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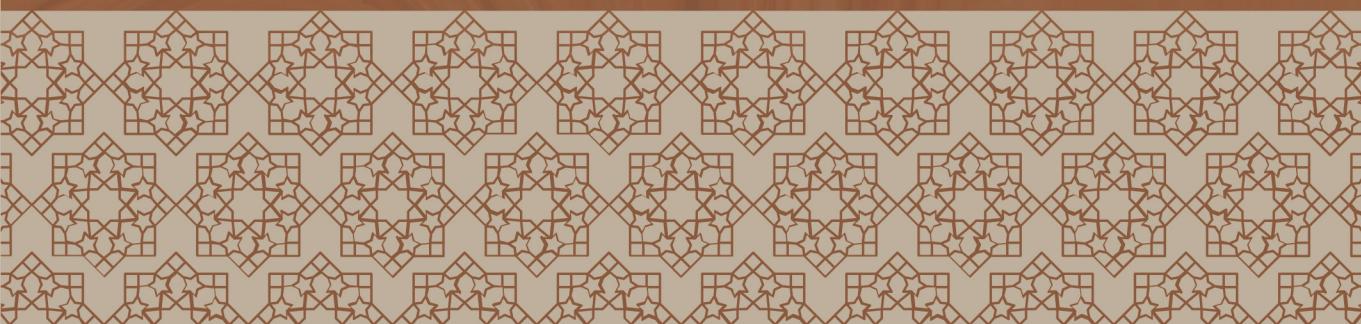
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# RELIGI

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## FAITH-BASED APPROACHES TO WASTE MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENTALISM IN INDONESIA

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### Abstract

This paper explores the transformative role of religion in promoting sustainable waste management through case studies of faith-based communities in Indonesia. Despite being one of the most religious countries in the world, Indonesia still struggles with low levels of ecological awareness—particularly in household waste management. This paradox highlights the untapped potential of religion in cultivating environmental consciousness and driving behavioral change at the grassroots level. Utilizing a qualitative approach through a comprehensive literature review and case study analysis, the study investigates how religious values can be meaningfully integrated into environmental action. Three representative cases are examined: the Eco-Mosque initiative and At Thoriq Ecological Islamic Boarding School (Islam), the Waste Bank program by the Batak Karo Protestant Church (Christianity), and traditional waste practices in Penglipuran Village (Balinese Hinduism). The analysis reveals that teachings such as *khalifah*, stewardship, simplicity spirituality (*ugahari*), *ahimsa* (non-violence), and indigenous wisdom hold significant potential for fostering eco-friendly behaviors. However, the dominance of anthropocentric theological paradigms and limited structural policy support remain significant challenges. The study argues that integrating spiritual values with waste management strategies requires cross-sector collaboration, including the reinterpretation of religious teachings, faith-based environmental education, and policy incentives for religious institutions. Ultimately, this paper affirms that religion is not only a source of personal spirituality but also a powerful force for collective ecological action—one that can inspire a greener, more sustainable future.

**Keywords:** Eco-Theology, Waste Management, Faith-Based Environmentalism, Environmental Ethics, Interfaith Initiatives

### Abstrak

Tulisan ini mengkaji peran transformatif agama dalam mendorong pengelolaan sampah yang berkelanjutan melalui studi kasus pada komunitas-komunitas berbasis iman di Indonesia. Meskipun Indonesia dikenal sebagai salah satu negara paling religius di dunia, tingkat kesadaran ekologis masyarakat—khususnya dalam pengelolaan sampah rumah tangga—masih tergolong rendah. Paradoks ini menunjukkan adanya potensi besar yang belum dimanfaatkan dari ajaran



agama dalam menumbuhkan kesadaran lingkungan dan mendorong perubahan perilaku di tingkat akar rumput. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui tinjauan pustaka yang komprehensif dan analisis studi kasus, penelitian ini menyelidiki bagaimana nilai-nilai keagamaan dapat diintegrasikan secara bermakna ke dalam aksi lingkungan. Tiga kasus representatif yang dianalisis meliputi: inisiatif Eco-Masjid dan Pesantren Ekologi At Thoriq (Islam), program Bank Sampah oleh Gereja Batak Karo Protestan (Kristen), serta praktik pengelolaan sampah berbasis adat di Desa Penglipuran (Hindu-Bali). Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa ajaran-ajaran seperti *khalifah*, penatalayanan, spiritualitas *ugahari* (kesederhanaan), *ahimsa* (tanpa kekerasan), dan kearifan lokal memiliki potensi signifikan dalam membentuk perilaku ramah lingkungan. Namun demikian, tantangan utama masih dihadapi, antara lain dominasi paradigma teologis yang bersifat antroposentrism dan keterbatasan dukungan struktural dari kebijakan publik. Studi ini berargumen bahwa integrasi nilai-nilai spiritual dengan strategi pengelolaan sampah memerlukan kolaborasi lintas sektor, termasuk reinterpretasi ajaran keagamaan, pendidikan lingkungan berbasis iman, serta insentif kebijakan bagi institusi keagamaan. Pada akhirnya, tulisan ini menegaskan bahwa agama bukan hanya sumber spiritualitas personal, melainkan juga kekuatan kolektif yang mampu menginspirasi aksi ekologis demi masa depan yang lebih hijau dan berkelanjutan.

