





A religious discourse on water and environmental conservation issues: An interfaith approach



Authors:

Abdul Mufid¹ 
Abd. Kadir Massoweang² 
Mujizatullah Mujizatullah² 
Abu Muslim² 

Affiliations:

¹Department of Hadith Studies, Faculty of Theology, Institute Agama Islam Khozinatul Ulum, Blora, Indonesia

²Pusat Riset Khazanah Keagamaan dan Peradaban, Badan Riset dan Inovasi Nasional, Jakarta, Indonesia

Corresponding author:

Abdul Mufid,
abdulmufid@iaikhozin.ac.id

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This research aims to discover areas of agreement among major religious faiths regarding the interaction between humans and the environment, and to assess the impact of these shared perspectives on environmental preservation in selected countries. The religions under examination are: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism. The primary viewpoints examined are: (1) Domination, where humans are considered superior in creation and utilise natural resources as required; (2) Stewardship, where humans are entrusted with authority over creation and have the responsibility of utilising natural resources; (3) Empathy, nature is affected by humans' appalling behaviour. Furthermore, the research problem focussed on how religious approaches paid attention to water and environmental conservation issues. The research results indicated that water was public property. In addition, the *Sunnah* (prophetic tradition) has also included several principles that contributed to guiding people to conserve water. The *Sunnah* provided several legal steps in water conservation, and Islam had ordered the preservation of natural resources from the beginning.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This research contributes to providing insight to the readers that these approaches were not necessarily contradictory, but could be considered complementary in some cases. Their actual impacts on water conservation and the environment should be further investigated.

Keywords: eco-religious; water conservation; natural resources; ecological of prophetic tradition; interfaith approach.

Introduction

The discourse on the ecological crisis emerges when there is a failure to protect the environment. The Director General of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) has provided evidence indicating that the extent of natural damage is worsening daily. Every second, 200 tons of carbon dioxide are released into the atmosphere, and we lose 750 tons of topsoil. Additionally, 47000 forests are cut down, 16 ha of land are cleared, and between 100 and 300 species become extinct each day. Meanwhile, as the global population grows by one billion people per decade, the Earth is ageing and experiencing an increasing burden. This critical environmental crisis demands attention as it affects the well-being of all living beings collectively (Kholis & Aulassyahied 2022:25–26).

The emergence of the ecological crisis became prominent during the 1960s, leading many individuals to reassess their connection with the natural world as human actions began to disrupt the delicate balance of nature and create a sense of alienation from life beyond themselves. By the 1980s, the issue had reached its peak, capturing widespread attention and witnessing a significant surge in scientific articles dedicated to its discussion. In the 1960s, Lynn White, Jr. presented an influential paper, *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis* (White 1967), published in the journal *Science*, which continues to generate ongoing debates. In his paper, White argued that the ecological crisis, resulting from the exploitation of science and technology, originates from an anthropocentric perspective deeply embedded in the Judeo-Christian tradition, which views humans and nature as distinct entities. This different position places humans higher than nature; therefore, humans have the right to rule over nature. White's argument then emphasises that the cause of increasingly massive, dramatic and complex environmental damage is when the anthropocentric perspective is supported by various discoveries from modern science and technology that are proven to be more destructive to nature (Amirullah 2015:3).

In Indonesia, there is much discussion about issues surrounding environmental conditions in the 21st century (Zulfa et al. 2016:29–40). Environmental exploitation without seeing and

considering its sustainability and balance creates various environmental issues (Rodin 2017:391–410). The actions of irresponsible individuals because of their greed have exploited nature and turned it into objects of value for economic interests and the pragmatic necessities of life. Improper use of technology, capitalism impacts and materialism have also adversely contributed to environmental damage (Zuhdi 2015:43). These events are in harmony with the word of God in the Qur'an surah ar-Rum verse 41.

