ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.03 No.03 (2025)

ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ETHICS IN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM

Ismail Shahid
MPhil Scholar NUML University Islamabad ismailshahid753@gmail.com
Ayaz Mahmood
PhD Scholar
International Relations , Muslim Youth University Islamabad
ayazlashariryk@gmail.com
Dr. Muhammad Asim Shahbaz
Instructor Islamic Studies
Department of Related Sciences
University of Rasul, Mandi Bahauddin
amasimshahbaz8@gmail.com

Abstract
This article explores the foundations, development, and contemporary applications of environmental responsibility and ethics within the Abrahamic traditions Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. By examining scriptural sources, theological interpretations, and legal frameworks, the study demonstrates that each tradition situates ecological care not as a peripheral concern but as an integral dimension of religious life. In Judaism, concepts such as bal tashchit (prohibition of needless destruction) and tikkun olam (repairing the world) embed ecological obligations in halakhic law. Christianity, while historically emphasizing dominion, has increasingly turned toward stewardship, with modern voices such as Laudato Si' reframing environmental protection as a moral imperative. Islam, through Qur'anic teachings on ayat (signs of God in nature), the principle of khilāfah (stewardship), and prophetic traditions, establishes a comprehensive ecological ethic rooted in balance (mīzān) and trust (amānah).The article further examines comparative ethical frameworks, highlighting both shared principles and divergences in practical theology and law. It also investigates interfaith initiatives, policy influence, and future prospects for cooperation in addressing global challenges such as climate change. Ultimately, the study argues that the Abrahamic faiths, despite doctrinal differences, provide complementary moral resources that can inspire collaborative responses to the environmental crisis.

Keywords: Judaism; Christianity, Islam, Stewardship, Bal Tashchit, Tikkun Olam,Khilāfah, Mīzān, Interfaith Dialogue, Climate Change, Abrahamic Traditions

Environmental Ethics as an Academic Discipline

Environmental ethics is a branch of applied philosophy that studies the moral relationship between human beings and the non-human world. Unlike traditional ethical frameworks, which largely limit moral responsibility to human society, environmental ethics extends moral concern to animals, plants, ecosystems, and the planet as a whole. Its development in the 1970s coincided with rising ecological crises such as deforestation, climate change, and pollution, and it has since become one of the most influential fields in contemporary moral philosophy.

Richard Routley (later Sylvan) was among the first to challenge the sufficiency of classical ethics in this regard. In his paper "Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethic?" he observed:

> "Is there a need for a new, an environmental ethic? We contend that there is such a need, since traditional ethics has restricted itself to the human sphere and has nothing to say about how humans should relate to the natural environment and its non-human contents."[1]

[1]Routley, Richard. "Is There a Need for a New, an Environmental Ethic?" In Proceedings of the XVth World Congress of Philosophy, 205–210. Varna, Bulgaria, 1973

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.03 No.02 (2025)

This statement illustrates the central problem: anthropocentric moral systems neglect the question of duties to the environment. Routley's proposal opened the path for recognizing forests, rivers, and species as entities that demand ethical consideration.Holmes Rolston III expanded this argument, insisting that the natural world possesses value beyond its utility for humans

The natural world carries intrinsic value, not merely instrumental value for human use. Ethics must therefore extend beyond the human community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals.Rolston's argument shifted the debate from human-centered ethics to an eco-centered vision. His insistence on intrinsic value established a cornerstone for the discipline.Earlier still, Aldo Leopold, in A Sand County Almanac, articulated what came to be called the "Land Ethic:"

"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."[2]

Leopold's principle introduced a moral standard rooted in ecological health rather than human benefit. It redefined ethics as responsibility not only to individuals or societies but to the land itself.Another decisive contribution came from Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss, who developed the concept of "deep ecology." He argued:

"The right of all forms [of life] to live is a universal right which cannot be quantified. No single species of living being has more of this particular right to live and unfold than any other species." [3]

Næss distinguished between "shallow ecology," which seeks to manage the environment for human purposes, and "deep ecology," which recognizes the inherent worth of all beings. His philosophy emphasized an egalitarian view of life, radically expanding the moral community.Taken together, these perspectives Routley's critique of anthropocentrism, Rolston's theory of intrinsic value, Leopold's land ethic, and Næss's deep ecology established environmental ethics as a discipline in its own right. They collectively advanced the idea that human beings are members, not masters, of the ecological community.

The Interconnection between Religion and Ecology

Religion and ecology have long been interconnected, even if the language of "environmental ethics" is relatively new. Ancient scriptures and traditions consistently present the natural world as a divine creation, worthy of respect, care, and reverence. In Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the cosmos is not seen as accidental but as the work of God, imbued with meaning. Thus, ecological responsibility cannot be separated from religious ethics; rather, it is seen as part of obedience to God.

Religion as Foundation for Ecological Awareness

The modern field of "religion and ecology" was pioneered by thinkers like Lynn White Jr., who argued that Western religious traditions shaped humanity's relationship with nature. In his famous essay "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" (1967), he wrote:

"What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny that is, by religion."[4]

---

[2]Leopold, Aldo. A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There. New York: Oxford University Press, 1949.

