



ECOTHEOLOGY IN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: A FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING STUDENTS' ECOLOGICAL RELIGIOUS CHARACTER

Wardatul Ilmiah¹, Fitri Hilmiyati², Ilzamudin Ma'mur³, Umdatul Hasanah⁴, Rasnam Rasyidi⁵

¹²³⁴Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin; Banten,

⁵Universitas Sultan Ageng tirtayasa

253701204.wardatulilmiah@uinbanten.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The increasingly complex global environmental crisis reflects not only technical failures in natural resource management but also a deeper crisis of human values and spirituality in relation to nature. In this context, ecotheology emerges as an integrative approach that connects theological, ethical, and ecological dimensions in addressing this crisis. This study aims to examine the role of ecotheology in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) as a theological foundation for shaping students' religious character in higher education. This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research design, incorporating conceptual and thematic analysis of classical and contemporary Islamic scholarship, as well as recent articles from reputable Scopus-indexed journals (2023–2025). The findings reveal that ecotheology functions as both a normative and transformative framework in developing students' religious character through the internalization of core Islamic values such as monotheism (tawhid), stewardship (khilafah), and trust (amanah). This process operates through four interconnected dimensions spiritual, moral, social, and ecological which collectively foster pro-environmental awareness and behavior. Furthermore, a transformative learning approach plays a crucial role in bridging the value–action gap, thereby strengthening sustainable value internalization. This study offers an integrative conceptual framework that positions ecotheology as a foundational paradigm in Islamic Religious Education for cultivating ecologically oriented religious character. Practically, it recommends the integration of ecotheological perspectives into the PAI curriculum through content enrichment, transformative pedagogical strategies, and eco-spirituality practices. These findings highlight ecotheology as a strategic approach to nurturing a generation that is religious, critical, and ecologically responsible in responding to the global environmental crisis.

Keyword: Ecotheology, Islamic Religious Education, Character Education, Ecological Awareness

INTRODUCTION

The current global environmental crisis shows an increasingly serious escalation and has a wide impact on human life. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023) report noted that global temperatures have increased by around 1.1°C compared to the pre-industrial era, which contributes to the increasing frequency of natural disasters such as floods, droughts, and forest fires (Pratama, A. (2024). Various recent studies also confirm that climate change has accelerated ecosystem degradation and increased the socio-ecological vulnerability of global society Bustamante, M., Roy, J., (2023). In Indonesia, data from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK) shows that the rate of deforestation and environmental damage remains a real threat, accompanied by an increasing clean water crisis and environmental pollution in various regions. This fact confirms that the ecological



crisis is not only a natural problem, but also a social problem that impacts the quality of human life, especially the younger generation. (Yopo, A., & Mbelangedo, N. (2025).

Furthermore, the environmental crisis is also correlated with a character crisis. Various social phenomena such as low concern for campus environmental cleanliness, consumer culture, and minimal ecological awareness among students indicate a gap between knowledge and practice of environmental ethics. This indicates that education has not fully succeeded in forming a character oriented towards ecological responsibility. Several recent studies show that students' environmental literacy has not consistently transformed into pro-environmental behavior (Rajagukguk, A., Lombu, P. Y., & Malau, M. (2026). In other words, environmental problems require not only technical solutions, but also a transformation of values and moral awareness.

From a philosophical and theological perspective, this crisis is rooted in the secular and anthropocentric perspective of modern humanity. Seyyed Hossein Nasr asserts that the environmental crisis is the result of a loss of awareness of the sacredness of nature, leading humans to treat it merely as an object of exploitation (Nasr, 1990). Furthermore, another work asserts that the earth is "wounded" by human behavior that is no longer aligned with Nasr's spiritual values (1994).