Water resources are one of the vital natural resources for all living things on earth – both flora & fauna and humans (Flor & Cangara 2018:3). The crucial function of water is to meet daily needs in various sectors of life. As a natural resource, water resource management activities are essential so that those who need water can get equal access, both in meeting their basic needs for drinking water and sanitation and to fulfil their subsistence needs as farmers when irrigating their crops and producing various products that require water. Many people need it; perhaps, water on this earth will not be sufficient at any time because its existence is limited (Basya Albar 2008:14).

The explanation above conveyed a discussion about water among humankind that had experienced a shift. Water is more often identified with *mahdhah* worship, such as performing ablution for the obligatory prayers five times a day. However, this identification in many places and times is inconsistent when viewed from the Muslims' behaviour in using water. Therefore, two issues become the central themes that will be discussed in this research: What is the position of the Sunnah of the prophet in water conservation? What principles were laid down by the Sunnah of the prophet for conserving water?

Role of religion on environmental conservation issues

Efforts to preserve the environment received serious attention from the prophet PBUH. Several prophetic traditions explain environmental preservation efforts, including:

Hadith about orders to revive dead land and the prohibition of abandoning it

Reviving dead land or unproductive land that has been damaged is highly recommended in Islam, bearing in mind that unmanaged land or unproductive land, instead of eliminating economic opportunities, also causes a further decline in the quality of land if not appropriately handled.

Jabir bin Abdullah narrated it and stated that some of us had land savings, then they said: 'We will lease the land (to manage it) with a third of the yield, a quarter and a half'. Then, the prophet PBUH said:

[W]hoever has land, let him plant or give it to his brother (to be used). If he is reluctant, let him pay attention to taking care of the land himself. (Ismail al-Bukhari 2002)

In addition, there is also another hadith that prohibits abandoning land as narrated by Bukhari in hadith number 2172:

[U]baidullah bin Musa has told us, has informed us al-Auza'i, from 'Atha' from Jabir said: There used to be some people who have some more land, then they say, we had better rent it out at a third, a quarter, or half.

Suddenly the prophet PBUH said: 'Whoever has land, then it should be planted or given to his friends. If you do not give it, hold it' (Ismail al-Bukhari 2002:672).

Then, compared with the Qur'an's arguments and explanations from the hadiths, many Qur'anic views are found that explain the prohibition of damaging the environment as described in surah al-Ruum verse 41 and surah al-Baqarah verse 195. What perfect Islamic teachings and technological insight are evident from the explanation of the Qur'an and the Hadith above illustrates how high the function of plants is in a field and the dangers caused by dead, neglected or bare land.

Hadith about orders to plant trees (reforestation) and land conservation

Reforestation is the practice of planting and maintaining plants on barren and wasted land or reforesting barren land that has been deforested because of forest clearing (reforestation). It is to accustom people to planting plants, whether in the form of trees, seeds or other plants, carried out individually, in community groups, or by the state. Reforestation will beautify the face of the world as well as provide benefits for humans and nature, such as trees and shelters. Plant roots can prevent erosion and flooding. Their leaves can be cool to the eyes of those who see them; help environment by reducing air pollution; protect settlements from the brunt of the wind; produces oxygen (O₂) for the respiration process of flora, including humans; absorbs carbon dioxide (CO₂) as a result of human waste; absorbs the sun's temperature so that overheating does not occur on the earth's surface (Smith & Smith 1974; Mufid et al. 2022).

The prophet's advice on planting trees (*reforestation*) is to teach his people to plant trees, seeds, or food crops. The prophet also forbade cutting down trees without following the correct procedure because it would threaten the continuity of living things on Earth. Plants are a complex system, from their leaves to their roots. In just one cell, many components support living systems. Plants can recycle toxic gases such as CO₂ into O₂ which is highly refreshing. Applying greenery, humans appear as someone friendly to the environment. The prophet's suggestion for reforestation reveals how extraordinary the benefits of planting trees are for the perpetrators, apart from being beneficial for the world and receiving high rewards. A single tree we plant will be a field of *sadaqah* rewards for us. Imam Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani explains that this reward will continue to flow as long as the plants planted are eaten or used by anyone and by anything, even though the person who planted them is gone. The ownership of the plants change.

