
Article

Promoting Ecological Civilization through Religious Prophetic Communication: An Interreligious Framework

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores the transformative potential of religious prophetic communication in advancing an ecological civilization. Drawing upon diverse religious traditions—Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Confucianism—it argues that religious teachings offer profound insights and ethical frameworks essential for addressing contemporary ecological challenges. A key aspect of ecological civilization is the presence of a pervasive ecological ethos. The paper contends that religious prophetic communication plays a crucial role in cultivating such an ethos by promoting a heightened ecological conscience and consciousness among individuals and communities. Through prophetic communication, faith actors and communicators articulate moral imperatives rooted in religious principles contextualized to the present ecological situation. The paper delineates five components that make up religious prophetic communication: (1) Communicating from the position of faith; (2) Communicating in a contextually relevant manner; (3) Communicating to energize; (4) Communicating to criticize; and (5) Communicating beyond words. Applied to the ecological context, religious prophetic communication aims to affirm, stimulate imagination, clarify misunderstandings, inspire action, and confront unjust realities. By carrying out its prophetic role, religious communicators can help bring about an ecological ethos and promote the realization of ecological civilization.

Keywords: Ecological civilization; Ecological conscience; Ecological ethos; Ecological consciousness; Religious communication; Prophetic communication; Buddhism; Islam; Christianity; Confucianism



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1. Introduction

The concept of “ecological civilization” has increasingly gained attention in recent years as a paradigm that offers a holistic vision of human life. This comes from the awareness that the realms of the human mind and society are not discrete compartments but interwoven domains wherein environmental, social, political, cultural, and religious dynamics interact in profound ways. Comprehending and embracing this reality is essential for responding to the multitude of challenges plaguing humanity today, among them the escalating ecological crisis that threatens to upend the aspiration towards establishing an ecological civilization.

In this context, religion’s prophetic voice is essential for bringing about transformative change in our world. It serves as a counterforce against harmful developments that threaten our shared environment. This paper proposes religious prophetic communication as a means for religious institutions to engage with various stakeholders in promoting an ecological civilization. An authentic ecological civilization requires a pervasive ecological ethos within society, whose members are imbued with well-developed ecological conscience and heightened environmental consciousness. In this regard, the role of religion is indispensable.

This paper proposes that one of the ways that religious institutions and leaders can contribute to achieving the ideals of an ecological civilization is through exercising prophetic communication. Through documentation analysis, this paper will expound on the nature and aspects of religious prophetic communication and its benefits for realizing the goals set forth for a society characterized by ecological sustainability and flourishing.

2. Key Components of Ecological Civilization

The root cause of the contemporary ecological crisis can be found in multiple perspectives. In 1967, Lynn White Jr. kick-started the discourse on deciphering the root cause of environmental problems by laying the blame squarely at the Judeo-Christian tradition for its anthropocentric scriptural teachings that support human domination over and exploitation of nature [1]. However, scholars such as Passmore, Callicott, and Hargrove, asserted that the ecological crisis cannot be blamed on ideas found in the Judeo-Christian Bible alone. The dualistic worldview from Greek philosophy, which posits a hierarchy between humans and nature, was incorporated into Christian thought, leading to a perception of humans as superior to and separate from the natural world. This anthropocentric perspective ultimately justified the exploitation of nature [2]. Moncrief added more nuance to the discourse by arguing that while religious beliefs shape human attitudes toward the environment, they are not the primary cause of environmental exploitation. Instead, he suggested that broader cultural and institutional dynamics, such as industrialization, democratization, and technological advancement, are more plausible and defensible explanations for the current ecological woes. This is supported by the fact that even in societies not influenced by Judeo-Christian religious thought, environmental problems also exist [3].

