

SACRED EARTH: RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES ON ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION AND CLIMATE ACTION

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Abstract

The relationship between religion and environmental conservation has become more prominent as faith communities recognize their moral need to practice ecological stewardship. Human views toward nature have historically been influenced by religious teachings, which have impact on conservation, climate action, and sustainability. This study investigates how religious traditions use institutions, values, and beliefs to promote environmental awareness. Different but complimentary viewpoints on environmental ethics are offered by Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Indigenous spirituality, which place an emphasis on stewardship, interconnection, and the sanctity of creation. Using case studies of faith-based environmental projects, interviews with religious leaders, and content analysis of religious texts, this study takes a qualitative approach. The process comprised semi-structured interviews with religious leaders and environmentalists, a review of faith-based sustainability initiatives, and an analysis of sacred texts. According to research, faith-based groups are essential to environmental advocacy efforts that combat pollution, deforestation, and climate change. Interfaith cooperation encourages group efforts to promote environmental justice. But when religious convictions clash with industrial and economic advancement, tensions result, creating moral conundrums. Misconceptions regarding the compatibility of faith and science and resistance within religious communities continue to be obstacles. This study emphasizes how religious organizations have the power to influence environmental laws and incorporate spiritual principles into conservation initiatives. Talking with legislators, religious leaders, and environmentalists can promote a more comprehensive approach to sustainability. The findings underline the importance of religion communities actively participating in environmental discourse, ensuring spiritual and ethical principles support the global fight against climate change.

Keywords: Sacred Earth, Religious Perspectives, Environment, Conservation, Climate Action

Introduction

Unprecedented environmental challenges confront the world, such as climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, pollution, and the depletion of natural resources (Adekomaya & Majozi, 2022; Kolawole & Iyiola, 2023). The growing occurrence of extreme weather phenomena, the escalation of global temperatures, and the thawing ice caps indicate an

urgent requirement for sustainable measures. Human activities, including industrialization, deforestation, and carbon emissions, have sped up environmental degradation, endangering ecosystems and human societies alike (Brosius, 1997; Okorundu et al., 2022; Prakash & Verma, 2022). Although scientific and technological solutions are crucial, tackling environmental crises necessitates a transformation in (Carneiro et al., 2021). Throughout history, religion has influenced how humans view nature, offering moral and ethical frameworks for their interactions with the environment (Adekomaya & Majozi, 2022; Ulutorti, 2024). Numerous faith traditions stress the importance of honoring creation, acting as responsible stewards, and recognizing the interdependence of all living beings. Religions direct followers' perspectives on nature through holy writings (Jähnichen, 2021). Religious figures and organizations can also rally significant numbers of people for the cause of environmental conservation (Gulliver et al., 2023).

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to evaluate the relationship between religious beliefs and environmental conservation. The qualitative technique is excellent for analyzing the depth of religious teachings, values, and institutional responsibilities in sustainability efforts. The main technique is content analysis, which is a methodical examination of sacred writings from Indigenous spiritual traditions, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity. The study finds recurrent themes pertaining to ecological stewardship and sustainable ethics by examining religious texts, theological commentary, and faith-based environmental pronouncements. Furthermore, officials involved in interfaith ecological initiatives, religious leaders, and faith-based environmental activists participated in semi-structured interviews. These interviews offer firsthand knowledge of religious organizations' goals, difficulties, and approaches to combating environmental degradation and climate change. Case studies of faith-based sustainability initiatives run by interfaith organizations and religious institutions are also included in the study. These case studies demonstrate practical implementations of religious concepts in conservation, including faith-led climate advocacy campaigns, water conservation programs, and tree-planting activities. Three main steps were involved in the process: (1) finding and gathering pertinent religious texts and official environmental statements from religious organizations; (2) interviewing chosen religious leaders and environmental specialists to learn about their views on ecological responsibility; and (3) examining documented faith-based environmental projects to assess their efficacy and impact. The study offers a thorough grasp of how religion affects environmental ethics and action because to its multifaceted methodological approach. To achieve a clear result, the study has the following objectives (1) To examine religious perspectives on environmental conservation. (2) To analyze sacred texts and theological interpretations regarding nature. (3) To evaluate the role of faith-based organizations in climate action. (4) To explore policy implications of religious engagement in environmental sustainability.