**Kata Kunci:** Ekoteologi, Pengelolaan Sampah, Gerakan Lingkungan Berbasis Iman, Etika Lingkungan, Inisiatif Lintas Iman

## INTRODUCTION

Religion plays a pivotal role in shaping the character and behavior of societies across Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia. As a fundamental element of social life, religion not only serves as a cultural identity but also profoundly influences daily practices. Clifford Geertz highlights the inseparability of religion and culture within Asian societies, emphasizing how both elements interact and merge within everyday life.<sup>1</sup> Thus, religion functions not merely as a belief system but as a cultural foundation that shapes collective thought patterns and social behaviors. Indonesia ranks among the most religious nations in the world. According to a 2020 Pew Research Center survey, Indonesia topped the list of 34 surveyed countries in terms of religiosity, with 96% of respondents identifying religion as a crucial aspect of their lives.<sup>2</sup> This statistic underscores the significant role religion plays in shaping moral values and societal norms in Indonesia. However, despite this high level of religiosity, environmental awareness—particularly in waste management—remains a critical challenge.

Indonesia faces a severe waste management crisis, despite its strong religious foundations. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Indonesia is the world's second-largest producer of plastic waste, trailing only behind China. Data from the National Waste Management Information System (SIPSN),

<sup>1</sup> Clifford. Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> Afandi, "Indonesia Negara Paling Religius Di Dunia Namun Tingkat Korupsi Tinggi, Ada Yang Salah?," 2021, <https://muhammadiyah.or.id/2022/04/indonesia-negara-paling-religius-di-dunia-namun-tingkat-korupsi-tinggi-ada-yang-salah/#:~:text=Muhammadiyah-,Indonesia Negara Paling Religius di Dunia,Korupsi Tinggi%2C Ada yang Salah?&text=MUHAMMADIYAH.OR.ID%2C JAKARTA,>

published by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK) in 2023, reveals that Indonesia generates approximately 31.9 million tons of waste annually. Alarmingly, only 63.3% of this waste is managed effectively, while the remaining 35.67% remains unprocessed. Despite regulatory frameworks and waste management policies, environmental degradation persists, driven by excessive consumption and a lack of public awareness regarding waste sorting<sup>3</sup>.

One of the most pressing challenges in addressing waste management lies in fostering behavioral change. The adoption of environmentally responsible habits, such as waste segregation, is a gradual process influenced by multiple factors, including social norms, government regulations, economic incentives, and accessibility to recycling systems. Many individuals remain reluctant to adopt sustainable practices unless the immediate benefits are evident. Consequently, effective behavior change strategies must take into account psychological, social, and cultural factors that shape public attitudes<sup>4</sup>.

In this context, religion holds immense potential as a catalyst for behavioral transformation in waste management. Given the profound influence of religious teachings on social life in Indonesia, integrating religious values into environmental consciousness campaigns could serve as a powerful tool for fostering sustainable behaviors.<sup>5</sup>

The methodology of this study employs a policy analysis approach based on literature review and case studies to explore the integration of religious values in waste management. The literature review examines academic journals, policy reports, and publications from religious institutions and environmental organizations to understand the role of faith in ecological sustainability. Additionally, case studies from various faith-based communities, such as the Eco-Mosque Initiative in Indonesia, Eco-Church Programs, and waste management practices rooted in Hindu-Balinese traditions in Penglipuran, are analyzed to identify best practices in implementing faith-based environmental policies. A qualitative approach is employed to assess the effectiveness of existing policies and to identify challenges and opportunities in multi-stakeholder collaboration, involving governments, religious communities, academics, and NGOs. Based on findings from the

<sup>3</sup> Zahrayoanaaurelia, “Indonesia Darurat Sampah Plastik,” 2024, [https://www.kompasiana.com/zahrayoanaaurelia4024/676bdbe34777c293025fa52/indonesia-darurat-sampah-plastik?lgn\\_method=google&google\\_btn=onetap](https://www.kompasiana.com/zahrayoanaaurelia4024/676bdbe34777c293025fa52/indonesia-darurat-sampah-plastik?lgn_method=google&google_btn=onetap)).

<sup>4</sup> Anggita Laras Syanlindri and Supriyono Supriyono, “Masyarakat Dan Kesadaran Mengelola Sampah (Studi Deskriptif Pada Salah Satu RW Di Kelurahan Leuwigajah Kota Cimahi),” *Jurnal Sosialisasi: Jurnal Hasil Pemikiran, Penelitian Dan Pengembangan Keilmuan Sosiologi Pendidikan* 1, no. 2 (2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.26858/sosialisasi.v1i2.43967>.

<sup>5</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms Of Religious Life*, ed. Karen E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995), [https://monoskop.org/images/a/a2/Durkheim\\_Emile\\_The\\_Elementary\\_Forms\\_of\\_Religious\\_life\\_1995.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/a/a2/Durkheim_Emile_The_Elementary_Forms_of_Religious_life_1995.pdf). ;Gordon Lynch, *Between Sacred and Profane: Researching Religion and Popular Culture, Between Sacred and Profane* (London and New York: I.B. Touris, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780755624928>.

literature and case studies, this study formulates policy recommendations emphasizing interfaith collaboration, faith-based environmental education, and incentives for religious communities actively engaged in waste management. This methodology provides a systematic and evidence-based foundation for designing more inclusive and sustainable policies.

