



Ecotheology Based Religious Moderation: A Study of Indonesia's Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (IRI)

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Abstract:

*The contemporary global ecological crisis reflects not only environmental degradation but also a spiritual and epistemological rupture that has desacralized nature. This study aims to analyze the integration of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's ecotheological thought with the values of religious moderation in the interfaith movement of the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (IRI) Indonesia. Employing a qualitative approach with document based thematic analysis, this study examines official reports, policy statements, and institutional publications of IRI Indonesia. The analytical framework is constructed from Nasr's core concepts *tawhid*, *amanah*, *khalifah fi al-ard*, *mizan*, critique of the desacralization of nature, and sacred science integrated with the principles of religious moderation promoted by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs. The findings indicate that IRI Indonesia consistently frames forests as a sacred trust and operationalizes this notion through interfaith collaboration in education, advocacy, and science-informed conservation practices. Although the integration of science and religion within IRI remains predominantly ethical and pragmatic rather than fully ontological as envisioned by Nasr, this approach has proven effective in building moral legitimacy, strengthening interfaith solidarity, and enhancing public participation in forest conservation. This study concludes that the synthesis of Nasr's ecotheology and religious moderation offers a viable operational paradigm for faith-based environmental movements in plural societies.*

Keywords: *Islamic Ecotheology, Religious Moderation, Interfaith Movement, Forest Conservation*

INTRODUCTION

The global ecological crisis of this century poses a real threat to the sustainability of life on earth. The modern ecological crisis is characterized by increasing environmental damage resulting from human activities that disrupt ecosystem balance. Ironically, despite the signs of environmental degradation, human ecological awareness remains low.¹ The global climate crisis caused by human activities is not just an ecological problem, but a reflection of man's spiritual disconnection from the cosmic order. The destruction of nature in the global region reflects the loss of relational consciousness among man, nature, and the Divine. Therefore, efforts to save the environment cannot be solved by technology or policy alone, but rather demand a reconstruction of spiritual consciousness that places humans within a sacred network of life.² Human freedom towards nature is not an absolute right, but a mandate that is limited by the principle of *mīzān* (balance) and the prohibition of *israf* (excess). When humans go beyond these limits, they not only damage ecosystems but also violate the moral and spiritual order of creation.³

Contemporary discourse on the environment confirms that religion is increasingly recognized as a source of moral and spiritual knowledge, capable of complementing the scientific approach to the global ecological crisis. The concept of ecotheology emerged as a form of theological reflection that combines faith, ethics, and ecological responsibility, aiming to restore the sacred relationship between man and nature. Ecotheology emphasizes that preserving nature is an integration of human religious and moral obedience to the creator. Seyyed Hossein Nasr is the central figure who highlights the importance of reviving spiritual awareness of nature. Nasr believes that the modern environmental crisis is rooted in a worldview that has shifted the orientation of knowledge towards secularism and removed the spiritual dimension from the cosmos, so that humans view nature only as a material object to be exploited. For Nasr, the recovery of the ecological crisis must begin with the reconstruction of the Islamic metaphysical view that places humans as caliphs responsible for maintaining the balance of creation.⁴ Ecotheology is now evolving into a cross-tradition spiritual paradigm that affirms religion's role as a moral and transformative basis for building

¹ Saad Saood Safdar and Ghulam Shams-ur-Rehman, "The Roots of the Ecological Crisis in the Theological and Philosophical Landscape of Modern Civilization: An Analysis of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Perspective," *Islamic Studies* 60, no. 3 (September 2021): 287–308, <https://doi.org/10.52541/isiri.v60i3.1847>.

² Anna Kirkpatrick-Jung and Tanya Riches, "Towards East Asian Ecotheologies of Climate Crisis," *Religions* 11, no. 7 (July 2020): 341, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11070341>.

³ Muhammad Muhammad et al., "Freedom That Is Not Absolute: Ecological Ethics and Human-Nature Relationship in the Qur'an," *Studia Ecologiae et Bioethicae* 22, no. 4 (July 2024): 17–27, <https://doi.org/10.21697/seb.5821>.

⁴ Afrizal Nur et al., "Qur'anic Ecotheology and the Ethics of Forest Protection in Indonesia," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 26, no. 2 (July 2025): 351–82, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v26i2.6312>.

humanity's ecological consciousness.⁵ Thus, ecotheology functions not only as a theoretical discourse but also as an ethical and spiritual framework, seeking to restore harmony among humans, the universe, and God.⁶

Religious moderation offers a relevant conceptual framework for an ecotheological perspective because it provides a foundation for interfaith dialogue that emphasizes balance, tolerance, and justice as a public ethics, directing religious people toward collective ecological responsibility. In the context of an environmental crisis rooted in modern spiritual and epistemological problems, as Seyyed Hossein Nasr criticizes, religious moderation serves as a social space that allows for the resanctification of nature and the reintegration of spiritual values and scientific knowledge. This framework of moderation aligns with the Nasr principle of cosmic trust and unity, positioning religion as a moral source that encourages collaborative ecological action across religious traditions. A moderate religious approach can increase public acceptance of environmental policies and strengthen the spiritual legitimacy for conservation actions.⁷ At the same time, the study of Islamic ecotheology confirms that ecological spirituality can function effectively only when integrated into an inclusive social praxis involving various religious actors.⁸

Indonesia, with its religious plurality, has an ecotheology grounded in Islamic traditions that also resonates with the theologies of other religions that equally emphasize the sanctity of nature. In Christianity, creation theology holds that the preservation of the earth is a human moral mandate.⁹ Hinduism teaches the principle of *Tri Hita Karana*, which means harmony among humans, nature, and God, and serves as the ethical foundation for ecological behavior.¹⁰ Buddhist traditions emphasize *ahimsa* and the interconnectedness of all beings, so caring for the environment is understood as a form of

⁵ M Lutfi Mustofa, M Fauzan Zenrif, and Ahmad Barizi, "Towards an Islamic Ecotheology: Indonesian Muslim Organizations in Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Efforts," *Problemy Ekorożwoju* 20, no. 2 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.35784/preko.5431.7089>.