[3]Næss, Arne. "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary." Inquiry 16, no. 1 (1973): 95–100.

[4]White, Lynn. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis." Science 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203–1207.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.03 No.03 (2025)

White argued that religious worldviews deeply influence ecological behavior. For instance, biblical notions of "dominion" were often misinterpreted as license for exploitation, but these same scriptures also emphasize stewardship and responsibility. His essay sparked decades of scholarship exploring how Judaism, Christianity, and Islam provide theological resources for addressing ecological crises.

Scriptural Example

The Hebrew Bible emphasizes the sacredness of creation. In the Psalms, creation is depicted as praising God:

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork." [5]

This verse demonstrates how nature itself is seen as a testimony to God. Ecology, in this view, is not merely about resources but about recognizing creation as a medium of divine revelation. Thus, religion provides not only prohibitions or laws but also spiritual motivation for environmental responsibility.

The Importance of Comparative Study of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

Studying Judaism, Christianity, and Islam together is essential for understanding environmental ethics in a comprehensive way. As the three major Abrahamic faiths, they share a monotheistic worldview, belief in divine creation, and the concept of human stewardship. Yet, they interpret these ideas in diverse ways. A comparative approach reveals both common ground and distinctive emphases, which is vital for interfaith dialogue on global ecological issues.

Shared Abrahamic Perspectives

All three traditions see humans as trustees rather than owners of the earth. The Qur'an, for instance, emphasizes khilāfah (stewardship):

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً [6]

"And when your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed, I will make upon the earth a vicegerent.'" [7]

The concept of khalīfah implies responsibility, not exploitation. Humanity is charged with maintaining balance (mīzān) in the created order, a theme echoed in Jewish and Christian teachings of stewardship.

Similarly, in Christianity, Pope Francis in his encyclical Laudato Si' (2015) stressed the universality of ecological responsibility:

"The earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor. We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth."[8]

Here, the Pope connects biblical creation theology ("dust of the earth," Gen. 2:7) with ecological ethics. This reinforces the shared scriptural foundation across Abrahamic traditions for environmental care.

Value of Comparative Approach

By studying these three religions together, scholars and practitioners can identify:

- Common theological bases for ecological stewardship.
- Differences in interpretation that may enrich dialogue.

[5]The Holy Bible, King James Version. New York: American Bible Society, 1999, Psalm 19:1.

[6]البقرة 2:30

[7]The Qur'an. Translated by Saheeh International. Riyadh: Dar Abul-Qasim, 1997, 2:30.

[8]Francis. Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.03 No.02 (2025)

- Opportunities for collaboration in interfaith environmental initiatives.

Comparative study thus provides both an academic framework and a practical platform for addressing one of the most urgent issues of our time: the global ecological crisis.

Foundations of Environmental Responsibility in Judaism

Biblical Concepts of Creation and Stewardship

In Judaism, environmental responsibility is deeply rooted in the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh), particularly within the Torah (the Five Books of Moses). The Jewish tradition does not perceive creation as a random occurrence but rather as the deliberate act of God, who entrusted humankind with the responsibility to care for and preserve the natural world. This theological foundation provides the ethical framework for Jewish environmental thought. The central ideas of creation (bereshit) and stewardship (shomrei adamah guardianship of the earth) form the basis of Jewish ecological ethics.

The narrative of Genesis (Bereshit) offers two primary accounts of creation that establish humanity's relationship with the environment:

(1) the dominion mandate ("fill the earth and subdue it")

(2) the stewardship mandate ("to till and to keep it").

While at first glance these passages may appear contradictory, rabbinic interpretations emphasize that dominion does not mean exploitation but responsible guardianship.

The Biblical Text of Creation

The Torah begins with the majestic account of creation in Genesis 1, which sets the stage for understanding the divine order of nature and the role of humanity:

"So God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" [9]

This passage establishes the unique role of human beings as bearers of the divine image (tzelem Elohim). The command to "subdue" (kivshuha) and "have dominion" (ur'du) has historically been misinterpreted as a license for exploitation. However, Jewish exegetical tradition clarifies that dominion is not arbitrary power but a sacred trust to manage creation responsibly. As the medieval commentator Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, 1040–1105) notes, if humanity acts justly, they rule over creation, but if they corrupt the earth, they fall beneath the animals in moral stature.

"If he merits, he rules over the beasts and cattle; if not, he will become subjugated before them[10]".

This interpretation aligns with the notion that human beings are stewards rather than exploiters, charged with maintaining the balance of creation.

Stewardship in the Garden of Eden

The second account of creation in Genesis 2 provides a complementary vision of humanity's relationship with the environment:

Translation:

"The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to till it and to keep it." [11]

Here, the Hebrew verbs le'ovdah (to till/serve) and le'shomrah (to keep/guard) are crucial. The

[9]Genesis 1:27–28

[10]Rashi, Commentary on Genesis 1:26

[11]Genesis 2:15

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.03 No.03 (2025)

dual responsibility implies both productive use of the land and its protection. Jewish environmental ethics thus emerge from this tension between use and preservation. The rabbinic tradition interprets this as humanity's obligation to serve as caretakers (shomrei adamah) of God's creation.