## RELIGIOSITY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF ECOLOGICAL PARADIGMS

Household waste management in Indonesia continues to face significant challenges. Studies conducted in Yogyakarta<sup>6</sup> and Bali<sup>7</sup> reveal persistently low public awareness, coupled with regulatory frameworks that remain ineffective in driving substantial change. This crisis is further exacerbated by a culture of overconsumption and a lack of household-level waste segregation initiatives. Addressing these issues necessitates a more comprehensive approach—one that integrates religious values and institutions as key drivers in fostering ecological consciousness.

Religiosity, understood as the practice of religious values in everyday life, has the potential to serve as a foundation for transforming societal behaviors. Wayne Teasdale argues that spirituality, when truly internalized, should compel individuals toward active engagement in communal and environmental concerns rather than remain confined to personal piety<sup>8</sup>. Similarly, Hasan Hanafi asserts that spirituality must manifest in moral and social actions that yield tangible benefits for both society and the environment<sup>9</sup>. This perspective highlights the significant role of religion in shaping ecological awareness by translating religious values into concrete action.

However, the dominance of anthropocentric religious paradigms often impedes the cultivation of environmental consciousness. Lynn White's thesis critiques religious traditions—particularly Christianity's interpretation of Genesis—as a foundational cause of ecological degradation, given its framing of humanity as the central figure

<sup>6</sup> Surahma Asti Mulasari, Adi Heru Husodo, and Noeng Muhamadir, "Analisis Situasi Permasalahan Sampah Kota Yogyakarta Dan Kebijakan Penanggulangannya," *Jurnal Kesehatan Masyarakat* 11, no. 2 (2016): 259, <https://doi.org/10.15294/kemas.v11i2.3989>.

<sup>7</sup> I Gusti Ayu Intan Saputra Rini and I Nyoman Gede Maha Putra, "Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Dalam Pengelolaan Sampah Plastik Pada Desa Peliatan, Kecamatan Ubud, Kabupaten Gianyar, Bali," *Community Service Journal (CSJ)* 6, no. 2 (2024): 107–19, <https://doi.org/10.22225/csj.6.2.2024.107-119>.

<sup>8</sup> Wayne Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions* (Novato: New World Library, 2001), [https://www.google.co.id/books/edition/The\\_Mystic\\_Heart/q8TCdmstdJoC?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=wayne+teasdale+the+mystic+heart&printsec=frontcover](https://www.google.co.id/books/edition/The_Mystic_Heart/q8TCdmstdJoC?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=wayne+teasdale+the+mystic+heart&printsec=frontcover).

<sup>9</sup> Kazuo Shimogaki, *Prof .Dr. Hasan Hanafi | KIRI ISLAM* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2012).

in creation.<sup>10</sup> Smith<sup>11</sup> further argues that many religious doctrines inherently separate humans, nature, and the Divine, thereby legitimizing environmental exploitation. Consequently, it becomes imperative to critically reassess anthropocentric tendencies in religious teachings and shift toward a more holistic paradigm that embraces ecological interconnectedness.

Fostering an ecological dimension within religious consciousness is essential in addressing environmental crises. Bauman posits that contemporary challenges such as consumerism and environmental exploitation must be understood not only as economic or political issues but as deeply religious concerns<sup>12</sup>. Religion, therefore, must extend beyond ritualistic observance and eschatological concerns to actively promote sustainable living on Earth.

The conceptualization of religion's role in enhancing ecological awareness can be examined through two interrelated aspects: readiness and capacity for action. Readiness pertains to individual motivation, while capacity involves education, community support, and structural mechanisms that facilitate behavioral change. Within this context, religion exhibits an inherent ambivalence—it can either propel or hinder environmental awareness (the ambivalence of religion). Thus, religious leaders play a pivotal role as agents of change, steering theological interpretations toward ecological sustainability.

In light of these considerations, transforming religious paradigms to become more ecologically oriented must begin with the reinterpretation of religious teachings that embrace nature as an integral part of spiritual life. Religious values can serve as a powerful source of inspiration for behavioral shifts in household waste management and broader environmental conservation efforts. By integrating ecological consciousness into spirituality and moral ethics, religion can make meaningful contributions through faith-based environmental education, family-oriented ecological teachings, and cross-sectoral collaboration to address waste management challenges.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, *Dari Ruang Privat Ke Ruang Publik: Sebuah Kumpulan Tulisan Teologi Kontekstual Emanuel Gerrit Singgih* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2020); Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, vol. 23 (United States of America: Library Of Congress Cataloging In Publication Data, 1982), <https://doi.org/10.2307/3104822>.

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *Religion, Religions, Religious* (USA: Indiana University, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Whitney Bauman, “Religion, Science, and Nature: Shifts in Meaning on a Changing Planet,” *Zygon* 46, no. 4 (2011): 777–92, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9744.2011.01217.x>; Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*; Whitney A. Bauman, Richard Bohannon, and Kevin J. O’Brien, *Grounding Religion: A Field Guide to the Study of Religion and Ecology*, *Grounding Religion: A Field Guide to the Study of Religion and Ecology*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003259466>.

