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From Sacred Entity to Secular Resource: The Transformation of Water Values in an Ecotheological Perspective

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Abstract

Water holds a significant position not only as an ecological resource but also as a spiritual and sacred symbol within human societies. However, modernization, rationalization, and economic orientation have driven a transformation in the meaning of water, shifting it from a sacred and relational understanding toward a more secular, instrumental, and exploitative perspective. This study aims to analyze the transformation of water meanings in modern society and to examine the role of the church in fostering ecological awareness through an ecotheological perspective. The research employs a qualitative method with a library research approach, analyzing various literature related to the sacredness of water, secularization, ecological crisis, and ecotheological thought. The findings indicate that in traditional societies, water is perceived as part of a spiritual reality maintained through customary values, rituals, and collective ecological practices. This certainly constitutes a distinct dilemma Therefore, the church plays a strategic role as an agent of value transformation, bridging local cultural heritage, scientific knowledge, and theological principles concerning creation care. This role is expressed through faith-based education, strengthening ecological ethics, reinterpreting the sacred value of water, environmental advocacy, and the development of ecotheology-based educational curricula within the church. This awareness emerges from the church's calling to embody a contextual theological praxis in responding to ecological crises and to affirm that water protection is an integral part of Christian responsibility toward the sustainability of life.

Keywords: creation care; ecotheology; sacredness of water; secularization; value transformation

Abstrak

Air memiliki posisi penting tidak hanya sebagai sumber daya ekologis, tetapi juga sebagai simbol spiritual dan sakral dalam kehidupan masyarakat. Namun, modernisasi, rasionalisasi, dan orientasi ekonomi telah mendorong terjadinya transformasi nilai air dari yang semula dipahami secara sakral dan relasional menjadi semakin sekuler, instrumental, dan eksploitatif. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis perubahan makna air dalam masyarakat modern serta mengkaji peran gereja dalam membangun kesadaran ekologis melalui perspektif ekoteologi. Penelitian menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan kepustakaan melalui analisis berbagai literatur mengenai sakralitas air, sekularisasi, krisis ekologis, dan pemikiran ekoteologi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dalam masyarakat tradisional, air dipandang sebagai bagian dari realitas spiritual yang dijaga melalui nilai adat, ritual, dan praktik ekologis kolektif. Akan tetapi, berkembangnya paradigma modern yang berorientasi pada rasionalitas instrumental menyebabkan air direduksi menjadi komoditas ekonomi, sehingga memicu pencemaran lingkungan, terutama akibat aktivitas peternakan dan lemahnya kesadaran ekologis masyarakat. Oleh sebab itu, gereja memiliki peran strategis sebagai agen transformasi nilai yang mampu menjembatani warisan budaya lokal, pengetahuan ilmiah, dan prinsip teologis tentang pemeliharaan ciptaan. Peran tersebut diwujudkan melalui pendidikan iman, penguatan etika ekologis, reinterpretasi nilai sakral air, advokasi lingkungan, dan pengembangan kurikulum pendidikan gerejawi berbasis ekoteologi. Kesadaran ini berangkat dari visi gereja yang dipanggil untuk menghadirkan praksis teologis yang kontekstual dalam merespons krisis ekologis serta membangun kesadaran bahwa menjaga air merupakan bagian integral dari tanggung jawab iman Kristen terhadap keberlanjutan kehidupan.

Kata kunci: *ekoteologi; pemeliharaan ciptaan; sakralitas air; sekularisasi; transformasi nilai*

INTRODUCTION

Water occupies a fundamental position in the social, cultural, and religious constructions of societies across the world. In many cultures, water is understood not only as an ecological resource but also as a symbol of purity, healing, and spiritual life.[1] The sacredness of water shapes ritual practices, customary norms, and ethical relationships between humans and nature. Within the ecotheological paradigm, elements of nature, including water, are understood as an integral part of the created order that possesses intrinsic value and therefore cannot be reduced merely to a utilitarian object serving human interests.[2] However, rapid social change, particularly through modernization processes and population growth, has driven a shift in how nature is perceived, moving from a sacred and relational understanding toward a more instrumental and exploitative one.

