

# The Important of Eco-Interreligious Praxis for Caring the Earth

Aloys Budi Purnomo

Environmental Science Doctoral Program of Soegijapranata Catholic University of Semarang

Author: [alloys@unika.ac.id](mailto:alloys@unika.ac.id), Tel.: +62-818307295

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**Abstract:** Indonesia is the largest Muslim-populated country in the world marked by the diversity of religions and beliefs. Indonesia is also unique in facing environmental problems. Some of the interreligious figures in Central Java are involved in the movement of preserving the integrity of creation and environmental sustainability. In this condition, interreligious networking is required. This is what called eco-interreligious praxis. All religions and beliefs are challenged to engage in a joint movement overcoming the ecological crisis. This study is a reflection of a multidisciplinary synergistic between contextual theology, environmental science, and interreligious dialogue praxis. This research is conducted by an interpretive multidisciplinary synergistic method to examine the experience based on the encyclical *Laudato Si'*. The result inspires anyone and anywhere to take care of the Earth, our common home in an eco-interreligious praxis.

**Keywords:** Contextual theology, Ecological crisis, Eco-interreligious praxis, Environmental science, Interreligious network

## I. INTRODUCTION

The context of this research is Indonesia as the largest Muslim-populated country in the world. In 2019, Indonesia had an estimated population of 270,630,000 people. Indonesia is characterized by a religious diversity officially recognizing Islam, Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Konghucu (Confucianism) and other categories (most of them are native/ indigenous religions). According to the census data of 2010, 87.18% is Muslim (Islamic), then Christian is 6.94%, and Catholicism is 2.91%, Hinduism is 1.69% and Buddha is 0.72%, Konghucu (Confucianism) is 0.05%. There are other categories around 0.13%, not declared 0.06%, and not requested 0.32%. Indonesia is made up of more than 17,000 islands with over 1.9 million square miles of land, which makes it the 4th largest country. About 56.7% of Indonesia's population lives on Java (Jakarta, West Java, Central Java, East Java, and Yogyakarta), the most populous island [1].

The context of Indonesia is very important to answer the question of this research inspired by the call of Pope Francis in the encyclical *Laudato Si'* [2]. Pope Francis published an encyclical of *Laudato Si'* on 18 June 2015. The encyclical *Laudato Si'* was signed by Pope Francis on 24 May 2015. Since its publication, the encyclical has influenced and impacted the world today, including in Indonesia.

In the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis called for the importance of the interreligious network to take care of the Earth, our common home which is being overridden by the ecological crisis. The question is how contextualize the

call of Pope Francis in the encyclical of *Laudato Si'* to conduct an interreligious network to take care of the Earth being overwritten by the ecological crisis in Indonesia? That is the research question to answer and to find that the call of Pope Francis who encourages the interreligious network to care for the Earth of our common home is very relevant and significant to the context of Indonesia. The encyclical *Laudato Si'* has an important meaning in the context of life in Indonesia for two things. First, it relates to Pope Francis' insistent on the interreligious network to address the ecological crisis that befalls the Earth, our common home. Secondly, related to the ecological crisis issues that also occurred in Indonesia. This work will examine these two points as a primary concern to find the importance of eco-interreligious praxis for caring for the Earth, our common home.

This paper is organized as follows. The introduction of this section I will be followed by section II that contains the related works of this paper. Then, section III contains the methodology of this research. Section IV describes results and discussion on the eco-interreligious praxis on care for our common home based on two environmental problems, that is North Kendeng Mountains Region and the Tambakrejo case. Section V gives a conclusion and recommendation for future research.

## II. RELATED WORK

Especially for the case of North Kendeng Mountains Regions, this paper is placed in related work that has been done by Zainal Abidin Bagir [3] and Finsensius Yuli Purnama [4]. Their research is very beneficial to study the eco-interreligious praxis, although they do not examine

this topic. At the very least, the context of the North Kendeng Mountains Region which is the focus of their work can be a point of departure for this study scientifically, although this reflection is more excavated from the experience of engaging with the local community struggle.

