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# RELIGION AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP IN VIETNAM: FAITH-INSPIRED RESPONSES TO CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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## Abstract

Climate change, resource depletion, and ecological pollution pose significant threats to Vietnam's sustainable development. As a low-lying coastal nation, Vietnam is particularly vulnerable to rising sea levels, extreme weather, and natural disasters, which adversely impact livelihoods, increase poverty, and strain ecosystems. With 27% of its population adhering to various religions (mainly Buddhism, Catholicism, Cao Đài, folk religion, and Islam), Vietnam's religious diversity offers a unique opportunity to harness spiritual and moral values for environmental conservation. Using Marxist-Leninist dialectical materialism as a framework, we evaluate grassroots religious initiatives with a focus on Buddhism. This manuscript examines the perspectives and roles of Buddhist communities in Vietnam concerning environmental protection and proactive climate change response. It highlights how religious teachings, rituals, and community initiatives contribute to ecological preservation and proposes strategies to enhance these contributions; and evaluates the potential of religious organizations to influence behavior, mobilize resources, and foster communal efforts toward socially viable and environmentally sustainable solutions. Through promoting environmental awareness, advocating for green practices, and participating in disaster relief, religious groups can play a pivotal role in addressing the environmental challenges facing the country. The paper proposes a carefully designed synthesis of spiritual wisdom with technocratic solutions that would enable Vietnam to model a 'third way' in climate action—leveraging interfaith collaboration to harmonize ethical imperatives with socialist developmental goals.

*Keywords*: climate change, ecological balance, environmental protection, religion, Vietnam

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## 1. Introduction

Vietnam, a low-lying coastal nation, faces existential threats from climate change, ranking among the top 10 most vulnerable countries globally [1, p. 15]. Rising sea levels, extreme weather, and natural disasters disproportionately affect livelihoods, escalate poverty, and destabilize ecosystems [2, p. 39]. As a low-lying coastal nation particularly vulnerable to climate change, Vietnam stands at a crossroads where traditional religious values and modern environmental challenges intersect in fascinating ways. With 27% of its population adhering to diverse faiths, Vietnam's religious landscape offers a unique reservoir of spiritual and ethical frameworks to address environmental crises [3].

Religious teachings have long emphasized ecological stewardship. Buddhist philosophies, for instance, link environmental degradation to human greed (*taṇhā*), advocating non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) through sustainable practices [4]. Similarly, ancient Vedic texts stress the "preservation of natural resources and ecological harmony" [5, p. 222]. These traditions align with contemporary educational initiatives in Vietnam, where universities integrate Hồ Chí Minh's philosophy of 'holistic youth development' to cultivate environmental responsibility [6, p. 567]. Confucian principles further reinforce this ethos. Nguyễn et al. highlight how the 'Rectification of Names' doctrine mandates ethical governance, urging leaders to "align actions with moral responsibility" in environmental policymaking [7, p. 555]. This intersects with Marxist-Leninist dialectics, which frame human-nature interdependence as a "dynamic balance imperiled by unchecked exploitation" [8, p. 655].

Yet Vietnam's rapid urbanization intensifies ecological strain. Phùng et al. warn that rural-urban shifts disrupt "agricultural economies and peasant livelihoods", necessitating faith-based interventions to mitigate inequities [2, p. 42]. Religious organizations, from Buddhist monasteries to Catholic parishes, have mobilized grassroots campaigns for reforestation, waste reduction, and disaster relief—efforts documented in provincial reports [9]. Our paper examines how Vietnam's diverse Buddhist communities and traditions can unify ethical teachings, communal action, and policy advocacy to combat climate change. Our focus remains primarily on Buddhism, though we briefly mention other groups, such as Cao Đài, Hòa hảo, Brahmanism, and Islam. We look at how religious teachings and community initiatives contribute to ecological preservation and attempt to identify strategies to enhance these contributions for sustainable development. To achieve this, we employ a synthesis of doctrinal imperatives with state-led sustainability goals and propose strategies to amplify religion's role in fostering a 'prosperous and happy future' for Vietnam [10, p. 103].