Rapid social change, particularly through processes of modernization and population growth, has driven a shift in perspectives toward nature, from what was once sacred and relational to increasingly instrumental and exploitative. The concept of the Ecozoic Era offers a paradigmatic correction, in which the universe is understood as "a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects." This perspective emphasizes reciprocal relationships between humans and the entire community of life, reflected in an awareness of listening to the voices of all beings, from the smallest organisms to the broader ecosystems, which together form a universal chorus of joyful existence. E.O. Wilson, through the concept of biophilia, as further developed with Stephen Kellert, emphasizes the affective bond between humans and the entirety of life, thereby opening the possibility of restoring a more holistic worldview grounded in ecological consciousness.[3] This awareness is necessary so that nature is not perceived as a concept separated from human existence.[4]

The transformation from sacred to secular values emerges alongside the development of a rationalistic paradigm and an economic orientation that emphasizes resource exploitation. In many societies, religious and customary values once attached to water springs have gradually faded and been replaced by a practical approach that positions water as a commodity. Modern Western practices, often described as "closer to hotel than home," reflect a context in which utilitarian perspectives dominate: humans overuse water, consume resources without limits, and leave ecological impacts without long-term responsibility.[5] This worldview reflects a shift in the relationship between humans and nature, from a sacred and sustainable interconnectedness toward a pattern of exploitative consumption that is detached from ecological awareness.

A harmonious ecological relationship has the potential to be disrupted, particularly when economic needs and development demands begin to dominate human relations with nature. The shift from developmentalism toward globalization marks an expansion of a paradigm that not only focuses on economic growth but also brings increasingly complex

[1] Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1997), 194-195.

[2] Ernst M. Conradie, *Christianity and Ecological Theology* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2006), 166.

[3] H. Frankfort et al., *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient near East*, *Classical Philology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1946), 4.

[4] Jenkins Willis, *The Future of Ethics : Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 36.

[5] Sallie Mcfague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 53.

ecological consequences.[6] This represents the operating logic of the modern world, a distinct historical force that stands in tension with social justice and environmental sustainability.[7]

In the Indonesian context, water has historically held significant spiritual value within local traditions as well as major world religions. However, pressures from modernization and lifestyle changes have led to a degradation of these ecological and spiritual values. Nature is increasingly perceived as a machine ready for exploitation.[8] In many regions, including indigenous and rural communities, this transformation of values is evident in the decline of customary practices that once protected water sources, as well as in the increasing ecological pressure caused by economic activities such as agriculture, household industries, and livestock farming.

Communities across diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds maintain strong cosmological relationships with nature, where elements such as water springs are understood as part of a sacred spiritual reality and are preserved through local wisdom transmitted across generations. Ritual practices indicate that water sources function not only as ecological assets but also as mediums of purification that carry profound religious and spiritual meanings. In addition, the presence of myths and beliefs in supernatural forces surrounding water sources further reinforces the perception that nature constitutes a sacred space that must be respected and preserved.

However, alongside social change and economic development, tensions have emerged between customary practices and the pragmatic influences of modernization, resulting in a shift in values from sacred to secular in the perception of natural resources.[9] These challenges become increasingly significant as civilization moves into the digital era, a period in which the demand for natural resources becomes increasingly strategic in the development of supporting infrastructures.

Although the development of ecotheological discourse in both global and national contexts affirms that religion can serve as an important ethical force in responding to ecological crises, ecotheology invites society to view water as a divine gift that must be cared for through principles of moral responsibility and stewardship.[10] However, the extent to which its influence becomes significant remains an open question. This represents a distinct dilemma that calls for deeper theological reflection within the church, particularly in relation to water discourse, which represents a fundamental element for human life.

The significance of this study lies in its empirical synthesis of the transformation of water values and how these changes influence ecological awareness in society. Amid environmental crises and increasing pressure on natural resources, understanding how cultural and spiritual dimensions shape ecological behavior becomes highly relevant. Furthermore, through the ecotheological framework, this study offers an approach that emphasizes the role of the church in actively contributing to the reconstruction of theological thought regarding the importance of sustaining water resources within the social sphere.

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[6] Daniel P. Castillo, "Against the 'Unity' of Babel: Liberation Th Eology and the Language of Sustainable Development," in *Theology and Ecology across the Disciplines: On Care for Our Common Home*, ed. Celia Deane-Drummond and Rebecca Artinian-Kaiser (London: T & T Clark, 2018), 125.

