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Interfaith Responses to Climate Justice: Ethical Frameworks Across Religious Traditions

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ABSTRACT

Climate change has generated extensive scientific and policy responses; however, the ethical dimensions of climate justice across religious traditions remain insufficiently systematized in comparative scholarship. Existing studies often examine single traditions or lack a structured interfaith analytical framework, leaving a clear gap in understanding shared and divergent moral foundations across religions. This study addresses this gap through a qualitative comparative interfaith analysis of four major world religions Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. The research employs systematic textual analysis of primary religious scriptures, doctrinal interpretations, and international interfaith climate declarations. A thematic coding approach is used to identify and compare key ethical constructs, including stewardship, justice, responsibility, and protection of vulnerable populations. The findings reveal both normative convergence particularly in principles of environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and intergenerational justice and theologically grounded divergences that shape distinct ethical interpretations. The study's primary contribution lies in developing a structured comparative framework for interfaith climate ethics, advancing the field beyond descriptive analyses toward a more integrated and analytically rigorous model. This framework provides a foundation for incorporating religious ethical perspectives into global climate justice discourse and policy engagement, demonstrating the relevance of interfaith moral consensus in addressing contemporary environmental challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Climate change is increasingly recognized not only as an environmental and scientific challenge but also as a profound ethical issue with global and local implications. Climate justice emphasizes the fair distribution of climate-related burdens and responsibilities, particularly highlighting the disproportionate impacts on vulnerable communities and developing nations (Schlosberg, 2013). Beyond technical and policy-oriented interventions, addressing climate change requires normative guidance that can direct human behavior, prioritize the protection of affected populations, and ensure intergenerational equity (Gardiner, 2011). Ethical frameworks offer a lens through which the moral dimensions of climate change can be understood, interpreted, and operationalized, complementing the legal, political, and economic dimensions of climate action.

Religious traditions have historically shaped moral and ethical discourses, influencing individual behavior, social norms, and institutional policies. Across the globe, religions such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism articulate responsibilities toward the natural world, emphasizing stewardship, care for creation, and moral obligations toward others (Tucker & Grim, 2001). These ethical teachings can provide normative guidance for climate action, offering motivations rooted in moral duty, sacred obligation, and intergenerational responsibility. Interfaith collaborations increasingly highlight the shared ethical potential of religious communities to influence climate governance and sustainability initiatives (GreenFaith, 2020). By examining these religious ethical

frameworks, scholars and policymakers can identify shared moral principles that may inform both local and international climate strategies.

Problem Statement

Although considerable research explores religion and environmental ethics, most studies focus on individual religious traditions or local initiatives, limiting understanding of cross-traditional ethical frameworks that could guide global climate justice (Gardner, 2019). Existing scholarship often emphasizes advocacy or descriptive accounts, leaving a gap in systematic comparative analysis of moral principles across religions (Pope Francis, 2015; Swearer, 2015). Without such comparative studies, opportunities to derive globally coherent ethical imperatives and interfaith collaborative strategies remain underutilized. There is therefore a critical need to examine how different religious traditions articulate moral responsibilities toward climate justice, identify areas of convergence and divergence, and evaluate their potential to inform ethical, policy-oriented solutions to climate challenges.

Research Questions

To address this gap, the present study focuses on the following research questions:

1. What ethical principles do major religions articulate regarding climate justice?
2. How do interfaith ethical frameworks converge and diverge in their guidance for climate action?
3. What normative insights can these traditions jointly

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offer for global climate governance and policy?

These questions guide a comparative analysis that systematically evaluates religious teachings, doctrinal interpretations, and interfaith declarations to provide a structured framework connecting ethical theory with practical environmental governance.

Significance

This study contributes to both theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective, it enriches the field of religious ethics by providing a comparative interfaith framework that synthesizes moral principles across traditions, offering insights into the philosophical and normative underpinnings of climate justice (Tucker & Grim, 2001; Gardiner, 2011). By situating religious ethical principles in conversation with contemporary global environmental challenges, the research advances scholarship on how moral philosophies can be operationalized in practical decision-making contexts.

From a policy perspective, the study provides actionable insights for interfaith climate initiatives and global governance structures. Identifying shared ethical imperatives, such as stewardship of creation, care for the vulnerable, and intergenerational responsibility, can facilitate cross-cultural dialogue, inform international environmental agreements, and strengthen moral legitimacy in climate policies (GreenFaith, 2020). Moreover, understanding divergences in ethical priorities allows policymakers to tailor strategies to specific cultural or religious contexts, enhancing the effectiveness and acceptability of climate interventions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Religion and Environmental Ethics

Religion has long functioned as a foundational source of moral authority, shaping ethical norms that govern human–nature relationships. Scholarly work in religion and ecology demonstrates that religious traditions do not merely offer spiritual interpretations of nature but also articulate moral obligations regarding environmental care, restraint, and responsibility (Tucker & Grim, 2001). These ethical frameworks are increasingly examined as normative resources for responding to contemporary ecological crises, including climate change.