<sup>13</sup> Matthias Basedau, Simone Gobien, and Sebastian Prediger, “The Ambivalent Role of Religion for Sustainable Development : A Review of the Empirical Evidence,” *Leibniz-Institut Für Globale Und Regionale Studien*, no. 2017 (2019); Nancy Ammerman, *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives, Sustainability (Switzerland)*, vol. 11 (Oxford University Press, 2007), <http://scioteca.caf.com/bitstream/handle/123456789/1091/RED2017-Eng-8ene.pdf?sequence=12&isAllowed=y%0Ahttp://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.regsciurbeco.2008.06.005%0Ahttps://www.researchgate.net/>

Ronald Adam's research offers a comparative perspective between studies in the United States and Indonesia. International findings, such as those from the Pew Research Center, indicate that religiosity is often linked to a lower concern for environmental issues. In the U.S., highly religious individuals—measured by the frequency of prayer, attendance at religious services, and the centrality of religion in daily life—tend to interpret climate change as being under divine control rather than as an urgent human responsibility. Conversely, less religious groups express greater concern about the climate crisis.<sup>14</sup>

In contrast, a 2024 survey conducted by the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM), UIN Jakarta, highlights a different trend in Indonesia. The data indicate that the more frequently individuals take religious values into account in decision-making, the higher their level of knowledge about climate change and energy transition. This correlation is statistically significant, with those who incorporate religious considerations scoring above 73% on environmental knowledge, compared to those who seldom or never do so, who score below 68%. Belief in the reality of climate change is uniformly high across all groups (over 90%), regardless of religiosity. Yet differences emerge in explaining its causes. Non-religious individuals are more likely to attribute climate change to human activity (56.38%), whereas highly religious individuals are more likely to view it as a natural process (39.52%). Regarding responsibility, religious groups emphasize individual accountability first, followed by the government and corporations, whereas the non-religious place corporations at the top.

The divergence also appears in perceived contributing factors: religious individuals highlight economic activities, while the non-religious focus more on lifestyle choices. Conspiratorial or eschatological explanations remain marginal across all groups. In terms of behavior, religious individuals demonstrate greater consistency in private pro-environmental practices—especially in conserving water and electricity—while non-religious groups lead in specific zero-waste actions such as reusing containers and recycling. Public behavior reflects a similar pattern. Religiosity positively correlates with participation in small-scale environmental actions (community clean-ups, encouraging eco-friendly habits, correcting littering). However, in larger-scale activism (donations, campaigns, petitions), non-religious groups show higher engagement, particularly in donations and advocacy campaigns. Taken together, the Indonesian case suggests that both religious and non-religious individuals demonstrate environmental concern, though through different pathways. This stands in contrast to findings in the U.S. where religiosity is negatively

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<sup>14</sup> Ronald Adam, "AGAMA DAN LINGKUNGAN : PERAN AGAMA DALAM MEMBENTUK PENGETAHUAN, PANDANGAN DAN PERILAKU PRO LINGKUNGAN," in *DILEMA ENVIRONMENTALISME: Seberapa "Hijau" Masyarakat Indonesia*, vol. 17 (Jakarta: UIN Jakarta Press & PPIM UIN Jakarta, 2024), 302.

associated with ecological engagement. In Indonesia, therefore, religion holds potential as an important driver of environmental knowledge, attitudes, and practices—albeit through diverse forms of engagement.<sup>15</sup>

This Indonesian context further highlights the potential of interfaith collaboration in promoting environmental action, particularly in waste management. Iim Halimatusa'diyah's study reinforces this by highlighting the role of interreligious interaction in ecological cooperation. At the local level, religious homogeneity often results in limited interfaith engagement. Survey data show that a majority of Indonesians have few or no friends of different religions (31.94% and 37.01%). In comparison, those with many or very many cross-religious friendships remain a minority (24.6% and 6.45%). Yet research consistently demonstrates that interreligious contact fosters greater social, political, and religious tolerance.<sup>16</sup>

Environmental issues can thus serve as a strategic entry point for interfaith interaction and cooperation. Survey findings reveal strong public openness: 75.49% reject the notion that religious differences should hinder environmental cooperation; 91.29% are willing to receive aid, and 94.33% are willing to provide assistance during disasters, regardless of religious affiliation. Nevertheless, practice lags behind attitudes. Only 3.32% of respondents report consistently collaborating across faiths on environmental issues, and 25.41% do so often. In contrast, the majority rarely (31.71%) or never (39.57%) do so. Importantly, this gap arises not from unwillingness but from limited opportunities. Only 24.67% report frequent opportunities, and a mere 2.56% report consistent opportunities for interfaith collaboration on environmental issues.<sup>17</sup>

Together, these studies affirm the vital role of religion in shaping Indonesia's environmental paradigm, particularly in the context of waste management. Expanding spaces and opportunities for interfaith cooperation on ecological issues not only strengthens collective environmental action but also enhances tolerance and social cohesion through the shared goal of protecting the environment.