Significantly, this research will be of relevant in different facets of life. Religion is essential in the formation of human awareness and ethics (Ulutorti, 2024). Grasping the impact of religious beliefs on environmental attitudes can aid in developing more effective conservation strategies that are in harmony with cultural and spiritual worldviews. Moreover, faith-based organizations operate on a global scale and can motivate grassroots initiatives, positioning them as essential contributors to climate change mitigation. Governments and NGOs can cultivate a more comprehensive approach to sustainability that connects with various communities by weaving religious values into environmental policies. Moreover, examining the connection between religion and environmental ethics aids in dispelling

misunderstandings that religious viewpoints contradict scientific environmentalism. This study emphasizes the collaboration between faith and ecological duty, showing how spiritual beliefs can enhance scientific endeavors aimed at tackling climate change.

Religious and Scholarly Views on the Environment

Religious customs worldwide provide distinctive viewpoints on the preservation of the environment (Bridgewater & Rotherham, 2019; Ulutorti, 2024). These views are based on sacred texts, theological doctrines, and moral teachings that direct adherents in their relationship with nature. Christian teachings highlight the importance of Earth stewardship, illustrated by Genesis 2:15, which entrusts humanity with the care of creation. Numerous Christian denominations endorse environmental conservation as a moral obligation, promoting responsible resource management and sustainability practices (Ahmad et al., 2021). According to Islamic teachings, humans serve as custodians (khalifah) of the Earth, a concept referenced in the Quran (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:30). Islamic environmental ethics promote moderation, resource conservation, and the banning of wastefulness (Surah Al-A'raf 7:31). Nature is regarded as sacred in Hinduism, with deities frequently linked to natural elements (Singh et al., 2017). Dharma encompasses respect for all forms of life, and Hindu texts promote sustainability and environmental reverence. Mindfulness and compassion for all living beings are encouraged by Buddhism. The interdependence principle teaches that human actions impact the environment, so ecological conservation is vital for spiritual well-being (Chattopadhyay, 2024).

Indigenous worldviews often see the Earth as a living being that deserves respect and protection (Arrows, 2016; Kohler et al., 2019). A number of Indigenous customs feature ceremonies and rituals that pay tribute to nature and stress the importance of equilibrium and concord with the environment (Agung et al., 2024). The sacred texts and teachings of these traditions emphasize that believers have a responsibility to safeguard the environment. A multitude of religious texts promote living in harmony with nature, denouncing exploitation and highlighting the need to care for creation as a godly duty. From a theological standpoint, numerous religions view nature as a divine creation, which fosters a feeling of respect and moral duty to safeguard it. (Omoyajowo et al., 2024). Scholarly perspectives on religious views of the environment highlight the integral role of faith in promoting ecological responsibility. Scholars such as Nicholson & Kurucz (2019) have argued that religious traditions provide a foundational ethical framework that fosters environmental stewardship. Their research emphasizes that sacred texts and theological principles shape believers' attitudes towards nature, reinforcing sustainability. Furthermore, Subhasmita & Behura (2024) explore how Hinduism's concept of Dharma instills reverence for all living beings, thereby encouraging sustainable practices. This scholarly perspective aligns with the idea that religious teachings act as moral compasses, guiding adherents in their interactions with the environment.