This approach is also supported by contemporary studies that emphasize the importance of re-spiritualizing the relationship between humans and nature as a solution to the ecological crisis Supartono, (A. R., Dwirizki, A., Wijayasari Irsyam, N. M., Suseno, B. R., Gatra, P., & Fonseca, B. (2024). Therefore, an alternative approach is needed that is able to restore the spiritual dimension in the relationship between humans and nature. Islam as a comprehensive religion has a strong theological foundation in building environmental ethics. The concept *monotheism*, *caliph*, And *trust* positioning humans as guardians of the balance of nature, not as absolute rulers. These principles became the basis for the birth of Islamic ecotheology, an approach that integrates theological values with ecological awareness in responding to the environmental crisis. (Abdul Quddus (2012). In recent studies, ecotheology is seen as a transformative framework that is able to bridge the spiritual dimension and ecological praxis in education (Yopo, A., & Mbelangedo, N. (2025). Ecotheology not only offers conceptual understanding, but also encourages the transformation of human behavior in maintaining environmental sustainability.

In the context of education, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a strategic role in shaping students' character. Education aims not only to transfer knowledge but also to instill values and shape personality. Lickona emphasized that character education must encompass the dimensions of *moral knowing*, *moral feeling*, And *moral action* so that the values can be fully internalized. (Lickona Thomas, 2009). Recent research also shows that the integration of character education based on religious values significantly increases ecological awareness and sustainable behavior of students (Mahrus, M. (2024). Thus, the integration of ecotheological values in Islamic Religious Education is important to foster a religious character that is not only oriented towards a vertical relationship with God, but also a horizontal relationship with the environment.

In addition, the classical Islamic intellectual tradition also made a significant contribution to the formation of religious character. Al-Ghazali in *Ihya' Ulumuddin* emphasizes the importance of purification of the soul (*tazkiyatun nafs*) as the foundation of human ethical behavior (Al-Ghazali, 1996). This spiritual awareness will



ultimately give rise to moral responsibility towards fellow creatures, including the environment. In the contemporary context, this approach is in line with research findings that emphasize that spirituality has a positive correlation with pro-environmental behavior. (Nuryadin, S., & Bakar, A. (2017). Thus, the formation of religious character in Islam is holistic, encompassing spiritual, social, and ecological dimensions.

On the other hand, contemporary ecotheological studies also show that the environmental crisis is a spiritual crisis that requires a religious-values-based approach. Juhrodin (2025) emphasized that environmental damage must be understood as a spiritual calling to rebuild harmony between humans, nature, and God. (Juhrodin, n.d.). In line with this, various recent studies (2023–2025) in reputable Scopus journals show that religious-values-based education has a significant influence in increasing ecological awareness and pro-environmental behavior among students. (Afandi, I., & Fuadi, M. H. (2025).

Studies on the ecotheology of the Qur'an have shown significant progress, particularly in efforts to link theological values with ecological awareness. One important study was conducted by Ritonga et al., who analyzed the concept of ecotheology in *Tafsir al-Marāghī* And *Tafsir al-Mishbāh* with an educational psychology approach. The results of this study indicate that both interpretations reject the anthropocentric paradigm and emphasize that humans as caliphs have a moral and spiritual responsibility to maintain the balance (*mizān*) of nature in a sustainable manner. Al-Marāghī emphasizes the individual ethical dimension based on sharia and rationality, while Quraish Shihab highlights the socio-ecological dimension through the concepts of *isti'mār* and *taskhīr* oriented towards justice and sustainability. Furthermore, this study confirms that the integration of ecotheological values with educational psychology theories such as Kohlberg's moral development, Kolb's experiential learning, and Bandura's social learning can form ecological awareness that is not only cognitive, but also touches on affective and behavioral aspects (Ritonga et al., 2025). However, these studies remain conceptual and have not specifically examined the implementation of ecotheological values in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. Most studies tend to separate character education from environmental education and have not optimally integrated the two within an Islamic theological framework. This integration is crucial for developing students' religious character and strong ecological awareness. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by examining the integration of ecotheological values into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning practices to foster a more applicable and contextualized environmental awareness. Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the role of ecotheology in Islamic Religious Education as a theological foundation for the formation of students' religious character. This research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of an integrative paradigm between theology, education, and ecology, as well as practical contributions to the development of ecotheology-based Islamic Religious Education learning models in higher education.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature study design (*library research*) enriched with conceptual analysis to examine the role of ecotheology in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in the formation of students' religious character. This approach was chosen because it is able to explore meanings, values, and theoretical constructions in depth, especially in philosophical and normative studies. (Teddue et al., n.d.). The research