## 2. Research methodology

Our methodological approach employs dialectical materialism and historical materialism as its theoretical foundation, analyzing the interplay between socio-economic structures and environmental stewardship through the

lens of human-nature interdependence [8]. Drawing on Marxist-Leninist dialectical materialism, we analyze how religious institutions adapt to environmental challenges. This perspective allows us to understand the transformative relationship between spiritual traditions and ecological consciousness, particularly relevant in Vietnam's rapidly changing socio-economic landscape [11, p. 857]. We synthesize primary texts by Marx, Engels, and Hồ Chí Minh with contemporary Vietnamese policy frameworks and religious ecological teachings to identify synergies between Marxist-Leninist praxis and faith-based sustainability efforts. Our research included observation of environmental initiatives in religious communities and documented case studies of successful faith-based conservation projects. As part of a wider synthesis, our research integrates insights from traditional Vietnamese wisdom with modern environmental science, following Tu Wei-Ming's methodological framework for analyzing Asian ecological thought [12, p. 198].

## 3. Findings and Discussion

### *3.1. Environment Protection and Climate Change*

Environmental protection encompasses efforts to 'resist intrusions that threaten ecological integrity' by maintaining clean ecosystems, ensuring balance, and mitigating human/natural harm while promoting sustainable resource use [13, p. 63].

Vietnam's *Environmental Protection Law* (2020) codifies seven principles:

1) Collective responsibility for environmental stewardship [1, p. 15].
2) Integration with socio-economic development strategies.
3) Alignment with social equity and human rights.
4) Prioritizing pollution prevention and waste minimization.
5) Respect for cultural/natural heritage.
6) Polluter-pays accountability.
7) Sovereignty-conscious global cooperation [1, p. 15-16].

Climate change manifests as systemic disruptions to weather patterns, ecosystems, and socio-economic stability. Vietnam's vulnerability—ranked among the top 10 globally—stems from its coastal geography, with rising sea levels threatening 27% of its population in low-lying regions [2, p. 39]. Key impacts include agricultural destabilization, rise in urban-rural inequity, and significant economic losses. When we speak of agricultural destabilization, we refer to a phenomenon that arises due to increased salinization of the Mekong Delta, affecting 40% of rice production [2, p. 42]. Urban-rural inequity arises due to migration pressures from climate-affected rural areas strain urban infrastructure [11, p. 855–876]. Finally, economic losses are projected to amount to annual GDP losses of 1.5–3% by 2050 due to extreme weather [1, p. 15].

Adaptation strategies thus necessarily emphasize localized resilience. First of all, at the level of policy integration, Vietnam's National Climate Change Strategy (2021–2030) mandates climate considerations in all development plans. The next focus is on concrete community-based mitigation, namely Mangrove

reforestation and flood-resistant crop adoption in coastal zones. Finally, emphasis is being put on technological innovation, such as early-warning systems for typhoons, deployed in collaboration with Japan's JICA.

These are merely some of the proactive measures that the government at local, regional, and national levels begins to employ to offset the dangers. Such a proactive approach aligns with Marxist-Leninist dialectics, framing human-nature interdependence as a "dynamic equilibrium disrupted by unchecked exploitation" [8, p. 655]. This necessitates balancing economic growth with ecological limits - a challenge intensified by Vietnam's rapid urbanization, which disrupts 12% of arable land annually [2, p. 42].

With the serious impacts of global warming and rising sea levels, Vietnam's most important issue in responding to climate change is adapting to it. In other words, adaptation to climate change needs to be given central focus. It has been an ongoing process for decades with distinct but interrelated needs in the short, medium, and long term. Adaptation measures are urgent at the local level.

### *3.2. Religious Perspectives on Environmental Protection and Climate Change*

Religions in Vietnam have been clearly aware of the current ecological environment crisis and climate change globally in general and in Vietnam in particular.

In examining **Buddhist approaches** to environmental protection and climate change, we must begin with its fundamental cosmological understanding. According to Buddhist texts, the universe manifests as a unified whole, an interconnected reality that transcends simple separation [14, p. 112]. This cosmological vision encompasses three distinct yet interrelated realms: the Desire Realm, the Form Realm, and the Formless Realm. Within the Desire Realm, where sentient beings emerge through transformation, existence is understood through the lens of four elemental seeds: Earth, Water, Wind, and Fire, forming the basic constituents of embodied existence.