## FROM SPIRITUAL AWARENESS TO ECOLOGICAL ACTIVISM

Religion plays a fundamental role in shaping both personal and collective identities, influencing beliefs and practices that define human relationships with nature. Religious values inherently carry relational principles, positioning nature not merely as a resource but as an integral part of spiritual life. Amidst escalating environmental crises driven by

<sup>15</sup> Adam, 165.

<sup>16</sup> Iim Halimatusa'diyah, "IMAN HIJAU DAN PERILAKU PRO LINGKUNGAN MASYARAKAT INDONESIA," in *DILEMA ENVIRONMENTALISME: Seberapa 'Hijau' Masyarakat Indonesia?* (Jakarta: UIN Jakarta Press & PPIM UIN Jakarta, 2024).

<sup>17</sup> Halimatusa'diyah.

excessive exploitation and unsustainable consumption, the ecological wisdom embedded in religious traditions can serve as a crucial foundation for fostering environmental consciousness. By examining perspectives from major world religions—Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism—alongside local indigenous beliefs such as *Pemena* in North Sumatra, we can uncover spiritual insights that reinforce ecological movements.

In Islam, human existence is understood not only in material terms but also through a profound spiritual dimension. Seyyed Hossein Nasr emphasizes that humanity's ultimate goal is to attain *ma'rifah*, or complete knowledge, which leads to the state of al-*Insān al-Kāmil* (the fully realized human). This perspective frames humans not as exploitative rulers but as *khalifah* (stewards) entrusted with maintaining environmental balance. Islam sees nature as a divine trust (*amanah*) rather than an object for exploitation. The symbiotic and transcendental relationship between humans and nature reflects spiritual well-being; when humanity suffers spiritual degradation, nature also falls into imbalance and destruction. Modern environmental crises, according to Nasr, are not merely technical or economic issues but deeply rooted in a spiritual crisis. The materialistic and secular approaches to nature often disregard its sacred dimension. In contrast, Islam teaches that every element of nature contains divine signs, making excessive exploitation an act of spiritual denial.<sup>18</sup>

Christianity underscores the principle of simplicity (*ugahari* spirituality) as a response to overconsumption. Biblical teachings, particularly in Matthew 6:11, advocate for a life of sufficiency—not in poverty, but in gratitude for what is available. Jesus serves as a model for self-restraint, rejecting consumerist excess. When people disregard limits in consumption, it disrupts both personal harmony and the divine order. Overconsumption signifies greed and irresponsibility in the appreciation of God's blessings. Furthermore, neglecting environmental regulations, such as waste management, reflects a moral failure in fulfilling human responsibilities. The church and Christian communities play a crucial role in promoting ecological awareness through education, advocacy, and concrete actions in resource management.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (Reading: Cox & Wyman Ltd, 1988); Bernard T. Adeney-Risakotta, *Living in a Sacred Cosmos: Indonesia and the Future of Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 2018).

<sup>19</sup> Endang Sri Budi Astuti, "Spiritualitas Keugaharian: Sebagai Respons Terhadap Pola Hidup Hedonisme Di Era Digital," *Jurnal Teologi Praktika* 3, no. 1 (June 30, 2022): 24–35, <https://jurnalsttenggarong.ac.id/index.php/JTP/article/view/41>; Markus, "Spiritualitas Keugaharian: Merayakan Keragaman Bagi Kehidupan Kebangsaan Yang Utuh," 2018, <https://pgi.or.id/weblama/spiritualitas-keugaharian-merayakan-keragaman-bagi-kehidupan-kebangsaan-yang-utuh/>; Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, *Bergereja, Bertologi, Dan Bermasyarakat* (Yogyakarta: Taman Pustaka Kristen Indonesia, 1997); Nurelmi Limbong, "Spiritualitas Keugaharian (Studi Injil Lukas 3:10-14)," *Jurnal Teologi Cultivation* 4, no. 1 (July 25, 2020): 104–14, <https://e-journal.iakntarutung.ac.id/index.php/cultivation/article/view/220>

Hinduism promotes the principle of *ahimsa* (non-violence), extending beyond human relationships to interactions with nature. *Ahimsa* emphasizes that all life has intrinsic value and contributes to cosmic balance. This principle fosters harmony by discouraging harm to any living being, encouraging mindful consumption, and advocating responsible resource use. More than a moral teaching, *ahimsa* calls for conscious living, ensuring that everyday choices—from food consumption to waste disposal—respect all forms of life. This approach fosters sustainable habits that promote ecological balance.<sup>20</sup>

Buddhism views the human-nature relationship through the ethical framework of *sīla* (moral discipline), which shapes environmental responsibility. Key Buddhist virtues such as *metta* (loving-kindness), *upekkha* (equanimity), and humility reinforce wise and compassionate interactions with nature. Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh emphasizes that nature is not merely a resource, but an integral part of human spirituality. For instance, he describes water as a bodhisattva that sustains all life, advocating for mindful consumption and responsible waste disposal. Buddhism teaches that harming nature mirrors internal imbalance, making environmental care an essential moral duty.<sup>21</sup>

*Pemena*, the indigenous religion of North Sumatra, embodies a relational worldview encapsulated in the phrase “aku kap kam, kam kap aku” (“I am you, you are me”). This philosophy extends beyond human interactions to encompass nature, underscoring the notion that ecological harm has a direct impact on society. In *Pemena* cosmology, all elements of life are interconnected, necessitating self-restraint and sustainable behaviors to maintain balance.<sup>22</sup>

A significant challenge in environmental ethics is overcoming anthropocentrism, which prioritizes humans over all other entities. Each religious tradition offers a counter-narrative to environmental exploitation by emphasizing the importance of ecological values. Islam emphasizes divine stewardship, Christianity promotes simplicity, Hinduism teaches non-violence, Buddhism emphasizes inner balance, and *Pemena* advocates for interconnectedness.