Hadith from Anas (may God bless him) states that: The prophet PBUH says: 'A Muslim does not plant a tree or sow seeds on soil, then birds or humans or animals come to eat some of it, but what he eats is his charity' (Narrated by Imam Bukhari).

Hadith about a prohibition of open defecation

Prophet's Hadith, which Abu Hurairah (may God bless him) narrated, mentions: 'Let not one of you urinate in still water, which does not flow, then bathe from it'.

Prohibition of cutting down trees unjustly

Regarding the preservation of nature, Islam teaches humans to take care of plants and not to cut them down immediately if they do not have a significant purpose. The prophet PBUH, in several hadiths, appealed to this:

Nashr bin 'Ali informed us, citing Abu Usamah, who heard from Ibn Juraij, who learned from Uthman bin Abu Sulaiman, who was informed by Sa'id bin Muhammad bin Jubair bin Mut'im, who heard from Abdullah bin Hubsyiy, that the Prophet (PBUH) stated, 'Whoever cuts down a bidara tree, Allah will immerse his head in the fire of hell'. (Dawud 2009)

Abu Dawud was once questioned about this hadith, to which he responded succinctly, explaining that it means:

[I]f someone cuts a bidara tree in a bidara field, unjustly and without a valid reason, even if it serves as a place of shelter for travelers and livestock, then Allah will condemn them to hell by burying their head. (Dawud 2009)

Makhlad bin Khali and Salamah bin Syabib have also relayed this hadith, with Abdurrazak reporting it from Ma'mar, who learned from Uthman bin Abi Sulaiman, and a resident of Thaqif, who recited it to the prophet PBUH as a hadith (Dawud 2009).

According to the aforementioned hadiths, the prophet PBUH instructed the revitalisation of barren land, the planting of trees (reforestation), and the prohibition of defecation and urination in various specific locations. These locations include: roads, shelters, fruit-bearing trees, near water sources, at meeting points of water, along riverbanks, in animal burrows within the ground and stagnant water. This prohibition aims to prevent environmental pollution from occurring.

The information above obviously shows Islam as a religion that teaches to keep the environment clean. These prohibitions are to prevent disease outbreaks caused by not maintaining cleanliness. Therefore, humans are not only obliged to manage the environment but protect and prosper it concurrently. Growing can start from the smallest environment, the family environment.

With the rise of secularism, many scholars in the Western world tend to view religious traditions and practices as being confined to personal beliefs, having limited social

implications. While this perspective may hold in Western societies, it remains a subject of debate and does not apply to numerous other cultures where religion continues to hold significant importance in daily life. It is widely agreed upon that no major religion can be regarded as an environmental ideology. In other words, none of them can be considered truly 'ecocentric' as some contemporary philosophical movements, such as deep ecology, propose. Religions are more accurately described as 'theocentric', as they provide a framework for guiding the relationship between humans and god, and consequently, among humans themselves. The environmental consequences resulting from perceiving nature's role in God's creation or meeting human needs are generally considered of secondary importance within most religious traditions.

Major religions prioritise questions such as how we establish a connection with God (through prayer and worship), how we discern God's intentions for us (through revelation), how we navigate the concept of life after death (eschatology), and how we should interact with our fellow human beings (morality). These inquiries hold greater significance to religions than environmental matters. However, it is worth noting that there are two evident connections between religion and the preservation of nature: one pertains to theoretical considerations, while the other relates to ethical perspectives.