Within Christian thought, environmental ethics are often articulated through the concept of stewardship, rooted in biblical injunctions to “tend and keep” the Earth (Genesis 2:15). While early critiques most notably White’s (1967) argument that Christian anthropocentrism contributed to ecological degradation sparked debate, subsequent scholarship has shown that Christian theology contains strong countervailing traditions emphasizing humility, care for creation, and moral accountability (Hitzhusen, 2007; Bouma-Prediger, 2001). Contemporary eco-theology reframes stewardship not as domination but as responsible guardianship, positioning environmental protection as a moral and spiritual duty.

Islamic environmental ethics similarly emphasize human responsibility toward nature through the concepts of khalifa (vicegerency or stewardship) and mizan (balance). Humans are understood as trustees of God’s creation, morally bound to maintain ecological balance and prevent corruption (fasad) on Earth (Foltz, 2006; Dinar, 2012). Islamic scholarship highlights that environmental harm constitutes not only ecological damage but also ethical and social injustice, thereby linking ecological responsibility with broader moral and legal accountability.

Dharmic traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism contribute distinct yet complementary ethical perspectives. Hindu environmental thought, grounded in dharma and the sacredness of nature, emphasizes cosmic interconnectedness and reverence for all forms of life (Narayanan, 2018). Buddhism, through principles such as ahimsa (non-harm), compassion, and interdependence (pratītyasamutpāda), promotes ethical conduct that minimizes suffering across human and non-human realms (Swearer, 2015). These traditions offer non-anthropocentric ethical frameworks that challenge instrumental approaches to nature and support sustainable ecological relations.

Despite this rich body of work, much of the literature remains tradition-specific, focusing on internal theological debates rather than cross-traditional ethical synthesis. As a result, the broader relevance of religious environmental ethics for global climate justice remains insufficiently theorized.

Eco-Theology and Faith-Based Environmental Action

Eco-theology and religion–environment studies have emerged as important interdisciplinary fields linking theological reflection with environmental activism. Scholars argue that religious worldviews can motivate pro-environmental behavior by providing moral meaning, ethical urgency, and collective identity that transcend purely economic or legal incentives (McFague, 2008; Hitzhusen, 2007). Faith-based environmentalism manifests through conservation initiatives, sustainable development advocacy, and climate justice movements at both local and global levels.

Organizations such as GreenFaith and interfaith climate networks illustrate how religious ethics are operationalized in practice, mobilizing communities toward ecological stewardship and policy advocacy (GreenFaith, 2020). Empirical studies suggest that faith-based engagement can enhance public legitimacy and moral commitment to climate action, particularly in societies where religious institutions retain strong social influence.

However, existing scholarship on religious environmental action tends to be descriptive or normative, emphasizing success stories and moral appeals without sufficiently interrogating how religious ethics align or conflict with established climate justice frameworks. This limits the analytical contribution of eco-theology to broader debates in environmental governance and justice.

Climate Justice Across Disciplines

Climate justice has developed as an interdisciplinary framework integrating environmental ethics, political theory, international law, and social justice. Central to climate justice are questions of equity, responsibility, and participation: who contributes to climate change, who suffers its consequences, and who has the authority to shape climate responses (Gardiner, 2011; Schlosberg, 2013).

Distributive justice focuses on the unequal allocation of climate-related harms and benefits, highlighting the disproportionate vulnerability of marginalized populations and developing countries (Roberts & Parks, 2007). Procedural justice emphasizes inclusive and transparent decision-making, ensuring that affected communities participate meaningfully in climate governance (Agyeman *et al.*, 2003). Restorative justice extends the framework further by addressing historical responsibility, compensation, ecological repair, and intergenerational obligations (Caney, 2005).

While climate justice theory is well-developed in secular ethical and legal scholarship, its engagement with religious moral traditions remains limited. Most analyses treat religion as a social or cultural variable rather than as a substantive ethical framework capable of shaping justice-oriented climate governance.

