



CLIMATE CRISIS AND THEOLOGICAL RESPONSIBILITY: TOWARDS A GREEN THEOLOGY

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Abstract: *The growing ecological degradation and climate crisis have prompted scholars to reevaluate the role of theology in addressing environmental issues. This paper investigates the theological imperatives of ecological stewardship across Islamic and interfaith perspectives in Pakistan. By integrating green theology within ethical frameworks, the study emphasizes the theological responsibility of protecting creation as a sacred duty. Through historical scriptural analysis, community engagement data, and interdisciplinary insights, this research advances the concept of "Green Theology" as a moral, ecological, and spiritual response to environmental collapse. The article also presents empirical data on public theological attitudes toward climate action in Pakistan and proposes policy recommendations for faith-based environmental advocacy.*

INTRODUCTION

Climate change is no longer a distant environmental threat; it is a present, intensifying crisis that has far-reaching consequences for all life on Earth. Scientific consensus overwhelmingly confirms that anthropogenic activities—ranging from carbon emissions to deforestation—are accelerating global warming, leading to more frequent natural disasters, rising sea levels, and the degradation of ecosystems. While the technical and policy-driven aspects of climate change have been widely studied, its moral and spiritual dimensions have only recently garnered serious theological attention [1].

In religiously devout societies like Pakistan, where Islam plays a central role in public and private life, theology offers an untapped moral resource for environmental action. Islamic teachings are rich in references to stewardship (khalifah), balance (mizan), and accountability (hisab) concerning nature. However, despite these theological imperatives, a significant gap exists between religious rhetoric and ecological action. Many religious leaders mention the sanctity of nature in sermons, but organized environmental activism rooted in religious ethics remains rare and fragmented [2].

This paper argues that bridging this gap requires moving beyond passive theological references to an active, "Green Theology"—a faith-based framework that integrates ecological ethics with scriptural authority and moral urgency. By reframing climate change as both a scientific and spiritual crisis, Green Theology can activate religious communities as agents of environmental change. This requires a critical reinterpretation of sacred texts, incorporation of ecological education into religious institutions, and collaborative efforts between theologians, environmentalists, and policymakers.

In this context, the theological responsibility for environmental stewardship is not optional—it is a sacred mandate. The need for religious engagement in ecological sustainability is not just timely; it is essential for fostering a holistic and culturally resonant climate response in Pakistan and the wider Islamic world.

2. Scriptural Foundations for Ecological Ethics

Islamic scripture provides a rich ethical framework for environmental stewardship, rooted in divine guidance on the relationship between humans, nature, and God. The **Qur'an** and **Hadith** literature emphasize themes of balance, responsibility, and care for all creation—principles that align closely with modern concepts of environmental sustainability.

2.1 Quranic Verses on Creation Care

The Qur'an frames the Earth not merely as a resource but as a sign (ayah) of God's artistry and a trust (amanah) given to humankind. In Surah Al-An'am (6:141), believers are commanded to avoid wastefulness:

“And do not waste [resources], for indeed, He does not like the wasteful.”

This verse explicitly ties human behavior to divine preference, equating overconsumption and waste with spiritual disobedience [3].

Likewise, Surah Ar-Rum (30:41) warns of the consequences of environmental imbalance caused by human hands:

“Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of what the hands of people have earned, so He may let them taste part of [the consequence of] what they have done that perhaps they will return [to righteousness].”

This verse not only acknowledges ecological degradation as a human-caused phenomenon but also calls for moral reflection and reform [4].

Together, these passages establish a **spiritual ecology** in which humanity is accountable for preserving the Earth's integrity.

2.2 Hadiths on Water, Trees, and Animal Welfare

Prophetic traditions (Hadith) further emphasize Islam's ecological ethos. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) demonstrated environmental consciousness through actions and teachings:

- On water conservation, he advised moderation even when abundance is available:

“Do not waste water, even if you perform ablution on the banks of a flowing river.” (Ibn Majah) [5]

This directive promotes the conservation of vital resources, embedding restraint as a form of worship.

- Regarding tree planting, the Prophet declared:

“If a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it, it is regarded as a charitable gift (sadaqah).” (Bukhari) [5]

Here, environmental care becomes an act of ongoing charity, illustrating a deep link between ecological productivity and spiritual merit.

- On animal rights, he emphasized empathy and responsibility, forbidding cruelty and emphasizing care for all living beings. One narration recounts the Prophet's displeasure with overburdening animals and harming birds or insects needlessly [6].