⁶ Yustinus Andi Muda, "Ecotheology Menurut Seyyed Hossein Nasr dan Sallie McFague," *Jurnal Teologi* 09, no. 01 (May 2020): 69–84, <https://doi.org/10.24071/jt.v9i01.2040>.

⁷ Wasil Wasil and Muizudin Muizudin, "Ekoteologi dalam Menyikapi Krisis Ekologi di Indonesia Perspektif Seyyed Hossein Nasr," *Refleksi* 22, no. 1 (October 2023), <https://doi.org/10.15408/ref.v22i1.31403>.

⁸ Mustofa, Zenrif, and Barizi, "Towards an Islamic Ecotheology: Indonesian Muslim Organizations in Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Efforts."

⁹ Suryani Suryani, Nur Fitriyana, and Nugroho Nugroho, "Eco Theology from a Christian Perspective (A Study of Verses on Environmental Conservation)," *LITERACY: International Scientific Journals of Social, Education, Humanities* 4, no. 3 (September 2025): 279–85, <https://doi.org/10.56910/literacy.v4i3.3125>.

¹⁰ Sukirno Hadi Raharjo, Siti Utami Dewi Ningrum, and Faizal Akhmad Adi Masbukhin, "Harmoni Manusia, Alam, dan Tuhan dalam Praktik Tri Hita Karana pada Pendidikan Lingkungan Hidup di Desa Krisik," *Jurnal Penelitian Agama Hindu* 9, no. 1 (January 2025): 57–70, <https://doi.org/10.37329/jpah.v9i1.3521>.

universal compassion.¹¹ Meanwhile, the cosmology of Indonesia's indigenous peoples views land, forests, and water as sacred entities, guarded by customary laws and spiritual rites.¹² This theological spectrum shows that every religious tradition has a moral framework compatible with environmental conservation, thus providing a conceptual foundation for the birth of cross-faith ecological action, as developed by the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative Indonesia.

Nasr's idea of ecotheology does not stop at metaphysics alone, but opens up space for socio-religious practices that place spirituality at the basis of ecological ethics. Awareness of tauhidyyah, which affirms the unity of God, humanity, and nature, is the moral foundation for contemporary religious movements seeking to restore sacred meaning in the relationship between humans and the environment. This principle finds its praxis form through a religious moderation approach that emphasizes balance, justice, and interfaith moral responsibility in maintaining the sustainability of creation. The concept of religious moderation developed by the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia emphasizes four main indicators: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and acceptance of local wisdom as the foundation for building a harmonious and ecologically just religious life. The value of religious moderation not only encourages interfaith social harmony but also serves as an ethical foundation for environmental concern.¹³ This approach finds concrete form in Indonesia's Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (IRI). This interfaith alliance seeks to provide spiritual leadership in protecting Indonesia's forests, which are among the world's lungs and are now facing a serious threat from deforestation. The collaboration between Interfaith Rainforest Initiative Indonesia and leaders of Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Indigenous Peoples emphasizes that nature conservation is a matter of the sanctity of life that transcends religious boundaries. This movement is clear evidence that religious moderation in Indonesia can be translated into collective action across faiths to maintain ecological sustainability and strengthen spiritual solidarity in the face of the global environmental crisis.¹⁴

Seyyed Hossein Nasr's ecotheology research is still dominated by philosophical and normative approaches that focus on the critique of modernity, the desacralization of nature, and the spiritual crisis of modern

¹¹ Pratama Yudha Pradheksa et al., "Environmental Ethics in the Spiritual Perspective of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam: Aligning Roles and Finding Intersecting Paths," *Peradaban Journal of Religion and Society* 2, no. 2 (July 2023): 122–35, <https://doi.org/10.59001/pjrs.v2i2.93>.

¹² A Maksun et al., "Ecotheology: Environmental Ethical View in Water Spring Protection," *Ethics in Science and Environmental Politics* 23 (June 2023): 23–33, <https://doi.org/10.3354/esep00205>.

¹³ Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Moderasi beragama*, Cetakan pertama (Jakarta: Badan Litbang dan Diklat, Kementerian Agama RI, 2019).

¹⁴ Interfaith Rainforest Initiative, *Faiths for Forests Declaration and Action Agenda* (Oslo: Interfaith Rainforest Initiative, 2019), <https://www.interfaithrainforest.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Faiths-for-forests-declaration.pdf>

humans, with little attention to the dimensions of interfaith social praxis.¹⁵ Meanwhile, research on religious moderation in Indonesia, developed by the Indonesian Ministry of Religion, highlights socio-political issues such as tolerance, national commitment, and the prevention of extremism, but has not linked them to ecological issues or environmental conservation. On the other hand, Islamic ecotheological studies in Indonesia are generally limited to intra-religious contexts, for example, within Islamic organizations such as NU, Muhammadiyah, and Islamic boarding schools, without addressing the dynamics of interfaith cooperation in addressing ecological crises.¹⁶ Until now, no research has been found that integrates Nasr's ecotheology with the value of religious moderation in the context of interfaith movements such as the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative Indonesia, which is a real space for spiritual collaboration and ecological action across religions. Therefore, this research aims to fill a theoretical and empirical gap by advancing a new paradigm for the dialogue among spirituality, ecology, and religious moderation in Indonesia.

This study aims to analyze the integration of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's ecotheological concept with the values of religious moderation in the context of the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative Indonesia, focusing on efforts to create synergy between Islamic ecological spirituality and interfaith collaboration in environmental conservation. Theoretically, this research contributes to synthesizing the relationship between Nasr's ecological spirituality and the social ethics of religious moderation, expanding the meaning of Islamic theology towards interfaith social practices. In contrast, this research offers a collaborative paradigm for interfaith movements and environmental policies grounded in spiritual values oriented towards ecological justice and sustainability. At the global level, this study enriches the discourse on faith-based sustainability by affirming that cross-faith spiritual harmony can be an ethical basis for social peace and ecological sustainability in a pluralistic society.

