed not as a center of domination, but as a center of responsibility.

At the individual level, ecological practices—reducing consumption, improving energy efficiency, and adopting sustainable lifestyles—may appear modest. Theologically understood, however, such practices constitute a form of ecological asceticism: self-discipline reflecting moderation and spiritual awareness. The Islamic principle of *i'tidāl* (moderation) and the prohibition of *isrāf*

⁴⁰ Denni Arli et al., “Who Cares More About the Environment, Those with an Intrinsic, an Extrinsic, a Quest, or an Atheistic Religious Orientation?: Investigating the Effect of Religious Ad Appeals on Attitudes Toward the Environment,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 185, no. 2 (2023): 427–48, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-022-05164-4>.

(wastefulness),⁴¹ the Christian call to ecological conversion articulated in *Laudato Si'* by Pope Francis,⁴² and the cultivation of mindfulness in Buddhist traditions all suggest that external transformation must be rooted in inner conversion.⁴³ Nevertheless, secular critics rightly caution that approaches centered solely on individual morality risk diverting attention from exploitative global economic structures. An exclusive focus on “lifestyle change” can obscure the responsibility of multinational corporations and industrialized states. This critique is valid, and it is precisely here that religion must move beyond personal ethics toward a more critical political theology.

Within the Confucian tradition, a structurally parallel argument is found in the classical hierarchy of self-cultivation (*xinshen*) presented in the Great Learning (*Daxue*) as the foundational prerequisite for all social and political transformation. Ecological praxis, in this framework, begins with the cultivation of *Ren* rather than with policy change alone—the expanding capacity for empathy and relational care that, at its fullest extension, encompasses the non-human world.⁴⁴ Contemporary Confucian political philosophy reinforces this connection by arguing that self-cultivation and structural transformation are not sequential but mutually requiring: virtue cannot be fully realized in isolation from the objective political and social conditions that make the moral development of all possible.⁴⁵ Crucially, in Confucian ethics, the rectification of the self

⁴¹ Hero Gefthi Firnando and Cucu Setiawati, “Ekoteologi Aswaja: Integrasi Nilai-Nilai Nahdlatul Ulama Dalam Etika Lingkungan,” *NAHNU: Journal of Nahdlatul Ulama and Contemporary Islamic Studies* 3, no. 2 (2025): 603–32, <https://doi.org/10.63875/nahnu.v3i2.109>.

⁴² Happy Mathew Tirivangasi and Louis Nyahunda, “The Interplay of Christianity and Nda African Traditional Religion in Shaping Climate Change Adaptation in Zimbabwe: An Afrocentric Analysis,” *Sustainable Development* 33, no. 2 (2025): 2266–77, <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.3231>.

⁴³ Vanel, “Representasi Hukum Kausalitas dalam Prajñā Pāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra (Studi Semiotika tentang Representasi Hukum Kausalitas dalam Prajñā Pāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra).” See also, Keown, *Buddhist Ethics*, 3–5. Mindfulness (Right Mindfulness) is identified as the seventh element of the Noble Eightfold Path, falling within the division of Meditation (*samādhi*), and constitutes an integral component of the Buddhist path to nirvana alongside morality (*śīla*) and insight (*prajñā*).

⁴⁴ Tu Weiming, “The Continuity of Being,” 56.

⁴⁵ Stephen C. Angle, *Contemporary Confucian Political Philosophy: Toward Progressive Confucianism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 30–31, 71. Angle argues, drawing on Analects 12:1, that the public realization of full virtue requires objective political

(*zhèngxīn*) is not complete until it issues in the rectification of social and political relations. This insight supports the argument that religion must move beyond personal ethics toward structural engagement with questions of climate justice.

The human role in environmental action finds its collective expression within religious communities. Research on religion-based social movements demonstrates the significant mobilizing capacity of faith communities.⁴⁶ Initiatives such as eco-friendly mosque programs in Southeast Asia, green church⁴⁷ movements and fossil fuel divestment⁴⁸ campaigns across various Christian denominations, and ecologically grounded ritual practices within Hindu and Buddhist communities illustrate how theology can be translated into economic decisions and institutional policy. In East Asian contexts, Confucian-inspired revival movements have similarly begun to articulate ecological commitments through the language of relational ethics and moral self-cultivation. In mainland China, practitioners and educators have drawn on Confucian environmental philosophy (*rujia de shengtai zhexue*) and the classical ideal of harmonious human-nature relations to engage the state's discourse of "ecological civilization" (*shengtai wenming*), framing sustainable development as an extension of the *Daxue* continuum from personal cultivation to the governance and harmonization of the world.⁴⁹ These initiatives demonstrate that Confucian ethics possesses resources for collective mobilization, provided its institutional expression is critically assessed rather than romanticized, and provided the distinction between genuine civic agency and state-sanctioned appropriation of tradition is kept clearly in view.⁵⁰

structures: self-cultivation and the structural conditions that make moral development possible for all are continuous rather than separable.