Theological perspectives further emphasize the divine mandate for environmental stewardship. Grothe, (2017). discuss Christian doctrines, particularly the concept of humanity as caretakers of creation, as derived from Genesis 2:15. This theological interpretation underlines the moral obligation to protect and sustain the Earth. Similarly, Islamic theologians reference the Quranic notion of khalifah (stewardship), as seen in Surah Al-Baqarah 2:30, to stress humanity's duty to manage resources responsibly. Sinha, (2025) contribute to this discourse by examining how various religious traditions view nature as divine, fostering a spiritual obligation to its preservation. These theological insights

demonstrate that environmental care is not just an ethical concern but also a religious imperative. From a philosophical standpoint, ecological ethics within religious traditions offer a compelling rationale for conservation. Promchin et al, (2024) examines Buddhist principles of interdependence and compassion, highlighting how mindfulness towards nature contributes to personal and collective spiritual well-being. Philosophers like McGregor, (2016) argue that Indigenous worldviews, which regard the Earth as a living entity, provide a holistic approach to environmental ethics. This philosophical perspective aligns with the broader ethical discourse that emphasizes balance and harmony between human activity and nature, advocating for an integrated and respectful approach to environmental conservation. Additionally, theological and philosophical discourse collectively reinforce the necessity of environmental responsibility as a sacred duty. Ogar, (2023) argue that Indigenous ceremonies dedicated to nature embody principles of sustainability, paralleling religious teachings that discourage exploitation. Goodenough, (2023) further examine how rituals and moral codes within religious traditions promote equilibrium with the natural world. The convergence of scholarly, theological, and philosophical perspectives underscores the multifaceted role of religion in shaping environmental consciousness, highlighting the universal moral responsibility to protect the Earth across diverse faith traditions.

Religion and Environmental Ethics

Many indigenous religions also embrace stewardship, viewing nature as a living entity that must be respected and protected. The principle of stewardship extends beyond religious doctrine into practical applications, encouraging sustainable agricultural practices, conservation efforts, and policies that mitigate ecological degradation. It calls upon individuals and communities to adopt lifestyles that reduce waste, promote biodiversity, and ensure the longevity of natural ecosystems (Emina, 2021). Stewardship is a key concept in religious environmental ethics that emphasizes people's moral need to preserve the Earth as a sacred trust. Stewardship highlights the need of sustainable practices and wise resource management, and it stems from the belief that nature is a gift from God (Dawson et al, 2021). The Christian Book of Genesis conveys the idea that humans are entrusted with the preservation of creation rather than its depletion. Through the idea of "Khilafah," which holds that it is humanity's divine obligation to act as stewards (khalifah) of the Earth, maintaining harmony and balance, Islam also encourages environmental responsibility.

Often misunderstood as a permit for exploitation, the idea of dominion is linked to human supremacy over nature (Oscarson, 2019). A more complex interpretation, however, contends that dominion does not imply unbridled consumerism but rather a type of responsible administration. True dominion, according to religious scholars, is consistent with stewardship, in which people use their power over nature sensibly, responsibly, and ethically. For example, in Christianity, dominion is explained in Genesis 1:26-28, where humans are granted power over the land and animals. Historically, this text has been interpreted incorrectly to support environmental damage and industrial growth. But according to modern theological viewpoints, dominion means having an obligation to preserve and care for the environment rather than take advantage of it (Luetz & Leo, 2021). Judaism and Islam share similar viewpoints, seeing dominion as a duty to preserve the Earth rather than destructively dominate it. Policies that stop pollution, deforestation, and climate change are necessary for the responsible exercise of dominion, which emphasizes the significance of an ethical approach to environmental governance.

The principles of sustainability, moderation, and respect for life are continuously emphasized as essential to human existence in a variety of religious traditions (Hermawan & Masruri, 2024). Religious teachings caution against excess and greed and support a balanced approach to resource utilization. For example, the "Right Livelihood" precept of Buddhism urges followers to follow morally and ecologically responsible behaviors that reduce harm to other living things. The sacredness of nature is also upheld in Hinduism, where writings such as the Bhagavad Gita highlight the interdependence of all living things and the need to coexist peacefully with the environment. The Earth must be revered as an ancestor or sacred being, according to indigenous spiritual practices, which frequently honor nature as an extension of the divine (Arrows, 2016; Omoyajowo et al., 2024). These religious perspectives align with contemporary sustainability goals, such as reducing carbon footprints, promoting renewable energy, and fostering conservation efforts. The principle of ecological responsibility extends to industrial and governmental policies, urging leaders to enact laws that protect natural resources and prevent environmental exploitation.