Every religion encompasses a specific cosmology, which aims to elucidate the origins and evolution of the universe and the significance of humans within nature. The perception of whether humans hold a central position in God's creation or are on equal footing with other animals carries significant consequences for the ecological equilibrium of our planet. This belief shapes our understanding of our place in the universe, our interactions with other species, and our approach to using natural resources to achieve a more balanced and sustainable life (Arneth 2011:25–38; Mieth 2011:39–86; Okyere-Manu et al. 2022:94–104; Sun 2010: 179–188).

The correlation between religion and the environment is intertwined with individual conduct. Some experts argue that addressing current ecological challenges necessitates more than just technological solutions; it requires fundamental changes in our way of life, which are influenced by our ethical and moral values. Religion, as a source of sound principles guiding ethical and moral behaviour, plays a crucial role in fostering new attitudes towards the environment. For instance, practices like reducing water consumption and minimising human impact on ecosystems are influenced by consumer habits, which are closely tied to individuals' perceptions of material versus spiritual values. While religious beliefs may not solely change people's perspectives on environmental sustainability, they undoubtedly contribute to the cohesive force of religious and moral principles. Consequently, numerous authors acknowledge the inherent importance of ethical and moral values in environmental conservation, as well as the potential for world religions to

shape and uphold them (Engel & Engel 1990; King-Tak 2009:9; Kinsley 1995; Pan-Chiu 2017:478).

Upon initial examination, religious traditions may appear divergent, yielding varying theoretical worldviews and ethical implications. Nevertheless, upon closer scrutiny, numerous shared concepts and values can be discerned among the major religious traditions. These include fundamental beliefs concerning human identity, origins and the afterlife. Recognising these shared concerns about the environment could promote interfaith collaboration in offering unified responses to the pressing ecological crisis we face today (Pan-Chiu 2013:67).

As a preliminary exploration of the broad topic, the researchers have examined the core tenets of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism to identify general religious principles associated with environmental conservation. Subsequently, an overview of how these principles are being implemented is provided, offering insights into the environmental challenges faced by representative countries of each religion. It is important to acknowledge that this study serves as an initial approach and not an exhaustive assessment of the subject matter.

Relationship between humans and nature in major religious traditions

Religious traditions boast a wealth of history and diversity, encompassing a wide array of beliefs, even within their mainstream denominations. Although these traditions are often simplified and categorised with general labels like Muslim, Christian or Buddhist, it's essential to recognise the significant variations within Islam, Christianity and Buddhism. Within Christianity, for instance, the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church records over 28000 different denominations that have emerged since the Reformation. Nevertheless, the majority of Christians align with the prominent churches, such as Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran and Anglican. Taking into account the internal diversity within each major religious tradition would complicate the endeavour of summarising general religious concepts associated with environmental sustainability. Hence, this study will concentrate on fundamental concepts proposed to be inherent in every religion, primarily derived from their principal scriptures and traditions: the Bible (Jewish and Christian), Qur'an (Islam), Veda and Bhagavad Gita (Hindu), supplemented with other relevant references (Lai 2011:5-7; Pan-Chiu 2011:82-102; Peter 2019:450; Rider 2010:11).

In an attempt to encompass the various perspectives, we have endeavoured to categorise the religious views on the interrelation between humans and nature. It is important to note that these approaches need not conflict; rather, they can complement one another and are not exclusive to any specific religion, as multiple faiths may embrace them. Additionally, within the same religion, different categories can be found,

influenced by historical interpretations of sacred texts or the presence of diverse internal factions. The identified religious attitudes towards the environment include concepts such as power, stewardship, empathy, analogy, worship of God, cosmic humility, nature mysticism and worship. A more comprehensive explanation of each category will be presented in the following section.

Power

This perspective posits that humans hold a central position in creation, being the sole beings made in the image of God, and thus, they have a direct and unique relationship with him. The purpose of other beings' existence, apart from humans, is primarily to serve human needs, allowing resources to be utilised solely for human benefit. However, the ethical limitation lies in respecting the needs of other human beings, both present and future. Some authors attribute the current ecological crisis to the dominant ideology within the Judeo-Christian tradition, which has led to extensive exploitation of natural resources (White 1967). This argument has sparked heated debates in recent decades (Min 2009:160).