METHOD

This research is qualitative and uses a document-based thematic analysis approach. The research analytical framework is built on Seyyed Hossein Nasr's thought, which is operationalized into a set of thematic codes. The Codes were compiled by integrating the concept of Nasr ecotheology and the values of religious moderation formulated by the Ministry of Religion of

¹⁵ Safdar and Shams-ur-Rehman, "The Roots of the Ecological Crisis in the Theological and Philosophical Landscape of Modern Civilization."

¹⁶ Hendy Setiawan, Nanang Indra Kurniawan, and Purwo Santoso, "Ecotheological Movement of the Muhammadiyah Environmental Council in Response to the Environmental Governance Crisis," *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies*, October 13, 2022, 639–70, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol21.iss3.art2>.

the Republic of Indonesia, and by contextualizing them with the practice of the Indonesian Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (IRI).

The main source of data for this research is official documents of the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative Indonesia, including program reports, attitude statements, activity narratives, and institutional publications, which can be accessed through the IRI Indonesia website (<https://iri-indonesia.org/>). The documents were chosen because they represent the institutional position and cross-faith collaborative practice on forest and environmental conservation issues in Indonesia.

Data analysis was conducted using a combination of deductive and inductive approaches. The deductive approach is used by referring to the conceptual category of Nasr's ecotheology as the initial framework for data encoding. Meanwhile, an inductive approach is used to interpret thematic patterns that emerge empirically from IRI documents and activity reports. This process enables an analytical dialogue between theory and field data, resulting in a conceptual synthesis of Nasr's ecological spirituality, the ethics of religious moderation, and interfaith collaborative praxis in the context of contemporary Indonesian ecology.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretically, this study uses five main focuses of Nasr's thought as the basis for analysis. First, the concept of the desacralization of nature as the root of the modern ecological crisis, and Nasr's criticism of the reductionistic paradigm of modern science. Second, the principle of monotheism or divine unity that views nature as God's verses and part of the sacred cosmic order. Third, the idea of sacred science, namely the need for science based on metaphysical and ethical dimensions, not mere instrumental rationality. Fourth, the concept of trust and caliph *fi al-ard* as the basis of human moral responsibility towards nature. Fifth, the concept of *mīzān* (balance) as a normative limit to human exploitation and domination over the environment. These five concepts serve as analytical criteria for assessing the resonance between normative narratives and ecological practices carried out by IRI Indonesia, as well as for identifying potential gaps between theological discourse and praxis.

Nasr's thoughts in this study serve not only as a theoretical foundation for the literature review but also as an operational framework for the data analysis. This approach is in line with Nasr's view that the recovery of ecological crises requires a return to the sacred dimension in science and ethics, so that ecotheological theory is treated as a tool of critical analysis of contemporary socio-religious practices.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Profile and Context of the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (IRI) Indonesia

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative Indonesia is an extension of IRI's international initiative. This multi-faith alliance aims to bring together religious moral authority to stop and reverse tropical deforestation, in collaboration with indigenous peoples, non-governmental organizations, government agencies, and the private sector, to protect forests. IRI Indonesia operates three main lines of intervention: first, education, such as faith toolkits, issue primers, and debriefing modules for religious leaders to increase ecological awareness; second, advocacy, which engages in efforts to influence public policy and encourage deforestation-free practices in the supply chain; and third. Policy is IRI's effort to participate in policy forums and to support the recognition of customary rights as a framework for achieving practical impact. IRI's faith-based actions are grounded in the theological claim that forests are sacred trusts that demand interfaith moral obligations, combined with scientific evidence on forests' roles in carbon storage, biodiversity, and water cycle regulation. The Principles set by IRI Indonesia are then integrated with the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples and alignment with national and international policy frameworks. In practice, IRI Indonesia translates these sacred narratives and scientific foundations into concrete programs, such as field visits, planting activities, and dialogue between religious leaders and indigenous communities, as mechanisms to transform moral legitimacy into measurable, contextually relevant collective action.¹⁷

The conservation model carried out by IRI Indonesia is interesting because it is not based solely on scientific data but also on the integration of ecotheological framings from various faith traditions as a moral and practical basis for forest protection. This faith-based approach aligns with the global trend, in which faith-based organizations actively promote environmental conservation by integrating theological teachings with ecological actions at the community level, as evidenced by systematic studies of their contributions to environmental sustainability. The involvement of interfaith organizations can expand the reach and legitimacy of conservation actions by combining religious values with concrete sustainability strategies, such as advocacy and community-based mobilization.¹⁸ In line with that, the concept of interfaith in Indonesia highlights a moral common ground in environmental management, where various religious traditions emphasize human responsibility for nature as part of their normative teachings. These findings confirm that IRI not only

¹⁷ Interfaith Rainforest Initiative, *Country Primer: Indonesia* (Oslo/Jakarta: Interfaith Rainforest Initiative & United Nations Environment Programme, 2019), <https://www.interfaithrainforest.org/>.

¹⁸ Hamza Khan, Sana Ullah, and Rimsha Sarwar, "Faith Based Organizations, Environmental Conservation and Sustainability: A Systematic Review," *Research Mosaic* 5, no. 1 (2025).

brings faith communities together for interfaith dialogue, but also translates those theological values into concrete action of tropical forest conservation.