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<sup>20</sup> Whitney A. Bauman, Richard Bohannon, and Kevin J. O’Brien, *Grounding Religion: A Field Guide to the Study of Religion and Ecology*, *Grounding Religion: A Field Guide to the Study of Religion and Ecology*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003259466>; Adhitama Satria, “Implementasi Konsep Tri Hita Karana,” *Dharmasmṛti, Jurnal Ilmu Agama & Kebudayaan* 20, no. 2 (2020): 29–45, <https://ejournal.unhi.ac.id/index.php/dharmasmrti/issue/view/23>.

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Mc Annally, “Buddhism, Bodhisattvas, and the Compassionate Wisdom of Water,” in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Nature: The Elements*, ed. Laura Hobgood and Whitney Bauman (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2015), 6.

<sup>22</sup> Darwin Prinst, *Adat Karo* (Medan: Bina Media Perintis, 2008); E.P. Gintings, *Religi Karo: Membaca Religi Karo Dengan Mata Baru* (Kabanjahe: Abdi Karya, 1999).

To translate these values into action, religious teachings must extend beyond theological discourse into environmental activism. Collaboration between religious institutions, governments, and communities is vital in fostering an effective ecological movement. Places of worship—such as churches, mosques, temples, and indigenous communities—can serve as environmental education hubs, advocate for eco-friendly policies, and spearhead initiatives like waste management, reforestation, and sustainable consumption.<sup>23</sup>

Ultimately, ecological spirituality must evolve into concrete religious activism, transforming faith into a driving force for environmental sustainability. Religion is not merely a source of belief but a transformative power in preserving the planet for future generations.

## IMPLEMENTING ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGIES THROUGH RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS: CASE STUDIES FROM INDONESIA

Religious institutions in Indonesia have actively contributed to environmental preservation by integrating ecological values with spiritual teachings. Several initiatives illustrate how religious communities translate their beliefs into tangible environmental actions.

### 1. *Eco-Mosques and the Ecological Islamic Boarding School At Thoriq*

Islamic organizations have pioneered environmentally friendly programs that merge faith-based principles with sustainability efforts. One notable example is the *eco-mosque* movement, spearheaded by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) in collaboration with several mosques, primarily in Jakarta. This initiative promotes various ecological practices, including *Zero Waste* waste management systems aimed at minimizing environmental pollution<sup>24</sup>.

Although Indonesia has established regulatory frameworks for waste management, such as Law No. 18 of 2008, the adoption of *Reduce, Reuse, Recycle (3R)* principles remains suboptimal in daily life. Therefore, enhanced collaboration among stakeholders is necessary to reinforce Islamic values in educating communities on effective waste management, ensuring waste materials are repurposed or recycled efficiently.<sup>25</sup> Another

<sup>23</sup> Nancy T. Ammerman, “Finding Religion In Everyday Life,” *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review* 75, no. 2 (2014): 189–207, <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/sru013>; Steward Harrison Oppong, “Religion and Identity,” *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* 3, no. 6 (2013), [www.ajicrnet.com](http://www.ajicrnet.com).

<sup>24</sup> Surahma Asti Mulasari, Herman Yuliansyah, and Dkk, *Ecomasjid Dan Kotribusinya Dalam Pengelolaan Lingkungan Dalam Perspektif Keagamaan, Ekonomi, Kesehatan Masyarakat, Pendidikan Karakter Dan Pemberdayaan Masyarakat* (Yogyakarta: CV. Mine, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> Heru Purwanto, Ficky Augusta Imawan, and Wiliam Reynold, “The Role of the ‘EcoMasjid’

example of Islamic ecological commitment is the At Thoriq Ecological Islamic Boarding School in Garut, West Java. This pesantren (Islamic boarding school) actively integrates sustainability principles by converting waste into organic fertilizer and implementing water management systems to improve soil fertility and agricultural productivity. The pesantren fosters a holistic approach to ecology, emphasizing the interconnectedness of land, water, and ecosystems as a response to exploitative natural resource practices. The program engages both students and the local community, fostering a harmonious and faith-driven approach to environmental stewardship<sup>26</sup>.

## **2. Waste Bank Management by the Batak Karo Protestant Church (GBKP)**

The commitment to environmental sustainability is also evident in Christian communities, as seen in the *eco-church* movement. Batak Karo Protestant Church (GBKP) in North Sumatra has established a waste bank program to promote responsible waste management. This initiative, in collaboration with the church's youth wing, provides specialized training on waste sorting and recycling. Once trained, the youth take charge of managing the waste bank, which operates in Kabanjahe. The program is further supported by the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) and local government authorities.