" When you use the powers of nature, regard them as divine gifts to be employed, never for your own careless or wanton self-indulgence, but for wise and noble purposes[12]".

Balancing Dominion and Stewardship

The two creation accounts together reflect a dialectical balance: humanity is called to exercise authority over creation but within the framework of service and care. Dominion is therefore conditional—rooted in righteousness and obedience to God. This understanding rejects anthropocentrism in favor of theocentrism, where creation belongs to God, and humans act as custodians.

As the Psalmist declares:

" The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it."
[13]

This psalm establishes that ultimate ownership of the earth lies with God, and humanity merely functions as tenants or caretakers. This perspective creates a theological foundation for environmental ethics in Judaism, where ecological responsibility is viewed as a religious obligation rather than a secular concern.

Halakhic Perspectives on Ecology

The Halakhah (Jewish law) is not merely a legal system but a comprehensive framework that encompasses ritual, ethics, and the regulation of human interaction with the natural world. Environmental responsibility in Judaism is codified through Halakhic principles, especially those related to land use, agricultural practice, conservation, and the prohibition of waste (bal tashchit). These laws demonstrate that ecological awareness is not a modern addition to Judaism but has always been embedded in the religious legal tradition.

The Principle of Bal Tashchit (Do Not Destroy)

One of the most significant Halakhic principles regarding ecology is bal tashchit, derived from Deuteronomy 20:19–20, where the Torah prohibits the destruction of fruit trees during wartime.

Translation:

"When you besiege a city for a long time, making war against it in order to capture it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them. You may eat from them, but you shall not cut them down. For is the tree of the field a man, that it should be besieged by you?" [14]

The rabbis expanded this verse far beyond the context of warfare, establishing a general prohibition against wasteful destruction of natural resources. Maimonides (Rambam, 1138–1204) codified this principle in his Mishneh Torah:

"Not only trees, but anyone who breaks utensils, tears clothing, demolishes a building, stops up a spring, or destroys food in a destructive manner transgresses

[12]Hirsch, Samson Raphael. The Nineteen Letters. Translated by Bernard Drachman. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1899, 57.

[13]Alter, Robert. The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007, 82.

[14]Deuteronomy 20:19

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR

the command of bal tashchit[15]".

The Sabbatical and Jubilee Years

Halakhah also enshrines ecological balance through the Sabbatical year (Shemittah) and Jubilee year (Yovel). Every seventh year, the land must lie fallow, and its produce is left for the poor and animals (Leviticus 25:4–7). This legal framework prevents overexploitation of the soil and teaches that land belongs ultimately to God.

"But in the seventh year the land shall have a complete rest, a sabbath for the Lord; you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard." [16]

Tikkun Olam (Repairing the World) and Environmental Ethics

The concept of Tikkun Olam ("repairing the world") has become central to Jewish ethical thought and is increasingly applied to environmental issues. Rooted in rabbinic literature and later developed in Lurianic Kabbalah, Tikkun Olam reflects the belief that human beings are co-partners with God in restoring and perfecting creation. While originally spiritual and social in meaning, in modern Jewish thought it has been extended to include ecological repair, emphasizing responsibility to heal the damaged natural world.

Rabbinic Origins of Tikkun Olam

The earliest use of the term appears in the Mishnah (Gittin 4:2), where certain rabbinic decrees are instituted "mipnei tikkun ha-olam" ("for the sake of repairing the world"). Though initially a legal principle, the broader ethical implications became clear in later Jewish philosophy.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks interprets Tikkun Olam as a universal mandate to sustain justice, peace, and environmental harmony:

"To be a Jew is to be summoned to responsibility, not only for one's own people but for the world, to mend its fractures and heal its wounds[17]".

Kabbalistic Expansion: Humanity as Co-Creator

In the Lurianic Kabbalistic tradition (16th century), Tikkun Olam is linked to the mystical doctrine of shevirat ha-kelim ("the shattering of the vessels"). Creation was fractured, and humanity's ethical and spiritual acts participate in its repair. Applied ecologically, this implies that environmental degradation is a cosmic rupture that must be healed through responsible stewardship.Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935), the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Palestine, connected Tikkun Olam to ecological duty:

"The more that holiness spreads through the world, the more the majesty of nature is revealed, and the more humanity is called to protect it[18]".

Modern Application: Environmental Tikkun

In contemporary Jewish thought, Tikkun Olam has become synonymous with eco-justice. Jewish environmental organizations such as Hazon and The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) explicitly use the language of Tikkun Olam to frame ecological activism as a religious duty.Thus, Tikkun Olam transforms ecology into a spiritual mission: the act of planting trees, conserving water, and preventing climate change are understood as fulfilling the covenant with God by repairing creation.

---

[15]Maimonides. Mishneh Torah: Laws of Kings and Their Wars. Translated by Eliyahu Touger. New York: Moznaim Publishing, 1987, 212.

[16]Milgrom, Jacob. Leviticus 23–27: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary. Anchor Bible Commentary, vol. 3B. New York: Doubleday, 2001, 2158.