The uniqueness of the interfaith ecotheology operated by IRI also lies in its ability to connect sacred teachings with scientific data, so that forest conservation is understood not only as a rational action, but also as a form of spiritual devotion. The approach reinforces the findings of recent studies demonstrating the effectiveness of sanctity-based protection practices for maintaining biodiversity and local conservation behaviors, thereby enabling sacred discourse to serve as a social regulatory mechanism that complements scientific interventions.¹⁹ In addition, field studies in the Asian context show that local spiritual and customary institutions can achieve sustainable resource management when religious values are articulated as community obligations.²⁰ This approach is consistent with analyses that map the role of religion in conservation, including the collaborative practices of religious leaders and interfaith communities, which show that the moral legitimacy resulting from religious narratives strengthens social mobilization and acceptance of sustainability practices on the ground.²¹ By treating forests as a shared sacred trust, IRI establishes a moral common ground that increases ecological solidarity and makes conservation a collective religious mandate, thereby making IRI not only an advocacy program but also a social laboratory of cross-traditional ecotheological practices in the plural context of Indonesia.

Analysis of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Theory and Religious Moderation

Seyyed Hossein Nasr emphasized that the root of the modern ecological crisis is not just the physical degradation of the environment, but a manifestation of the spiritual and epistemological crisis of modern humans who view nature instrumentally. Modern rationality that glorifies science and technology ultimately gives birth to a fragmented worldview, separating man from the source of spirituality and divine values. Nature, which was originally seen as a sign of God's power, is now reduced to an object of material exploitation without moral consciousness.²² Seyyed Hossein Nasr, in his book *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, argued that to restore the balance of the cosmos, first man must return to the principle of monotheism (divine unity) as the basis of existential unity. In Nasr's view, the concept of monotheism is not merely a theological statement about the

¹⁹ Megan K. Sullivan et al., "Sacred Forest Biodiversity Conservation: A Meta Analysis," *Conservation Science and Practice* 6, no. 1 (January 2024): e13055, <https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.13055>.

²⁰ Arief L Hakim et al., "Protected Spring and Sacred Forest Institutions at the Instrumental Relational Value Interface," *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 62, no. 101292 (June 2023): 101292, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2023.101292>.

²¹ Alexander M. Greene et al., "Linking Faith and Conservation in Sacred and Community Forests of Far Western Nepal," *Religions* 16, no. 4 (April 2025): 480, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16040480>.

²² Agung Pratama Dharma and Saldan Manufa, "Seyyed Hossein Nasr: Kritik Islam atas Sekularism Lingkungan," *El-Faqih: Jurnal Pemikiran dan Hukum Islam* 10, no. 1 (April 2024): 53–76, <https://doi.org/10.58401/faqih.v10i1.1308>.

oneness of God, but an ontological principle affirming the existential unity of God, man, and nature. Nature in the framework of Nasr does not stand as an autonomous and profane entity, but as a manifestation of the Divine presence.²³ Nasr explained that monotheism has cosmological implications, where all creation is arranged in one sacred order because it comes from one source. Thus, separating man from nature or exploiting the environment without spiritual awareness violates the principle of divine unity itself. The restoration of monotheistic consciousness means restoring the sacred view of the cosmos by seeing nature as God's verses that lead humans to spiritual knowledge, rather than merely as objects of scientific exploitation.²⁴

Second, the mandate is humans' ethical responsibility towards creation. Nasr's thought contains a strong moral message, in which humans are not only ecologically but also theologically responsible. Nature is a reflection of monotheism, the unity of reality that unites God, humans, and the universe. All forms of destruction of nature are, in essence, a violation of the principle of divine unity. This concept reinforces the value of trust, in which human beings, as caliphs *fi al-ard*, bear the responsibility of maintaining balance and harmony in life.²⁵ Third, *mīzān* is the principle of universal balance, as well as the revival of sacred science, both grounded in metaphysical and spiritual values. *Mīzān* is a moral law that guides humans to act proportionately and not exceed limits in the use of natural resources. This principle forms the foundation of Islamic ecotheology that rejects overexploitation and calls for a spiritually civilized ecological lifestyle.²⁶ This perspective is equivalent to the cross-religious view held by almost all major religious traditions, which holds that balance and harmony are the highest spiritual principles in the relationship between man and nature. The concept of *mīzān* is not only a typical theological concept in Islam, but it also resonates with the universal values of various religions, which both call for cosmic order and moral responsibility towards nature. These findings indicate that the spirit of *mīzān* and sacred science can serve as a cross-faith epistemological bridge, uniting

²³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1990).

²⁴ Muizudin and Syaiful Azmi, "Ekoteologi Islam dan Hindu pada Alih Fungsi Hutan: Telaah Pemikiran Seyyed Hossein Nasr dan Vandana Shiva," *Inklusiva: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 1, no. 1 (December 2023): 87–104, <https://doi.org/10.15408/ijssaa.v1i1.41394>.

²⁵ Mustofa, Zenrif, and Barizi, "Towards an Islamic Ecotheology: Indonesian Muslim Organizations in Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Efforts."

²⁶ Jeffry Anggara and Mohammad Izdiyan Muttaqin, "Toward a Sustainable Future Integrating Hossein Nasr's Environmental Ethics into Islamic Environmentalism," in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Strategic and Global Studies (ICSGS 2024)*, vol. 33, ed. Ibrahim Kholilul Rohman et al., Atlantis Highlights in Social Sciences, Education and Humanities (Dordrecht: Atlantis Press International BV, 2025), 557–67, https://doi.org/10.2991/978-94-6463-646-8_33.

science, spirituality, and ethics within the framework of global conservation grounded in divine consciousness.²⁷

Seyyed Hossein Nasr views the way out of this crisis as the revitalization of sacred consciousness in science, or what he calls sacred science. Sacred science does not reject modern science, but returns it to the dimensions of values, ethics, and transcendence. True knowledge must lead man to recognize the presence of God in every structure of creation, not just master it. Nasr calls for a reintegration of science, ethics, and spirituality, in which every scientific and social activity should be directed toward maintaining cosmic balance.²⁸ This thinking is an important foundation for reading the interfaith social reality in Indonesia. The integration of spiritual and social values is key to building a sustainable interfaith ecological movement. The concepts of monotheism, trust, and *mīzān* in Nasr's ecotheology have a strong alignment with the values of religious moderation as formulated by the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, including balance (*tawassuṭ*), tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*), and justice (*'adālah*). Therefore, Nasr's thought not only provides a theological basis for ecological awareness but also opens space for interfaith dialogue to build ecological and spiritual harmony in a pluralistic society.