Religious Ethics and Climate Justice: Points of Intersection

Recent scholarship increasingly recognizes that religious ethical principles can reinforce climate justice norms by grounding abstract justice concepts in moral narratives of responsibility, care, and solidarity (Tucker & Grim, 2001; Gardner, 2019). Christian and Islamic stewardship ethics align closely with distributive justice by emphasizing protection of the poor, future generations, and vulnerable communities. Dharmic traditions, with their emphasis on interconnectedness and compassion, resonate strongly with restorative and procedural justice approaches that stress collective responsibility and inclusive ethical deliberation.

Despite these conceptual overlaps, existing studies rarely develop systematic frameworks that map religious ethical principles onto specific dimensions of climate justice. The absence of comparative analysis across multiple traditions further limits the theoretical integration of religion and climate justice.

Comparative Interfaith Ethics

Comparative theology and interfaith ethics provide methodological tools for analyzing moral convergence and divergence across religious traditions (Knitter, 2002; Fowler, 2014). In environmental ethics, comparative approaches help identify shared moral commitments such as care for creation, restraint, and justice while also acknowledging distinct theological foundations and ethical priorities (Swearer, 2015; Palmer & Finlay, 2018). Interfaith initiatives demonstrate the practical potential of comparative ethics, fostering collaboration across

religious boundaries in climate advocacy and sustainable development (GreenFaith, 2020). However, much of the literature remains advocacy-oriented, prioritizing consensus-building over critical ethical analysis. Divergences, tensions, and normative implications for policy design are often underexplored.

Research Gap and Theoretical Framework

This review identifies three critical gaps. First, there is a lack of systematic comparative analysis of religious ethical traditions specifically oriented toward climate justice. Second, religious environmental ethics are rarely integrated with established climate justice frameworks (distributive, procedural, restorative), limiting their policy relevance. Third, interfaith ethics literature often under-theorizes normative divergences, reducing analytical rigor. To address these gaps, this study adopts a comparative interfaith ethical framework integrating Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. The framework is structured around three analytical pillars:

1. Identification of ethical principles within each tradition relevant to ecological responsibility and justice.
2. Comparative analysis of convergences and divergences across traditions.
3. Application to climate justice theory, mapping religious ethics onto distributive, procedural, and restorative justice dimensions.

By bridging religious ethics and climate justice theory, this study advances both conceptual clarity and applied relevance, contributing a structured ethical framework for interfaith collaboration and climate governance.

Theoretical Framework

Ethics Theory

Understanding climate justice requires a robust ethical lens that integrates both religious and secular perspectives. Within this study, four core ethical concepts are central: justice, stewardship, reciprocity, and sacred obligation. Justice pertains to the equitable distribution of environmental burdens and benefits, the protection of vulnerable populations, and the responsibility of moral agents for both present and future generations (Schlosberg, 2013). Distributive justice evaluates who bears the costs and benefits of environmental change, procedural justice emphasizes participatory decision-making, and restorative justice addresses remediation of harms (Caney, 2005). These frameworks provide a secular ethical foundation that complements religious teachings by offering universal principles applicable across diverse contexts.

Stewardship denotes the moral responsibility to care for the Earth and its resources. In religious contexts, stewardship reflects the idea that humans act as caretakers of creation, guided by sacred principles. Christianity emphasizes stewardship as the divine mandate to “tend and keep” the Earth (White, 1967; Hitzhusen, 2007), while Islam similarly articulates *khalifa* (vicegerency) as a trust to maintain ecological balance (Foltz, 2006).

In Dharmic traditions, stewardship is framed through interdependence and ahimsa, emphasizing harmonious coexistence with all living beings (Swearer, 2015; Narayanan, 2018).

Reciprocity reflects the ethical principle that human actions toward the environment generate moral obligations in return. Religious doctrines encourage reciprocal care: humans have a duty to protect the Earth, which in turn sustains human life. Reciprocity also underpins intergenerational ethics, highlighting obligations to future generations (Gardiner, 2011).

Sacred obligation situates environmental ethics within the context of divine or ultimate authority, transforming ecological stewardship from a moral choice into a binding duty. Religious prescriptions across traditions convey that ethical responsibility toward creation is not optional but an essential aspect of moral and spiritual life (Tucker & Grim, 2001).

By integrating these religious concepts with secular justice theories, the study establishes a conceptual foundation to analyze climate justice as both a moral and societal responsibility. This dual approach ensures that the framework is globally relevant while grounded in rigorous ethical theory.

Comparative Ethical Methodology

To systematically evaluate religious ethical contributions to climate justice, this study employs comparative interfaith ethical analysis, combining principles from comparative theology and hermeneutics. Comparative theology facilitates understanding across religious traditions by identifying convergent and divergent ethical principles, while hermeneutics provides the methodological tools to interpret sacred texts, doctrinal writings, and interfaith declarations in their historical, cultural, and theological contexts (Fowler, 2014; Knitter, 2002).