Since its inception in 2022, this initiative has significantly raised environmental awareness among GBKP congregants. The program encourages community members to separate waste and either deliver it to the church's waste bank or use the church's waste collection service. Beyond reducing waste volume, this initiative enhances local government waste management efforts and underscores religious institutions' role in advocating for environmental policies<sup>27</sup>.

## **3. Sustainable Waste Management in Penglipuran Traditional Village**

Penglipuran, a traditional village in Bali, exemplifies the successful integration of Hindu-Balinese religious values with sustainable tourism. The village adheres to strict customary laws to maintain environmental conservation, which in turn influences its architectural planning and waste management systems. This deep-seated environmental consciousness stems from local wisdom and customary law (*awig-awig*), which function as social mechanisms to uphold ecological balance.<sup>28</sup>

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Program in Jakarta in the Development of Awareness of Eco-Friendly Living Culture," *Cities and Urban Development Journal* 2, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.7454/cudj.v2i1.1023>.

<sup>26</sup> Inayatul Maula, "Pondok Pesantren Ekologi At Thoriq: Dari Sustainability Alam Menuju Kemandirian Ekonomi," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 12, no. 2 (2022): 9–16, <https://doi.org/10.38073/jpi.v12i2.934>.

<sup>27</sup> Humas MODERAMEN, "Kreatif Merawat Lingkungan (Pelatihan 'Bank Sampah' PERMATA GBKP)" (Kabanjahe, 2022), [https://gbkp.or.id/new/?page=berita\\_full&id=2&tabel=tb\\_berita&lang=bahasa&key=id\\_berita](https://gbkp.or.id/new/?page=berita_full&id=2&tabel=tb_berita&lang=bahasa&key=id_berita).

<sup>28</sup> I Wayan Budiarta, I Nengah Muliarta, and I Wayan Ana, "Pengelolaan Sampah Berbasis Masyarakat

A key waste management strategy in Penglipuran is the *Berekah* method, an ancestral technique for decomposing organic waste. Residents dig pits in their backyards or agricultural areas to dispose of organic waste such as food scraps and plant debris. The waste is then covered with soil, watered, and left to decompose for several months, transforming into nutrient-rich compost. This method not only aligns with the *zero-waste* concept but also demonstrates how indigenous wisdom can offer sustainable waste management solutions.<sup>29</sup>

#### **4. Sangurejo Climate Village: Faith-Based Transformation of an Urban Hamlet in Yogyakarta**

Sangurejo, a hamlet in Sleman, Yogyakarta, was once marked by density, poverty, and poor sanitation. In 2012, a dengue outbreak highlighted the severe consequences of unmanaged waste and polluted waterways, as trash accumulated in rivers and the Kaliaji reservoir. For years, Sangurejo was synonymous with environmental neglect and vulnerability. Yet, since 2022, this narrative has undergone a dramatic shift. Residents began cleaning their surroundings, practicing community-based waste management, planting trees, and even transforming waste into a source of income. By 2024, Sangurejo's transformation had earned national recognition through the ProKlim Utama award from Indonesia's Ministry of Environment and Forestry, as well as international appreciation from the UN-ECOSOC. Today, Sangurejo is celebrated as a model of eco-tourism and grassroots resilience.

This shift was neither sudden nor accidental. It was pioneered by local religious leaders who also served as environmental activists. Using faith-based narratives, they encouraged residents to approach waste as both a material and a spiritual issue. Initiatives such as “*Waste for Charity*,” “*From Trash to Everlasting Merit*,” and “*Clerics for Waste Care*” reframed waste management as a form of worship (*ibadah*) and an ongoing act of merit (*amal jariyah*). Mosques became more than spaces of prayer: they were converted into “waste banks,” where recyclables could be deposited, sold, and the proceeds donated to the poor. This religious framing nurtured a collective consciousness that culminated in Sangurejo's declaration as a *Climate Village* in 2023.

Beyond curbing littering habits, the community has developed sustainable waste practices. Organic waste is composted using simple household techniques, while inorganic waste is repurposed into marketable goods. To expand its impact, residents founded

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Dan Peningkatan Keterampilan Berbahasa Inggris Di Desa Wisata Penglipuran, Kecamatan Kubu, Kabupaten Bangli, Provinsi Bali,” *Abdidas* 5, no. 5 (2024): 466–76.

<sup>29</sup> Tina -, M.Taufan Qolby, and M. Tsani Alhaq, “Kajian Kepedulian Masyarakat Berbasis Kearifan Lokal Dalam Upaya Pelestarian Lingkungan Di Desa Penglipuran Bali,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Lingkungan Dan Pembangunan* 20, no. 02 (2019): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.21009/plpb.202.01>.

Ecoprint & Craft Sangurejo (ECSA), a micro-enterprise that processes organic waste into natural dyes for textiles and batik, thereby turning ecological stewardship into economic opportunity.