Tawheed and the Narrative of the Sanctity of Nature

The sacred narrative carried by IRI Indonesia has a deep theological significance when read within the framework of Islamic ecotheology as developed by Seyyed Hossein Nasr. The essence of Nasr's thought lies in the principle of monotheism, which holds that God, man, and nature are ontologically unified. This perspective illustrates that all reality is a manifestation of the Divine, so the exploitation of nature amounts to denying that unity.²⁹ Nasr places all existing reality as a manifestation of the Divine existence, in which God is not separate from nature, but is present in every dimension of existence. This awareness of the unity of form enables humans to go beyond the modern anthropocentric paradigm and view ecological action as ontological worship, preserving the Divine reflection in creation.³⁰ This view aligns with IRI's theological language, which states that "Indonesia's forests are a sacred trust", underscoring that forests are not merely economic resources but a spiritual mandate that must be maintained. To understand

²⁷ Lalu Pattimura Farhan and Prosmala Hadisaputra, "Responses of Religions Outside of Islam toward the Ecological Crisis: A Literature Review," *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies*, July 15, 2022, 411–32, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol21.iss2.art4>.

²⁸ Dharma and Manufa, "Seyyed Hossein Nasr."

²⁹ Anggara and Muttaqin, "Toward a Sustainable Future Integrating Hossein Nasr's Environmental Ethics into Islamic Environmentalism."

³⁰ Rüdiger Lohker, "Islamic Ecotheology: Transcending Anthropocentrism through Wahdat al-Wujūd," *Ascarya: Journal of Islamic Science, Culture, and Social Studies* 4, no. 2 (November 2024): 82–89, <https://doi.org/10.53754/iscs.v4i2.705>.

how interfaith movements view the preservation of tropical forests, it is important to review the sacred narratives used by IRI Indonesia. The Faiths for Forests Declaration and Action Agenda document states that "Indonesia's forests are a sacred trust" and that tropical forests are "an irreplaceable gift essential to life on Earth".³¹

Sacred language, such as sacred trust, places forests not only as a resource, but as a divine trust. Nasr emphasized that the ecological crisis that occurred was rooted in a spiritual crisis when modern humans viewed nature anthropocentrically, detached it from the Divine order, and treated rivers or forests only as objects of use. Humans have "forgotten the presence of God in nature," so exploitative behavior towards the environment becomes a form of denial of monotheism itself.³² IRI interprets forests as sacred trusts, operationalized through interfaith collaborative movements to preserve them as a form of spiritual obedience.

The awareness of monotheism does not stop at the theological level; it must be manifested in ecological behavioral changes. Spiritual transformation towards a simple lifestyle and moral responsibility towards nature is important to be undertaken as an actual manifestation of faith. This perspective gives a praxis dimension to IRI's narrative, framing the sacredness of forests not only as a religious symbol but also as a moral foundation that moves interfaith communities to act to maintain the balance of nature as a manifestation of servitude to God.³³ Therefore, when IRI uses a spiritual-moral narrative, it reflects Nasr's idea that modern humans must restore a spiritual awareness of nature that has been secularized by modernity. The implications of the narrative do not stop at a purely symbolic or theological level. The sacred framing serves as a moral basis for policy advocacy and concrete action in forest protection, making nature conservation a shared religious responsibility that mobilizes religious leaders and interfaith communities. One example is IRI Indonesia's activities, which organize training for religious leaders in East Kalimantan, linking forest status to climate change, indigenous peoples' rights, and the theological basis of conservation actions.³⁴

This approach shows how spirituality serves as the basis for socio-ecological ethics, fostering interreligious solidarity in efforts to mitigate ecological crises. This spiritually based approach has the power to mobilize

³¹ Interfaith Rainforest Initiative, *Faiths for Forests Declaration and Action Agenda*.

³² Fradiv Mochammad Sulthan Rafly, Muhlas Muhlas, and Munir Munir, "Analisis Teologi Lingkungan Seyyed Hossein Nasr Terhadap Krisis Air di Masyarakat Batujaya Karawang," *Jurnal Riset Agama* 2, no. 3 (December 2022): 36–49, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jra.v2i3.18278>.

³³ Md. Abu Sayem, "Eco-Religious Teachings and Environmental Sustainability: An Analysis of Workability of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's 'Eco-Spirituality' in the Context of Bangladesh," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no. 3 (November 2021): 69–83, <https://doi.org/10.55831/ajis.v6i3.357>.

³⁴ Interfaith Rainforest Initiative, "IRI Country Program Launched in Indonesia," *Interfaith Rainforest Initiative*, 2020, <https://www.interfaithrainforest.org/2020/02/01/iri-country-program-launched-in-indonesia/>.

moral action by involving religious authority in building the community's ecological consciousness. They show that religious organizations in Indonesia have great potential to instill ecological awareness through the principles of caliphate fil ard and moral responsibility towards nature. An Islamic ecotheological paradigm that can unite the theological, ethical, and praxis dimensions of environmental sustainability in Indonesia. The principles of monotheism and the sanctity of nature can serve as a "universal language" that brings together interfaith communities in environmental advocacy.³⁵

The use of sacred narratives by IRI Indonesia has direct implications for advocacy practices and the formation of public awareness. Theological language, such as "Indonesia's forests are a sacred trust," serves as a moral framing that affirms forest protection as a spiritual responsibility rather than just an administrative policy. This framing broadens the base of social participation, as leaders and faith communities are more likely to accept religious messages than technocratic jargon. Spiritual values can effectively mobilize moral support for religion-based ecological movements. IRI Indonesia, through this narrative, seeks to build ethical legitimacy for environmental policy advocacy, strengthen cooperation between religious institutions and the state, and foster a cross-faith moral consensus that protecting forests means maintaining the sanctity of life.³⁶