Zainal Abidin Bagir examined *Laudato Si'* concerning the ecological conversion and recognition of indigenous religions, especially among the Samin people who struggle to maintain the integrity of the North Kendeng Mountains Region. Bagir was studying the growing awareness of the importance of religion in protecting the environment as it was serialized in the encyclical *Laudato Si'*. The context of Bagir is the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (IRI). Thus, the focus was on forest protection and from the perspective of indigenous religions/communities. However, Bagir's study is important for this research precisely because of its appreciation of the encyclical *Laudato Si'* as the Catholic religious text which response to the most important issues of this age but also other religious communities to encourage interreligious conversations to protect the Earth [3]. Bagir placed his study also in the context of *Sedulur Sikep* (= Samin Community) which was being certified by the construction of cement plant in the region of North Kendeng Mountains. Unfortunately, did not come to the study of eco-interreligious praxis even though Indonesia is a country with a diversity of religions.

This research is also related to the work of Finsensius Yuli Purnama who studied Kendeng case, especially related to *Semen* (= cement) versus *Samin* (= an indigenous community Pati, Central Java of Indonesia) conflict in the perspective of the encyclical *Laudato Si'* with a focus on the impact of the online petition "Change.Org" in the article titled *Semen vs Samin: The Impact of "Change.Org" Online Petition in Perspective of Laudato Si'* [4]. As the title, Purnama focuses on the technological aspect as explained by *Laudato Si'* in the Kendeng case. Unlike the encyclical *Laudato Si'* which impressed pessimistic, Purnama gave a positive perspective. In the case of the North Kendeng Mountains Region, communication technology in a particular online petition has a good impact. So, Purnama was optimistic that technology became a new hope to help the Samin Community struggle in safeguarding their region.

The meaning of Purnama's study is more on the narrative side about the struggle of the Samin Community in safeguarding the integrity of creation and environmental sustainability. The data being processed by Purnama is important for this research as a secondary source in the desk-research perspective of this research method. Although Purnama did not come to the discussion about eco-interreligious, the description of the community of Samin and cooperation with the Community Network Concerned Kendeng Mountains (JM-PPK/*Jaringan Masyarakat Peduli Pegunungan Kendeng*) can confirm the idea of the importance of eco-interreligious praxis that has not been developed by Purnama.

This research is very assisted and related to the work of a documentary film made by Anto Galon as director and Sunu Fajar as the film producer "*Tambakrejo #Bergerak Bersama*" (Tambakrejo#Moving Together) [5]. The film summarizes the eco-interreligious praxis performed by the interreligious figures, including myself, in caring for the Earth of our common home. The focus is on the integral human ecology that is championed in an interreligious network by defending the citizens who victimized the development in the city of Semarang.

Especially about the Tambakrejo case, I have examined with the focus of interreligious eco-theological leadership from the perspective of environmental science [6]. While in this paper, the work is reprocessed in a multidisciplinary perspective with contextual theology and interreligious dialogue to discover the importance of eco-interreligious Praxis to take care of the earth, our common home. All related works are used to build ideas and research objectives that are about the importance of eco-interreligious praxis to take care of the Earth as our common home.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study is a reflection of a multidisciplinary synergistic between contextual eco-theology, environmental science, and interreligious dialogue praxis. This research is conducted with an interpretive method to examine the experience based on the encyclical *Laudato Si'*. Inspired by the theory-developing research method with desk-research type [7], this research includes two core studies. First, a critical theoretical study in hermeneutic interpretive patterns to answer the research question. Questions will be answered based on the main source of the encyclical *Laudato Si'* and other sources of literature purposive. Secondly, this study combines critical theoretical studies with the study of secondary documents that is empirical-based data which has been documented in the form of writing and audio-visual archives according to desk-research principles and types, related to the environmental problem of North Kendeng Mountains and Tambakrejo area. This method and map of the North Kendeng Mountains Region, as well as Tambakrejo, can be described as follows (Figure 1, Figure 2 and Figure 3).