[17]Sacks, Jonathan. To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility. New York: Schocken Books, 2005, 89.

[18]Kook, Abraham Isaac. Orot HaKodesh. Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1964, vol. 2, 452.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.03 No.03 (2025)

Environmental Responsibility in Christianity

Genesis and the Idea of Dominion vs. Stewardship

Christian thought on environmental responsibility originates in the Book of Genesis, where humanity's relationship with the natural world is defined. Two crucial terms in Genesis 1:28 — "subdue) "Hebrew –kivshuha (and "have dominion) "Hebrew – וּרְדוּ :urdu — (have generated centuries of theological debate. Did God grant humans absolute dominion, legitimizing the exploitation of nature, or a form of stewardship, where humans are caretakers of creation?

The question became especially pressing in modern times, when Christian teachings were implicated in the rise of industrial exploitation of the earth. In 1967, historian Lynn White Jr. famously argued that Christianity bore the "historical guilt" for the ecological crisis by fostering a dominion-based worldview. Yet, many Christian theologians countered that stewardship, not domination, is the authentic biblical teaching.

The Biblical Foundation: Genesis 1:26–28

"Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram: et praesit piscibus maris, et volatilibus caeli, et bestiis universae terrae. et benedixit illis Deus, et ait: Crescite, et multiplicamini, et replete terram, et subicite eam, et dominamini piscibus maris, et volatilibus caeli, et universis animantibus quae moventur super terram." [19]

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth"'.The Latin terms subicite ("subdue") and dominamini ("have dominion") appear forceful, suggesting mastery and control. Early Christian interpretation often aligned this with humanity's exalted status in creation. However, the deeper theological issue is whether dominion is exploitative authority or responsible stewardship.

Patristic Interpretation: Dominion as Service

The Church Fathers frequently interpreted dominion as ordered responsibility rather than reckless domination. Augustine (354–430 CE) emphasized that human beings, as image-bearers of God, must reflect divine care:

"Let them have dominion… not as a tyrant lording it over his subjects, but as a father providing for his children[20]".

Medieval and Scholastic Expansion

In the medieval period, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) integrated Aristotelian philosophy with Christian theology. For Aquinas, dominion was not absolute ownership but usufruct (the right to use without destroying).

"The earth was given to man not for his sole use, but so that he may employ it for the common good of all[21]".

The Reformation and Human Authority

During the Reformation, figures like John Calvin (1509–1564) reinforced stewardship but

[19]Genesis 1:26, 28

[20]Augustine. The Literal Meaning of Genesis. Translated by John Hammond Taylor. New York: Newman Press, 1982, 1:26.

[21]Aquinas, Thomas. Summa Theologiae. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947, II-II, q.66, a.1, 354.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR

emphasized human accountability before God. Calvin argued that humans are tenants on God's land:

"Let him who possesses a field, so partake of its yearly fruits, that he may not suffer the ground to be injured by his negligence, but let him endeavor to hand it down to posterity as he received it, or even better cultivated[22]".

Modern Criticism and Reinterpretation

In the 20th century, Lynn White Jr. provocatively argued that Christianity's dominion doctrine was the "most anthropocentric religion" and thus responsible for the ecological crisis:

"Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen by destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference[23]".

This critique provoked a wave of ecological theology in Christianity. Modern theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann and Pope Francis reinterpret Genesis as a mandate for stewardship, not domination.

For example, Pope Francis in Laudato Si' (2015) insists:

"We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us. Our dominion over the universe should be understood in the sense of responsible stewardship[24]".

The Genesis account has been interpreted in two opposing ways:

- As dominion, legitimizing human-centered exploitation.
- As stewardship, requiring responsible care for God's creation.

From Augustine to Pope Francis, the mainstream Christian tradition increasingly emphasizes stewardship as the authentic interpretation. Thus, Christianity provides not only theological justification for ecological care but also resources to critique destructive interpretations that have fueled environmental crises.

Qur'anic Teachings on Nature as Ayat (Signs)

Islamic thought places a profound emphasis on the relationship between humanity, God, and nature. In the Qur'an, the natural world is consistently referred to as a set of ayat signs of God's creative power and ongoing providence. This framing suggests that the environment is not a neutral background for human activity but a sacred text that reveals divine wisdom. Thus, ecological responsibility in Islam is rooted in reverence for God's creation and the ethical imperative to preserve it.

Nature as Revelation

The Qur'an describes the heavens, the earth, and all living beings as signs (ayat) pointing to God's existence and attributes. One striking passage declares:

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لَآيَاتٍ لِأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ[25]

"Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding."

This verse establishes the cosmos as a theater of divine signs. The alternation of day and night, far from being a mere physical process, is understood as a lesson for the reflective mind. In Islamic ecological thought, to neglect these signs or to exploit them irresponsibly is to fail in

[22]Calvin, John. Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis. Translated by John King. Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847, 1:28, 93.

[23]White, Lynn Jr. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis." Science 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1205.

[24]Francis. Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015, 67.

[25]Qur'an 3:190, Saheeh International

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR

recognizing their theological significance.