The Concept of Trust and the Caliph as Moral Responsibility

The Islamic paradigm holds that human beings are not rulers but guardians and holders of the divine mandate to preserve the balance of creation. This principle is implemented in real life in various IRI programs, such as the Religious Leaders Training in East Kalimantan (2021), which involves Islamic, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and traditional leaders. This training aims to link religious messages to the issues of climate change and the rights of indigenous peoples, while integrating theology and climate science modules into a single learning framework.³⁷ The module affirms that the caliph's duty is not only to protect nature as a resource, but also to regard it as a form of spiritual obedience to God and as a matter of respect for His creation. As a follow-up, IRI developed religious toolkits or issue primers for various religions, including the Islamic Toolkit and the Protestant Toolkit, which contain sermon guides, prayers, and teaching materials that place

³⁵ Taufik Hidayatulloh et al., "Eco-Theology in Islamic Thought: Religious Moderation and Organizational Roles in Mining Management in Indonesia," *Progresiva : Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Pendidikan Islam* 13, no. 03 (December 2024): 379–92, <https://doi.org/10.22219/progresiva.v13i03.37102>.

³⁶ Hidayatulloh et al., "Eco-Theology in Islamic Thought."

³⁷ Interfaith Rainforest Initiative Indonesia, *Religious Leaders Training – East Kalimantan: Building Faith-Based Leadership for Climate and Indigenous Rights* (Jakarta: Interfaith Rainforest Initiative Indonesia, 2021), <https://www.interfaithrainforest.org/2021/04/09/iri-indonesia-launches-new-provincial-chapter-in-east-kalimantan/>.

ecological mandates at the center of community teaching and decision-making.³⁸ The toolkit explicitly links scripture verses to scientific data on deforestation, land degradation, and carbon, thereby lending religious messages scientific legitimacy.

The form of interfaith collaboration affirmed in the Interfaith Commitment Statement on Forest Protection (2023), which states that "protecting the tropical forests is a moral responsibility shared by all faiths," indicates an agreement that forest protection is a shared spiritual responsibility.³⁹ This IRI approach has conceptual similarities with the ecotheological practices of local communities in Batu, East Java, as studied by Maksum and Sopyan (2023) in their study on the protection of Umbul Gemulo spring water sources. In this context, the principle of trust also serves as a spiritual and social foundation, leading people to protect water as God's trust rather than just an economic asset. The collective actions of citizens who maintain the balance of nature through religious rituals and social action demonstrate how trust can be an ecological ethic born of the group's spiritual consciousness. The findings strengthen the argument that trust is transformative, motivating individual behavior and building collective moral solidarity that resembles the cross-faith pattern developed by IRI.⁴⁰

The caliphate and the mandate in Islam must be understood in a non-anthropocentric way, namely as an expression of divine mercy and justice towards all creatures, not as a justification for human domination over nature. The modern ecological crisis is rooted in the spiritual and epistemological crisis of modern man, who has separated himself from the Divine order and lost the monotheistic awareness that nature is a manifestation of God. The meaning of the caliph, who is restored as God's representative by imitating His love and balance, seeks to call for a spiritual reconstruction of the Islamic environmental ethics.⁴¹ This perspective enriches the meaning of IRI praxis, because efforts to operationalize the mandate through interfaith training and educational toolkits align with the caliphate's theological vision: human responsibility born of awareness of the sanctity of creation, not merely a social moral impulse.

In the global context, similar dynamics are also evident in the García-García (2024) study, which shows that in various European countries, faith

³⁸ Interfaith Rainforest Initiative Indonesia, *Islamic Toolkit and Protestant Toolkit for Tropical Forest Protection* (Jakarta: Interfaith Rainforest Initiative Indonesia, 2023a), https://www.interfaithrainforest.org/s/Interfaith_Islam.pdf.

³⁹ Interfaith Rainforest Initiative Indonesia, *Interfaith Commitment Statement on Forest Protection* (Jakarta: Interfaith Rainforest Initiative Indonesia, 2023b), <https://www.interfaithrainforest.org/s/declarations/declaration-iri-indonesia-en.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Maksum et al., "Ecotheology."

⁴¹ Bianka Speidl, "Emergence of a Shi'ī Islamic Environmental Paradigm: Legal and Ethical Considerations," *Journal of Islamic Ethics*, March 28, 2025, 1–33, <https://doi.org/10.1163/24685542-20250003>.

and spiritual commitment play a significant role in encouraging environmentally friendly behaviors, especially in energy conservation and climate awareness.⁴² Although its expression varies between religious traditions, the general pattern suggests that religious values serve as the moral compass that shapes public ecological behavior. The findings strengthen IRI Indonesia's position that amanah and caliph can serve as a universal moral language that bridges science and spirituality in addressing climate change. By making responsibility for creation a form of interfaith worship, IRI presents ecotheological practices aligned with global trends in religious involvement in energy and climate policy.

The translation of the values of Amanah and the caliph in these activities shows a strong pattern of religious moderation, both theologically, epistemologically, and socially. Theologically, IRI reinterprets religious texts and symbols regarding the trust and care for the earth within a framework of universal values acceptable to all religions, thereby avoiding doctrinal dominance. The values of tasamuh (tolerance), tawazun (balance), and i'tidal (justice) are expressed through interfaith cooperation, making religion a common moral foundation rather than a source of division. Epistemologically, moderation is a feature of IRI's integrative method, which brings science and religion together without negating either. Scientific data on climate and biodiversity do not replace theological teachings, but enrich their meaning. This approach represents the epistemology of moderation, which is a balance between empirical knowledge and spiritual awareness. Meanwhile, socially, IRI's religious moderation is realized through interfaith and ethnic encounters, such as training with religious leaders, traditional leaders, and academics who affirm that protecting nature is a collective moral duty of mankind.