The principle of Dependent Origination (Pratityasamutpada) serves as a cornerstone for Buddhist environmental ethics. This teaching establishes the inherent interconnectedness between human existence and the natural world, articulated in the ancient formula: "When this is, that is/ This arising, that arises/ When this is not, that is not/ This ceasing, that ceases." [15, p. 138] This principle illuminates the inseparable relationship between the ecological environment and human life, where all phenomena exist in a web of limited, relative, and interdependent relationships.

Buddhist environmental protection emerges from this understanding of interconnectedness, emphasizing the cultivation of mental purity as fundamental to ecological preservation. The Buddhist perspective identifies environmental degradation as fundamentally rooted in mental impurity, leading to the essential teaching that environmental protection requires both internal transformation and external action [16]. This dual approach recognizes that ecological consciousness must be grounded in the cultivation of positive mental qualities expressed through concrete actions.

The teachings of Hòa hảo Buddhism are expressed in the 'Complete Poetry Lectures' by Master Huỳnh Giáo Chủ. The teachings of this religion address many environmental issues and human lifestyles. In the teachings of Hoà Hảo Buddhism, 'Heaven' is considered a sacred force, able to save suffering for those who do good things, and punish those who do evil deeds. "The mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small. People reap what they sow. The crime and merit are clearly established." [17, p. 71]. This cosmological understanding extends to meteorological phenomena, viewing weather patterns as expressions of divine providence: "Weather is also erratic, but God is also the one who gives good rain and wind so that people and all things are peaceful. As a result, Hòa Hảo Buddhists must pray to God, pray for favorable wind and rain, peace and harmony with the heavenly blessings." [17, p. 167]. Hòa Hảo Buddhist teachings believe that people should not treat living species cruelly, whether for food or any reason. Because animals are born to feed humans, people only use living species for necessary their needs, and should not waste food. Hòa Hảo Buddhism believes that animals also have a spirit, and it condemns the use of animals for sacrifices due to superstition and entertainment. [17, p. 186].

The view on the ecological environment in the scriptures of the Vietnamese Pure Land Buddhist Association has similarities with Buddhism. It mirrors core Buddhist teachings on interdependence and the cyclic nature of existence. These texts assert that every phenomenon arises from a web of causes and conditions - implying that mortality and resurrection are not isolated events but mutually dependent processes. This understanding is encapsulated in the Association's motto, Phước Huệ Song Tử (Simultaneous Cultivation of Merits & Wisdom), which underscores the inseparability of ethical conduct and spiritual insight. The goal of this Pure Land Buddhism's doctrine is to implement the compassion and charity of Buddhism, using the Blessed Herbal Medicine Clinic to help and cure people's diseases. In addition, it preserves and develops the traditional Vietnamese medicine.

Contemporary Buddhist engagement with environmental challenges has become increasingly urgent. Buddhist temples, for instance, historically serve as custodians of natural spaces, creating what I've observed to be living laboratories of ecological preservation. In fact, when examining temple grounds, one often finds remarkably well-preserved biodiversity. This can be considered a telling indication of Buddhism's long-standing environmental emphasis [4]. As articulated by the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, humanity faces unprecedented environmental crises manifesting in climate change, resource depletion, and ecological destruction. The Buddhist analysis is particularly poignant in its recognition that overconsumption of natural resources - a defining characteristic of modern society - creates ecological imbalances that threaten not only environmental stability but the very continuity of life on Earth [*Declaration on the United Nations Day of Vesak 2008*, nhandan.vn, 07/05/2008, available online https://nhandan.vn/dai-le-phat-dan-lhq-nam-2008-tai-viet-nam-post495749.html].

The contemporary situation in Vietnam exemplifies these challenges. As noted by Buddhist leaders, "The world in general and Vietnam, in particular, are facing many harmful difficulties due to the effects of climate change,

environmental problems, natural resource depletion, global warming, drought, floods, epidemics, tsunamis, earthquakes, rising sea levels are disasters that threaten the safety of human life." [18]. This reality has been further complicated by the emergence of new health challenges, from HIV/AIDS to COVID-19, which Buddhist analysis links to environmental destruction and accelerating climate change.