While the above perspectives diverge in various degrees regarding the origin of the ecological crisis, they all illustrate the “civilizational” nature of the environmental problems facing humanity today. Therefore, ecological civilization can be seen as a creative response to this dilemma. It envisions a society where humans harmoniously coexist with nature, integrating ecological principles into governance, economy, culture, and lifestyle. Extensive literature has documented the origins and evolution of this concept in China, sparing detailed repetition here. However, for this paper, it is crucial to outline the primary aspects of ecological civilization as a global ecological vision. Professor Pan Jiahua of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences University summarizes the paradigm of ecological civilization as encompassing four primary elements: justice, efficiency, harmony, and cultural development [4]. Justice involves respecting natural and human rights to ensure ecological and social justice. Efficiency spans ecological, economic, and social dimensions, emphasizing productivity with minimal environmental impact and well-functioning social systems. Harmony promotes mutual benefit between humans, nature, and society while balancing production, consumption, and regional disparities. Cultural development fosters dignity, equality, and healthy living, culminating in a holistic ecological civilization where justice forms the foundation, efficiency facilitates means, harmony reflects external balance and cultural development represents the ultimate goal.

Spencer Scott, from the organization One Earth, has identified six key elements constituting ecological civilization [5]:

- **Renewable Energy & Energy Efficiency:** This entails transitioning to 100% renewable energy sources, enhancing energy storage capabilities, and optimizing efficiency to minimize overall demand and environmental impact.
- **Sustainable Urbanization:** Focuses on developing cities and transportation systems that enhance ecosystems, incorporating renewable public transit, promoting walkable cities, and using eco-friendly materials.
- **Sustainable Industry & Consumption:** Balances productivity with sustainability by fostering eco-friendly, durable products and promoting a circular economy mindset among consumers.
- **Ecological Abundance, Biodiversity, and Resilience:** Protects and enriches ecosystems, promotes biodiversity, and enhances resilience to climate change and extreme weather events through initiatives such as the 30 by 30 conservation target [6].
- **Ecological Institutions:** Establishes new regulatory systems, legal protections for ecosystems and shifts success metrics from GDP to holistic indicators like Gross National Happiness.
- **Equitable Distribution of Power and Resources:** Ensures fair distribution of resources and power to decentralize decision-making, thereby enhancing resilience and stability across diverse cultures and ecosystems.

From the description above, ecological civilization aims to reconcile human development with environmental well-being, prioritizing principles such as sustainability, interdependence, harmony with nature, equity, justice, and cultural ethics. These principles advocate for long-term environmental health, recognizing the interconnectedness of all life forms and promoting a respectful relationship with nature. Thus, achieving an ecological civilization necessitates a more profound transformation than is commonly recognized. While solutions such as renewable energy are important, a systemic shift grounded in ecological principles is essential. This is because social and environmental issues are interlinked, requiring interconnected solutions that benefit the collective good [7].

An ecological ethos that permeates human society is implicit in this vision, transcending mere legislation to encompass spiritual and cultural transformation. According to John B. Cobb, Jr., achieving ecological civilization requires technological and scientific approaches and profound spiritual and cultural shifts [8]. The scientist James Gustave Speth, a co-founder of the Natural Resources Defense Council and former dean of the Yale School of Forestry

and Environmental Studies, once remarked to a British radio presenter, “I used to think that top global environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse, and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science, we could address these problems, but I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy; to deal with these, we need a spiritual and cultural transformation. And we scientists don’t know how to do that” [9].

Cobb remarked that indigenous traditions offer valuable resources for nurturing this transformation. In the Chinese context, many scholars have turned to Confucianism as an indigenous resource for buttressing the ideals of ecological civilization [10,11]. This is consistent with the view that religion offers a comprehensive framework that provides meaning and purpose to human existence. Encompassing beliefs, rituals, and ethics, religious teachings shape individuals and communities within a cosmological context and connect humanity to the divine, nature, and each other, offering a path for personal growth and societal cohesion [12]. In reality, academics from diverse fields and religious traditions have collaboratively developed the field of religion and ecology, which has led to the creation of academic programs, journals, and organizations that integrate scientific and religious perspectives on environmental issues. This collaboration has revealed the environmental potential within religious traditions, positioning religions as significant partners in promoting sustainable development. The dialogue between scientists and religious leaders has led to joint efforts, such as appeals for environmental preservation and participation in climate summits [13].