data sources consist of primary data in the form of classical and contemporary works such as the thoughts of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Al-Ghazali, and Islamic ecotheology literature, and secondary data in the form of reputable international journal articles (Scopus Q1–Q2), global reports such as the IPCC, and educational and environmental policy documents (Snyder, 2019). Data collection techniques are carried out through documentation studies and *systematic literature review* taking into account the relevance, credibility, and recency of the sources (2023–2025). Next, the data was analyzed using the technique *content analysis* and thematic analysis which includes the process of data reduction, categorization, conceptual synthesis, and drawing conclusions. (Krippendorff, 2004). To ensure the validity of the data, this study uses source triangulation through comparison of various literatures as well as theoretical consistency between classical perspectives and contemporary research Lumbu, A., Panda, F. M., Judijanto, L., Djollong, A. F., Tumber, R. T., Priyanto, P., ... & Ardiansyah, W. (2026). With this approach, the study seeks to produce an integrative analytical framework that connects the concept of Islamic ecotheology, religious education, and the formation of students' religious character in the context of sustainability.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Basic Concepts of Ecotheology

Ecotheology is an interdisciplinary approach that integrates theological dimensions with ecological awareness in understanding the relationship between humans, nature, and God. From an Islamic perspective, ecotheology is rooted in the principle *monotheism* (union of creation), *caliph* (the role of humans as leaders of the earth), and *trust* (moral responsibility towards nature) which is the basis of environmental ethics (Abdul Quddus (2012). Thus, ecotheology is not only conceptual, but also normative and practical in shaping human behavior towards the environment. Seyyed Hossein Nasr asserts that the modern environmental crisis stems from the loss of a sacred awareness of nature. In his work, *Man and Nature*, he stated that modern humans have separated themselves from spiritual values so that nature has been reduced to an object of exploitation. (Nasr, 1990). Further, in *Religion and the Order of Nature* Nasr emphasized that resolving the ecological crisis must be achieved through the reconstruction of religious consciousness, viewing nature as a manifestation of divine signs (Nasr, 1994). This view is reinforced by Juhrocin (2025), who states that the ecological crisis is a spiritual crisis that demands a harmonious transformation of human relations with God and nature. (Juhrocin, n.d.)

Types of Ecotheology

In the study of ecotheology, there are several main approaches that explain the relationship between God, humans, and nature. Theocentric ecotheology places God at the center, where nature is understood as a sacred creation and connected in the concept of *monotheism*. (Abdul Quddus (2012) & Abdul Quddus (2012), n.d.) . Meanwhile, religious anthropocentric ecotheology emphasizes the role of humans as *caliph* who have a moral responsibility to protect the environment (Abdul Quddus (2012) & Abdul Quddus (2012), n.d.), in line with the findings that moral values play an important role in sustainability (Indriasari, R., Sidiq, F. F., & Mendrofa, D. E. K. (2024). Furthermore, cosmocentric ecotheology views nature as an interconnected system whose balance must be maintained



(*balance*) (Abdul Quddus (2012) & Abdul Quddus (2012), n.d.), which is supported by the concept of planetary boundaries in modern environmental science (Rockström et al., 2023). Transformational ecotheology emphasizes changes in behavior and social systems through the integration of religious values and sustainability (Talengkera, R. L., & Tumiwa, E. S. (2025)., as well as the importance of transformative learning in forming ecological awareness Yopo, A., & Mbelanggedo, N. (2025). Thus, ecotheology is not only theoretical, but also oriented towards real changes in human behavior and social life.

Ecotheology in Religious Character Education

Ecotheology plays a strategic role in education, particularly in shaping ecologically oriented religious character. Character education emphasizes not only knowledge but also moral attitudes and actions, as Lickona emphasizes through the concept of *moral knowing*, *moral feeling*, and *moral action* (Lickona Thomas, 2009). In an Islamic perspective, this character formation is strengthened by the concept *tazkiyatun nafsw* which emphasizes the purification of the soul as the basis of human ethical behavior (Al-Ghazali, 1996). The integration of ecotheological values into education enables the formation of spiritual awareness that fosters environmental responsibility. This is supported by contemporary research showing that sustainability-based education can increase students' ecological awareness (Atmawijaya, 2025). As well as the importance of *transformative learning* in changing values and behavior. Furthermore, the integration of religious values has been shown to contribute significantly to pro-environmental behavior. Thus, ecotheology in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) can be an effective instrument in shaping students' religious character, oriented not only toward ritual worship but also toward ecological responsibility.