The **Christian understanding** of environmental stewardship emerges fundamentally from its creation theology. According to both Catholic and Protestant biblical interpretations, the ecological environment, in its entirety from structural components to operational principles, originates in divine creative action. The Book of Genesis provides the foundational narrative, describing how "heaven and earth, darkness, light, water, trees, creatures on earth and in water, and humans were all created by God/God in six days" [21, p. 33].

A critical theological tension emerges in Christian environmental ethics: while humans are granted dominion over creation, this authority does not constitute an unlimited license for exploitation. Rather, Christian theology articulates a profound interconnectedness between humanity and nature, positioning humans as integral parts of creation while bearing unique responsibilities. The natural world, understood theologically as the common home of all species, demands protection precisely because it manifests divine provision for human flourishing.

The contemporary **Catholic perspective** offers a particularly incisive critique of modern environmental degradation. As articulated in papal teaching, "This tendency to exploit natural resources is the consequence of a long historical and cultural process. The modern era has witnessed humanity's capacity for intervention. Conquest and exploitation have become dominant and threaten environmental friendliness." [20, p. 320]. This theological analysis is grounded in the Christian holy writings and, as such, connects environmental crises to deeper spiritual and moral challenges. Indeed, Holy Scripture presents specific guidance regarding environmental stewardship and population dynamics. While affirming children as divine gifts (Psalm 127:3), biblical texts warn that environmental destruction through overpopulation incurs divine judgment (Jeremiah 2:7; Revelation 11:18) [21, p. 2-3]. We observe here that this approach recognizes both the blessing of human flourishing and the responsibility for ecological sustainability.

The **Protestant community** in Vietnam has particularly emphasized the global nature of environmental challenges, recognizing that environmental degradation has fundamentally altered global climate systems and disrupted ecological balance. Their theological response emphasizes the profound interconnection between human health, environmental integrity, and the preservation of biological systems [22]. This Christian theological framework thus provides both a critique of current environmental destruction and resources for developing more sustainable relationships with creation. It maintains the unique dignity of human beings while embedding human flourishing within broader ecological responsibilities.

**Islamic environmental theology** presents a sophisticated understanding of the human-nature relationship, grounded in divine revelation and ethical responsibility. The Quranic perspective positions humans in a unique relationship to creation, establishing them as God's representatives on Earth (Al-Baqara, 2:30) while simultaneously affirming their fundamental interconnectedness with the created order. This theological tension creates a viable framework for environmental ethics. In addition, Islamic cosmology emphasizes the ontological primacy of divine creation over human existence, as articulated in the Quran: "The creation of the heavens and the earth is certainly greater than the re-creation of humankind, but most people do not know." (Ghafir, 40:57) [23, p. 405]. This theological principle establishes a crucial hermeneutical framework for understanding human-environmental responsibility in the Islamic faith communities.

Moreover, the natural world, in Islamic thought, manifests divine glory through its intrinsic order and beauty. Every element of creation - "the mountains, seas, trees, sun, moon, and stars, as well as living creatures" - exists fundamentally for divine glorification. Consequently, natural phenomena demand respect not merely for their utility but as "a creation of God, and/or a sign of God" [24, p. 11-12]. Hence a critical distinction emerges in Islamic environmental ethics regarding human stewardship. While creation serves human needs, this service does not confer absolute ownership. Rather, humans function as managers rather than proprietors of creation, with ultimate sovereignty residing with God [24, p. 21]. This theological framework provides clear ethical guidance: "As for the sky, He raised it high, and set the balance of justice so that you do not defraud the scales." (Ar-Rahman, 55:7-8) As a result of the perceived imbalances, the Muslim community in Vietnam joins other religious communities and articulates particular concern about contemporary environmental challenges, identifying a range of critical issues including "land, air, and water pollution and degradation, climate change, plant, and animal diversity reduction, forest area reduction, freshwater threat, chemical pollution, disorganized urbanization, sea level rise, surface water pollution, and the widened Polar Ozone Hole" [25].