Another verse similarly frames all creatures as part of God's revelatory order:

وَمَا مِن دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا طَائِرٍ يَطِيرُ بِجَنَاحَيْهِ إِلَّا أُمَمٌ أَمْثَالُكُم[26]

"And there is no creature on the earth nor bird that flies with its wings but they are communities like you."

This verse is especially significant for environmental ethics. By describing animals as "communities like you," the Qur'an grants them moral and ontological dignity. Humanity is not placed outside of creation but within it, as one community among others, bound to respect the integrity of fellow creatures.

Balance and Harmony in Creation

The Qur'an also emphasizes the principle of mīzān (balance) as an ecological norm:

وَالسَّمَاءَ رَفَعَهَا وَوَضَعَ الْمِيزَانَ أَلَّا تَطْغَوْا فِي الْمِيزَانِ[27]

"And He raised the heaven and imposed the balance. That you not transgress within the balance."

This verse portrays the universe as inherently ordered by divine justice and proportion. Environmental exploitation is thus interpreted as a form of transgression (ṭughyan), violating the balance God established. Muslim scholars have read this as an ethical warning: human beings, as khalīfah (vicegerents), are responsible for maintaining this balance, not disturbing it.

The Qur'an frames nature as a repository of divine signs, urging believers to reflect upon and preserve creation. Far from endorsing an anthropocentric exploitation of resources, it places humanity within a web of communities, balanced by divine order. Environmental responsibility, then, is not an optional modern addition to Islamic thought but a foundational principle rooted in revelation itself.

The Concept of Khilafah (Stewardship)

The Qur'an introduces humanity as khalīfah (vicegerent or steward) on earth. This concept provides the foundation of Islamic environmental ethics. Khilafah implies authority, but authority conditioned by accountability to God. Humanity does not own the earth; rather, it is entrusted with its care. The ethical implications of this are profound: exploitation becomes betrayal of trust, while conservation and balance are fulfillment of divine responsibility.

Scriptural Basis

The Qur'an states:

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً[28]

"And when your Lord said to the angels: 'Indeed, I will place upon the earth a vicegerent.'"

This passage positions humanity as khalīfah a term implying stewardship. Classical exegetes such as al-Tabari (d. 923) explained this as responsibility to govern the earth with justice, not arbitrary domination. Contemporary scholars highlight that this verse redefines human identity: not as master of nature, but as servant of God entrusted with the care of creation.

Another verse underscores the accountability dimension:

ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ خَلَائِفَ فِي الْأَرْضِ مِن بَعْدِهِمْ لِنَنظُرَ كَيْفَ تَعْمَلُونَ[29]

"Then We made you successors on earth after them, so that We may see how

[26]The Qur'an. Translated by Saheeh International. Riyadh: Dar Abul-Qasim, 1997, 6:38.

[27]The Qur'an. Translated by Saheeh International. Riyadh: Dar Abul-Qasim, 1997, 55:7–8.

[28]The Qur'an. Translated by Saheeh International. Riyadh: Dar Abul-Qasim, 1997, 2:30.

[29]The Qur'an. Translated by Saheeh International. Riyadh: Dar Abul-Qasim, 1997, 10:14.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR

you act."

Here, succession (khilāfah) is tied to divine evaluation. Stewardship is not privilege but a test, placing humanity under moral scrutiny for its treatment of the environment.

Prophetic Traditions on Conservation and Balance (Mīzān)

The Qur'anic vision of balance (mīzān) is further elaborated in the Sunnah. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ emphasized moderation, care for natural resources, and respect for all creatures. These traditions demonstrate that environmental ethics is deeply rooted in Islamic spirituality, not a modern addition.

Hadith on Water Conservation

The Prophet warned against wasting water even in the act of ritual purity:

لَا تُسْرِفْ فِي الْمَاءِ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ عَلَى نَهَرٍ جَارٍ[30]

"Do not waste water, even if you are on the bank of a flowing river."

This hadith illustrates how conservation is a spiritual duty, not merely a pragmatic concern. Even in abundance, wastefulness is condemned, aligning human conduct with the principle of balance.

Hadith on Planting and Continuity of Life

The Prophet also emphasized planting trees as an act of enduring charity:

إِنْ قَامَتِ السَّاعَةُ وَفِي يَدِ أَحَدِكُم فَسِيلَةٌ فَإِنِ اسْتَطَاعَ أَنْ لَا يَقُومَ حَتَّى يَغْرِسَهَا فَلْيَغْرِسْهَا

"If the Final Hour comes while you have a sapling in your hand, and it is possible to plant it before it arrives, then you should plant it."[31]

This teaching highlights the intrinsic value of sustaining life, even in the shadow of cosmic finality. The Prophet frames ecological responsibility as a perpetual duty, reinforcing the Qur'anic notion of stewardship and balance.

Balance as an Ethical Principle

Together, these traditions affirm the Qur'anic call to maintain mīzān. They establish conservation, moderation, and renewal of life as central aspects of Islamic ethics. For Muslims, neglecting these duties is not only a social or ecological failure but also a spiritual deficiency.