⁴⁶ Agusalam Lestari and Karim Muhamad, "Religiosity and Climate Change: An Eco-Religious Approach," *Environmental & Socio-Economic Studies* 12, no. 1 (2024): 35–50.

⁴⁷ Mufid, "Green Fatwas in Bahtsul Masā'il."

⁴⁸ Adedeji and Lenz, "Christian Eco-Theology and Urban Climate Adaptation in Yorubaland, Nigeria."

⁴⁹ Sébastien Billioud and Joël Thoraval, *The Sage and the People: The Confucian Revival in China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 73, 142. On the *Daxue* continuum from self-cultivation to world governance as a framework for ecological responsibility, see also *ibid.*, 140, 232.

⁵⁰ Billioud and Thoraval, *The Sage and the People*, 73. The authors document how Confucian environmental philosophy is mobilized within party-school pedagogy

In this context, environmental action extends beyond conservation to become part of the broader struggle for climate justice. Political theology plays a crucial role by linking ecological crisis to structural inequality. When religious organizations engage in climate justice advocacy, they expand the horizon of responsibility beyond emission reduction to questions of risk distribution and ecological burden-sharing. Islamic principles of justice (*'adl*), the Christian notion of the common good, the value of non-violence in Indian traditions, and the Confucian ideal of *Ren* (humaneness) converge in calls for a just energy transition on a global scale.

A postcolonial dimension further enriches this analysis. Many Indigenous communities that have sustainably protected forests and lands for generations have become victims of global resource extraction.⁵¹ Ecological practices grounded in local wisdom demonstrate that harmonious relations with nature are not romantic utopias, but historical realities marginalized by colonialism and industrial capitalism. At the same time, postcolonial ethics warns against reducing religion to an uncritical symbol of resistance. Religious institutions themselves have at times aligned with political power or economic interests detrimental to the environment. In this sense, religion occupies an ambivalent position: it may legitimize domination, yet it may also serve as a source of prophetic resistance. Awareness of this ambivalence is essential to prevent faith-based environmental action from devolving into moral rhetoric devoid of structural reflection.

Secular critiques of religious environmental ethics often highlight two concerns: theological particularism and the potential for dogmatism. Can religious values be received within a plural public sphere? And are religious institutions sufficiently responsive to climate science? The response lies in religion's capacity for normative translation—articulating theological concepts in an inclusive language of public ethics. When *amānah*, stewardship, or *abim̄sā* are expressed as commitments to intergenerational responsibility and ecological solidarity, religion contributes to the public sphere without imposing

and minjian activist networks alike, while consistently underscoring the ambiguity of spaces where official and popular Confucianisms intersect.

⁵¹ Almut-Barbara Renger et al., *Religion and Ecology: Perspectives on Environment and Sustainability across Religious Traditions*, March 13, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.30965/27507955-20230030>.

its particular metaphysical claims. Synergy between science and spirituality becomes essential: science provides data and projections, while religion offers moral motivation and social networks.

The human role in environmental action is not static. Through reflective praxis, religious communities can assess successes and failures and recalibrate their strategies in response to evolving social and ecological realities.⁵² Environmental action thus becomes an ongoing process of collective learning. Comparatively considered, the world's religions demonstrate that the movement from principle to practice is not a mere technical implementation, but a transformation of consciousness and structure. Humanity functions as the mediator between normative values and ecological reality—an agent capable of deepening crisis through neglect, yet equally capable of nurturing the Earth through reflective and just action. Religion's contribution to addressing climate change does not end with moral discourse; it finds its fulfillment in praxis that is politically engaged, postcolonially aware, and open to secular critique. In the tension between faith and action, between spirituality and structure, the human role emerges as the decisive locus upon which the future of the Earth as a shared home depends.