Religious ethics also advocate for ecological restoration, reinforcing the belief that environmental degradation is not only a physical crisis but also a moral and spiritual concern. Human exploitation of nature upsets the balance of creation and causes misery, as acknowledged by many religious traditions (Suzuki, 2022). In many religious contexts, the practices of wildlife preservation, soil protection, and reforestation are seen as acts of penance and spiritual devotion. Adopting eco-friendly activities like cutting back on plastic use, investing in renewable energy, and taking part in tree-planting efforts are encouraged by Christian movements like the "Green Church" program. Islam's teachings on the environment promote conservation as a kind of devotion by emphasizing "mizan" (balance) and against excessive use. Religious communities are essential to halting environmental harm and promoting a restoration culture because they incorporate these moral precepts into their everyday lives (Kolade, 2023). Furthermore, Christian philosophy emphasizes the necessity of systemic adjustments to preserve natural ecosystems, which is strongly ingrained in responsible environmental governance. Religious organizations and leaders are frequently strong proponents of environmental justice who have an impact on grassroots activism and policy choices. Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*, which calls for immediate action against climate change, is a shining example of religious support for sustainable environmental policy (Zagonari, 2023). In a similar vein, Islamic leaders have called on countries to enact laws that uphold the moral precepts of ecological justice and conservation. Additionally, indigenous groups support governance structures that put sustainability first (Dawson *et al.*, 2021) and frequently oppose industrial operations that endanger biodiversity. In the end, the values of sustainability, stewardship, and responsible dominion provide a moral framework that directs people toward a day when protecting the environment is a holy obligation rather than just a choice.

Faith-Based Environmental Movements

Organizations rooted in faith are essential to promoting environmental causes. Several faith-based organizations have begun efforts aimed at encouraging sustainable lifestyles, climate activism, and ecological justice (Shattuck, 2021). Examples include the Catholic Church's *Laudato Si'* encyclical (*Laudato Si'* is not a movement, it is a document), urging immediate environmental action, as well as Islamic initiatives advocating for eco-friendly mosques. Faith groups have spearheaded significant religious initiatives such as tree-planting campaigns, sustainable agriculture projects, and community-based conservation programs.

Collaborations that cross faith lines, like the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative, unite various religious groups to tackle issues of deforestation and climate justice (Petrov & Rahman, 2023). Even with religious backing for environmental preservation, some communities exhibit resistance (Aiguobarueghian *et al.*, 2024; Carmenta *et al.*, 2023). Barriers to environmental activism include prioritizing economic development, skepticism toward climate science, and doctrinal differences. Due to the perception of environmentalism as a secular agenda by certain religious groups, there is hesitance in fully adopting conservation initiatives (Alajmi *et al.*, 2023).

When industrial growth endangers natural habitats, conflicts between economic development and religious ethics can occur. Although religious teachings endorse sustainability, economic pressures often pose challenges to the application of these principles. Misunderstandings regarding the role of religion in climate action continue to exist. (Eom *et al.*, 2021). Religious institutions can shape environmental policies by promoting ethical stewardship and sustainability (Abumoghli, 2023; Leary *et al.*, 2016). Involving faith leaders in conversations about policy can assist in crafting conservation strategies that connect with communities. Incorporating religious values into conservation initiatives enhances public dedication to environmental sustainability. (Shah & Asghar, 2024). NGOs, and faith-based organizations can promote comprehensive environmental policies. Policymakers can tap into religious networks to reach broader audiences and effectively promote environmentally friendly initiatives . (Elgammal & Alhothali, 2021)

The Green Pilgrimage Network (Nigeria Chapter)

In Nigeria, cities like Abuja and Osogbo have incorporated green initiatives into their religious activities, ensuring that places of worship and pilgrimage sites maintain ecological balance. The Green Pilgrimage Network (GPN) is a global faith-based environmental initiative that encourages religious communities to adopt sustainable practices, especially in pilgrimage sites. The network works with churches, mosques, and traditional religious centers to encourage environmental responsibility as a religious duty. The Nigerian chapter of GPN has worked closely with faith leaders to instill environmental consciousness among pilgrims, reinforcing the idea that preserving the environment is in line with divine stewardship. (<https://www.greenpilgrimageeurope.net/>)