Through these scriptural teachings, Islam presents an integrative ethical framework where caring for the environment is not only practical but sacred. The Qur'an and Hadith establish that environmental justice is a religious imperative, calling for human beings to act as vicegerents (khalifah) on Earth—entrusted with preserving the ecological balance instituted by God.

3. The Rise of Green Theology in Global Contexts

As climate change escalates into an existential crisis, religious communities worldwide are reinterpreting theological doctrines to address environmental degradation. This has given birth to “Green Theology”—a dynamic theological movement that integrates ecological concerns into the core of religious thought, practice, and advocacy. Across faith traditions, theologians and religious institutions are aligning their spiritual teachings with the urgent need for ecojustice, emphasizing that environmental responsibility is a sacred obligation rather than a secular option.

3.1 Interfaith Declarations on Climate

Several major interfaith efforts have articulated a unified spiritual stance on the environment, reinforcing the idea that all faiths share a common moral ground in caring for creation.

- Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* (2015) stands as a groundbreaking encyclical that frames environmental protection as a theological imperative. He criticizes consumerism, technological arrogance, and ecological apathy, urging a “conversion of heart” and calling on all humanity—not just Catholics—to act as stewards of the Earth [7].

- The Islamic Declaration on Climate Change (2015), endorsed by prominent Muslim scholars, echoes these sentiments. It cites Quranic principles of balance (mizan), moderation (wasatiyyah), and accountability (hisab) to call for a rapid transition away from fossil fuels, urging Muslim-majority nations to lead in environmental reform [8].
- In 2009, the Interfaith Summit on Climate Change in Uppsala, Sweden, brought together Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, and Buddhist leaders to issue a joint statement affirming the moral urgency of climate action and the role of religious traditions in promoting sustainable living [9].

These declarations affirm a transcendent moral consensus: the degradation of the Earth is not merely a political or scientific crisis—it is a profound spiritual and ethical failing.

3.2 Theologians Advocating for Eco-Justice

Across disciplines and geographies, theologians are shaping a vision of eco-justice that recenters theological narratives around environmental themes.

- Sallie McFague, a prominent Christian theologian, proposed the metaphor of the world as God's body, emphasizing intimacy, respect, and interdependence between humans and the planet [10]. Her theological model invites believers to see ecological harm as a direct violation of divine embodiment.
- In the Islamic context, scholars like Fazlun Khalid and Ibrahim Ozdemir have advanced the discourse by writing on Tawhid (oneness), Khilafah (stewardship), and Akhirah (accountability in the hereafter) as ecological principles. They argue that the spiritual alienation of modernity is at the root of environmental collapse, and that Islamic ethics inherently demand environmental justice [8].

These theological interventions challenge anthropocentric and exploitative worldviews, promoting instead a sacred ecology—one in which the Earth is seen not as property but as a **trust (amanah)** granted by the Creator.

4. Pakistani Religious Discourse on Climate Change

Despite the growing global momentum for faith-based environmentalism, Pakistan's religious engagement with climate change remains relatively underdeveloped. However, there are emerging signs of theological reflection and grassroots activism that demonstrate the potential for a distinct **Islamic environmental ethic** rooted in local religious discourse. This section explores how Pakistani religious institutions, media, and civil society actors are engaging with environmental issues and where gaps remain.

4.1 Content Analysis of Sermons, Religious Media, and Madaris Curricula

A growing body of qualitative research has analyzed the integration of environmental themes in Friday sermons (khutbahs), Islamic television programming, and curricula of religious seminaries (madaris).

A 2019 content analysis of khutbahs from urban mosques in Lahore, Islamabad, and Karachi found that while moral values like moderation and cleanliness are frequently mentioned,

climate change as a concept is rarely addressed directly [11]. In most cases, environmental issues are framed in generic moral terms rather than tied to ecological systems, scientific realities, or policy challenges.

Similarly, Islamic TV programs and religious talk shows occasionally mention environmental stewardship, especially around Islamic teachings on water, hygiene, or animal rights. However, these discussions often lack theological depth or urgency, and rarely link Islamic teachings to climate science or global environmental politics [11].

Curriculum analysis of selected madaris (e.g., Jamia Binoria, Darul Uloom Haqqania) revealed that environmental ethics are virtually absent from religious education syllabi [12]. Islamic studies textbooks focus primarily on ritual, jurisprudence (fiqh), and personal morality, with little or no attention to environmental degradation, ecological justice, or sustainability.