Limits and Tensions in Interreligious Ecological Ethics

An interreligious synthesis of ecological ethics cannot be constructed upon assumptions of ahistorical harmony. The global climate crisis reveals that the world's religions not only provide moral legitimacy for environmental protection but also contain potential justifications for passivity, domination, or even resistance to ecological agendas.⁵³ Strengthening an interfaith ethical synthesis, therefore, requires a critical examination of these internal limitations, rather than a celebratory focus on conceptual convergences alone.

Within the Abrahamic traditions, the most salient tension concerns anthropocentrism. Creation narratives that position humanity as uniquely endowed can be interpreted as an ethical mandate to care for the Earth, yet they may also be read as a

⁵² Munawar-Rachman, "Dialog Agama Dan Ekologi."

⁵³ Nurasyah Dewi Napitupulu et al., "Ecotheology dan Ecopedagogy: Upaya Mitigasi terhadap Eksploitasi Alam Semesta," *Voice of Wesley: Jurnal Ilmiah Musik dan Agama* 1, no. 2 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.36972/jvow.v1i2.9>.

theological legitimation for domination.⁵⁴ In the context of industrial modernity, certain theological interpretations have intersected with the logic of capitalist exploitation. Nevertheless, synthesis remains possible when human distinctiveness is redefined as relational moral responsibility rather than unlimited ontological superiority. The point of convergence lies not in rejecting human uniqueness, but in deepening its ethical dimension.

By contrast, Hindu and Buddhist traditions begin not with a theology of creation, but with cosmologies shaped by the law of karma and principles of universal interconnection.⁵⁵ Normatively, these provide strong foundations for non-violence (*ahimsā*) and ecological awareness. A more subtle tension operates within karma-based traditions—one that is rarely thematized in ecotheological literature. When ecological suffering is interpreted primarily through the lens of karmic causality, there is a structural risk of what might be termed moral naturalization: the attribution of socially produced suffering to metaphysical law rather than to identifiable political and economic actors. This is not a failure of Buddhist or Hindu ethics per se; it is a function of how karma is received in contexts where structural critique is absent. The corrective lies not in abandoning karmic ethics but in what Joanna Macy's work makes possible: reading *pratītyasamutpāda* not only cosmologically but structurally, as a framework for identifying the systemic and political causes of ecological destruction rather than attributing such destruction to individual karmic accumulation alone.⁵⁶ When karma-based ethics are

⁵⁴ Michael S. Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2007), 166. Northcott argues that Lockean accounts of human dominion and property have shaped a modern anthropocentric orientation toward the natural world in which the earth exists instrumentally as the site of human accumulation rather than as divine creation with intrinsic worth; recovering the latter requires recognizing ecological and moral limits that the Abrahamic traditions' own theological heritage supplies. On the misreading of the biblical dominion mandate as license for ecological exploitation, see also *ibid.*, 79.

⁵⁵ Vanel, "Representasi Hukum Kausalitas dalam Prajñā Pāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra (Studi Semiotika tentang Representasi Hukum Kausalitas dalam Prajñā Pāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra)." See also, Keown, *Buddhist Ethics*, 5–8, 39–40. Keown explains karma as a natural moral law—not divine reward and punishment but a principle analogous to the law of gravity—governing the ethical consequences of intentional action within the cosmic order of Dharma.

⁵⁶ The argument that *pratītyasamutpāda* can function as a structural-analytical framework—identifying systemic and political causes of suffering rather than

thus enriched by structural analysis, the depoliticization risk is substantially reduced, and the traditions' emphasis on interdependence becomes a resource for, rather than an obstacle to, climate justice advocacy.

Further tensions appear in the way Indigenous traditions are positioned within global ecological discourse. Many studies elevate local cosmologies as paradigms of harmonious human–nature relations and as alternatives to industrial modernity. While sustainable ecological practices indeed exist within many Indigenous communities, romanticization risks oversimplifying their internal social dynamics. Indigenous communities, too, are embedded within complex power relations, economic transformations, and political negotiations. From a comparative standpoint, idealizing one tradition at the expense of others undermines methodological integrity. Interreligious ethical synthesis requires acknowledgment that all traditions—global and local alike—harbor ecological potential as well as historical limitations. Dialogue must therefore be grounded not in mythologization, but in critical and equitable evaluation.