Figure 1: Multidisciplinary Synergistic Method



Figure 2: Map of North Kendeng Mountains Region [9]

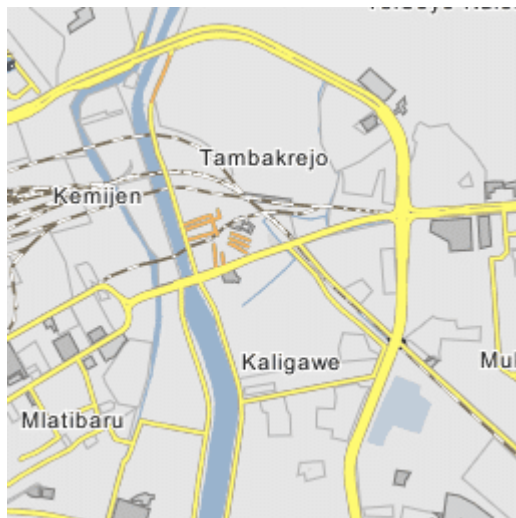


Figure 3: Map of Tambakrejo, Semarang City  
[Source: <http://wikimapia.org/11994803/id/Pelabuhan-Tanjung-Emas>]

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

How contextualize the call of Pope Francis in the encyclical of *Laudato Si'* to implement an interreligious network to take care of the Earth being overwritten by the ecological crisis in Indonesia? First of all, Pope Francis asserted the importance of interreligious praxis to take care of the Earth by writing, "In this Encyclical, I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home" [2]. According to Antony J Kelly, Pope Francis has emphasized the importance framework of interreligious concern for integral ecology [8].

As already mentioned, to examine the importance of eco-interreligious praxis for caring for the Earth, our common home, this paper bases on two field experiences. The first is the experience of engaging in the environmental movements of the Samin Community in the North Kendeng Mountains Region. The second is togetherness with the interreligious figures in the city of Semarang in the Tambakrejo case. The following is the result and discussion of the two experiences.

Here is the contextualization of *Laudato Si'* in the Indonesian context, especially in the environmental case of

the North Kendeng Mountains Region. The environmental problem that occurred in the North Kendeng Mountains Region is a triangular conflict between local communities, the government, and the private sector. The government and the private sector (the company) plan to economical the limestone for the cement industry. It began in 2006 to the present. The eco-interreligious movement and praxis began in 2006, when Samin Community fought the cement plant development plan (PT Semen Gresik) that would build cement plants in Sukolilo sub-district, Pati. In 2009, Samin Community won a lawsuit in the state administrative Court to the Supreme Court (PTUN). As a result, PT Semen Gresik Indonesia resigned from Pati but later moved to Gunem Regency, Rembang Regency under the name of PT Semen Indonesia. On June 17, 2014, to present. From 2010 to 2019, Indocement Group entered Pati with a cement plant development plan in the Kayen subdistrict and Tambakromo, the neighboring village of Samin Community. Some residents of North Kendeng Mountains Region and Samin Community against PT. Semen Indonesia and Indocement Group [available at comANDRE, "Inspirasi Perlawanan Dari Warga Samin Lawan Industri Semen," *Kaskus.Co.Id*, last modified 2015, <https://www.kaskus.co.id/thread/54f700db138b46fa278b4576/dokumenter-perjuangan-samin-melawan-industri-semen/> (accessed 17.09.2019)].

On the government side (the ruler) and the company (entrepreneur), the utilization of limestone is seen to be beneficial to increase economic growth, job opportunities and other positive impacts [9]. This view is different from the experience of residents and environmental activist including the interreligious figures involved in the struggle with the local community.

In the view of local communities and environmental activists as well as several interreligious figures, cement plant development plans are a threat to the environment and humanity. First, the activity of limestone mining in the interests of concrete mills is draining water resources, damaging soil fertility, and endangering the lives of the farmers. With a simple but very basic language, the local community who pioneered by the Sedulur Sikep/Samin Community says, "We eat rice, not cement!" For them, the North Kendeng Mountains Region is a part of Mother Earth that should not be damaged and hurt. That is why, in every struggle and their protests, they always repeat the singing they created as follows. "Mother Earth has already given, Mother Earth hurt, Mother Earth will judge." They sang the song's lyrics in the Javanese Language, "*Ibu Bumi wis maringi, Ibu Bumi dilarani, Ibu Bumi kang ngadili*". For the Muslim, usually, the song is connected with Islamic prayers. So, they continued singing with the refrain: *Laa ilaaha Illa Allah. Al-Malikul Haqqul Mubin. Muhammadur Rasulullah. Shadiwul Wa'adil Amin*. With that song, they believed that the Lord God Almighty would give justice to His people. I am a Roman Catholic priest, Samin Community is indigenous, but we sing the song as a joint prayer in the framework of eco-interreligious praxis without discrimination. I was involved intensively in the