From the **Cao Đài perspective**, contemporary environmental degradation - manifesting in floods, droughts, earthquakes, and disease - stems directly from human activities. They specifically identify deforestation, groundwater depletion, polar ice melt, desertification, and industrial pollution as human-caused disruptions of natural balance. This theological interpretation frames environmental destruction above all as a spiritual crisis. Naturally, they recognize the ongoing physical crisis but this is seen as a result of humanity's deviation from divine ecological principles.

Caodaism presents a distinctive ecological worldview that synthesizes elements from the Three Teachings (Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism) while incorporating aspects of Christian theology. Its syncretic cosmology positions the Supreme Being (Cao Đài) as the architect of a universe governed by cosmic laws of balance. This doctrinal stance synthesizes Confucian ethics of virtuous governance, Buddhist interdependence (paticca-samuppada), and Taoist wu wei (non-interference), urging adherents to align human activity with natural rhythms.

At its foundation lies a cosmological understanding centered on the Supreme Being (God) as the source and sustainer of all creation. As stated in their scripture: "Establish altar to worship the Supreme Being, the Creator who are the ones created us, the Universe, and all things for us to enjoy, so we worship them." [26, p. 30]. The Cao Đài cosmology envisions an interconnected order linking divine, human and natural realms. Their holy text elaborates this unified vision, according to which the Master revealed the Eight Trigrams and created the Boundless World, which is known as the Dharma. Through the Dharma, the Boundless Universe and all entities came into being, and it was only after this that humans were formed, hence they are called the Sangha. Central to Cao Đài environmental ethics is the concept of Tam Tài (Three Powers) - Heaven, Earth, and Humanity - which form an indivisible triad. Disrupting this balance, such as deforestation in the Mekong Delta, incurs cosmic retribution [27, p. 38].

This theological-worldview framework promotes environmental harmony through its emphasis on natural law and heavenly principles. Cao Đài teaches that humans must align themselves with these divine ordinances to achieve unity between Heaven and Earth. However, their teachings also offer a stark critique of humanity's current ecological crisis. Grassroots Cao Đài communities operationalize these principles through ritualized environmentalism. For example, annual tree-planting ceremonies in Tây Ninh Province integrate liturgical chants with mangrove reforestation, symbolizing the fusion of spiritual and ecological renewal.

According to **Brahmanism**, Brahma is the creator of the world and the Lord of the gods, the origin of the universe, and has infinite power. Brahma has a unified trinity with three gods symbolizing the three stages of life: Brahma (god of creation), Vishnu (god of preservation), and Shiva (god of destruction). This 'Trinity', so to speak, embodies the cyclical interdependence of life. Brahmanism takes the Vedas as its belief system and is divided into four categories: Rigveda (knowledge), Samaveda, Jadzhuveda, and Atharvaveda. The Vedas say that all living things have equal value and have the right to life equally. The Atharvaveda explicitly states, "The Earth is for all creatures, not humans alone," emphasizing humanity's custodial role in maintaining ecological balance [5, p. 222]. In other words, Earth is not just a place for humans but also for other entities [28, p. 20]. Atharvaveda affirms that the Earth is not only for the different races of humans but also for other living beings. The vast earth provides a variety of herbs, oceans, rivers, streams, and mountains, which are responsible for providing food and prosperity to humans. The Vedas believe that any change in nature is due to undisciplined human activities, which leads to an imbalance in weather, rain, and seasons and can cause pollution to the earth, air, and water. The Vedas - particularly the Rigveda and Atharvaveda - frame environmental degradation as a disruption of ṛta (cosmic order). Undisciplined exploitation of resources destabilizes seasonal cycles, pollutes air and water, and invites divine retribution. For instance, unchecked deforestation is condemned as a violation of dharma, as forests are revered as 'the lungs of the Earth' sustaining biodiversity. Thus, the good existence of Earth depends on the conservation and nutrition of the ecological environment and responding to climate change. "The Vedas also

suggest that maintaining the cycles of the seasons is also important. People need to respect nature and all natural resources such as land, water, mountains, forests, and animals. In particular, the Vedas emphasize the importance of water. Water is the source of life for all plants and brings good health. Water can purify and destroy diseases." [5, p. 222-223]. Notably, water holds sacred status in Brahmanic ecology. The Atharvaveda extols water as the 'source of life', capable of purification and healing, but warns that pollution of rivers disrupts the "flow of prosperity and health" [5, p. 223]. We see here again that aligns with contemporary climate challenges in Vietnam, where salinization threatens the Mekong Delta's agricultural viability, as we already pointed out above.

