

## An Analysis of the Efficacy of the Common Good Theory in Resolving the Environmental Crisis

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines the efficacy of the theory of the common good (*khayr-i 'umūmī*) in resolving environmental crises, focusing on Christian and Islamic perspectives. Rooted in Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophy, the theory of the common good emphasizes collective flourishing and intergenerational justice, aligning with Christian stewardship and Islamic vicegerency (*khilāfah*). Through comparative analysis, this study highlights the convergences between Christian and Islamic traditions in promoting environmental sustainability and collective responsibility for environmental protection, while also critiquing divergences such as anthropocentrism within these traditions. By integrating theological principles such as justice, community, and spiritual motivations, the theory of the common good offers a theoretical framework that links religious ethics with environmental governance. This framework promotes interfaith dialogue and practical applications in addressing environmental challenges. However, despite its capacity to enrich environmental policies, the theory has limitations, including oversimplification of theological doctrines and implementation challenges across diverse cultural contexts. The study underscores the necessity of future research to address these gaps and to strengthen collaboration between religious and secular worldviews in order to present an inclusive approach to global environmental sustainability.

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## 1. Introduction

This article examines the efficacy of the theory of the common good in resolving environmental crises, focusing on Christian and Islamic perspectives. Rooted in Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophy, the theory of the common good emphasizes collective flourishing and intergenerational justice, aligning with Christian stewardship and Islamic vicegerency (*khilāfah*).

In an era marked by intensifying environmental crises—where climate change is projected to exacerbate the vulnerability of billions of people worldwide—the intersection of the common good theory with religious perspectives on the environment offers a compelling framework for ethical action. The link between religious environmental approaches and the common good theory is significant because religious affiliations play a fundamental role in shaping the environmental attitudes and behaviors of the vast majority of humanity, and can mobilize religious communities to protect the environment against challenges such as biodiversity loss and water stress.

In a general definition, the common good theory is understood as the set of social conditions that enable individuals and groups within a community to realize their own flourishing and the community's movement toward transcendence (*ta'ālī*) more fully and more easily. The importance of this theory lies in providing a normative foundation for addressing social gaps, as it promotes non-excludable goods beneficial to all, thereby strengthening social cohesion and human flourishing.

## 2. Methodology

This study, through comparative analysis, highlights the convergences between Christian and Islamic traditions in promoting environmental sustainability and collective responsibility for environmental protection, while also critiquing divergences such as anthropocentrism within these traditions. The proposed model begins with the fundamental axis of societal well-being (*sa'ādatmandī-yi jāmi'ah*) and employs Aristotelian-Thomistic concepts of the common good as collective flourishing, adapted to religious contexts.

The research is qualitative and library-based, drawing on primary and secondary sources in Christian theology (including papal encyclicals such as *Laudato Si'*), Islamic theology (*Qur'ān*, *ḥadīth*, and works of Muslim scholars), and contemporary environmental ethics literature.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1. The Common Good Theory as an Integrative Framework

The common good theory, through the integration of theological principles such as justice, community, and spiritual motivations, offers a theoretical framework that links religious ethics with environmental governance. This framework promotes interfaith dialogue and practical applications in addressing environmental challenges.

### **3.2. Christian Perspectives: From Stewardship to Agapic Ethics**

In Christian traditions, environmental innovations often extend beyond the stewardship model in its traditional sense toward an agapic ethics (akhlāq-i āgāpīhī), where love universalizes care for creation. This transformation reinterprets the concept of dominion over creation as an all-encompassing love that reflects God's love for all creatures. As seen in the papal encyclical *Laudato Si'*, this shift introduces the environment as a common good, linking social justice with environmental sustainability through ritual practices and political advocacy.

### **3.3. Islamic Perspectives: Public Interest and Vicegerency (Khilāfah)**

In Islamic perspectives, the common good manifests through the application of the concepts of public interest (maṣlahat-i ʿāmmih), vicegerency (khilāfah), and trust (amānah). These principles guide sustainable practices and policy frameworks that prioritize collective well-being over individual gain. The elements of the common good theory align with these religious approaches, emphasizing sustainable resource use through a responsible view of human interaction with nature.

### **3.4. Recognition of Intrinsic Value and Justice**

The findings indicate that the common good theory recognizes the intrinsic value of non-human elements in creation and promotes a type of ethics of care that extends beyond anthropocentrism. Justice and participation constitute other principles of the common good theory, ensuring that environmental policies include marginalized communities and prioritize the vulnerable.

### **3.5. Adaptive Convergence and Interfaith Dialogue**

Adaptive convergences of the common good across traditions render interfaith dialogues significant. Traditions that emphasize shared values such as justice and stewardship adapt the common good theory to promote global cooperation in environmental initiatives.

### **3.6. Limitations and Unresolved Tensions**

Despite its capacity to enrich environmental policies, certain limitations have been identified, including the oversimplification of theological doctrines and implementation challenges across diverse cultural contexts. One overlooked aspect in Christian and Islamic environmental studies is the examination of the duality between society and its members and the relationship between them for the purpose of societal flourishing and the facilitation of its transcendence. Furthermore, debates surrounding anthropocentrism versus ecocentrism in both religions—through narratives of Christian stewardship and Islamic vicegerency—remain unresolved, as they are often criticized for prioritizing human needs over planetary health.

### **3.7. Evolution of the Literature**

The findings reveal that the existing literature from the 1960s to the present has undergone significant evolution, moving from early critiques toward more inclusive frameworks. This global scholarly trajectory reflects a shift in the

perception of religions from enemies of the environment to active agents in environmental ethics, highlighting the emergence of the religious common good within this transformation. Contemporary case studies and theological texts, including papal encyclicals and interfaith declarations, demonstrate efforts to link religious ethics with environmental policy-making and confirm the capacity of religious teachings to shape pro-environmental behaviors and attitudes.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study underscores the necessity of future research to address theoretical and practical gaps and to strengthen collaboration between religious and secular worldviews in order to present an inclusive approach to global environmental sustainability.

The common good theory, by bridging secular and religious concepts, provides a foundation for supporting comprehensive environmental care. The synthesis of these principles—realized within the context of a purposeful society—not only critiques exploitative practices but also proposes a moral vision in which environmental ethics is promoted as an extension of religious duty toward societal transcendence. This framework can mobilize religious communities to protect the environment and promote interfaith dialogue and practical applications in addressing environmental challenges.

However, for the full potential of the common good theory to be realized in resolving the environmental crisis, limitations such as the oversimplification of theological doctrines and implementation challenges across diverse cultural contexts must be addressed. Future research should fill these gaps and strengthen collaboration between religious traditions and secular approaches to shape an inclusive and effective approach to environmental sustainability.

This study demonstrates that integrating principles such as justice, participation, trustworthiness (*amāndārī*), and public interest (*maṣāliḥ-i ‘āmmih*) into environmental policy-making can provide a practical and normative framework for the protection of creation, thereby establishing the common good as an ethical and practical foundation for responding to environmental crises.

#### Declarations

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