The crux of the controversy lies in interpreting the first chapter of Genesis, where God instructs humans to:

[B]e fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Be lord of the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all living things that move on the earth. (Gn 1:28)

Furthermore, God provides plants and trees as food for humans and grants leaves of plants for food to all animals. A literal interpretation of this passage would seemingly justify the mere exploitation of resources for human benefit. However, some Christian interpreters propose an alternative interpretation, highlighting that the concept of domination is not absolute in the Jewish tradition. They point out that this passage can be understood as a mandate of delegation, similar to a king's mission to govern his people.

Despite more lenient interpretations, it is reasonable to acknowledge that the Judeo-Christian tradition contains numerous references affirming the clear superiority of humans over the rest of creation. For example, the Psalm states:

[W]hat is the man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet. (Ps 8:4-8)

According to this tradition, only humans are created in the image of God, possess free will enabling them to sin, and are deemed worthy of God's incarnation (Jesus Christ) to save them from the original fall. These beliefs can lead to varying consequences, but they imply the prioritisation of human needs over those of other species. Practically, this perspective suggests that potential ecological issues are often considered secondary when they conflict with human progress, such as

alleviating poverty or controlling population growth, particularly when demographic policies impose practices that challenge people's family values. This notion has sparked significant controversy, particularly at various recent United Nations-sponsored population conferences.

Other religious traditions follow similar considerations of human superiority over other creatures (Callicott & Ames 1989; Santmire 2000:1; Sponsel 2017:95–96; Tucker & Grim 2001:9–10). It is the case for Islam, which follows the Judeo-Christian tradition regarding the relationship between God and humans as the core of the religious message. Nature was created in this conception to satisfy human needs, as several verses of the Qur'an state:

[O] mankind! Worship your Lord, who has created you and those who lived before you, so that you might remain conscious of Him. It is He Who made the earth as a stretch for you and the sky as a roof, and He sends down water (rain) from the sky, then He produces all fruits as sustenance for you. Therefore, do not set up partners for Allah while you know. (al-Baqarah vv. 21–22)

[D]oes Allah Who created it not know (what you gave birth to or kept secret); and He is Subtle, All-Knowing? (al-Mulk v. 14)

Stewardship

After the controversy surrounding Christianity's ecological position sparked by White's paper, certain Christian scholars have highlighted the importance of interpreting the Bible by comparing specific texts with others, as consistency can be found throughout the scriptures. In this regard, the first chapter of Genesis must be understood in conjunction with the second chapter, which presents an alternative Creation account. According to Genesis:

[Y]ahweh Lord formed the human from clay and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and the human became a living being. Yahweh Lord took the man and placed him in a Garden of Eden to cultivate and care for him. (Gn 2:7–15)

This version depicts humans as an integral part of nature, where the name 'Adam' is derived from the Hebrew word 'Adamah', meaning earth. Thus, humans are intrinsically connected to the land and will ultimately return to it as stated in Genesis 3:19: 'for dust you are, and to dust you will return'. A second crucial aspect in this chapter is that God entrusts humans with the responsibility to cultivate and care for the land. Consequently, human dominion over the land is limited in two significant ways: firstly, as part of the land, we are inherently tied to it, and secondly, God designates us as caretakers of the land. This delegation implies that our authority over other creations is not absolute but rather imbued with responsibility. As such, it must be exercised with due care and consideration, rather than being wielded arbitrarily (Coward 1995; Hargrove 1986:xii; Jacobsen 1996:907–909; Jenkins & Chapple 2011:441–463).