Criteria for Selecting Traditions and Ethical Principles

1. Global significance: Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism were selected due to their wide geographic presence and influence on moral and social norms.

2. Textual richness: Each tradition possesses extensive primary sources—scriptures, doctrinal interpretations, and interfaith declarations—allowing systematic analysis.

3. Ethical relevance: Traditions were selected based on explicit teachings regarding human responsibility toward creation, social equity, and stewardship.

4. Practical applicability: Traditions included have active participation in environmental advocacy, enabling translation from theory to policy insights.

The methodological process involves:

- Identifying primary ethical directives in texts and declarations.
- Categorizing principles under stewardship, justice, reciprocity, and sacred obligation.
- Comparing across traditions to identify convergences (shared ethical imperatives) and divergences (distinct theological or moral emphases).
- Mapping these principles to climate justice outcomes, such as distributive equity, participatory governance, and ecological sustainability.

Operational Definitions

To ensure clarity, the following key terms are operationalized:

- Climate Justice: Ethical and political framework addressing the fair distribution of environmental harms and benefits, protection of vulnerable populations, and obligations to future generations (Schlosberg, 2013; Gardiner, 2011).
- Moral Agent: An individual, community, or institution capable of making ethical decisions that affect the



Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Interfaith Ethical Frameworks

environment, including humans as caretakers of creation.

- **Ecological Stewardship:** The responsibility of moral agents to protect, preserve, and sustainably manage natural resources, grounded in both religious and secular ethics.

- **Sacred Obligation:** Ethical duties derived from divine or ultimate authority, making moral responsibility a binding spiritual commitment.

- **Reciprocity:** Principle emphasizing mutual ethical obligation between humans and the environment, and across generations.

These definitions guide the analysis, ensuring that concepts from different traditions are interpreted consistently while allowing for theological specificity.

Description

Figure 1 visually represents the comparative interfaith ethical framework. The model consists of:

- Four Core Ethical Dimensions (Justice, Stewardship, Reciprocity, Sacred Obligation) as primary nodes.

- Religious Traditions (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism) mapped to each ethical dimension, illustrating shared principles (overlaps) and distinctive emphases (divergences).

- Climate Justice Outcomes positioned as the resulting node, linking ethical principles to practical implications in global governance, equity, and sustainability.

This figure communicates the conceptual integration of religious ethics and secular justice theory, providing a clear framework for subsequent methodology and analysis sections.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative, comparative, and interpretive research design to examine how major world religions articulate ethical principles relevant to climate justice. A qualitative approach is suitable because the research focuses on normative reasoning, moral values, and interpretive understanding, rather than quantifiable outcomes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The comparative dimension allows systematic evaluation across multiple traditions to identify both shared ethical imperatives and distinctive theological emphases, while the interpretive component ensures contextual understanding of textual meanings and doctrinal intent.

The methodology integrates comparative theology with hermeneutic analysis, offering a rigorous framework for interpreting sacred texts and interfaith statements. Comparative theology allows for critical engagement with religious teachings across traditions, identifying convergences and divergences in ethical principles (Fowler, 2014; Knitter, 2002). Hermeneutics ensures that textual interpretation considers historical, cultural, and linguistic contexts, allowing accurate extraction of moral directives and ethical reasoning relevant to climate justice. This dual approach ensures that the research is

both normatively informed and practically applicable for interfaith environmental initiatives.

Data Sources

Data sources were carefully selected to provide a comprehensive foundation for ethical analysis. They include primary religious texts, interfaith climate statements, and secondary scholarly analyses.

Primary Texts

Sacred scriptures and canonical writings were examined for explicit and implicit environmental ethics:

- **Christianity:** Biblical passages emphasizing stewardship (Genesis 1–2, Psalms 24) and papal encyclicals (e.g., *Laudato si'*) (White, 1967; Pope Francis, 2015).

- o **Islam:** Qur'anic verses and Hadiths addressing khalifa (stewardship) and ecological balance (Foltz, 2006; Dinar, 2012).

- **Buddhism:** Pali Canon and contemporary interpretations emphasizing ahimsa (non-harm) and interconnectedness with nature (Sweater, 2015).

- **Hinduism:** Vedic and Upanishadic texts highlighting moral duties toward creation (Narayanan, 2018).

Interfaith Climate Statements and Coalition Documents

- GreenFaith International declarations on ecological stewardship and climate ethics (GreenFaith, 2020).