The concept of Trust in IRI practice serves as an ethical basis that guides religious actions towards concrete ecological action. Amanah is understood not only as an individual moral responsibility but also as a collective spiritual mandate inherent in man's position as the guardian of creation. Amanah is a bridge between the normative dimension of religion and ecological action based on scientific evidence. Religious leaders are not only invited to understand deforestation and carbon data, but also to reinterpret religious duties as a responsibility to maintain the balance of nature. This view is in line with Seyyed Hossein Nasr's framework, which places humans as beings who receive the cosmic mandate from God, namely the responsibility to recognize and preserve the order of nature as a reflection

⁴² Pablo García-García, "Faith, Climate, and Energy Frugality: Unravelling the Nexus in European Perspectives," *Studia Ecologiae et Bioethicae* 22, no. 3 (August 2024): 41–56, <https://doi.org/10.21697/seb.5812>.

of the Divine order.⁴³ However, Nasr emphasized that the mandate does not stop at the ethical level but is metaphysical. Man bears an epistemological responsibility to know nature not solely for the sake of exploitation or conservation, but to recognize the essence of the purity of existence (tawḥīd al-wujūd) manifested in it.⁴⁴

IRI articulates Amanah as a moral value that guides socio-religious actions in protecting the environment. Nasr interprets it further as a spiritual consciousness that restores man's ontological relationship with nature. This difference shows two layers of Amanah ethics: IRI operationalizes it as a basis for cross-faith praxis and collective action, while Nasr sees it as the foundation of sacred knowledge that connects man, nature, and God in a complete cosmic unity. Thus, the differences between IRI and Nasr are not contradictory, but complementary. IRI presents Amanah as a social ethics and collective praxis that encourages interfaith action to protect nature. At the same time, Nasr situates it at a metaphysical level as man's sacred awareness of his connection to God and the cosmos. The two meet at the same point: ecological responsibility rooted in the spiritual dimension of humans, so that the concept of Amanah can be understood as both a transcendent value and an ethical principle that leads to concrete action in environmental conservation.

Sacred Science in the Practice of IRI Indonesia

Various documents and activities carried out by IRI Indonesia explicitly demonstrate efforts to integrate scientific knowledge and spiritual values in environmental advocacy. This unifying element is evident in the structure of IRI's teaching materials and toolkit that links ecological terminology, such as carbon, biodiversity, and deforestation, using religious narratives of trust, ecological sin, and moral responsibility for creation. The integration shows that scientific data is not treated as an autonomous entity, but as an instrument that acquires ethical legitimacy through a theological framework. Such an approach aligns with Seyyed Hossein Nasr's concept of sacred science, grounded in metaphysical awareness and spiritual principles, and views science as a pathway to knowledge of the Divine.⁴⁵

Nasr's view aligns with IRI's view that science is a partner of spirituality rather than a rival. IRI Indonesia through the guidance of sermons based on ecological data, the use of scientific terms in religious fatwas such as GHG or carbon emissions as in MUI Fatwa No. 86/2023, as well as dialogue forums between scientists, BRIN researchers, and religious leaders conceptually seek to uphold an epistemological model that Nasr calls the unity of knowledge. That is, the unity between scientific rationality and transcendent

⁴³ Sayyid Hossein Nasr, *Religion & the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁴⁴ Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*.

⁴⁵ Nasr, *Religion & the Order of Nature*.

consciousness. The experience of nature is not only scientific, but also spiritual. The beauty and order of nature are forms of God's revelation that foster man's religious awareness of creation. Nature is not only an object of scientific study, but also a space of spiritual contemplation that reveals God's love and wisdom.⁴⁶

This elaboration expands the meaning of Nasr's sacred science in the context of IRI, because IRI's approach, which teaches religious leaders to view forests as a divine mandate, aligns with efforts to restore a sense of wonder, love, and respect for nature. Thus, the integration of IRI into scientific data and spiritual value can be read as a form of aesthetic, ethical, sacred science, in which ecological knowledge is directed toward reviving awareness of the beauty and sanctity of nature as a reflection of the Divine presence. IRI's approach reflects the so-called Islamization of the natural sciences through the framework of Islamic cosmology. Islam has an epistemological tradition that places nature as an open book that must be read with a scientific and spiritual perspective. Islamic cosmology does not separate empirical observation and metaphysical consciousness, but rather directs science to find divine order in the order of creation. The reintegration of scientific knowledge and spiritual values carried out by IRI can be understood as a praxis manifestation of Qur'anic cosmology, as a step towards a science inseparable from the values of monotheism and sacred consciousness. This approach not only connects science and religion in an ethical dimension but also implies an epistemological reorientation as idealized by Nasr.⁴⁷

Although IRI Indonesia has succeeded in integrating spiritual values into the scientific framework through interfaith guidance, religious fatwas, and forums of scientists and religious leaders, this form of integration still operates at the ethical and pragmatic level, not yet at the ontological level as Seyyed Hossein Nasr referred to in the concept of sacred science. Epistemologically, the IRI initiative blends scientific data with religious moral teachings to encourage civilized ecological behavior, but has not yet positioned nature as a sacred reality reflecting *tajalli*, or Divine manifestation. Seyyed Hossein Nasr argues that these limitations are a consequence of the modern social system, which demands cross-sectoral collaboration in which religion often functions as an ethical framework for science rather than an ontological basis.⁴⁸ However, such an approach is important to build a bridge between spiritual

⁴⁶ Lisanne D. Winslow, "An Ecospirituality of Nature's Beauty: A Hopeful Conversation in the Current Climate Crisis," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 79, no. 2 (June 2023), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i2.8420>.

⁴⁷ Muhammad Fiqih Cholidi and Safiya Fadlulah, "Cosmology in Islam, Constructing Islamization of Nature Science," *Jurnal Al-Dustur* 5, no. 1 (June 2022): 126–47, <https://doi.org/10.30863/jad.v5i1.2572>.