Religion’s involvement adds an essential ethical dimension to the sustainability discourse, encouraging moral responsibility and ethical actions among followers and beyond. Time and again, we have seen that when religious leaders and institutions speak out promptly, they significantly impact global situations. For example, a study on American Catholics discovered that by publishing the encyclical *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis significantly influenced American public opinion on climate change. The report found that more Americans, particularly American Catholics, are now concerned about global warming, believe it will have serious impacts, and view it as a moral, social fairness, and religious issue [14].

Thus, achieving the vision of ecological civilization demands a comprehensive approach integrating spiritual, cultural, political, economic, and social dimensions. This holistic framework ensures that all facets of human life align with the imperatives of sustainability, justice, and harmonious coexistence with nature.

3. Understanding “Prophet” and “Prophetic” in the Religious Context

The term “prophetic”, as employed in this paper, requires some explanation. Commonly, when people hear the word “prophetic”, they think of its dictionary meaning related to predicting the future. For instance, the Cambridge Online Dictionary defines “prophetic” as “saying correctly what will happen in the future”, and the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines it as “foretelling events”. While these definitions are accurate, a second definition in the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary is more relevant to this paper’s context: “of, relating to, or characteristic of a prophet or prophecy”.

To understand this definition, one must explore what it means to be a prophet. The term “prophet” has multiple meanings. In addition to predicting future events, the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary also defines a prophet as “one who utters divinely inspired revelations” and “one gifted with more than ordinary spiritual and moral insight”. These definitions together most closely reflect the sense of “prophet”, and by extension “prophetic”, that this paper employs.

The first definition of “prophet” fits theistic religious systems such as those belonging to the Abrahamic traditions. The second definition can be applied to all religious traditions, including atheistic ones such as Buddhism and Confucianism. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, being prophetic involved acting as a spokesperson for God, delivering divinely inspired messages and often aimed at calling people back to faithfulness, justice, and righteousness. Prophets were seen as individuals God chose to convey God’s will and purpose to the people. This divine inspiration often involved receiving visions, dreams, theophany [15], or direct communications from God, making the prophetic message authoritative and carrying the weight of divine truth.

Central to the role of the prophet was the call to repentance and covenant faithfulness. Prophets reminded people of their covenant relationship with God, urging them to abandon idolatry, injustice, and moral corruption.

This call to repentance often came with warnings of imminent judgment if people did not change their ways. For example, the prophet Jeremiah warned the Israelites about the consequences of their unfaithfulness and the coming Babylonian exile (Jeremiah 25:1-14).

Another significant aspect of prophetic activity was the advocacy for social justice. Prophets spoke out against oppression, exploitation, and inequality, reminding their listeners that true worship of God includes just and

compassionate treatment of others. The prophet Amos was well-known for his denunciations of social injustice and his call for justice to “roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24).

While forthtelling—addressing present conditions and moral states—was a primary function, prophets also foretold future events, particularly concerning God’s plans for judgment and redemption. These predictions validated the prophet’s message and underscored the urgency of repentance. Prophecies about the coming Messiah, as seen in the writings of Isaiah and Micah, provided hope for future restoration and salvation (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7; Micah 5:2). This dual role of foretelling and forthtelling adds depth to the prophetic mission, linking present behavior with future consequences and promises.

The prophetic role is significant in Islam, as in the Judeo-Christian context. Prophets, known as “*Anbiya*” (singular: *Nabi*) or “*Rasul*” (messenger), were chosen by Allah to convey divine messages. Their mission included guiding people toward righteousness, teaching monotheism, and establishing moral and ethical codes based on revelation [16]. Central to the prophetic mission was the call to monotheism, or “*Tawhid*”, which is the belief in the oneness of Allah. Prophets emphasized that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah, and they strived to eradicate idolatry and polytheism.

Prophets also called for moral and ethical behavior, urging people to live according to justice, honesty, compassion, and humility [17]. Social justice is a recurring theme in the messages of the prophets. They spoke against oppression, exploitation, and inequality, advocating for the rights of the poor, orphans, and marginalized members of society [18].

The prophetic role also included warning of consequences for disobedience and promising rewards for adherence to divine commands. Prophets foretold both immediate and eschatological outcomes, offering hope of paradise for the faithful and cautioning against the torment of hell for those who reject the divine message. These warnings and promises reinforced the moral imperatives conveyed by the prophets and emphasized the importance of following the path prescribed by Allah. (Surah An-Naba 78:36; Surah Al-Baqarah 2:81).