struggle in North Kendeng Mountains Regions from August 17, 2012, to August 17, 2019.

In the case of the conflict, environmental activists from various religions moved together to realize the eco-interreligious praxis. These include several interreligious figures, especially from Islam, Catholic and indigenous religions (Samin Community/Sedulur Sikep).

That is a description of the environmental and eco-interreligious case in the North Kendeng Mountains Region. The issue is very thick with the problem of integrity of creation and environmental sustainability but also threatens the generation of humanity.

Now, in the case of Tambakrejo, the main problem is the problem of the humanitarian environment and integral human ecology [6]. Tambakrejo case is a case related to the development plan of Semarang which has been known as the city of Rob and flood. To overcome the problem, the normalization of the river was done by the government of Semarang. One of them is the normalization of the flood of East Canal River which affects the people of Tambakrejo Semarang. The people who are small fishermen who have been living in the Tambakrejo area since 1989 must move elsewhere and far from the sea. The citizen refused to be moved. Consequently, there is a brutal displacement. Houses and public facilities such as mosques also become targets for the displacement. All are flat with the ground.

This condition moved several interreligious figures defending citizens with other activists. The presence of these interreligious figures can be placed in the context of the call of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* to defend the integral human ecology. Interreligious figures move to live the eco-interreligious praxis to safeguard the earth, humanity, and the environment.

The result of eco-interreligious is that all conflicting parties can be reconciled. The city government, in this case, the mayor, and the victim's citizens can sit together to find the best solution. In the end, through the eco-interreligious praxis, the citizens did not move. Thus, the city government provides the facilities needed by residents so that people's lives are expected to be better.

That is the summary of the eco-interreligious Praxis as shown in the documentary "Tambakrejo#Bergerak Bersama". The documentary was also a reminder for the Semarang city government to keep the promise delivered to the citizens [5].

Following the method of the interpretive-hermeneutical-constructivist [10], Pope Francis in the case has opened the wide door of interpretation for the eco-interreligious praxis. Pope Francis' idea was also found in the traditions of other religions as already indicated by Yazid Said [11], Mokrani [12], and Fachruddin [13]. Pope Francis also urged the need for a new dialogue involving all people. All the people and leaders of religions must do dialogue to

protect nature, defend the poor, and construct a network of fraternity [2]. This would be a transformative interreligious ecological praxis [2], [14]. Referring to the research of Donald Dorr, in the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, there are many valuable materials that inspire, motivate and assist this research in demonstrating the contribution of eco-interreligious praxis in an integral ecological context for caring the Earth, our common home [15].

The encyclical *Laudato Si'* gives a firm and clear space for the eco-interreligious praxis, although the eco-interreligious praxis is not used. Pope Francis mentioned St. Francis Assisi as the patron saint of ecology as determined by Pope John Paul II. Pope Francis even mentions St. Francis Assisi as the protector of anyone who struggles for ecological interests, an excellent example in defending the vulnerable, the protector of all those who learn and works in the field of ecology and loved by people Non-Catholics. The call of St. Francis Assisi that the Earth is a common home, our sister, and even our mother underpins this encyclical, even the title of encyclical taken from the word of St. Francis Assisi: *Laudato Si', mi' Signore* – "Praise be to you, my Lord" [2].

Referring to Pasquale Ferrara's studies, an encyclical perspective of *Laudato Si'* gave a dynamic thrust of interaction between social and human structures as a solicitation for action. Ferrara argues that the encyclical perspective calls for a radical transformation of international relations, as it emphasizes the deep implications of environmental issues on the entire spectrum of security, development, economic and ethical-political challenges in the contemporary world. Ferrara was right when he wrote that the encyclical seemed to suggest that practicing sustainable international relations meant exiting the logic of power or hegemony, as well as operationalize the concept of care at the same time [16]. That's what in this paper is called eco-interreligious praxis.