Comparative Ethical Frameworks

Similarities in Abrahamic Approaches

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share a monotheistic worldview that directly informs their understanding of the natural world. Despite their differences in scripture, language, and historical experience, these traditions converge on three main principles: creation is divine, humanity is entrusted with stewardship, and balance is essential. These points of convergence provide the foundation for a comparative Abrahamic environmental ethic.

Shared Concept of Creation as Divine Work

The Hebrew Bible opens with the fundamental declaration:

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."[32]

The Qur'an echoes this affirmation:

اللَّهُ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ[33]

"Allah is the Creator of all things."

Likewise, the New Testament emphasizes divine authorship of creation:

"All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that

[30]Ibn Mājah, Muḥammad ibn Yazīd. Sunan Ibn Mājah. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2009, 1:425.

[31]Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. Cairo: Muʾassasat Qurtuba, 1993, 3:12491

[32]The Holy Bible, King James Version. New York: American Bible Society, 1999.

[33]The Qur'an. Translated by Saheeh International. Riyadh: Dar Abul-Qasim, 1997.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.03 No.03 (2025)

was made.[34]"

Together, these texts affirm that creation originates from God's deliberate will and possesses inherent meaning.

Stewardship and Responsibility

In Judaism, the principle of bal tashchit ("do not destroy") underlines environmental restraint:

"When you besiege a city for a long tim. you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them; for you may eat from them, but you shall not cut them down." [35]

Christianity similarly emphasizes responsibility. Pope John Paul II declared:

"Man has the right to a responsible use of the earth, in keeping with God's command, but he also has the duty not to destroy it[36]".

In all three cases, human beings are portrayed not as masters of creation but as trustees under divine authority.

Ethics of Balance and Moderation

وَالسَّمَاءَ رَفَعَهَا وَوَضَعَ الْمِيزَانَ أَلَّا تَطْغَوْا فِي الْمِيزَانِ[37]

"And He raised the heaven and imposed the balance, that you not transgress within the balance."

Augustine, reflecting the Christian tradition, wrote:

"For all things that exist are good, in so far as they exist, and all natural order is from God[38]".

Judaism embeds ecological moderation in the Sabbath and sabbatical year:

"But in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the Lord; you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard."[39]

All three faiths emphasize that overexploitation is a spiritual transgression, and moderation is a divine command.

The Abrahamic religions thus converge on an integrated vision: creation as divine gift, humanity as steward, and balance as a moral imperative. These commonalities not only highlight shared theological roots but also create the basis for joint interfaith responses to today's ecological crisis.

Divergences in Practical Theology and Law

Although Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share broad principles of creation, stewardship, and balance, their practical applications diverge significantly. These divergences reflect differences in theological emphases, legal systems, and historical experiences.

Jewish Legal Traditions

Judaism integrates environmental ethics through halakhic law, rooted in Torah commandments. A central example is bal tashchit (the prohibition against needless destruction). As the Talmud teaches:

"Whoever breaks vessels, tears clothes, demolishes a building, stops up a spring, or destroys food in a destructive manner transgresses the command 'You shall

[34]The Holy Bible, King James Version. New York: American Bible Society, 1999.

[35]The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. Wheaton: Crossway, 2001.

[36]John Paul II. Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990.

[37]The Qur'an. Translated by Saheeh International. Riyadh: Dar Abul-Qasim, 1997.

[38]Augustine. Confessions. Translated by Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

[39]The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. Wheaton: Crossway, 2001

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.03 No.02 (2025)

not destroy.'" [40]

This legal tradition creates binding obligations, not merely moral suggestions, embedding ecological responsibility into the daily practice of Jewish life.

Christian Theology and Practice

Christianity historically emphasized dominion (Genesis 1:28) but has evolved toward stewardship, especially in modern theology. However, practical theology diverges across denominations. For example, Catholic social teaching frames ecology as part of the "universal destination of goods," while Protestant traditions often emphasize personal responsibility. Pope Francis states in Laudato Si:'

"The misuse of creation begins when we no longer recognize any higher instance than ourselves, when we see nothing else but ourselves[41]".

Unlike halakhah or Shari'ah, Christian ethics lacks a unified legal framework, relying instead on moral exhortation and ecclesial authority.

Islamic Jurisprudence (Shari'ah)

Islam grounds environmental ethics in the Qur'an and Sunnah, operationalized through fiqh rulings. The principle of khilāfah assigns humans stewardship, while maqāṣid al-sharīʿah (objectives of Islamic law) frame protection of life, property, and lineage—extended by contemporary scholars to include the environment. The Prophet ﷺ taught:

"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." [42]

Unlike Christianity's moral model, Islam, like Judaism, integrates ecological responsibility into a legal system with binding duties.The divergences show that while all three traditions value the earth, Judaism and Islam approach ecology through binding legal obligations, while Christianity emphasizes moral persuasion and theological reinterpretation.

Dialogue between Traditions on Climate Change

In the twenty-first century, the urgency of climate change has created new opportunities for interfaith dialogue. Abrahamic traditions, despite divergences, have found common ground in addressing the ecological crisis.

Interfaith Declarations

In 2015, before the Paris Climate Conference (COP21), faith leaders issued a joint statement:

"Humanity is at a turning point. We must act now, out of love for our common home, to protect the earth from further climate disruption[43]".