These concepts have solidified into what is now known as environmental management, which has become the prevailing approach among environmentally conscious Christians. Interestingly, Sir Matthew Hale was one of the

first to use this term in the 17th century (Attfield 2006). According to this tradition, we are called to act as stewards, as emphasised in the gospels when individuals are asked to give an account of their administration (Lk 12:42–46; Mt 24:45–51). In this perspective, natural resources are not considered possessions to be exploited for personal gain or pleasure. Instead, they are viewed as gifts bestowed upon us by God, making us responsible for our actions on Earth. As aptly stated by John Paul II in 1994, humans often view the natural environment merely as a means for immediate use and consumption. However, the Creator's intent is for humans to engage with nature as intelligent and noble 'masters' and 'guardians', rather than being negligent 'exploiters' and 'destroyers'.

Environmental management is not exclusive to Christianity but also finds relevance in Judaism, as evidenced by references in the Torah and commentaries of prominent rabbis on the scriptures. The responsibility bestowed upon humans by God to care for creation is evident in the norms relating to the sabbatical year, as stated in Leviticus 25:23: 'The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine, for you are strangers and sojourners with Me'. Additionally, the psalms contain various verses alluding to God's preservation of Creation. Jewish traditions also emphasise environmental awareness, exemplified in texts like Ecclesiastes Rabbah, which conveys the notion that when God created the first humans, he entrusted them with the Garden of Eden and urged them not to harm his creation, as no one else would be able to repair it if it was damaged (Satio 1990:98–99).

Islam also contains various texts that emphasise human responsibility for the environment. Within Muslim scholarship, the term 'caliph of Allah' is used to describe the role of humans in managing the land (Ozdemir 2003). According to Islamic beliefs, individuals will be held accountable by God for their treatment of the land, just as they are for their families, which are also entrusted to them. Some hadiths, which are sayings and actions of the prophet Muhammad PBUH, forbid the wasteful use of resources, particularly water, which was highly valuable in the arid Arab lands. An impactful hadith in this context involves a warning from the messenger of God to a devout Muslim who wasted water during his ritual ablution, clearly condemning careless attitudes towards natural resources, even in the context of worship (Ozdemir 2003). It is important to note that similar to some Christian scholars (Bouma-Prediger 1993:278; Branch 1993:90; Moncrief 1970:508–512; Yeide, Jr. 1987:240–242), certain Muslim scholars have rejected the concept of environmental management, deeming it too anthropocentric to effectively guide human–nature relations.

Human responsibility for the environment holds significant importance within Hindu traditions, particularly in rural communities that deeply value caring for the land. Hindus are urged to avoid all forms of pollution and refrain from disturbing the balance of nature. For example, when the

ground is dug, it must be filled afterward to enhance the soil and maintain its natural equilibrium. A profound concern is shown for trees, which are considered essential reservoirs of life. Forests hold a vital role as a source of life and protection against soil degradation. This profound reverence for trees has led to the emergence of two prominent environmental movements in India in recent decades: Chipko and Appiko. Both movements passionately strive to safeguard forests from industrial exploitation and firmly demonstrate their close connection with the land (John Paul II 1989; Gosling 2001; Hope & Jones 2014:57; Mattson 2011:17; Tucker 1997:13).

Within the Buddhist tradition, environmental responsibility arises as a natural outcome of the interactions between humans and nature. One of the delusions hindering human happiness is an erroneous perception of their importance. This misperception has led humans to lose their connection with nature, destroying valuable resources because of their greed. To achieve better inner harmony and preserve natural resources, it is crucial to overcome greed. In this context, humans are encouraged to emulate bees, which extract nectar from flowers without causing harm or destruction (Gottlieb 2004; Hofman 2011:19–24; Toynebee 1972:141–146).

Empathy

This belief system posits that both humans and nature share a mutual reliance on God and are interconnected with one another. However, it is solely humans who possess free will and have the ability to question and challenge God's intentions. When humans exercise this freedom, nature is impacted by its weaknesses as well, causing the loss of the ideal balance between humans and the natural world. By this tradition, humans are regarded as the 'subjects' of Creation, and our choices and actions significantly influence the moral state of the entire environment.