- United Religions Initiative and other multi-faith environmental consensus documents, demonstrating practical implementation of ethical principles.

Secondary Scholarly Analyses

Peer-reviewed journal articles and academic books provided critical insights into religious ethics, comparative theology, and climate justice frameworks (Gardiner, 2011; Tucker & Grim, 2001; Hitzhusen, 2007).

This triangulated data collection ensures a robust, multi-layered perspective, combining doctrinal authenticity, interfaith applicability, and scholarly interpretation.

Analytical Steps

The research employed a structured, multi-step analytical process:

Text Identification

Relevant scriptures, doctrinal commentaries, and interfaith declarations were systematically identified through database searches, expert recommendations, and interfaith networks. The selection focused on content explicitly or implicitly addressing human responsibility, environmental ethics, and justice principles.

Coding for Ethical Themes

Identified texts were coded thematically to extract ethical principles, following a deductive-inductive hybrid approach. Core coding categories included:

- Justice: distributive equity, protection of vulnerable populations, intergenerational responsibility.
- Stewardship: care for creation, sustainable resource use, ecological sustainability.
- Responsibility/Reciprocity: ethical obligations toward the environment and future generations.
- Sacred Obligation: duties derived from divine or spiritual authority.

Cross-Religion Comparative Synthesis

Themes identified across traditions were compared to determine:

- Convergences: shared moral imperatives highlighting potential for interfaith collaboration.
- Divergences: unique ethical emphases reflecting theological or cultural specificity.

This process integrates normative interpretation (evaluating moral directives) with descriptive synthesis (mapping ethical themes across religions), forming the basis for a structured interfaith ethical framework applicable to climate justice.

Validity and Rigor

To ensure scholarly rigor and validity, the study employed several strategies:

Referential Adequacy

Primary texts and interfaith declarations were cross-verified using authoritative translations and academic commentaries, ensuring fidelity to original meanings.

Triangulation

Multiple sources scriptures, doctrinal commentaries, interfaith statements, and peer-reviewed analyses were integrated to corroborate findings, enhancing reliability and reducing bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Justification of Selection

- Religions were chosen based on global relevance, textual richness, and documented engagement with ecological concerns.
- Ethical principles were selected based on prevalence across sources and relevance to climate justice theory.

Transparent Coding and Verification

Ethical themes were independently coded and cross-verified to maintain consistency and replicability.

Ethical Reflexivity

The researcher maintained awareness of potential biases, interpreting religious teachings respectfully while applying rigorous comparative standards.

Limitations

Despite its strengths, the methodology has recognized limitations:

Boundaries of Textual Interpretation

Text-based analysis may not fully capture lived religious

practices or community-level behaviors that implement ethical teachings.

Scope of Traditions

Focusing on Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism excludes smaller or less globally represented religions, limiting generalizability.

Temporal and Contextual Variation

Sacred texts and interfaith statements span historical and cultural contexts. Hermeneutic analysis accounts for context, but interpretations may vary in contemporary application.

Advocacy Bias in Interfaith Declarations

Some interfaith documents may reflect aspirational goals rather than binding doctrinal principles, requiring cautious interpretation.

Nevertheless, the methodology provides a systematic, replicable, and rigorous approach for analyzing interfaith ethical contributions to climate justice, bridging normative theory, comparative theology, and practical policy insights.

Findings – Ethical Themes Across Traditions

This section presents the results of the comparative interfaith ethical analysis, organized by core ethical themes rather than by religion. This approach allows for clear visualization of convergences and divergences across traditions, highlighting potential areas for interfaith collaboration in climate justice.

Justice & Responsibility

Climate justice fundamentally entails equitable distribution of environmental burdens and benefits, protection of vulnerable populations, and ethical responsibility toward future generations (Schlosberg, 2013). Across religious traditions, principles of justice and responsibility are articulated in both normative and practical terms.

Christianity emphasizes human responsibility as stewards of God's creation, linking ecological care to moral accountability. Scriptural teachings, such as Genesis 1–2, describe humans as caretakers of the Earth, tasked with preserving its integrity (White, 1967; Hitzhusen, 2007). Papal encyclicals, particularly *Laudato si'* (Francis, 2015), further emphasize distributive justice, urging protection of marginalized communities disproportionately affected by environmental degradation.

Islam frames environmental responsibility through the concept of *khalifa*, positioning humans as stewards of the Earth accountable to God. The Qur'an (6:141; 7:31) articulates the principle that humans must avoid corruption (*fasad*) and waste, emphasizing intergenerational justice (Foltz, 2006; Dinar, 2012). Islamic ethics also stress community-centered accountability, highlighting that harm to nature constitutes a moral breach affecting society at large.