Ecotheology-Based Student Religious Character Indicators

Based on a synthesis of classical theory and contemporary research, the religious character of ecotheology-based students can be understood as a unity between spiritual, moral, social, and ecological dimensions. Spiritually, students have an awareness that nature is God's creation (*monotheism*) and carry out the role *ascaliph* with an attitude of gratitude and responsibility (Abdul Quddus (2012) & Abdul Quddus (2012), n.d.). In the moral dimension, this character is reflected in environmental concern, behavior that does not damage nature, and an awareness of the importance of sustainability. The social dimension is demonstrated through active participation in environmental conservation activities and a collaborative attitude in maintaining ecosystems. Meanwhile, the ecological dimension is evident in concrete behaviors such as an eco-friendly lifestyle (*reduce, reuse, recycle*), sustainable living practices, and consistency between values and actions. These findings are in line with contemporary research showing that values, spirituality, and identity have a significant influence on pro-environmental behavior Roqi, K., & Wahyudi, W. (2025), so that the integration of ecotheology in education is important in forming a holistic religious character of students.

Although studies of ecotheology, character education, and environmental education have advanced rapidly, the existing literature still reveals several significant gaps. Ecotheological studies tend to be philosophical and normative in nature, thus rarely being implemented in formal educational contexts. Furthermore, environmental education has



not been fully integrated with theological values, while character education is often separated from ecological issues. Furthermore, research specifically examining the role of ecotheology in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in higher education is still limited. This situation indicates the lack of a comprehensive model that fully integrates ecotheology, PAI, and the formation of students' religious character. This research aims to fill this gap through a more holistic, integrative approach.

The integration of ecotheology into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in higher education requires the development of teaching materials that are not only normative but also contextual and transformative in shaping students' ecological awareness. Theologically, ecotheology's content is based on the concept *monotheism, caliph, trust, And balance* which emphasizes that humans have a spiritual responsibility to maintain the balance of nature. (Abdul Quddus (2012) & Abdul Quddus (2012), n.d.). This perspective is reinforced by the view that the environmental crisis is a spiritual crisis that demands the reconstruction of human relations with God and nature (Juhrocin, 2025)

In addition, ecological values in Islam such as the prohibition of damaging the environment (*fasad fil ardh*), recommendations for maintaining cleanliness, and principles *mercy for all the worlds* needs to be integrated into learning materials, because nature is seen as a manifestation of divine signs (*kauniyah verse*). Nasr, Religion and the Order of Nature Nasr (1994). In the context of character education, ecotheology content is directed at fostering environmental awareness, ecological responsibility, and a sustainable lifestyle. This aligns with the concept of character education, which emphasizes the integration of knowledge, attitudes, and moral actions (Lickona Thomas, 2009), and is supported by findings that religious values significantly influence pro-environmental behavior. Implementation of this material also requires the use of transformative learning approaches, such as *problem-based learning, project-based learning*, and spiritual reflection, which have been proven effective in changing students' awareness and behavior. (Kurniawan, R. G. (2025).

Furthermore, the integration of ecotheology in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum can be done through strengthening special topics, thematic integration in faith, morals, and jurisprudence, as well as developing practices *eco-spirituality* and cross-disciplinary collaboration. Research shows that the integration of sustainability education into the university curriculum can increase students' ecological awareness, although it still requires strengthening of values to encourage behavioral change Kurniawati, E., & Sutriani, I. (2026). Thus, the content of ecotheology material in Islamic Religious Education is expected to produce students who have theological-ecological awareness, holistic religious character, environmentally friendly behavior, and the ability to become agents of change in realizing sustainability.

Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that ecotheology is an integrative approach that connects theological, ethical, and ecological dimensions in responding to the global environmental crisis. Classical perspectives such as the thoughts of Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Al-Ghazali emphasize that environmental damage is rooted in human spiritual crisis, so that a reconstruction of religious consciousness that views nature as part of Divine signs is needed. In the contemporary context, various studies also show that values, spirituality, and education have a significant role in shaping pro-environmental behavior, although there is still a gap between knowledge and action (*value-action gap*). Furthermore,



the integration of ecotheology into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at universities has proven to have great potential in shaping students' holistic religious character, encompassing spiritual, moral, social, and ecological dimensions. The material content is based on the concept of *monotheism*, *caliph*, and *trust*, and supported by a transformative learning approach, can encourage internalization of values and changes in student behavior towards sustainable ecological awareness.

However, the literature review also shows that previous research tends to be fragmented, both between character education and environmental education, and between theological and empirical approaches. Therefore, research is needed that integrates ecotheology within the framework of Islamic Religious Education in a more comprehensive manner, particularly in the context of developing the religious character of students in higher education. Therefore, this research is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of an ecotheology-based educational paradigm in response to the global ecological crisis. The results of this study indicate that the integration of ecotheology in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a significant role in shaping the ecologically oriented religious character of students. Based on an analysis of classical and contemporary literature, it was found that theological values such as *monotheism*, *caliph*, and *trust* serves as a normative foundation capable of building students' ecological awareness. This awareness is not only cognitive but also develops into a moral commitment and concrete behavior in protecting the environment, in line with findings that values and spirituality have a strong influence on pro-environmental behavior (Mubarok, A., & Haryanto, H. C. (2020).

Model Integrasi Ekoteologi dalam PAI



Furthermore, the research results show that the formation of ecotheology-based religious character occurs through the integration of four main dimensions, namely spiritual, moral, social, and ecological. The spiritual dimension is reflected in students' awareness that protecting the environment is part of worship, while the moral dimension is



seen in their attitude of caring and responsibility towards natural sustainability. The social dimension is demonstrated through active participation in environmental activities, while the ecological dimension is manifested in concrete behaviors such as waste reduction and a sustainable lifestyle. These findings are in line with research by Landena, A. Y. A., & Leobisa, J, which emphasizes that the integration of values and identity plays an important role in shaping sustainable behavior (Landena, A. Y. A., & Leobisa, J. (2026).

In addition, this study found that the learning approach used in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is very important in determining the success of internalizing ecotheological values. *transformative learning* proven to be more effective than conventional methods, because it is able to profoundly change students' perspectives, values, and behavior. Implementation of methods such as *problem-based learning*, *project-based learning*, and spiritual reflection provides a direct experience that strengthens the relationship between religious values and ecological practices. This is supported by research by Hidayati, R. E., which shows that transformative learning contributes significantly to changes in sustainable behavior (Hidayati, R. E., 2025). Other findings indicate that the integration of ecotheology in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum has not been optimally implemented. Most of the material is still normative and has not been systematically connected to contemporary environmental issues. This causes a gap between students' understanding of values and actual practices (*value-action gap*). This finding is in line with the research of Firdaus, F. A. which states that although sustainability education increases awareness, behavioral change still requires a value-based and experience-based approach (Firdaus, F. A. (2024)

Based on the overall findings, this study identified that the effectiveness of ecotheology in Islamic Religious Education is determined by three main factors, namely: (1) the strength of the theological foundation integrated into the learning materials, (2) the use of a transformative learning approach, and (3) contextual integration of the curriculum with environmental issues. These three factors interact with each other in shaping the religious character of students who are not only oriented towards ritual aspects, but also have sustainable ecological awareness and responsibility. This study clearly found that ecotheology functions as an effective theological foundation in forming students' religious character through internalization of values. *monotheism*, *caliph*, And *trust* integrated into the learning process. The main findings of this study indicate that the formation of ecotheology-based religious character occurs through four main dimensions—spiritual, moral, social, and ecological—which are interconnected and result in pro-environmental behavioral changes. Furthermore, this study confirms that a transformative learning approach is a key factor in bridging the gap between knowledge and action (*value-action gap*). Thus, this study offers an integrative conceptual framework that places ecotheology as a foundation in Islamic Religious Education to shape the sustainable religious character of students.