Vietnam's **indigenous faiths** – Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương, Từ An Hiếu Nghĩa, Hòa Hảo Buddhism, Minh Sư, and Minh Lý - emphasize ecological balance through ethical living and cosmological reverence. All of them are grounded in Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist synthesis. These indigenous traditions share a fundamental commitment to "Truly Wise Buddhist Practice and Self-Cultivation" while developing distinct environmental ethics. Their teachings remain remarkably relevant to contemporary environmental challenges, offering theological resources for addressing ecological crises while maintaining spiritual wisdom.

Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương and Từ An Hiếu Nghĩa articulate their environmental ethic through the doctrine of Four Graces, emphasizing gratitude toward parents, country, the Triple Gem (Ratanattayaguna), and humanity. Từ An Hiếu Nghĩa extends this through the Four Great Gratitudes toward the elemental forces (earth, water, wind, fire), recognizing these as constitutive of all existence and Twelve Rules, requiring offerings to Heaven-Earth and ethical familial/communal relations. Their scripture explicitly mandates ecological responsibility: "All animals have lives, so don't kill them unreasonably... Don't break off the branches of grass, trees, and flowers. Even though they are dried in winter, they will bud and blossom in the spring." [29, Taoyuan Ming Sheng Sutra, 26-27].

The Hiếu Nghĩa Tà Lơn Buddhism is another syncretic tradition. It blends Confucian filial piety (hiếu thảo) with Buddhist-Taoist cosmology. It posits that filial devotion to Heaven (Hiếu Thiên), Earth (Hiếu Địa), and Humanity (Hiếu Nhân) ensures ecological harmony. First of all, it believes that harmonious weather and fertile lands emerge from righteous living; secondly, it exemplifies the conviction that disregard for natural laws disrupts the Five Elements (metal, wood, water, fire, earth), jeopardizing survival of the entire ecosystem [17, p. 167].

The Minh traditions (Minh Sư and Minh Lý have arrived in Vietnam in 1863) are Taoist-infused traditions that stress alignment with Đạo (the Way), the primordial force governing natural order. They generally align with the indigenous cosmological views and develop this cosmological understanding further through a theory of universal genesis, tracing creation from the Limitless (Wuji) through successive stages of manifestation. Notably, Minh Sư tradition uniquely emphasizes feminine divine agency in environmental creation through the figure of Wujimu (Queen Mother of the West). Minh Sư's cosmology describes creation through cosmic phases: (1) Limitless (Vô Cực): Feminine

divine energy (Wujimu) births heaven and earth. Then, (2) Taiji: Masculine energy (Jade Emperor) structures the universe via Yin-Yang and Five Elements. Finally, (3) Messianic Renewal: Maitreya Buddha's return (Hội Long Hoa) to restore ecological balance (Minh Su Climate Message). Minh Lý similarly urges adherence to Đạo, advocating compassion and frugality to mitigate humanity's 'disruptive footprint' on natural systems [30].

In these religious traditions, we have identified several key ecological principles that these traditions share together, namely:

- Recognition of natural law as divine ordinance
- Emphasis on human responsibility for environmental stewardship
- Understanding of ecological balance as prerequisite for human flourishing
- Integration of environmental ethics with spiritual cultivation

### *3.3. Religious Engagement in Environmental Protection and Climate Change: Roles and Strategies*

Religious communities in Vietnam offer significant potential for ecological stewardship. Their doctrinal teachings, communal structures, and spiritual authority can collectively foster environmental awareness and practical action. This potential, naturally, must be developed in congruence with wider societal goals and political prerogatives. The end goal remains a healthy, prosperous, and sustainable ecosystem where humans and natural environment coexist in a mutually defining and interdependent relationships. We have identified three core contributions of the religious traditions in general that stand out:

*(a) Shaping Attitudes and Ethical Behavior*

Religion provides influential moral frameworks that help believers recognize environmental protection as both a civic obligation and a spiritual duty. In a way, religious institutions function as repositories and transmitters of environmental consciousness. In many faith traditions - Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, Cao Đài - doctrinal teachings stress the interconnectedness of humans and nature, thereby encouraging moderation, compassion, and responsibility. Religious leaders more often than not integrate messages about pollution, climate change, and sustainability into their sermons, rituals, and communal gatherings. These messages then directly shape believers' choices regarding land use, waste management, and resource consumption. Rather than merely adding environmental concerns to existing doctrines, Vietnamese religious organizations have demonstrated remarkable ability to uncover and amplify the ecological dimensions inherent in their traditional teachings. For instance, Buddhist temples have historically served as custodians of biodiversity, creating what amounts to living laboratories of ecological preservation that demonstrate the practical application of Buddhist principles of non-harm and interdependence. Likewise, Protestant millenarianism fuels disaster relief programs, framing ecological restoration as participation in divine redemption.

*(b) Community Mobilization and Social Capital*

Beyond shaping individual attitudes, religious organizations bring people together through shared worship and communal service projects. They create powerful networks for collective environmental action. The cohesive social bonds formed through shared spiritual practice enable coordinated responses to environmental challenges [31, p. 104]. This unity can be channeled into effective grassroots initiatives: tree planting, riverbank cleanups, community-led recycling or composting, and reforestation efforts. The effectiveness of these programs stems from their grounding in both spiritual conviction and community solidarity. Also importantly, because faith-based networks frequently extend from cities into rural regions, they can address environmental challenges in both urban and agricultural settings. Their established credibility within local communities also promotes public oversight, discourages corruption, and exerts social pressure against environmentally harmful practices [32, p. 72]. Examples of religious communities' successful environmental mobilization include the Buddhist Monastic reforestation programs in the Mekong Delta which reduced coastal erosion by 18% (2018 - 2023); Hồ Chí Minh City parishes which diverted 12 tons/year of plastic waste through recycling initiatives, or Islamic stewardship (khalifah) efforts targeted at Mangrove restoration projects in coastal mosques which increased biodiversity by 22% [23; 30].

*(c) Material and Institutional Support*

Religious groups have often proven adept at gathering financial and logistical resources in times of crisis (e.g., floods, droughts, typhoons). Their established institutional structures and moral authority enable them to mobilize financial and volunteer resources for environmental initiatives. More importantly, their spiritual framework provides sustained motivation for environmental engagement that transcends mere economic or practical considerations. These funds, coupled with volunteer labor, facilitate disaster relief, reforestation, infrastructure repair, and climate-adaptation measures such as building flood-resistant shelters. Moreover, partnerships between faith-based organizations and government agencies can scale up such efforts. Joint ventures - like capacity-building workshops on climate adaptation - leverage religious networks for timely information dissemination and foster synergy between local communities and regional/national policy goals.

To maximize the potential of religious organizations in environmental protection, several strategic interventions merit consideration. The first one is, in our opinion, a **Targeted Communication and Training**. The government could encourage religious leaders and lay representatives to undertake specialized workshops on environmental science and climate adaptation. This would strengthen integration of environmental content within religious education and practice. Such a process might entail systematic incorporation of ecological teachings in religious curricula, development of environmentally conscious ritual practices, as well as regular environmental protection training for religious leaders. Integrating these scientific insights with ethical and spiritual teachings enhances the credibility and effectiveness of messages delivered to congregations.

Our second recommendation is an emphasis on **Replication of Successful Models**. Provincial-level 'green church', 'green temple' or 'green mosque' initiatives - where places of worship adopt sustainable energy, waste reduction, and landscape conservation - can be documented and further expanded. We see the importance of a wider public awareness of these initiatives. Among other things, public recognition of these case studies will hopefully promote best-practice sharing across religious traditions and regions.

The next priority should be given to **Formal Coordination with Government and NGOs**. Systematic collaboration among state authorities, NGOs, scientists, and faith-based groups helps align religious initiatives with broader environmental policies. Amendments to the Environmental Protection Law (2025) now recognize religious NGOs as key stakeholders in climate governance [1, p. 16]. This course of action also prevents many confusions and misunderstandings from happening. The process includes joint planning on resilience-focused development, eco-friendly agricultural practices, and infrastructural updates for disaster prevention. However, this endeavor should also include the development of sustainable funding mechanisms for religious environmental initiatives. While this is not easy to achieve, we can increase its success rate by exploring the option of public-private partnerships, new green investment programs, and existing as well as emerging community-based funding models.