Buddhism approaches responsibility through *ahimsa* (non-harm) and awareness of interdependence. Moral

responsibility extends to all sentient beings, emphasizing that human actions have cascading ecological effects (Swearer, 2015). Environmental degradation is viewed not only as a social issue but as a spiritual failure to act with compassion.

Hinduism integrates justice with dharma, prescribing duties toward both humans and the natural world. Sacred texts emphasize that ethical action must maintain cosmic balance (rita) and social harmony, connecting ecological responsibility with spiritual merit (Narayanan, 2018). Humans are accountable not only to society but to the natural order itself.

Across these traditions, convergence emerges around the recognition that humans are responsible moral agents, accountable to a higher ethical or divine standard for environmental outcomes. Divergences are observed in scope and focus: Christianity and Islam emphasize accountability to God and society, while Buddhism and Hinduism extend responsibility to all sentient beings and the broader ecological order.

Stewardship, Care, and Sacred Duty

Stewardship and care for creation are central ethical principles, often articulated as sacred duties in religious teachings. These principles guide practical action toward climate justice.

Christianity positions stewardship as a moral imperative stemming from divine command. Human engagement with the environment is framed as a spiritual vocation, where neglect constitutes moral failure (Hitzhusen, 2007). The encyclical *Laudato si'* explicitly links stewardship with justice, advocating sustainable consumption and protection of the poor.

Islam similarly frames stewardship as a trust (amanah) granted by God. Ethical care involves conservation, sustainable use of resources, and prohibitions against corruption or waste (Foltz, 2006). Sacred duty encompasses both personal and communal obligations, reflecting a holistic moral framework.

Buddhism interprets stewardship through interdependence and the cultivation of compassion. Human care for the environment arises from awareness of relational effects, recognizing that ecological harm affects all living beings (Swearer, 2015). Ethical duty is internalized, emphasizing mindfulness and voluntary action rather than obligation imposed externally.

Hinduism presents stewardship as an extension of dharmic duties. Caring for rivers, forests, and animals is a form of spiritual discipline, linked to karma and cosmic order. Sacred duty is embedded in everyday practices, from ritual worship to lifestyle choices, reflecting a holistic integration of spirituality and ecology (Narayanan, 2018). Across traditions, the principle of stewardship converges around active care and moral obligation, though expressions vary: Abrahamic traditions (Christianity, Islam) emphasize divine command and societal accountability, whereas Dharmic traditions (Buddhism, Hinduism) stress relational and spiritual dimensions of

care.

Interdependence & Reciprocity

Interdependence and reciprocity underscore the relational ethics of climate justice, recognizing the interconnectedness of human and ecological systems.

Christianity frames interdependence in the context of creation as a communal gift from God. Humans are part of a moral ecosystem, where neglect of one aspect of creation harms the whole (White, 1967). Ethical reciprocity is evident in teachings that human care of creation reflects love of neighbor and God.

Islam emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature. Ethical conduct toward the environment aligns with broader societal justice and divine accountability (Dinar, 2012). This reciprocal ethic includes respect for natural limits, sustainable use of resources, and moral responsibility for harm caused to others.

Buddhism places interdependence at the core of ethical reflection. All life forms are interconnected, and moral action must account for systemic consequences (Swearer, 2015). Reciprocity extends to both sentient beings and future generations, reinforcing sustainability and environmental mindfulness.

Hinduism emphasizes cosmic interdependence, where humans, animals, and nature form an integrated ethical system. Ethical reciprocity is enacted through rituals, sustainable practices, and recognition of the sacredness of natural entities (Narayanan, 2018).

The shared insight is that climate justice requires recognition of relational responsibilities. Divergences appear in theological grounding and practical emphasis: Abrahamic frameworks stress societal and divine reciprocity, Dharmic frameworks stress systemic, spiritual, and ecological interconnectedness.

Shared Normative Insights

Analysis reveals several normative insights emerging from cross-religion comparison:

1. Universal Recognition of Responsibility: All traditions affirm that humans are moral agents with duties toward creation, society, and future generations.
2. Stewardship as Moral Imperative: Care for the environment is not optional but a sacred or divinely mandated duty, though the rationale varies—divine command (Abrahamic) versus relational/spiritual duty (Dharmic).
3. Interdependence and Reciprocity: Moral reasoning integrates awareness of ecological interconnections and obligations to others, highlighting systemic ethical considerations in climate action.
4. Integration of Justice and Ethical Action: Environmental ethics are intertwined with justice, requiring equitable treatment of vulnerable populations and accountability for harm.
5. Convergences and Practical Potential: Overlaps suggest strong potential for interfaith collaboration in climate initiatives, particularly around stewardship, justice, and communal responsibility. Divergences highlight the need for contextual sensitivity in policy and educational frameworks.