[7] Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 214.

[8] Sonny Keraf, *Filsafat Lingkungan Hidup: Alam Sebagai Sebuah Sistem Kehidupan* (Daerah lstimewa Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2014), 122-23.

[9] Valentino Wariki, "Partikularitas Pendidikan Agama Kristen Menjawab Tantangan Posmodernisme Lyotard," *Kurios: Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Agama Kristen* 9, no. 3 (2023): 689–701.

[10] H. Paul Santmire, *Before Nature: A Christian Spirituality*, *Sacred Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 12.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with a literature review approach. This approach is chosen to understand the transformation of water values as a social phenomenon that is rich in spiritual meaning and closely related to ecological concerns. Through an interpretive framework and underlying assumptions, social issues are analyzed in terms of their meaning within their broader context.[11] The qualitative approach provides space for researchers to interpret empirical realities, allowing the dynamics of changing meanings to be understood in greater depth.[12]

The focus of this study is not limited to empirical aspects but also extends to the construction of meanings, values, as well as theological and ecological reflections that develop across various scholarly literatures. Research data are obtained from multiple written sources, including books, academic articles, and documents relevant to the issues of the sacredness of water, modernization, secularization, and ecotheology. The literature used encompasses studies on human–nature relations, shifts in ecological paradigms in modern society, as well as the engagement of the church and theological thought concerning human responsibility toward creation.

Data are obtained through the examination of various written sources, including books, academic articles, theological documents, and literature addressing the sacredness of water, secularization, and ecotheology. The collected data are then classified into key themes, such as the spiritual meaning of water, shifts in ecological paradigms, and the role of the church in environmental preservation. Subsequently, the data are analyzed using a descriptive-interpretive approach by examining, comparing, and synthesizing various theoretical perspectives in order to identify patterns of change in the meaning of water, as well as the factors driving these shifts. The results of the analysis are then reflected within an ecotheological framework to understand the ethical and theological implications of the transformation of water values, while also formulating the strategic contribution of the church in fostering ecological awareness and action within society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Initial Meaning of Water: Sacredness and Spiritual Relations

Historically, communities have understood water springs as sacred spaces inseparable from communal spiritual life. A spring is not merely perceived as a physical source that fulfills basic needs, but as a place inhabited by supernatural forces, such as guardian spirits, which require respectful conduct and self-restraint in human interactions with nature. This understanding is reflected in various cultural practices, including customary prohibitions, symbolic offerings such as flowers, and the practice of maintaining silence when approaching water sources. These practices indicate a collective awareness that water possesses a sacred dimension that must be preserved through specific ethical behaviors.

This phenomenon can be understood within the framework of the concept of *hierophany*, namely the manifestation of the sacred within elements of nature, where the divine becomes present and is recognized through material mediums such as water.[13] This perspective strongly resonates with biblical traditions, which view water not merely as a material reality but as one imbued with profound theological meaning. In Old Testament

[11] John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed M Ethods Approaches* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2018).

[12] John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Fourth Edition Qualitative Inquiry Research Design Choosing* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 2018), 8.

[13] Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 2-4.

wisdom literature, water is depicted as an entity that simultaneously gives life and possesses destructive potential, thereby evoking both reverence and awe. Water, in the form of springs, wells, and rivers, is often understood as a locus of divine presence and a source of restoration and life, yet also as a force that cannot be fully controlled by human beings. Therefore, in the metaphorical text of Job 14:7–12, water is perceived intrinsically as a life-giving element capable of restoring withered vegetation, while human death is paralleled with the disappearance of vital water sources. In a striking metaphorical portrayal, Job 14:11–12 compares the irreversible condition of dried-up eternal water sources (rivers) with human mortality.[14]

Water-related phenomena depicted in Job 38:22–38 may be understood in terms of their intrinsic value and purpose. This principle is emphasized through the depiction of hail and snow as elements that are not merely stored in divine treasuries, but are also prepared for use at appointed times. The emphasis on rainwater in Job 38:22–38 is not limited to cultivated and fertile land that sustains human life, but also extends to the wilderness, which is transformed into fertile ground.[15] Through these passages, water is not only presented as an essential element for the continuity of life, but is also understood as part of the divine order that actively participates in the preservation, regulation, and sustainability of creation.