Structural dimensions present additional challenges. In various contexts, religious institutions have exhibited resistance toward climate activism perceived as overtly political or ideological. When climate change becomes associated with particular political agendas, some religious authorities adopt distance or skepticism. Such resistance exposes the gap between normative ethics and institutional interests. In Islamic jurisprudence, for instance, the principle of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* can support environmental protection as part of safeguarding life and sustainability, yet its implementation depends upon institutional resolve. Similarly, in Christianity and other traditions, ecological commitments are often negotiated in relation to economic interests or internal communal stability. These tensions

attributing suffering solely to individual karmic accumulation—is developed most rigorously in Joanna Macy, *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory: The Dharma of Natural Systems* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), particularly chap. 9, “The Co-Arising of Doer and Deed,” and chap. 12, “The Dialectics of Personal and Social Transformation.” Macy draws on general systems theory to show that dependent co-arising describes reciprocal, structurally embedded causality—not unidirectional personal moral fate. For a more accessible presentation of the same argument in the context of ecological crisis, see also Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self: Courage for Global Justice and Ecological Renewal*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2007).

underscore that religion as a social institution is not identical with religion as a reservoir of moral values.⁵⁷

Confucianism presents its own distinctive internal tension that a critical comparative analysis requires acknowledging. The tradition's emphasis on hierarchical social relationships (*wulun*) and its historical alignment with state power creates a structural risk of moral conservatism in ecological advocacy: when Confucian institutions are closely integrated with state authority—as has historically been the case across East Asia—there is a tendency to defer ecological decision-making to governmental expertise rather than engage in critical questioning of state-led development agendas. The complex relationship between Confucian revivalism and the Chinese state illustrates this ambivalence vividly: what emerged in mainland China in the early 2000s was simultaneously a bottom-up popular movement and a project that the Communist Party increasingly viewed as a resource for reoccupying the moral field—the two impulses operating in uneasy tandem rather than as a unified ethical force.⁵⁸ The more specific tension between Confucian ecological ethics and the state's simultaneous promotion of “ecological civilization” (*shengtai wenming*) and industrial expansion sharpens this ambiguity further.⁵⁹

A viable Confucian contribution to climate justice therefore, requires distinguishing between the tradition's cosmopolitan ethical resources and their institutional appropriation—the same distinction that has been drawn for every other tradition examined here. The normative framework for this distinction is provided by the theory of the postsecular public sphere: religious traditions retain genuine epistemic weight in democratic deliberation on climate justice, but only insofar as their moral intuitions are rendered translatable into publicly accessible reasons through a process of cooperative engagement between religious and secular citizens.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Sayem, *Religion and Ecological Crisis: Christian and Muslim Perspectives from John B. Cobb and Seyyed Hossein Nasr*.

⁵⁸ Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 295–96, 309.

⁵⁹ Billioud and Thoraval, *The Sage and the People*, 73. On the Confucian environmental philosophy (*rujia de shengtai zhexue*) being mobilized within party-school pedagogy alongside the state's ecological civilization discourse, see the discussion above at nn. 47–48.

⁶⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 125–26, 128–31.

Despite doctrinal divergences and practical tensions, interreligious ethical synthesis retains rational and normative plausibility. Synthesis does not require metaphysical uniformity, but convergence upon a shared horizon of moral responsibility. Abrahamic traditions emphasize entrusted stewardship of creation; Hindu and Buddhist traditions highlight moral interdependence; Confucian thought underscores relational harmony and moderation. These ontological differences provide a plural foundation of complementary arguments. Synthesis becomes possible because each tradition, when interpreted reflectively, contains principles of self-limitation, justice, and balance.

A critical comparative approach does not seek to eliminate tension, but to manage it as a source of interfaith learning. When anthropocentrism is reconstructed as entrusted responsibility, when karma is read alongside structural consciousness, when Indigenous traditions are respected without romanticization, and when religious institutions are encouraged toward ecological reform, ethical synthesis gains theoretical solidity. It rests not upon claims of superficial harmony, but upon reflective dialogue that recognizes difference as a productive condition for shaping global public ethics.

Tension, therefore, is not an obstacle to interreligious cooperation; it is a prerequisite for authentic synthesis. In the face of an escalating climate crisis, the world's religions cannot be content merely to affirm universal values. They must critically reassess their internal limitations and cultivate collective commitments that transcend doctrinal boundaries. Herein lies the academic and human significance of interreligious ecological ethics: as a space of critical dialogue in which difference is preserved, yet oriented toward shared responsibility for the future of our common Earth.