Table 1: Summary of Ethical Principles by Tradition

Religion	Core Ethical Concepts	Climate Justice Implications
Christianity	Stewardship, Justice, Responsibility	Humans as moral stewards; protect marginalized; align environmental care with moral duty
Islam	Khalifa (Stewardship), Justice, Reciprocity	Ethical care as divine trust; sustainable resource use; intergenerational and societal responsibility
Buddhism	Ahimsa, Interdependence, Compassion	Non-harm toward all beings; ecological mindfulness; relational ethics for sustainability
Hinduism	Dharma, Interdependence, Sacred Duty	Ethical duty to maintain cosmic and ecological balance; rituals and practices support sustainability

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Key Results

The comparative interfaith ethical analysis reveals both substantial convergence and significant divergence among Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism in their approaches to environmental responsibility and climate justice. The results demonstrate that, despite theological differences, these traditions articulate overlapping moral principles—such as stewardship, justice, interdependence, and accountability—that are directly relevant to contemporary climate justice debates. At the same time, differences in ethical grounding, normative emphasis, and modes of implementation generate important tensions that must be carefully managed in policy and governance contexts.

Ethical Convergence Across Religious Traditions

Shared Moral Foundations

A central result of the analysis is the strong convergence across all four traditions in recognizing humans as moral agents embedded within ecological systems. Christianity and Islam frame this responsibility through divine mandate, while Buddhism and Hinduism articulate it through spiritual and cosmic interconnectedness. Despite these different foundations, the outcome is ethically similar: humans are not entitled to exploit nature without restraint but are morally obligated to protect and sustain it.

Stewardship, care, and moral duty emerge as shared ethical imperatives. These principles align closely with climate justice norms emphasizing responsibility for vulnerable populations, ecosystems, and future generations (Schlosberg, 2013). This convergence supports the argument that religious ethics can function as normative complements to secular justice frameworks rather than as competing moral systems.

Interdependence and Collective Responsibility

Another significant result is the widespread recognition of interdependence and reciprocity. All traditions acknowledge that environmental harm produces cascading effects across social, ecological, and temporal dimensions. This reinforces climate justice arguments that emphasize systemic causality and collective responsibility rather than isolated individual actions.

From a governance perspective, this shared ethical understanding strengthens the feasibility of interfaith cooperation, as it provides a common moral language

for framing climate mitigation, adaptation, and loss-and-damage policies. The findings confirm earlier scholarship suggesting that religious moral narratives can motivate behavioral change and enhance public engagement with environmental policy (Tucker & Grim, 2001; Hitzhusen, 2007).

Divergence, Tension, and Ethical Complexity

Theological Grounding and Normative Orientation

Despite convergence, the analysis identifies meaningful divergences in how ethical responsibility is conceptualized and operationalized. Christianity and Islam emphasize vertical accountability—responsibility to God that translates into social and legal obligations. In contrast, Buddhism and Hinduism emphasize horizontal and systemic responsibility, extending moral concern to all sentient beings and the ecological whole (Swearer, 2015; Narayanan, 2018).

These differences shape how climate ethics are translated into practice. Abrahamic traditions often support institutional mechanisms laws, regulations, and moral enforcement while Dharmic traditions privilege internal transformation, ethical mindfulness, and voluntary restraint. This divergence has direct implications for policy design, particularly in pluralistic societies where a single ethical mode may not resonate across communities.

Contextual Interpretation and Temporal Emphasis

The results further reveal variation in how religious texts and teachings are interpreted in relation to climate change. Some traditions emphasize historical moral teachings adapted to contemporary contexts, while others develop explicitly modern environmental interpretations. This confirms existing critiques that religious engagement with climate issues is highly context-dependent and shaped by social, political, and cultural conditions (Gardiner, 2011; Foltz, 2006).

Recognizing these differences is essential for avoiding normative oversimplification. Interfaith climate initiatives that ignore theological and cultural specificity risk superficial consensus without sustained cooperation.

Implications for Climate Justice Theory

Distributive Justice

The shared emphasis on care for the vulnerable across traditions reinforces distributive justice principles. Stewardship and compassion support ethical arguments

for equitable burden-sharing, climate finance, and protection of communities disproportionately affected by climate change. Religious ethics thus strengthen moral claims for fairness that often struggle to gain traction through legal or economic reasoning alone.