This interreligious praxis can be further developed in the context of environmental leadership. As the leader of Alhaji Umar Lawal Aliyu, the leadership can be in various organizations and communities [17]. Leadership in the context of eco-interreligious is certainly not restricted to any particular organization, but rather in being in association with society in general. That is called the interreligious ecotheological leadership model which became my further research for my dissertation on the Doctoral Program of Environmental Science at the Soegijapranata Catholic University of Semarang, Indonesia.

## V. CONCLUSION

An ecological crisis cannot be resolved alone, but it must be done in togetherness with all people, regardless of religion and beliefs. Interreligious cooperation to take care of the Earth, preserving the integrity of creation and environmental sustainability will produce eco-interreligious praxis.

Cooperation in eco-interreligious brings positive results in caring for the earth as our common home. Both in the case of the North Kendeng Mountains Region and the case of Tambakrejo, Central Java, in Indonesia, the involvement of interreligious figures in the eco-interreligious praxis brought a positive impact. At least, the eco-interreligious praxis performed by religious leaders gave the edification to the citizens. Furthermore, eco-interreligious praxis gives new awareness to the authorities and entrepreneurs to think more positive about the integrity of creation and environmental sustainability than to dredge economic gains by damaging the earth, our common home.

Of course, this research still has limitations. There are at least two limitations to this research. First, the interreligious nature of the eco-interreligious Praxis is still dominated by the Islamic and Catholic sides. The research has not involved all the religious elements in Indonesia, namely Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Secondly, the involvement of interreligious figures from other churches has less attention precisely due to restrictions on interreligious aspects. Consequently, eco-ecumenical nature is still weak and not apparent. Naturally, this opens up space for future research to study more deeply, for example on the topic of eco-ecumenical Praxis for caring The Earth, our common home. The subjects excavated were ecumenical cooperation among Christian (Catholic and Protestant) figures in caring for the earth of our common house.

To care for our common home Earth, eco-ecumenical is certainly not less important compared to eco-interreligious. Only, the breadth and affordability of the eco-interreligious will be greater than that of the eco-interreligious Praxis. Why? Because Indonesia is the largest Muslim-populated country in the world. Thus, simply working with the interreligious figure of the Islamic religion, the reach and impact will be very broad and large. That is why, this research deliberately selects the themes and titles of the importance of eco-interreligious for caring for the Earth, our common home. That choice has been the power of this research, but it is also a weakness.

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## AUTHOR PROFILE

**Aloys Budi Purnomo** is a catholic diocesan priest of the Archdiocese of Semarang, Indonesia. He was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest on July 8, 1996. He currently serves as Head of Campus Ministry of Soegijapranata Catholic University and also a student for Environmental Science Doctoral Program, Soegijapranata Catholic University, Jl. Pawiyatan Luhur IV/1 Bendan Dhuwur, Semarang 50234, Indonesia. He served as Chief of Interreligious Affairs of the Archdiocese of Semarang (March 2008 – March 2019). Some of his books that have been published include *Membangun Teologi Inklusif-Pluralistik* (Penerbit Kompas: Jakarta, 2004), *Rakyat (Bukan) Tumbal Kekerasan & Kekuasaan* (Gramedia Pustaka Utama: Jakarta, 2005); *Preferential Option for and with the Poor* (Bina Media: Medan, 2003); *The Wonderful Europe* (Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2011). He also actively wrote as a columnist in several newspapers in Indonesia. In 2004 he founded the monthly magazine of INSPIRASI, Lentera yang Membebaskan as Editor-in-Chief of the journalistic services. Completed the Theology Licentiate study at the Pontifical Faculty of Wedabhakti, Yogyakarta, and Master of Theology, Field of Contextual Theology Concentration, Sanata Dharma University of Yogyakarta, Indonesia (July 1996-February 1998). ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2430-7643>