⁴⁸ Md. Abu Sayem, "Religions and Environmental Sustainability: Focusing on Some Practical Approaches by John B. Cobb Jr. and Seyyed Hossein Nasr," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no. 1 (January 2021): 65–80, <https://doi.org/10.55831/ajis.v6i1.265>.

awareness and public policy. This perspective clarifies IRI Indonesia's position: their integrative model, although not completely metaphysical, remains an effective strategy for restoring sacred values to the social and scientific realms through interfaith ethics and ecological collaboration.

Science that is oriented towards the sacredness demands a metaphysical reorientation, i.e., returning all scientific activities to the consciousness of the unity of existence (*tawḥīd al-wujūd*), Islam and Environmental Ethics,⁴⁹ while the practice of IRI still functions as the ethical framing of science, where religion gives moral direction to science without changing its ontological foundations. This condition can be understood because IRI operates within modern institutions and public advocacy that demand cross-sectoral collaboration, thereby emphasizing movement toward educational efficiency and effectiveness rather than metaphysical contemplation. Therefore, the IRI integration model is more accurately read as a form of combining moral and spiritual values with science to build the ethical legitimacy of conservation rather than as an effort to reconstruct the paradigm of knowledge as idealized by Nasr. Nevertheless, in contemporary Indonesia, where religion plays a significant social role in shaping public consciousness, this IRI strategy is a potential transformative step towards the revival of the praxis of sacred science.

Mīzān (Balance) in Ecological Practice

The normative force of Islam, which maintains cosmic balance, can be seen not only as theological rhetoric in IRI Indonesia's discourse but also as a driver of concrete ecological practices. Empirical evidence shows that the discourse of balance is translated into three types of practical interventions, namely immersion visits to customary forests to study sustainable management practices, such as the IRI's visit to the Kasepuhan Karang Customary Forest in February 2024. During the visit, IRI emphasized the importance of management based on local wisdom and the maintenance of the ecosystem's functions. The second is restoration and planting actions involving faith communities and indigenous peoples, such as the Forest and Climate Youth Leadership Camp, June 2024 planting activities, and planting seedlings during field visits. The action represents a concrete form of commitment to maintaining ecological balance, and the third is cross-stakeholder forums, such as the IRI National Conference 2024 and the training of houses of worship facilitators, which will be held from September to October 2024. The forum produces action plans and operational guidance materials to implement sustainable practices at the community level. The theoretical perspective holds that these initiatives align with Nasr's claim that *mīzān* should serve as the ethical basis for setting limits on the exploitation of

⁴⁹ Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*.

nature. Nasr rejected the logic of infinite utilization and encouraged a pattern of knowledge that respected divine order in creatio.⁵⁰ Mīzān, from the perspective of Islamic ecotheology, is understood not only as an ecological balance but also as a spiritual reflection of the tauḥīd principle, affirming the connection between God, man, and nature. When this balance is broken, not only is nature disturbed, but also the spiritual order of man. Thus, ecological actions, such as those carried out by IRI, not only have practical value but also actualize monotheistic consciousness that maintains cosmic harmony, as guided by Islamic teachings.⁵¹

Within the framework of religious moderation formulated by the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, the value of mīzān occupies a central position as an ethical principle that upholds proportionality in thinking and acting, including in responding to humanitarian and ecological issues.⁵² Mīzān teaches that human relations with nature should not be based on overexploitation, but must maintain a balance between the right to use and the obligation to conserve. In this context, religious moderation is not only about tolerance between people and national commitment, but also includes the ecological dimension as a form of collective moral responsibility.⁵³ Therefore, IRI Indonesia translates the narrative of balance into concrete activities such as restoration campaigns, interfaith training, and forest protection advocacy, thereby enabling these efforts to be read as the articulation of the praxis of religious moderation in the environmental field. This approach aligns with Seyyed Hossein Nasr's view that mīzān is not merely a moral value but a cosmic principle that governs the order of the universe and must be internalized in all aspects of human life.⁵⁴ Thus, integrating Islamic ecological spirituality and the values of religious moderation strengthens the moral legitimacy of the interfaith movement and opens space for the formulation of inclusive, spiritually civilized environmental policies.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that Seyyed Hossein Nasr's ecotheological thinking is highly relevant and can be practically operationalized through the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (IRI) Indonesia, which treats forests as a sacred trust grounded in the principles of monotheism, trust, caliph, mīzān, and sacred

⁵⁰ Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*.

⁵¹ Alfadhli et al., "Ekoteologi Islam: Menjelajahi Hubungan Spiritual Antara Manusia, Alam, Dan Tuhan Dalam Tradisi Islam," *Ta'wiluna: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an, Tafsir Dan Pemikiran Islam* 6, no. 1 (2025), <https://ejournal.iaifa.ac.id/index.php/>.

⁵² Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Moderasi beragama*.

⁵³ Mansur Hidayat, "Islamic Eco-Theology: Religious Narratives in the Climate Crisis in Indonesia," *Bulletin of Indonesian Islamic Studies* 2, no. 2 (December 2023): 197–212, <https://doi.org/10.51214/biis.v2i2.678>.

⁵⁴ Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*.

science. The study's findings confirm that IRI has successfully translated ecological spirituality into interfaith collective action through education, advocacy, and collaboration with indigenous peoples, thereby demonstrating the integration of spiritual awareness, religious moderation, ethics, and evidence-based conservation practices. Although IRI's integration of science and religion still operates mainly at the ethical and pragmatic levels, it has not fully reached the ontological dimension of sacred science as formulated by Nasr. This approach has proven effective in building moral legitimacy, expanding public participation, and strengthening interfaith solidarity in forest conservation. Operationally, this study recommends strengthening the framework of interfaith ecotheology in environmental policy, the development of religious-based ecological education modules that are more metaphysically reflective, and expanding collaboration between religious leaders, scientists, and policymakers so that environmental conservation in Indonesia is not only technocratically oriented but also rooted in sustainable spiritual awareness and collective ethics.

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