Procedural Justice

The findings also support procedural justice through the emphasis on collective responsibility and moral participation. Dharmic traditions, in particular, contribute insights into inclusive ethical deliberation and shared decision-making, complementing procedural justice demands for participatory governance (Agyeman *et al.*, 2003).

Restorative and Intergenerational Justice

All traditions implicitly or explicitly acknowledge responsibilities toward future generations, aligning with restorative justice approaches that emphasize repair, compensation, and long-term ecological balance (Caney, 2005). Religious narratives of continuity, rebirth, covenant, and moral legacy provide ethical depth to intergenerational climate obligations.

Policy and Governance Implications

The results yield several actionable implications for global climate governance:

Normative Legitimacy

Integrating interfaith ethical principles into climate policy can enhance legitimacy and public trust, particularly in societies where religious institutions remain influential.

Interfaith Coalition Building

Shared ethical concepts—stewardship, justice, interdependence—can serve as common reference points for multi-faith climate advocacy, education, and grassroots mobilization.

Context-Sensitive Implementation

Policymakers must recognize ethical divergence and avoid uniform moral prescriptions. Flexible frameworks that allow faith-based actors to engage according to their traditions are more likely to succeed.

Global Governance and Equity

Interfaith ethics can inform international negotiations on burden-sharing, loss and damage, and climate finance by grounding technical agreements in widely resonant moral principles.

Relation to and Contribution Beyond Existing Literature

These findings both corroborate and extend existing scholarship. Prior studies highlight the growing role of religion in climate discourse but often privilege Christianity and Islam, marginalizing Dharmic perspectives (Schroeder & Dolan, 2020). This study addresses that imbalance by demonstrating the analytical and normative value of

Buddhist and Hindu ethics, particularly in articulating relational and systemic responsibility.

Moreover, while earlier research emphasizes interfaith collaboration in general terms (Tucker & Grim, 2001; Gardiner, 2011), this study advances the literature by providing a structured comparative framework that explicitly links religious ethics to climate justice theory. It moves beyond advocacy and description toward normative analysis with direct policy relevance.

Synthesis

Overall, the results demonstrate that moral pluralism need not undermine collective climate action. Instead, carefully analyzed convergence can support cooperation, while acknowledged divergence can guide context-sensitive implementation. The comparative interfaith ethical framework developed in this study offers both theoretical advancement and practical guidance, positioning religious ethics as a meaningful contributor to global climate justice governance.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that major world religions Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism converge on key ethical principles central to climate justice, including human responsibility, ecological stewardship, interdependence, and accountability. Despite differences in theological and philosophical foundations, these traditions share a common moral orientation that supports interfaith cooperation in addressing climate change.

Using a systematic comparative approach, the study advances religious environmental ethics by moving beyond single-tradition analyses and linking religious moral frameworks with core dimensions of climate justice distributive, procedural, and restorative. This integration highlights that climate change is not only a scientific or economic issue but also a deeply moral concern embedded in widely recognized ethical systems. From a policy perspective, this ethical convergence provides a normative basis for enhancing legitimacy, public engagement, and equity in climate governance. At the same time, theological differences call for context-sensitive approaches that respect cultural and religious diversity. Interfaith collaboration grounded in shared ethical principles can bridge global policy frameworks and local action. This study demonstrates that major world religions Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism converge on core ethical principles central to climate justice, including human responsibility, ecological stewardship, interdependence, and accountability. Although these principles are grounded in distinct theological and philosophical traditions, their shared moral orientation provides a viable foundation for interfaith cooperation in addressing climate change.

By adopting a systematic comparative approach, the study advances scholarship in religious environmental ethics by moving beyond single-tradition or descriptive

analyses. It explicitly links religious moral frameworks with established climate justice dimensions—distributive, procedural, and restorative—thereby enhancing their relevance for contemporary climate governance. The findings affirm that climate change is not solely a technical or economic challenge but a moral issue embedded in widely recognized ethical traditions.

From a policy perspective, the identified ethical convergence offers a normative basis for strengthening legitimacy, public engagement, and equity in climate initiatives. At the same time, theological divergences underscore the need for context-sensitive implementation that respects religious and cultural diversity while pursuing shared climate goals. Interfaith coalitions informed by this framework can effectively bridge global policy objectives and local action through ethically grounded, community-based strategies.

Future research should empirically examine how interfaith ethical principles are operationalized in climate action, expand comparative analysis to additional religious traditions, and integrate ethical insights with climate justice metrics. Overall, the study establishes interfaith ethics as a meaningful and necessary component of equitable, inclusive, and sustainable climate governance.

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