Proverbs 8:22–31 and 3:19–20 present water as a cosmic entity that possesses both life-giving potential and the capacity to threaten life with death. Proverbs 8:22–31 states that the order of creation was formed through Wisdom, yet the primordial waters that threatened life were also part of this created order. Through the Wisdom of God, *tehom* (תהום) could emerge as a life-giving source of water. Meanwhile, verses 27–29 refer to the various boundaries imposed upon *tehom* in order to shape, establish, sustain, and stabilize the earth, since an uncontrolled *tehom* constitutes a latent threat to the order of creation.

In Proverbs 3:19–20, God is portrayed as the perfect architect who establishes the foundations of the earth upon *tehom*, the waters of chaos, in order to constitute the earth as a habitable space capable of withstanding the pressure of aquatic chaos.[16] Unlike Genesis 7:11, which employs the verb *baqaʿ* (בקע) to describe the onset of the flood as a destructive event, Proverbs 3:20a assigns a fertilizing function to the overflow of these cosmic waters, since they flow within divinely established boundaries.[17]

In the New Testament, water is frequently employed as a spiritual metaphor to signify life, renewal, and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself declares that streams of living water will flow from within those who believe in him, a statement that points to the Spirit as the source of life and human restoration.[18] This symbolism indicates that spiritual life cannot be separated from the very source of life itself. Therefore, from an ecotheological perspective, water is not merely a natural resource that serves human needs, but also bears profound spiritual significance.

The sacredness of water plays a significant ecological role, as the belief that water sources are inhabited by ancestral spirits positions them as living and sacred entities. This

[14] Kivatsi Jonathan Kavusa, *Water and Water-Related Phenomena in the Old Testament Wisdom Literature: An Eco-Theological Exploration*, ed. Claudia V. Camp and Andrew Mein, *Library Of Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament Studies*, vol. 685 (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 171.

[15] Ibid.

[16] For a more detailed discussion of the semantic depth of *tehom*, see David J. A. Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, Vol. VIII*, ed. David J. A. Clines (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 593-94.

[17] Kavusa, *Water and Water-Related Phenomena in the Old Testament Wisdom Literature: An Eco-Theological Exploration*, vol. 685, p. 173.

[18] Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Essential Practices from the Six Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 11.

belief shapes communal behavior and discourages actions that may damage the surrounding environment.[19] In several customary regulations, activities that threaten springs are prohibited, including cutting down trees nearby, disposing of waste, and creating excessive noise. These practices indicate that sacred values attached to nature function as an effective mechanism of ecological control.

Traditional views of water reveal a strong ambivalence of meaning in human consciousness, in which water is perceived not only as a source of life, but also as an entity that possesses a sacred dimension and evokes fear. In many communal traditions, water has long been both venerated and feared. Wells and springs are understood as sacred spaces, as dwelling places of divine power, and as sources of healing and restoration, while seas and rivers represent natural forces that may threaten human life.[20] This construction demonstrates that, within religious traditions, water has from the outset been situated within a theological framework that connects humanity, nature, and the Divine.

The Secularization of Water: A Shift from Sacred Value to Functional Resource

The transformation in the perception of water is clearly reflected in the everyday life of the community. In the past, springs were not merely regarded as sources for fulfilling practical needs, but also as inhabited spaces protected by ancestral spirits. Over time, however, this meaning has gradually shifted. The development of more rational modes of thinking, together with increasing economic demands, has led younger generations to perceive springs in a different way.

The rationalization of water values appears in three forms. First, water is increasingly used as a utilitarian component, particularly for household needs, agriculture, and livestock. Second, religious rejection of animistic elements has led to the discontinuation of offering rituals. Third, the social function of springs has shifted from sacred sites to communal facilities. These findings reflect the theory of rationalization, namely the replacement of traditional value orientations with instrumental orientations.

The modern ecological crisis is rooted in a fundamental transformation in the way humans perceive water and nature. In the past, water was understood as a sacred source of life and was often personified through dragons, cosmic serpents, or other aquatic beings. In modern society, however, water is increasingly treated as a resource that can be exploited without limit.[21] As a result, freshwater and marine ecosystems have suffered serious degradation due to dams, excessive exploitation, industrial waste, and human-induced climate change. At the same time, various water-dependent species have also experienced mass extinction.