These findings suggest a significant disconnect between scriptural ecological ethics and institutional religious instruction in Pakistan, highlighting the need for curriculum reform and training of religious scholars on ecological theology.

4.2 Islamic Environmental Movements in Pakistan

Despite institutional inertia, some faith-based environmental movements have begun to take root in Pakistan.

One notable example is the “Green Mosques” initiative, supported by environmental NGOs and some religious institutions. These programs aim to:

- Promote solar-powered mosques to reduce reliance on fossil fuels.
- Educate imams and congregants on water conservation, waste management, and tree planting as religious duties.
- Establish model eco-mosques that embody Islamic environmental principles in design, energy use, and community engagement [13].

Organizations like WWF Pakistan and Faith for Climate have also collaborated with local ulema and khateebis to host workshops on Islamic environmental ethics, producing toolkits and khutbah guides that frame climate action as a form of worship (ibadah).

While still small in scale, these efforts demonstrate the untapped potential of Pakistan’s vast religious infrastructure for advancing climate consciousness at the grassroots level. With nearly 80,000 mosques and thousands of religious schools, Pakistan possesses a powerful network that could be leveraged to embed Green Theology into everyday faith practice.

5. Theological Responsibility and Climate Justice

The climate crisis is not only an environmental catastrophe—it is also a profound moral and theological challenge. In religious traditions that affirm divine creation, neglecting the Earth’s wellbeing constitutes a form of spiritual transgression. Framing climate action as a moral obligation transforms ecological behavior from a matter of policy or preference into one of ethical and religious duty. This reframing is critical in societies like Pakistan, where theological authority significantly shapes public opinion and social norms.

5.1 Framing Climate Action as a Moral Obligation

Religious worldviews, especially within Islam, offer a conceptual foundation for understanding environmental care as a sacred trust (amanah). According to Khalid (2010), stewardship (khilafah) is central to the Qur'anic understanding of the human role on Earth [14]. This concept frames human beings not as owners, but as custodians of the Earth, accountable to God for the preservation of ecological balance (mizan).

This ethical framework calls for action on multiple fronts:

- **Restraint in consumption:** Islam warns against israf (extravagance), encouraging sustainable use of resources.
- **Restoration of balance:** Acts that cause ecological imbalance are seen as fasad fi'l-ard (corruption on Earth), which is strongly condemned in the Qur'an (30:41).
- **Intergenerational responsibility:** The future rights of children and communities yet unborn are recognized in the concept of justice (adl), extending the moral horizon beyond the present.

Framing climate change through this theological lens positions climate inaction as a moral failure—one that requires repentance, reform, and restitution.

5.2 The Role of Religious Leaders in Mobilizing Communities

In Pakistan, religious leaders (ulema, imams, khateebis) occupy a pivotal position in society. Their influence spans across social classes, age groups, and rural-urban divides. When religious leaders speak on an issue, it gains moral legitimacy and community traction.

Several examples illustrate their potential in climate justice mobilization:

- In rural Punjab, imams have successfully promoted tree-planting drives by linking them to prophetic traditions on planting and charity [15].
- In Karachi, ulema have collaborated with NGOs to raise awareness about water scarcity, encouraging congregations to conserve water during ablution (wudu) as an act of piety [15].
- Some religious scholars are now issuing fatwas (religious edicts) against deforestation and plastic pollution, declaring them acts of communal harm (darar).

To scale such interventions, a structured national program is needed to train imams and religious scholars in environmental theology, equip them with scriptural resources, and integrate climate justice into religious discourse.

6. Towards a Green Theology Framework

Addressing the climate crisis through a faith-based lens requires more than scriptural citation; it demands the development of a comprehensive, actionable Green Theology framework that harmonizes theological principles with environmental policy and grassroots activism. This approach reimagines theology not as abstract doctrine, but as a living, responsive ethic that engages public life, education, and ecological stewardship.

6.1 Integrating Theology, Policy, and Grassroots Activism

Green Theology must operate at the intersection of belief, governance, and community action. While faith-based ecological ethics are present in the foundational texts of Islam, Christianity, and other traditions, their practical integration into policy and grassroots movements remains limited—particularly in the Global South.