Such declarations represent a unification of moral voice across traditions.

Distinctive Contributions in Dialogue

Judaism often stresses justice (tzedek) in addressing climate impacts, highlighting the disproportionate suffering of vulnerable populations. Christianity emphasizes the theology of creation care, with Pope Francis's Laudato Si' framing climate action as a universal moral duty. Islam contributes its holistic perspective of mīzān (balance) and amana (trust), urging humanity to honor its trusteeship. The Qur'an declares:

إِنَّا عَرَضْنَا الْأَمَانَةَ عَلَى السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ[44]

---

[40]The Babylonian Talmud. Translated by Isidore Epstein. London: Soncino Press, 1935.

[41]Francis. Laudato Si' (On Care for Our Common Home). Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015.

[42]Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl. Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī. Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Salafiyya, 1908.

[43]Interfaith Declaration on Climate Change. Presented at COP21, Paris, 2015.

[44]The Qur'an. Translated by Saheeh International. Riyadh: Dar Abul-Qasim, 1997.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.03 No.03 (2025)

"Indeed, We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth"

Each faith thus contributes a unique moral vocabulary, enriching interfaith climate ethics. Dialogue on climate change demonstrates both the shared urgency and the diverse theological contributions of Abrahamic religions. This collaboration suggests that despite doctrinal differences, these traditions can unite in practical action to safeguard the planet.

Contemporary Applications

Interfaith Initiatives on Environmental Responsibility

In recent decades, the environmental crisis has become a central arena for interfaith collaboration. Unlike earlier centuries, where Abrahamic traditions largely operated independently in their theological discourses, the urgency of climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecological degradation has fostered cooperative efforts among Jewish, Christian, and Muslim leaders. These initiatives demonstrate not only shared moral concerns but also the practical potential of religion as a force for ecological responsibility in global society.

Global Interfaith Declarations

One of the most influential initiatives was the Assisi Declarations on Nature (1986), convened by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), where leaders from Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism articulated their ecological responsibilities. The Muslim declaration affirmed:

"Unity, trusteeship and accountability, that is tawḥīd, khilāfah, and akhira, the three central concepts of Islam, unite Muslims in their environmental ethos. They constitute the basic values taught by the Qur'an. Together, they form a comprehensive worldview which can make Muslims conscious of their responsibilities to Allah in relation to the whole of creation[45]".

This initiative marked one of the earliest collective statements where religious traditions explicitly linked their doctrines with modern ecological responsibility.

Jewish Christian Muslim Collaboration

In more recent years, the Interfaith Declaration on Climate Change (2009) brought Jewish, Christian, and Muslim leaders together, particularly in preparation for the Copenhagen Climate Summit (COP15). The declaration affirmed:

"We call on all people of faith to recognize that climate change is not only a scientific or economic issue but a moral and spiritual challenge. It is our duty as stewards of the earth, guided by our religious traditions, to protect creation for future generations"[46].

By framing climate change as a moral issue, this declaration allowed faith communities to transcend theological differences and address a common planetary threat.

Case Study: Islamic-Christian Dialogue in the Middle East

A regional example is the collaboration between the Muslim Council of Britain and the Church of England on sustainable living campaigns. Joint statements emphasized shared responsibilities, drawing on both Qur'anic and Biblical mandates for stewardship. These efforts not only highlight environmental ethics but also contribute to peacebuilding, as cooperative ecological work fosters dialogue in regions historically marked by religious conflict.

Academic and NGO Collaborations

Interfaith initiatives have also been institutionalized through NGOs such as the Alliance of

[45]Islamic Declaration on Nature." In The Assisi Declarations: Messages on Man and Nature from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism, edited by Prince Philip, 85–92. Oxford: WWF, 1986.

[46]Interfaith Declaration on Climate Change. London: Interfaith Climate Initiative, 2009.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.03 No.02 (2025)

Religions and Conservation (ARC), founded in 1995. ARC has partnered with Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities to implement sustainable development programs, from eco-mosques and green churches to kosher and halal organic farming. These programs demonstrate how theological principles can inform practical sustainability models.

Interfaith initiatives reveal that environmental ethics provides a rare platform where theological differences give way to shared action. The urgency of the climate crisis compels Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to cooperate, grounding ecological activism in their spiritual values. By doing so, they not only preserve the environment but also model pathways of peaceful coexistence and shared responsibility in a fractured world.

Policy Influence of Religious Ethics on Global Environmentalism

The global environmental movement has historically been driven by scientific research, economic modeling, and political negotiation. Yet, in recent decades, the moral authority of religion has played a growing role in shaping both public opinion and international policy. The Abrahamic traditions Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have been particularly influential in reframing ecological concerns not merely as technical issues but as urgent moral imperatives.

Religious Influence in International Forums

Religious leaders have increasingly participated in global policy dialogues. For example, before the 2015 Paris Climate Conference (COP21), Pope Francis released Laudato Si', which shifted the conversation by urging policymakers to treat climate change as a moral and ethical concern rather than simply an economic challenge. He wrote:

"A global consensus is essential for confronting the deeper problems, which cannot be resolved by unilateral actions on the part of individual countries. Such a consensus could lead, for example, to planning a sustainable and diversified agriculture, developing renewable and less polluting forms of energy, encouraging a more efficient use of energy, promoting a better management of marine and forest resources, and ensuring universal access to drinking water[47]".