This transformation cannot be separated from the rise of a modern worldview that emphasizes instrumental rationality and technical mastery over nature. The world, which was previously understood as a living space endowed with spiritual value and reciprocal relations, has gradually been reduced to a material object used primarily for human interests.[22] It has become an increasingly dystopian space marked by continuous degradation, in which nature is

[19] Jason Ā. Josephson- Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 97.

[20] Kavusa, *Water and Water-Related Phenomena in the Old Testament Wisdom Literature: An Eco-Theological Exploration*, vol. 685, p. 1.

[21] Veronica Strang, *Water Beings: From Nature Worship to the Enviromental Crisis* (London: Reaktion Books, 2023), 8.

[22] Valentino Wariki, Yusak Setianto, and Muryati Muryati, "Distopia Yohanes 12: Narasi Katarsis Rasul Yohanes Dalam Periode Konflik," *Phronesis: Jurnal Teologi dan Misi* 8 (2025).

no longer regarded as a living entity with agency, but merely as an economic resource and an object of management. In this process, the symbolic and sacred qualities of water have gradually faded, replaced by a scientific and technocratic approach that prioritizes efficiency, control, and exploitation. Nature is thus reduced to mere matter or an object to be dominated.[23] Slowly but decisively, nature loses its intrinsic qualities and is treated only as an object of classification and control.

At certain social levels, some community groups no longer perceive water as a living entity, but rather as a resource that can be used for practical purposes. However, when such practical exploitation remains uncontrolled, it may generate negative consequences for the sustainability of water itself. For example, chicken and pig farms established near water sources have the potential to degrade the existing value and quality of water. This practice reflects a shift in ecological paradigm, from reverence for the sacredness of nature toward a more utilitarian and functional approach to water resources.

One manifestation of this paradigm shift can be observed in livestock farming activities. Organic waste derived from chicken and pig manure is one of the main factors contributing to the decline in water quality. The presence of organic matter, nutrients, and pathogenic microorganisms in such waste may contaminate water sources, either through surface runoff or seepage into the soil. This condition not only affects ecological balance, but also creates serious risks to human health, particularly for communities that rely on springs as a source of water for their daily needs.

The resulting pollution may include unpleasant odors and changes in water color, both of which can disrupt the continuity of the ecosystem. The potential presence of high levels of *Escherichia coli* is often associated with pig and chicken farms located near water sources. Livestock manure contains various harmful pathogens, and when such waste enters water sources, it can pose serious threats to both the environment and public health.[24] In many regions, spring water pollution is generally caused by low ecological awareness among local communities, as well as weak supervision and local regulations that should protect water catchment areas.

In the current context of pollution, affective action and instrumentally rational action emerge simultaneously. Affective action is evident in the community's emotional responses to the smell of waste, changes in water quality, and concerns about health risks. These feelings of anxiety and anger do not arise without reason, but are triggered by the concrete reality that livestock activities constitute a major global source of greenhouse gas emissions and are also associated with various environmental problems, including ammonia emissions and regional nutrient imbalances.[25] These impacts are directly experienced by the community, thereby encouraging spontaneous actions such as reprimanding livestock owners. However, since affective action alone is insufficient to resolve such complex problems, the community subsequently shifts toward instrumentally rational action through collective clean-up activities, community discussions, and requests for government assistance as more planned and systematic efforts to address environmental pollution.

The presence of livestock farms established around water flows may generate significant ecological risks, since mountain water sources are highly vulnerable to contamination, particularly when they are not protected by adequate natural buffer zones. In addition, the porous soil characteristics of hilly areas may accelerate the infiltration of livestock

[23] Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences*, 9.

[24] Henning Steinfeld et al., *Livestock's Long Shadow: Environmental Issues and Options* (Rome: Food & Agriculture Org, 2006), 136.