Interreligious Ethical Synthesis and Its Implications for the Global Climate Crisis

The global climate crisis exposes the limitations of approaches that are purely technocratic. Its scale and depth—from ecosystem degradation to intergenerational social inequities—demonstrate that the issue is simultaneously normative and structural. It challenges how humans understand their relationship with nature, with one another, and with the future.⁶¹ In this context, interreligious ethical synthesis

⁶¹ Pillo and Rossi, *A Cross-cultural Study on Countries' Environmental Performance*.

gains conceptual relevance: not as a project of doctrinal unification, but as an effort to articulate a horizon of collective responsibility capable of transcending sectoral, disciplinary, and religious boundaries.

However, such a synthesis cannot rest on the assumption that all religious traditions are automatically harmonious on ecological issues. Comparative analysis reveals significant internal tensions and divergent normative orientations. Within Abrahamic traditions, for example, human–nature relations are framed through creation theology, which positions humans as privileged. Concepts such as *kehalifah* in Islam and stewardship in Christianity can be interpreted as mandates for guardianship. Yet historical interpretation shows that this privileged status is often read in anthropocentric and dominative ways. The tension between entrusted stewardship and domination is not merely theoretical; it carries practical implications for how religious communities respond to resource exploitation and the logic of unbounded economic growth.

By contrast, Asian traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism offer cosmologies of interconnection grounded in the law of karma and the principle of *ahimsā*. These frameworks foster ecological awareness by emphasizing the interdependence of all beings. Yet here, a different tension arises: when ecological suffering is interpreted primarily as the moral consequence of past actions, there is a risk of depoliticization. Climate disasters may be seen as outcomes of cosmic law rather than products of exploitative global production systems.⁶² In this comparison, Abrahamic traditions tend to foreground social justice and collective responsibility, whereas karma-based traditions emphasize personal and cosmic ethical dimensions. These divergent orientations create epistemic distance, but they also open opportunities for mutual correction.

Interreligious ethical synthesis becomes possible precisely when such tensions are processed reflectively. Anthropocentrism in Abrahamic traditions can be reconstructed as relational anthropocentrism—where human distinctiveness is understood as a moral burden of responsibility toward creation rather than as a license for exploitation. Conversely, understanding of karma can be enriched

⁶² Gando Iman et al., “Ekoteologi Dalam Bingkai Pluralisme: Landasan Teologis Kolaborasi Lintas Agama Untuk Menghadapi Krisis Iklim,” *Kamali: Jurnal Ilmu Agama* 1, no. 2 (2025): 111–28, <https://doi.org/10.64691/v0cj2322>.

by structural analyses of global injustice, ensuring that moral causality does not obscure institutional and political responsibility.⁶³ Synthesis, therefore, does not erase metaphysical differences but directs each tradition toward an ethical articulation that is more contextually responsive to the climate crisis.

Another dimension requiring vigilance is the tendency to romanticize Indigenous traditions as fully harmonious ecological models. In global discourse, Indigenous communities are often positioned as the antithesis of industrial modernity. While many local practices are indeed sustainable, romantic approaches risk oversimplifying internal dynamics, power relations, and social change.⁶⁴ Robust comparative analysis must avoid dichotomies between “problematic world religions” and “purely ecological local traditions.” All traditions operate within history and engage in economic-political negotiation. Credible synthesis requires acknowledgment of this ambiguity, so that dialogue is built upon critical evaluation rather than selective idealization.

Institutional challenges also loom large. Religion as a source of values is not always synonymous with religion as a social institution. Structural resistance to climate activism—whether due to concerns about politicization, economic interests, or theological conservatism—reveals a gap between normative principles and praxis. In Islam, the principles of *‘adl* (justice) and *maṣlahah* (common good) can support progressive environmental policy advocacy; in Christianity, the ideas of the common good and stewardship of creation have similar motivating force. Yet implementation depends on institutional courage to frame the climate crisis as a moral issue rather than merely a political one. These tensions call for internal transformation, not just normative consensus.

Amid these differences and resistances, one of the most important contributions of interreligious ethics is framing climate change as a shared moral concern.⁶⁵ The climate crisis deepens global inequities and disproportionately burdens the poor and future generations. Nearly all religious traditions place moral obligation upon

⁶³ Rocca, “Christianity and Anthropogenic Climate Change.”

⁶⁴ Renger et al., *Religion and Ecology*.