This religious tradition is evident in various passages of the Bible, where the fate of nature is intertwined with human actions and destiny. For example, the original sin of Adam and Eve is connected to a curse upon the land, as stated in Genesis:

[B]ecause you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it', cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil, you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow, you will eat your food until you return to the ground since from it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you will return. (Gn 3:17–19)

This concept is further reinforced in other parts of the Old Testament, such as Leviticus 26:32, which warns of the consequences of human actions on the land: 'I will lay waste to the land so that your enemies who live there will be appalled'. The disturbance caused by humans directly impacts all of creation, as revealed in Hosea:

[T]here is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying, murder, stealing, and

adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Because of this, the land dries up, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea are swept away. (Hosea 4:1–3)

These passages illustrate the inseparable link between human behaviour and the state of nature, emphasising that when humans are not at peace with God, the environment also suffers the consequences.

If human sin affects nature, restoring its original harmony necessitates moral repentance. This repentance is expected to be fulfilled in the last days when the Messiah judges all things and reinstates their ideal balance. An important passage from Isaiah (11:6–10) connects the messianic age to the perfect harmony between humanity and nature, as well as within nature itself:

[T]he wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put their hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

This passage implies that the new heavens and earth will mirror the original harmony between God and humans, as well as between humans and other creatures. A similar concept is echoed in a controversial passage from Saint Paul's letter to the Romans:

[T]he creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in the hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. (Rm 8:19–21)

In Hindu culture, the ethical bond between humans and nature is evident in various sacred scriptures. The Earth behaves like a living entity, responding to how humans utilise its resources. It exhibits gentleness and fertility when treated with care and kindness, but turns violent and cruel when mistreated. Thus, humans bear a moral responsibility to preserve and protect the Earth, refraining from causing harm, pollution or reckless exploitation of natural resources. When humans abuse their privileged position, the world may experience a range of natural disasters, including droughts, earthquakes, floods and pestilences. This occurs because the Earth is viewed as God's creation, and it finds joy when people remain loyal to God, offering him sacrifices, and practicing proper worship (Van Houtan & Pimm 2006:25–26).

Buddhist culture also acknowledges a moral interconnectedness between humans and nature. When treated with care and respect, the land yields fruitful results. However, human greed fosters division and conflicts over ownership, leading to violence and destruction (Kholis & Aulassyahied 2022:25–26). Human

moral behaviour plays a pivotal role in maintaining biological and physical equilibrium: a decline in moral standards often correlates with an increase in famine, epidemics and violence, while heightened moral values bring about abundance and prosperity. This concept is vividly illustrated in one of the ancient Buddhist texts, the Digha Nikaya:

[I]nitially, self-growing rice appeared on the Earth, but due to laziness, people began hoarding food instead of gathering it at each meal. This led to a strain on the food supply, necessitating the division of land among families. With the widespread adoption of private land ownership, greed grew, resulting in the plundering of others' land. Those caught in the act denied their theft. Consequently, the Earth's wealth diminished, and self-growing rice disappeared. People had to resort to the cultivation and planting of rice. However, this rice now required processing as it was covered with husks before it could be consumed. (Sponsel 2017:95–96)

Do religious traditions change environmental attitudes?