[25] Ilkka Leinonen, "Achieving Environmentally Sustainable Livestock Production," *MDPI AG* (2019): 1–4.

waste into groundwater flows. This situation is further exacerbated by the fact that livestock waste contains high concentrations of nitrogen, organic matter, and pathogenic bacteria, making it a potential major source of groundwater pollution, especially in rural areas of Indonesia.[26]

Water source pollution caused by livestock activities not only reveals technical problems related to waste management and ecological degradation, but also reflects a crisis of consciousness in the relationship between humans and nature. Water, which should be preserved as a source of life, is instead reduced to a disposal space that can be exploited for short-term economic interests. The community's response to pollution shows that water-related problems directly affect social, health, and emotional dimensions. Therefore, their resolution cannot rely solely on spontaneous actions or technocratic approaches. A more fundamental transformation is needed in the way water is valued and in how human responsibility toward the environment is understood. In this context, the role of the church becomes significant as an agent of value transformation. The church can help build ecological awareness within the community through a reinterpretation of the meaning of water, not merely as a biological necessity, but as part of creation that possesses spiritual, social, and ecological value and must therefore be protected collectively.

The Church as an Agent of Ecological Awareness and Community-Based Environmental Action

In many community contexts, serious threats to spring water quality caused by livestock waste and uncontrolled activities around upstream areas cannot be underestimated. In response, local communities have implemented various conservation strategies that combine traditional practices, collective action, and adaptation to modern conservation knowledge. These efforts demonstrate a collective commitment to safeguarding the sustainability of water resources for both present and future generations.

One of the main efforts is the establishment and implementation of protective zones around springs, ensuring that livestock activities, waste disposal, and garbage dumping do not occur within water catchment areas. This principle has been widely recognized in spring conservation literature as part of a community-based strategy for protecting water sources. By maintaining natural vegetation in upstream areas, such as planting local tree species and preserving land cover, communities strengthen the natural infiltration and filtration functions of groundwater while minimizing waste runoff.[27]

Empowering local communities to identify problems and solutions related to water resources enables them to choose approaches that are aligned with their social and cultural realities.[28] Communities do not merely function as resource users, but also as custodians of collectively inherited values. This is reflected in local wisdom practices that respect springs through various norms, such as prohibitions against disposing of waste near water sources, restrictions on cutting trees in upstream areas, and the enforcement of social rules to maintain environmental cleanliness. Although these values have undergone adjustments in response to modern contexts, they remain a moral foundation that strengthens collective commitment to sustaining water resources. Therefore, social and participatory measures are needed to raise

[26] Steinfeld et al., *Livestock's Long Shadow: Environmental Issues and Options*, 4.

[27] Fernanda Helena Oliveira da Silva et al., "Impact of Permanent Preservation Areas on Water Quality in a Semi-Arid Watershed," *Environments - MDPI* 12, no. 7 (2025): 1–24.

[28] Heather Cooley et al., "Global Water Governance in the Twenty-First Century," in *The World's Water : The Biennial Report on Freshwater*, vol. 8 (Washington: Island Press, 2014), 11.

awareness of water-related issues and to mobilize users to participate in the planning, management, and financing of water resource development.[29]

Local wisdom and collective community practices function not only as social mechanisms that regulate communal life, but also as concrete expressions of faith in responding to the ethical call to care for the environment. From the perspective of Christian theology, loving God and one's neighbor cannot be separated from responsibility toward creation, since nature is understood as belonging to God and must therefore be protected rather than exploited.[30] Accordingly, the church and Christian communities have a strategic role as agents of transformation in strengthening ecological awareness.

The church's role in responding to the environmental crisis can be realized through faith education that cultivates a theological understanding of the relationship between human beings, God, and the whole of creation. This education aims to form the ethical awareness of the congregation, enabling them to embody sustainable ways of life and to appreciate local cultural values that support ecological balance. The church functions not only as a spiritual institution, but also as a community of praxis that integrates faith with ecological responsibility. Accordingly, Christians, together with adherents of other faith traditions, have a distinctive role in proclaiming moral values and educating society toward ecological awareness. Such awareness is, in essence, an expression of responsibility toward oneself, others, and the whole of creation. This affirms the transformative dimension of faith education in offering a relevant witness amid the global environmental crisis.[31]

In contemporary developments, this sacred meaning is not abandoned, but is actively reinterpreted by religious institutions, particularly the church, within the framework of modern ecological ethics. The reinterpretation of sacred values into modern ecological ethics indicates that the church does not merely function as a guardian of spiritual tradition, but also as an agent of transformation that actualizes these values into collective norms for sustaining the environment. Through preaching, faith education, and pastoral praxis, the church contributes to shaping an understanding of water as a divine gift that must be managed responsibly. Studies on spiritual ecology affirm that religious values and local wisdom continue to serve as moral foundations for community-based conservation practices, while the church plays a strategic role in mediating these values into concrete action.