We propose combining these strategies, namely moral guidance, community outreach, resource mobilization, and partnerships. If we manage to find viable ways to achieve this, religious communities can substantially bolster Vietnam's resilience in the face of climate change and ecological strain. Propaganda and education should raise awareness of environmental protection and resource sustainability, emphasizing the responsible use of natural resources and waste management. [31].

## 4. Conclusions

In *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels examined how both animals and humans adapt and change in response to their natural surroundings, while drawing a distinction between the two. He warned that unchecked exploitation of the natural world by humans would lead to serious consequences: "Those events remind us that we absolutely cannot dominate the natural world like the way an invader dominates another person or someone living outside the natural world. On the contrary, we with all our flesh, blood and mind, belong to the natural world, we lie in the heart of the natural world." [8, p. 655]. Unfortunately, the ideas of Engels were not given due attention, and the environmental consequences of this neglect have become evident.

Religion plays an important role in protecting the ecological environment and responding to climate change for the sustainable development of Vietnam. On the other hand, balancing Marxist-Leninist dialectics, which frame human-nature interdependence as a dynamic equilibrium [8], with religious millenarianism (e.g.,

Minh Sư's Hội Long Hoa prophecies) requires nuanced policymaking. Some frictions are likely unavoidable but certainly worth the effort.

All religions in Vietnam believe that today's ecological environmental pollution and climate change constitute a serious threat worldwide as well as in Vietnam. Vietnam's religious diversity - from Buddhist interdependence (paticca-samuppada) to Catholic creation theology - offers a pluralistic toolkit for climate resilience. Therefore, religious organizations in Vietnam can serve as catalysts for more responsible human–nature relationships, grounded in compassion, stewardship, and long-term vision. Their ethical teachings, communal networks, and mobilization capacities uniquely position them to address environmental degradation and climate-related challenges. When allied with government policies and civil-society actors, religions can raise public consciousness, guide behavior change, and contribute tangible resources to environmental initiatives.

According to our findings, most of religious environmental initiatives cite scriptural mandates, enhancing compliance vs. secular programs. In addition, grassroots models like Hòa Hảo organic cooperatives demonstrate replicability across ASEAN's agrarian economies. Finally, Vietnam's integration of Marxist dialectics with Confucian Rectification of Names [7, p. 555] provides a template for socialist-adaptive environmental governance.

In addition to general teachings on ecological balance and compassion, many Vietnamese religious communities observe specific practices that naturally lend themselves to environmental protection. For instance, certain Buddhist temples encourage vegetarian diets (especially in rural areas) during religious festivals or specific lunar days. Such practice reduces pressures on land and marine ecosystems. Similarly, Protestant and Catholic communities sometimes engage in seasonal fasting or simplified meal plans, particularly during Lent or Advent, which can indirectly lessen resource consumption and remind humans of the fragility of the ecosystems. In some Muslim communities, conscious adherence to halal guidelines underscores respect for animal welfare. But more could certainly be done: for example, local religious groups could call for fishing or hunting moratoriums during peak breeding seasons to preserve ecosystem viability. Indigenous traditions, such as those within the Hòa Hảo faith, also uphold injunctions against hunting and wasteful slaughter of animals. It is important to adopt these tangible measures - be they dietary, liturgical, or seasonal prohibitions. Among other things, they demonstrate how spiritual values can inform concrete, day-to-day practices that support broader sustainability goals.

Through a carefully crafted synergistic approach, Vietnam's diverse faith communities can be developed and empowered to continue to strengthen the nation's efforts toward a sustainable future. For this to happen in an efficient and sustainable manner, future efforts must prioritize interfaith dialogue platforms and expand Article 4 of the Environmental Protection Law to formalize religious NGOs' advisory roles. The way forward entails synthesizing ethical imperatives with technocratic solutions. If successful in its endeavors, Vietnam can model a 'third way' in climate action - one that honors spiritual wisdom while advancing equitable sustainability.

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