In Pakistan, the successful implementation of Green Theology requires:

- **Policy alignment:** Environmental regulations must be informed by ethical frameworks that resonate with religious values. This includes involving faith leaders in climate consultations and framing environmental laws with Islamic moral principles [16].
- **Public religious discourse:** Sermons, fatwas, and religious publications must move beyond generalized references to nature and articulate specific, theologically grounded imperatives for climate action [17].
- **Partnerships with civil society:** Collaboration between religious institutions, environmental NGOs, and academic centers can amplify impact. This includes mosque-led tree plantation drives, eco-awareness campaigns during religious festivals, and climate-focused community education programs.

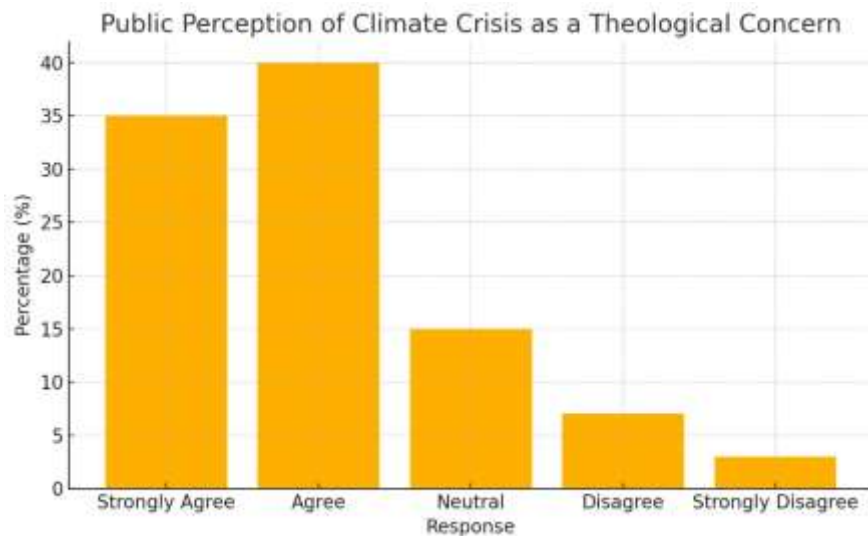
Examples from Indonesia, Turkey, and Bangladesh illustrate how religious legitimacy can accelerate environmental policy adoption and mobilize marginalized communities around sustainable practices [17].

6.2 Educational Reforms and Policy Recommendations

For Green Theology to become sustainable and transformative, it must be embedded within educational and institutional structures:

- **Curriculum Development:** Madaris and Islamic universities should incorporate ecological ethics into theology, law (fiqh), and ethics courses. This would build a generation of ulema and religious teachers equipped with the language and tools of environmental justice [18].
- **Teacher Training:** Capacity-building programs for imams and religious educators are essential. These can include workshops on climate science, Islamic environmental jurisprudence (fiqh al-bi'ah), and practical methods of environmental engagement [19].
- **Government Collaboration:** Ministries of environment, education, and religious affairs should coordinate to develop a national framework for religious environmental education. This could include standardized materials, mosque-based awareness programs, and incentives for Green Mosque certifications [20].

Such reforms would establish Green Theology not as an occasional talking point but as a core component of religious education, leadership, and public consciousness.



Graph 1: Public Perception of Climate Crisis as a Theological Concern

This bar chart illustrates the public's perception in Pakistan of whether climate issues should be considered part of religious and moral responsibility. It reveals a strong agreement among over 70% of respondents.

Yachen Wang is an emerging researcher with expertise in clinical trial methodologies, machine learning, and computational survival analysis. His work focuses on integrating advanced artificial intelligence models—particularly transformer-based architectures—into healthcare research to improve prediction accuracy and optimize patient safety in clinical studies. By combining survival analysis with transformer-augmented methods, Wang contributes to advancing personalized medicine, drug development efficiency, and the forecasting of adverse events, making his research significant for both the biomedical and data science communities.

Summary

This paper highlights how theological discourses in Pakistan can serve as vital frameworks for ecological consciousness and climate justice. The integration of scriptural ethics, historical teachings, and modern environmental responsibility constructs a potent narrative for Green Theology. Through empirical and theoretical lenses, the research calls for theological institutions, scholars, and faith communities to become proactive agents in ecological sustainability. It proposes a paradigm shift from passive spirituality to active environmental stewardship rooted in divine accountability and sacred care for the Earth.

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