The Church's Role in Reinterpreting Water Values through an Ecotheology-Based Church Education Curriculum

The church's strategic role lies in its capacity to act as an agent of value transformation that bridges local cultural heritage, scientific knowledge concerning water pollution, and theological principles regarding the care of creation. In this position, the church is not present merely as a symbolic institution, but as a contextual and relevant faith community amid the dynamics of modern society. The church is called to critically embody cultural values without losing the spiritual roots of Christianity, so that local traditions that honor water and nature can be reinterpreted in the light of faith as part of the responsibility to care for God's creation. The church has a vital role in carrying out a theological mandate that addresses practical issues

[29] Balázs M. Fekete and Eugene Z. Stakhiv, "Performance Indicators in the Water Resources Management Sector," in *The Global Water System in the Anthropocene: Challenges for Science and Governance*, ed. Anik Bhaduri et al. (New York: Springer, 2014), http://www.springer.com/gb/book/9783319075471.

[30] Douglas J. Moo and Jonathan A. Moo, *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2018).

[31] Christiana Zenner, *Just Water: Theology, Ethics, and Fresh Water Crises* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2018), 25.

of public concern, rather than remaining only at the conceptual level.[32] Building on this understanding, the theology lived out by the church cannot remain limited to doctrine or confession of faith alone, but must be realized in concrete praxis that responds to the crises of life in the world, including the problem of water pollution. This awareness is consistent with the conviction that the whole earth is full of God's glory (Isa. 6:3), even though human beings often fail to recognize and care for it. Water, as part of God's creation that sustains life, is not merely a natural resource, but also a sign of God's presence and glory in the world. Therefore, when water is polluted and damaged, it is not only the ecosystem that is wounded, but also the relationship between human beings, creation, and the Creator.

Christian hope is oriented toward the promise that the earth will one day be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2:14).[33] This promise is not a reason for passively waiting for the future, but a call for the church to manifest the signs of the Kingdom of God in the present through active participation in sustaining life. The church's involvement in preserving water resources thus becomes part of its witness of faith, affirming that the glory of God is made visible in a world that is cared for and shared as a common dwelling place.

Therefore, first, the church needs to formulate a theological foundation that strengthens the understanding that water is not merely a commodity or a source of daily life, but part of God's creation that must be respected and protected. This perspective of biblical stewardship is systematically articulated in contemporary ecotheological literature, in which the church is called to participate in environmental management through moral and spiritual responsibility.[34] In empirical studies of spring-based communities, an ecotheological approach has been shown to strengthen social solidarity and community mobilization in sustaining water sources.[35]

Second, the church serves as a mediator for educational spaces and the formation of ecological ethics. Through preaching, faith education, communal prayer, and congregational activities, the church can teach that protecting springs is part of the calling of faith, not merely a practical concern. The church as an institution plays an important role in building ecological awareness among believers, since its teaching can shape moral norms and collective behavior that are more attentive to the environment. The church is also called to develop a dialogical Christian pedagogy which, through the concept of civic hospitality, is able to hold together the tensions between conviction and openness, doctrine and dialogue.[36] This approach rejects hierarchical habits in Christian education and instead emphasizes a relational ethic grounded in the principle of shared humanity.[37]

Third, the church acts as a catalyst for collective action, rather than merely producing theological discourse. When communities face a crisis of spring water pollution caused by livestock waste, the church can encourage its members to take concrete action, such as

[32] Celia Deane-Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology: Theology for a Fragile Earth* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2017), 15.

[33] Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (Pymble, NSW 2073: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 30.

[34] Christopher Magezi, "Ecological Crisis and the Church: A Proposal for Biblical Stewardship as a Nexus for Environmental Protection," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 45, no. 1 (2024): 1–11.

[35] Ali Maksum et al., "Ecotheology: Environmental Ethical View in Water Spring Protection," *Ethics in Science and Environmental Politics* 23 (2023): 23–33, http://dx.doi.org/10.3354/esep00205.

[36] David I. Smith, "Civic Hospitality, Pedagogical Engagement, And Faith-Framed Learning," *International Journal of Christianity and Education* 28, no. 1 (2024): 3–6.