In addition to their role as divine messengers, prophets in Islam served as exemplary models of piety and righteousness. Muslims study and emulate their lives seeking to deepen their faith and align their conduct with divine expectations. The Sunnah, which comprises the sayings, actions, and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad, provides a practical framework for living in accordance with Islamic principles. Muslims regard the the Prophet Muhammad as the “*Uswatun Hasana*” (the best example), whose life offers comprehensive guidance for all aspects of personal and communal life [19].

Beyond the Abrahamic traditions, being prophetic often means proclaiming spiritual and moral insights that help steer individuals and communities away from self-destruction and suffering. In Buddhism, being prophetic is closely associated with proclaiming messages that align with the teachings of the Buddha. Because the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, achieved enlightenment through his own efforts, his teachings, known as the Dharma, offer profound moral and spiritual guidance. These teachings aim to alleviate suffering and help individuals attain liberation from mundane existence. The Buddha’s insights are considered extraordinary because they reveal the true nature of reality. These insights guide practitioners toward ethical living, mental discipline, and wisdom.

Thus, in Buddhism, individuals dedicated to learning and living according to the Dhamma can play a prophetic role. They do this by sharing insights and practices that help alleviate suffering and promote ethical living. The Buddha’s principal disciples, such as Mahākāśyapa and Ānanda, who had a deep understanding of the Buddha’s teachings, indeed tried to carry on the Buddha’s work through their ascetic practices and efforts at compiling and preserving the Buddha’s sermons and other pronouncements [20,21]. While this is often relegated to members of the Sangha, lay practitioners and teachers who have dedicated themselves to understanding the Dharma can offer valuable guidance to others.

In Confucianism, prophetic qualities are embodied historically in sages and exemplary individuals who possess deep moral insight and wisdom, often derived from their understanding of the principles of harmony, righteousness, and propriety. Confucius himself is considered a sage whose teachings on ethics, proper conduct, and social harmony have profoundly influenced East Asian culture and thought.

Sages such as Confucius and Mencius offer moral guidance based on their profound understanding of human nature and societal needs. Their teachings emphasize virtues like filial piety, benevolence, and righteousness, providing a framework for ethical behavior and good governance. The prophetic quality in Confucianism lies in the ability of these sages to discern the moral path and inspire others to cultivate virtues that contribute to personal development and social harmony.

In Confucianism, while sages like Confucius and Mencius hold the highest esteem, other individuals who may not attain the status of a sage can still play a significant prophetic role. These individuals help spread and embody Confucian values, thereby guiding society in ethical and moral ways.

One of the key concepts in Confucianism is the Junzi, translated as “gentleman” or “exemplary person”. Tu Weiming translates “*junzi*” as “profound person” to connote the *junzi*’s deep understanding of oneself, a resolute

courage and a heightened sensitivity to the world [22]. Although Junzi are not necessarily sages, they strive to live according to Confucian virtues such as benevolence (*ren*), righteousness (*yi*), and propriety (*li*). The Junzi are moral exemplars within their communities, dedicated to self-cultivation and moral integrity [23]. By living according to Confucian principles in their daily lives and interactions, they influence and guide others. Their commitment to ethical behavior and virtuous living inspires those around them to pursue similar paths of self-improvement and moral development for the common good [24].

Teachers and scholars hold a crucial role in Confucian society. Confucianism places a high value on education and the role of teachers. Though not necessarily sages, these individuals play a prophetic role by imparting Confucian ideals and wisdom to their students. Through their teachings, they preserve and transmit Confucian values, shaping the moral character of future generations. Scholars contribute to interpreting and expanding of Confucian thought, engaging in scholarly discourse that keeps Confucian teachings relevant and dynamic. Their intellectual efforts ensure that Confucian principles inform ethical and social conduct.

In summary, while manifestations of prophetic communication vary from one religious tradition to another, individuals who exercise prophetic communication aim to speak what they perceive to be the truth for the good of individuals and communities. Ultimately, the purpose of religious prophetic communication is to affirm beliefs, stimulate imagination, clarify misunderstandings, inspire action, and confront harmful realities. [25].