The encyclical influenced not only Catholic communities but also secular policymakers, many of whom cited it in debates leading up to the Paris Agreement.

Islamic and Jewish Policy Engagement

Similarly, in 2015, Muslim scholars and leaders issued the Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change, calling upon governments to commit to a rapid phase-out of fossil fuels and transition to renewable energy. The declaration emphasized humanity's role as khalīfah (stewards), urging policymakers to ground their decisions in justice (ʿadl) and balance (mīzān). Jewish organizations, such as the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL), have also worked with U.S. policymakers to push for sustainable energy legislation, framing environmental protection as an expression of tikkun olam (repairing the world).

Through encyclicals, declarations, and advocacy groups, religious ethics have begun to influence global policymaking, ensuring that environmental debates are not only technical but also moral, binding humanity to responsibilities that transcend national borders.

Prospects for Future Cooperation

Looking forward, the question is whether Judaism, Christianity, and Islam can sustain and deepen their cooperation on environmental issues. While theological differences remain, the ecological crisis provides a rare platform for unity, where shared ethical principles can outweigh historical divisions.

Theological Common Ground

All three traditions affirm that creation is sacred, entrusted to humanity, and must be preserved

[47]Francis. Laudato Si' (On Care for Our Common Home). Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015, 164.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.03 No.03 (2025)

in balance. This theological convergence provides a durable foundation for ongoing interfaith collaboration. The Qur'an's insistence on mīzān (balance), the Biblical principle of stewardship, and Christian reinterpretations of dominion as responsibility create overlapping frameworks that can be mobilized for future joint action.

Institutional and Grassroots Opportunities

Future cooperation could focus on:

- Joint Faith-Based NGOs: Expanding initiatives like the Alliance of Religions and Conservation to include more localized interfaith projects.
- Policy Partnerships: Coordinated lobbying by Jewish, Christian, and Muslim groups in international forums such as the United Nations.
- Grassroots Movements: Eco-mosques, green synagogues, and Christian climate action networks creating shared projects in renewable energy, water conservation, and sustainable agriculture.

Hopeful Vision

An interfaith statement from the 2021 Faith and Science Towards COP26 meeting in Rome summarized this prospect:

"Future generations will never forgive us if we miss the opportunity to protect our common home. We have inherited a garden; we must not leave a desert to our children[48]".

The future of interfaith cooperation on environmental issues lies in integrating theological commitments with practical initiatives, ensuring that religious ethics inform both grassroots activism and global policy. If successful, Abrahamic traditions may provide the moral and spiritual leadership required to confront one of the greatest challenges of the modern era.

Summary

This study investigates how Judaism, Christianity, and Islam conceptualize and practice environmental responsibility and ethics. Each of these Abrahamic faiths draws on its sacred texts and traditions to guide human interaction with the natural world.

In Judaism, ecological ethics are grounded in the Torah and rabbinic law, particularly through principles like bal tashchit (avoiding waste and destruction) and tikkun olam (repairing the world). These ideas frame environmental care as a religious duty rather than a mere social concern.

Christianity has historically emphasized human dominion over creation, but modern theology increasingly highlights stewardship, urging believers to see themselves as caretakers of God's creation. Documents such as Pope Francis's Laudato Si' underline the moral urgency of addressing climate change and ecological degradation.

In Islam, the Qur'an and Hadith emphasize balance (mīzān), stewardship (khilāfah), and trust (amānah). Humanity is portrayed as God's trustee on earth, obligated to preserve natural resources and avoid corruption of the environment.

The article also explores comparative insights, interfaith dialogue, and practical initiatives where these traditions converge in shaping global environmental policies. It concludes that despite theological differences, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam offer complementary ethical frameworks that can foster meaningful cooperation in confronting today's ecological challenges.

[48]Faith and Science: Towards COP26." Joint Appeal of Religious Leaders and Scientists. Vatican City: October 4, 2021.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR

Bibliography

1. Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl. Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī. Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Salafiyya, 1998.
2. Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL). Environmental Resources and Policy Engagement. New York: COEJL, 2014.
3. Epstein, Isidore, trans. The Babylonian Talmud. London: Soncino Press, 1935.
4. Francis. Laudato Si' (On Care for Our Common Home). Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015.
5. "Faith and Science: Towards COP26. Joint Appeal of Religious Leaders and Scientists." Vatican City: October 4, 2021.
6. "Interfaith Declaration on Climate Change." London: Interfaith Climate Initiative, 2009.
7. "Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change." Istanbul: International Islamic Climate Change Symposium, 2015.
8. "Islamic Declaration on Nature." In The Assisi Declarations: Messages on Man and Nature from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism, edited by Prince Philip, 85–92. Oxford: WWF, 1986.
9. The Qur'an. Translated by Saheeh International. Riyadh: Dar Abul-Qasim, 1997.