[37] Yusak Setianto et al., "Refiguring Christian Pedagogy through Ruang Karso: A Symbolic Framework for Formative Praxis," *International Journal of Christianity and Education* (2026).

protecting water sources, resisting harmful livestock practices, and engaging in environmental advocacy. This is consistent with the concept of caring for creation, which emphasizes that faith must be embodied in concrete ecological responsibility.[38] In many global Christian communities, churches have taken leading roles in environmental initiatives, including conservation, reforestation, spring protection, and environmental justice campaigns.

Fourth, through the reinterpretation of local traditions and cultures, the church can bridge the sacred values of customary practices and the ecological moral values of Christian faith. Rather than rejecting local customs, the church can adopt the fundamental customary value of reverence for water as a sacred entity and situate it within a biblical framework that affirms creation as God's work that must be protected. This approach demonstrates how religion can accommodate, revitalize, and reinterpret cultural heritage for ecological sustainability. In this way, the community does not lose its identity, but discovers a renewed meaning that remains relevant to contemporary contexts and environmental challenges.

Through preaching, catechesis, Sunday school, Bible study, and congregational ministry training, the church can instill a perspective of biblical stewardship that regards nature as God's sacred creation and therefore as something that must be cared for responsibly. At the same time, such a curriculum needs to develop a dialogical Christian pedagogy grounded in contextual hermeneutics, which opens space for local cultural values concerning reverence for water to be reinterpreted in the light of Christian faith.[39] This urgency must be realized because ecclesial education cannot stop at the transfer of doctrine. Rather, it must become a medium for ecological ethical formation that encourages congregations to participate actively in collective environmental action, ecological advocacy, and the strengthening of social solidarity for the sustainability of shared life.

The church is not merely a religious institution, but also a moral and ecological actor that enables a transformation in the understanding of water, from a material resource into part of the relational nexus between human beings, God, and nature that must be cared for. This transformation creates space for the community to perceive the environmental crisis not merely as a technical problem, but as a challenge of faith and a shared responsibility for the survival of present and future generations.

CONCLUSION

Water was initially understood by the community not merely as an ecological resource, but as a sacred entity possessing spiritual, social, and cosmological meanings within the relationship between human beings, nature, and the Divine. However, modernization, rationalization, and economic orientation have driven a transformation in the value of water, from a sacred and relational entity into an increasingly secularized object that tends toward exploitative practices. This paradigm shift is evident in the use of water sources that neglects ecological sustainability, including pollution caused by livestock activities and the weak ecological awareness of local communities. As a result, water is no longer treated as part of the created order that must be respected, but is instead reduced to a utilitarian object serving practical human interests.

From an ecotheological perspective, the water crisis is understood not merely as a technical or environmental problem, but also as a spiritual and moral crisis that reflects the

[38] Hendry Corneles Mamengko Runtuwene, "Ecotheology: Integrating Faith, Creation Care, and Contextual Practice in Indonesian Protestant Congregations," *Educatio Christi* 6, no. 1 (2025): 145–170.

[39] Valentino Wariki, "Menautkan Makna Dan Roh : Interseksi Hermeneutik Paul Ricoeur Dan Hermeneutik Pentakostal Dalam Tafsir Kitab Suci," *Diegesis: Jurnal Teologi Kharismatika* 8, no. 1 (2025): 1–18, https://doi.org/10.53547/27t3yr84%0Ae-ISSN:

breakdown of the relationship between human beings, creation, and the Creator. Therefore, the church has a strategic role as an agent of value transformation, capable of bridging local cultural heritage, scientific knowledge, and theological principles concerning the care of creation. Through faith education, the reinterpretation of the sacred value of water, the formation of ecological ethics, and contextual collective action, the church is called to embody a concrete theological praxis in responding to water pollution and environmental degradation.

In response to this theological concern, the church needs to develop an ecotheology-based ecclesial education curriculum that consistently instills the awareness that protecting water and the environment is an integral part of the Christian calling. Ecclesial education must not stop at the transfer of doctrine, but should become a means of ecological ethical formation that encourages the active involvement of congregations in sustaining creation. The church functions not only as a religious institution, but also as a community of praxis that manifests the signs of the Kingdom of God through ecological responsibility, social solidarity, and the preservation of shared life for present and future generations.

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