⁶⁵ Edi Purwanto and Sonya Kristiawan, “Ethical and Theological Responses to Climate Change,” *Jurnal Luxnos* 11, no. 1 (2025): 82–98, <https://doi.org/10.47304/b3e4wf07>.

protecting the vulnerable. This shared concern enables the articulation of climate justice in a language that is communicable and acceptable in pluralistic public spaces. Here, synthesis operates at the ethical-practical level: translating particular theological concepts into operational and socially intelligible moral categories.

Furthermore, interreligious ethical synthesis expands the scope of responsibility from the individual to the structural level. The climate crisis is a product of unsustainable global production and consumption systems. Thus, interfaith ethics cannot stop at calls for personal repentance but must also critique exploitative economic systems and advocate for transformative sustainable development. In this regard, religion functions as a critical partner in public policy—providing moral legitimacy while exerting ethical pressure on states and corporations.

The academic implications are equally significant. The synthetic approach challenges the fragmentation of religious studies, which often remain confined to single-tradition analyses. By emphasizing dialogue and critical comparison, the study of religion and climate change moves from normative description toward dialectical evaluation of internal tensions, power dynamics, and collaborative potential. Synthesis is not a theological compromise; it is ethical coherence built through hermeneutical and dialogical praxis. Doctrinal differences need not obstruct ecological cooperation. On the contrary, it is precisely in the recognition of difference that synthesis gains depth.

Abrahamic traditions, karma-based traditions, Confucian relational ethics, and Indigenous cosmologies each offer distinct horizons of meaning regarding humanity and nature—and each carries its own internal tensions and historical limitations. The Confucian horizon—grounded in the cultivation of moral relationships that expand outward toward Heaven-and-Earth—contributes a model of graduated cosmopolitan responsibility that neither collapses into abstract universalism nor retreats into cultural particularism. When this Confucian insight is brought into dialogue with the Abrahamic emphasis on prophetic structural critique, the Buddhist recognition of interdependence, and the Hindu affirmation of cosmic order, the resulting synthesis is richer, more geographically diverse, and more analytically rigorous than any single tradition could produce alone. When these horizons are brought together with

awareness of their limitations, a dialogical space emerges that enables the formation of shared commitments—placing humans as moral agents responsible for Earth as a common home, a responsibility that transcends faith, nation, and generation.

Conclusion

This study affirms that climate change represents an expression of an ethical crisis, reflecting humanity's problematic relationship with nature. Through a comparative analysis of the ethics of world religions, the research identifies a cross-traditional normative consensus that positions humans as moral agents bearing responsibility for the sustainability of life. Ethical principles such as *khalīfah*, stewardship, *ahimsā*, *Ren*, *xiūshēn*, *zhongyong* and cosmic harmony indicate that the excessive exploitation of nature contravenes fundamental religious values, framing the climate crisis as a human failure to actualize these moral mandates within social and structural praxis.

Theoretically, this article contributes the comparative normative convergence model as a new analytical category in the study of religion and climate change—one that moves beyond both doctrinal mapping and ecotheological advocacy. Its defining feature is the insistence that synthesis is not found but constructed: it emerges through the deliberate confrontation of normative principles with their internal tensions, their institutional limitations, and their capacity for translative articulation in pluralistic public discourse. In this respect, the model stands in critical dialogue with the harmonization-oriented approaches characteristic of much interfaith ecological literature, while offering a more methodologically rigorous alternative to single-tradition ecotheological scholarship.

Accordingly, this synthesis is positioned not merely as conceptual harmony but as an analytical category capable of bridging theological reflection with social transformation agendas. Moreover, the findings address the central research question by demonstrating that the gap between normative religious teachings and the ecological practices of faith communities is not solely a theological issue; it is a social and cultural problem requiring the reconstruction of public ethics. The interreligious ethical synthesis developed here opens space for more transformative, action-oriented interfaith dialogue and

provides a theoretical foundation for strengthening equitable environmental policies and movements.

Nonetheless, this study has limitations, as it focuses on textual and normative analysis without incorporating empirical field research on the ecological practices of religious communities. Future research could therefore engage in empirical studies of interfaith climate initiatives across various social contexts to assess the extent to which this normative convergence is realized in collective praxis and public policy. In this way, religion emerges not merely as a source of symbolic value but as a moral force capable of shaping collective human consciousness in responding to the global climate crisis in a humanistic and sustainable manner.

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