Youth engagement was institutionalized through the *ProKlim Preacher* program, where mosque-based youth groups received training in eco-dakwah. Equipped with Qur'anic and prophetic teachings on caring for creation, these young preachers now spread environmental awareness as part of their religious mission. By framing ecological responsibility as a form of worship, environmental messages have become more grounded and culturally resonant within the community. Findings from the *Religious Environmentalism Action (REACT)* program, conducted by the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) at UIN Jakarta, reinforce this experience. Religion can serve as a strategic instrument in environmental advocacy, particularly in bridging the gap between environmental awareness and action. Religious language fills the conceptual void that often prevents communities from engaging with ecological issues—a phenomenon scholars describe as *hypocognition*. In Sangurejo, religious framing not only made ecological practices meaningful but also ensured their sustainability by embedding them in everyday spirituality.<sup>30</sup>

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Effective sustainable waste management cannot be achieved without strong collaboration among key stakeholders. Governments, religious institutions, academics, and civil society must collaborate to develop faith-based environmental policies that extend beyond regulations and are deeply rooted in cultural and religious values. This collaboration is essential to ensuring that ecological awareness is widely and sustainably implemented.

### **1. Integrating Religious Values into Waste Management Policies**

Governments can partner with religious and indigenous organizations to design waste reduction campaigns that incorporate religious and cultural values. This can be achieved through environmental certification standards, such as the “Green Mosque” and “Eco-Church,” which recognize places of worship that implement sustainable waste management practices. Additionally, fiscal incentives such as tax reductions or grants can be provided to faith-based communities actively engaged in environmental programs, encouraging broader participation.

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<sup>30</sup> Savran Billahi, “Dari Dusun Sangurejo Kita Belajar ‘Framing’ Agama Ampuh Gerakkan Aksi Lingkungan” ([fisip.uinjkt.ac.id](http://fisip.uinjkt.ac.id), 2025).

## ***2. Strengthening the Role of Religious Institutions in Environmental Education and Action***

Religious institutions play a strategic role in spreading ecological awareness in society. Governments and academics can collaborate with faith-based communities to develop religion-based environmental curricula, organize workshops for religious leaders, and support fatwas and religious declarations that emphasize waste management as a spiritual responsibility. Furthermore, a door-to-door education model can be implemented through volunteer groups from religious communities, tasked with educating households and monitoring waste management practices.

## ***3. Reinterpreting Religious Teachings for Ecological Awareness***

Religious leaders should be actively involved in developing ecological narratives within religious teachings, emphasizing not only the relationship between humans and God but also with nature. Through seminars, workshops, and religion-based educational modules, sustainability values can be introduced from an early age, ensuring that ecological awareness becomes an integral part of religious practice.

## ***4. Establishing Collaborative Forums and Monitoring Systems***

To ensure the sustainability of these policies, an Interfaith Council for Environmental Sustainability should be established, involving religious leaders, academics, and policymakers to develop concrete solutions to environmental issues. Additionally, a community-based digital platform can be created to monitor and report on faith-based waste management programs, facilitating ongoing evaluation and improvements. Governments can also collaborate with media outlets to highlight success stories from faith-based communities, inspiring broader public participation.

With well-planned and sustained collaboration, faith-based waste management initiatives can evolve into a larger and more effective movement, fostering a socially responsible ecosystem that prioritizes environmental stewardship.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study reveals that religion holds a strategic and transformative role in fostering ecological awareness and promoting sustainable waste management practices. Through a careful review of diverse religious traditions and indigenous beliefs, it becomes evident that spiritual teachings across faiths inherently encourage a shift from anthropocentric worldviews to more relational and ecologically grounded paradigms. The integration of religious consciousness into both household and community-level waste management is not only relevant, but also essential. Religious and spiritual institutions carry a concrete

responsibility to shape narratives, educate communities, and mobilize moral resources in response to the environmental crisis.

The three case studies explored—Eco-Mosque and the At Thoriq Ecological Islamic Boarding School (Islam), the Waste Bank by the Batak Karo Protestant Church (Christianity), and traditional waste practices in Penglipuran Village (Balinese Hinduism)—demonstrate that faith-based practices can evolve into powerful collective responses to ecological challenges. Religious institutions are not merely guardians of doctrine; they are potential mediators between governments and communities, and catalysts for interfaith collaborations that lead to innovative initiatives such as community waste banks and culturally rooted environmental education programs. Moreover, teachings such as *khalifah*, stewardship, *ugahari* (spiritual simplicity), *ahimsa* (non-violence), and relational wisdom from indigenous cosmologies are not simply moral ideals—they are social energies capable of shaping behaviors and transforming values. However, their full potential is often hindered by dominant anthropocentric theologies, insufficient policy support, and limited opportunities for cross-sectoral collaboration.

This study thus recommends a strong interfaith and cross-sectoral approach to policy design—one that encourages the ecological reinterpretation of religious teachings, strengthens faith-based environmental education, and provides policy incentives for religious actors committed to sustainability. Building sustained interfaith forums and participatory community monitoring systems will be key to ensuring that faith-based environmental efforts are not temporary or symbolic, but embedded within robust, long-term social frameworks. In conclusion, religion is not confined to personal spirituality; it is a dynamic and collective force that can redefine humanity's relationship with the Earth. By integrating faith-based values into systems of waste management, we cultivate not only more ethical environmental practices but also a deeper expression of religiosity as an act of love and responsibility for our shared planetary home.

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