The Nigerian Interfaith Action Association on Climate Change (NIFA-CC)

The Nigerian Interfaith Action Association on Climate Change (NIFA-CC) is another important faith-based environmental movement in Nigeria that brings together Christian and Muslim leaders to address climate change through faith-driven advocacy. NIFA-CC was founded to bridge religious divides and promote a collective response to ecological challenges, especially in rural communities affected by flooding, desertification, and deforestation. NIFA-CC actively organizes workshops, tree-planting campaigns, and awareness programs that emphasize the ethical responsibility of caring for the environment, with one of their major projects focusing on reforestation and sustainable agricultural practices to reverse desertification in northern Nigeria. Religious leaders are crucial in spreading knowledge about climate change and promoting environmental policies that are in line with social justice and spiritual teachings. (<https://www.nigerianinterfaith.org/>)

The Kenya Catholic Church's Laudato Si' Movement

Based on Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*, which urges immediate action against environmental degradation, the Kenya Catholic Church's *Laudato Si'* Movement has been a driving force in East Africa for environmental conservation. The Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB), the movement's leader, has started a number of tree-planting initiatives, sustainable agricultural methods, and campaigns to combat climate change. Catholic churches in Kenya aggressively support ecological education, asking congregations to reduce carbon footprints and embrace renewable energy. The movement has partnered with schools, seminaries, and local governments to integrate environmental studies into religious education, ensuring that young generations view ecological care as a spiritual responsibility. The Kenya Catholic Church has emerged as a leader in faith-based environmental activism through national campaigns, illustrating how religious organizations can impact grassroots initiatives for sustainable development as well as policy. ([http s://communications.amecea.org/index](http://communications.amecea.org/index))

Conclusion

The research highlights the profound link between religion and environmental conservation. Various faith traditions share a common focus on stewardship, reverence for nature, and the ethical duty to safeguard the planet. Theological perspectives and sacred texts offer a robust ethical foundation for environmental responsibility, countering the misconception that religion and ecological sustainability are at odds. There is hope for the future of how religion will engage with environmental conservation (Ives & Kidwell, 2019). Faith-based organizations' ongoing advocacy for climate action can influence global environmental policies and inspire grassroots movements. Religious leaders can mobilize communities, promoting a shared sense of responsibility for the environment. Religious environmental advocacy can be made more effective by bolstering interfaith cooperation, thus fostering a coordinated response to climate change. Religious institutions and policymakers need to be called to action. Religious groups should incorporate environmental education into their religious teachings and promote sustainable practices among their adherents. It is important for those who make policy decisions to acknowledge that religious organizations can play a role in promoting ecological sustainability. Through collaboration, the two sectors can develop policies and initiatives that are in harmony with ethical and spiritual values, resulting in more impactful conservation endeavors. It is important for environmentalists to work with religious leaders as a means of connecting science and faith. Environmentalists can garner wider backing for their initiatives by stressing common values of preservation and sustainability. Understanding how faith influences attitudes toward nature will help create a more inclusive and holistic environmental conservation strategy.

Recommendations

- i. Environmental stewardship should be integrated into sermons, religious education programs, and community activities by religious institutions. Faith leaders can foster a culture of sustainability in religious communities by instructing followers on the moral and spiritual significance of safeguarding the environment.
- ii. To tackle environmental challenges, organizations that are faith-based should collaborate beyond religious lines. Religious advocacy for ecological justice can be significantly enhanced through interfaith initiatives, including collaborative conservation efforts and awareness campaigns.

- iii. It is important for governments and environmental organizations to work together with religious institutions in order to create policies that are consistent with ethical and spiritual values. It is important to include faith leaders in policy discussions to guarantee that religious viewpoints are taken into account in environmental governance.
- iv. Religious organizations ought to set an example by embracing environmentally friendly practices, including the use of renewable energy in worship venues, advocating for waste reduction, and endorsing sustainable farming. When faith communities adopt sustainability, it will encourage a wider societal transformation.

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