We have demonstrated that major religions universally advocate for proper consideration of nature, aiming to foster a more harmonious relationship between human activities and nature preservation. Despite this, the practical impact of religious values on environmental policies remains limited. If we consider Lynn White's critique, it suggests that countries with more anthropocentric religious beliefs, such as Christianity and Islam, would encounter significant environmental challenges. In contrast, countries following oriental religious traditions should ideally create more environmentally friendly societies. However, this ideal scenario is not readily observable in practice. For instance, comparing the United States, a predominantly Christian country, with Saudi Arabia, a predominantly Muslim country, or China, a country with a Buddhist majority, or India, often seen as a stereotypical Hindu country, we find that environmental policies and practices are not solely determined by their religious backgrounds. The United States, despite being predominantly Christian, faces significant environmental issues and is a substantial global polluter because of its high per capita ecological footprint. Nevertheless, it also promotes strict environmental regulations on air quality and water management, with substantial support from Christian groups. Similarly, ecological challenges in countries like India, Pakistan or Thailand cannot be attributed primarily to Christianity, as Christians constitute a minority and have limited influence in shaping national policies. Instead, the environmental problems faced by these countries are influenced more by their high consumption of natural resources, often sourced from wealthier countries, which may be predominantly Christian. Hence, the ecological issues and their solutions appear to be independent of the diverse religious backgrounds of these countries. Religious beliefs, while relevant, do not singularly determine the approach to environmental matters, and solutions should be sought independently, taking into account diverse socio-economic and cultural factors.

Why don't different religious values translate into distinct internal environmental policies? Could it be because these countries are not as virtuous as perceived, or more precisely, because environmental concerns are not given priority within their religious doctrines? In the case of Islam, some Muslim scholars have criticised the lack of attention given to environmental issues by national policies and religious leaders, even in countries that claim to adhere to Islamic law (*shariah*) (Kholis & Aulassyahied 2022). Similarly, while Buddhist traditions are widely acknowledged for their emphasis on environmental preservation, experts point out that China, where many people hold Buddhist beliefs and practice Buddhism, is recognised as one of the most polluted countries globally. Although China is not officially considered a Buddhist country, it houses thousands of temples. The practical implications of this apparent disparity warrant consideration. Despite religious values that may endorse environmental care, various factors beyond religious doctrines come into play in shaping a country's environmental policies and practices. Hence, the practical outcomes may not directly align with the perceived environmental priorities of particular religious traditions.

On the contrary, most Christian countries, especially those with a strong traditional Christian influence, are at the forefront of environmental preservation efforts, and their populations are increasingly recognising the necessity to modify their lifestyles and reduce their ecological footprints (though not instantaneously). This shift can be attributed to a combination of factors. One possibility is the emergence of a new 'green' theology that emphasises environmental stewardship within Christian teachings. Alternatively, it could be a result of a higher standard of living, which allows people to focus on meta-material goals once their basic needs are met. A complementary illustration can be observed in South Korea, which has significantly expanded its forest area in recent decades. This progress may be linked to its Buddhist tradition, which still coexists alongside Christianity in many parts of the country. However, it could also be associated with the nation's economic prosperity, as improved financial conditions often facilitate investments in environmental conservation and restoration efforts.

Conclusion

While religious traditions may not currently play the primary role in shaping national environmental policies, they possess significant potential to influence new perspectives on nature. This article seeks to examine some of these attitudes that serve as the foundation for change. Encouraging greater religious engagement in environmental matters and fostering a deeper appreciation for the profound connections between humans and nature are essential aspects that require attention. This article has explored some of these aspects, but there is still much more to be explored and considered.

Numerous religious leaders have emphasised the connection between environmental sustainability and the imperative to transform our way of life, a transformation that is intimately tied to moral choices. As expressed by the Pope in a

recent statement, it is increasingly evident that the issue of environmental degradation compels us to scrutinise our lifestyles and the prevailing patterns of consumption and production, which often prove unsustainable from social, environmental, and even economic perspectives. Ultimately, achieving the necessary changes in our current economic model will necessitate a resolute rejection of many of the comforts we presently enjoy. Religious values provide a robust foundation upon which to anchor such sacrifices, as they recognise that spiritual rather than material gratification is the true source of happiness.

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Authors' contributions

A.M., A.K.M., M.M., A.M. and I.I. contributed to collection of data, data documenting and analysis, and manuscript preparation. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft of this article and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

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