Discussion

The results of this study confirm that ecotheology plays a fundamental role as a theological foundation in the formation of students' religious character through Islamic Religious Education (PAI). This finding strengthens the argument that the environmental crisis is not merely technical in nature, but is rooted in a spiritual and value crisis, as stated



by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who emphasized the loss of sacred awareness of nature as the main cause of environmental damage (Nasr, 1990). In this context, the integration of values *monotheism, caliph, And trustin* PAI, it has been proven to be able to build theologically based ecological awareness, thus expanding the meaning of religiosity from mere ritual to ecological responsibility. The findings of this study also indicate that ecotheology-based religious character formation occurs through four main dimensions: spiritual, moral, social, and ecological. This model enriches the character education theory developed by Lickona, which previously emphasized three main dimensions (*moral knowing, moral feeling, moral action*) (Lickona Thomas, 2009). By adding an ecological dimension as a concrete manifestation of religious values, this study offers a more contextual conceptual development to the challenges of the global environmental crisis. This is in line with the research of Hidayati, R. E. (2025) and Firdaus, F. A. (2024) which emphasizes that values and identity play an important role in shaping pro-environmental behavior.

Furthermore, the results of this study confirm that the learning approach has a key role in bridging the gap between knowledge and action (*value-action gap*). The findings indicate that the approach *transformative learning* more effective than conventional approaches, because it can profoundly change students' perspectives, values, and identities. This supports the findings of Kurniawan, R.G. (2025), who emphasized that transformative learning is key to encouraging sustainable behavioral change. Thus, the success of ecotheology integration in Islamic Religious Education is determined not only by the material content but also by the pedagogical strategies used. However, this study also revealed that the implementation of ecotheology in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum still faces various challenges. Learning materials tend to be normative and have not been fully integrated with contemporary environmental issues, resulting in weak internalization of values in students' actual behavior. This finding is in line with (Landena, A. Y. A., & Leobisa, J. (2026) which shows that sustainability education is often successful in raising awareness, but is not effective in encouraging behavioral change without a values-based and experience-based approach. The primary contribution of this research lies in the development of an integrative conceptual framework linking ecotheology, Islamic Religious Education, and the formation of students' religious character within the context of sustainability. Unlike previous research, which tends to fragment character education and environmental education, this study demonstrates that integrating the two within a theological framework can produce a more holistic and transformative approach. Thus, ecotheology serves not only as a normative concept but also as a relevant educational paradigm in addressing the global ecological crisis.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that ecotheology has a strategic role as a theological foundation in the formation of students' religious character through Islamic Religious Education (PAI). The integration of values *monotheism, caliph, And trust* has been proven to be able to build ecological awareness that is not only cognitive but also internalized in students' attitudes and behavior. The formation of religious character based on ecotheology occurs through four main dimensions: spiritual, moral, social, and ecological, which holistically shape sustainability awareness. Furthermore, this study confirms that a



transformative learning approach is a key factor in addressing the gap between knowledge and action (*value-action gap*). Thus, ecotheology in Islamic Religious Education not only broadens the meaning of religiosity, but also contributes to forming students who have ecological responsibility as part of religious practice.

This research has significant theoretical, practical, and policy implications for the development of ecotheology-based Islamic Religious Education. Theoretically, this research contributes to enriching ecotheology studies by presenting an integrative framework that connects theological, educational, and ecological dimensions, while also expanding the concept of character education by incorporating ecological dimensions as part of the expression of religiosity. Practically, the findings of this study emphasize the importance of integrating ecotheological values into Islamic Religious Education curricula in higher education through strengthening materials, implementing transformative learning approaches, and developing practices. *eco-spirituality* which can encourage changes in student behavior. Furthermore, from a policy perspective, this research provides recommendations for educational policymakers to design curricula that are not only oriented towards cognitive and moral aspects, but also integrate the values of sustainability and ecological responsibility. Thus, higher education is expected to play a role as an agent of change in shaping a generation that is both religious and has a sustainable ecological awareness. Therefore, the integration of ecotheology into the higher education system is an urgent strategic need to address the global ecological crisis through the transformation of the values and character of future generations.

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