4. Religious Prophetic Communication in the Ecological Context

Having delineated the meaning of “prophet” and “prophetic” in this paper, we now turn to aspects of religious prophetic communication in the ecological context. In this paper, five primary components are proposed.

4.1. Communicating from a Position of Faith

Religious prophetic communication is never done from a neutral position but always from the stance of faith [26]. This faith typically involves a profound belief in the divine, whether it’s in a monotheistic deity (such as God in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), the cosmic order (as in Hinduism), or in enlightened principles (as in Buddhism). Those who engage in prophetic communication do so with a fundamental trust in the truths they convey. They see them as revelations or insights granted through divine inspiration, spiritual enlightenment, or moral clarity. Pope Francis asserted, “The rich heritage of Christian spirituality, the fruit of twenty centuries of personal and communal experience, has a precious contribution to the renewal of humanity” [27]. The sentiments expressed by Pope Francis regarding the Christian context could represent those who come from other religious traditions.

The stance of faith implies a firm commitment to the beliefs, values, and teachings of the religious tradition. Prophetic communicators often speak from personal conviction and dedication to upholding and transmitting these beliefs. Speaking from a position of faith requires boldness and truthfulness in the face of social trends and tides that may display affinities against the contribution of religion in the public arena. Sometimes, speaking from a position of faith is done in anguish and sternness, not out of hatred or condescension toward the listener, but out of deep care and concern for their well-being.

In the context of ecological issues, prophetic communication from the stance of faith carries significant implications. It suggests that calls for ecological stewardship, justice, and sustainability are not merely pragmatic or scientific appeals but are deeply rooted in ethical imperatives derived from religious teachings. For instance, in Judeo-Christian traditions, the mandate to care for creation (Genesis 1:28) or the prophetic calls for justice and righteousness extend to environmental concerns. Catholic social teachings and liberation theology emphasize that the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are inextricably interrelated [28].

Similarly, in Buddhism, the interconnectedness of all life and the imperative to alleviate suffering encompass ecological responsibilities as part of a broader ethical framework. We are reminded that just as a person recoils at the thought of pain and treasures her own life, so do other sentient beings (*Dhammapada*, 129–130). Thus, suffering should not be inflicted on others intentionally, mercilessly, and wantonly. The decision to ignore this injunction leads to real consequences, if not in the present life, then in a future life.

Speaking from a position of faith, in the context of Islam, entails evaluating all human activities concerning the ecology within the framework of submission to Allah. Islam teaches that humans are stewards (*khalifah*) of the Earth, entrusted with its care and responsible for maintaining its balance. The Qur’an emphasizes the importance of not corrupting the Earth after it has been set in order (Qur’an 7:56). It highlights the interdependence of all living creatures (Qur’an 6:38). The Prophet Muhammad also advocated for sustainable living, emphasizing moderation and

conservation of resources. For example, he advised against wastefulness even when using abundant resources such as water (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, 425). Therefore, in Islam, ecological responsibility is not just an ethical choice but a religious duty, reflecting a broader commitment to living in harmony with Allah's creation and upholding the trust placed in humanity as guardians of the Earth [29].

4.2. *Communicating in a Contextually Relevant Manner*

Religious prophetic communication is critical in highlighting religious principles to advocate against harmful situations and promote beneficial ones. Effective prophetic communication requires more than moral exhortation; it demands genuine community commitment and contextual understanding from the speaker. Prophetic figures are not detached "armchair prophets" but are deeply embedded in their communities, listening to concerns, struggles, and aspirations to ensure their advocacy resonates authentically [30].

The prophetic voice gains credibility and impact from its intimate connection to the community. Through respectful, mutual dialogue, prophetic figures articulate the moral imperatives of their faith traditions in relevant and meaningful ways. This approach enables them to address systemic issues and advocate for changes that pertain directly to the lives of the people involved.

Grounded in genuine community engagement, prophetic communication can catalyze profound social and environmental transformation. While climate change and other crises are global, their effects and solutions vary by context. A conscientious effort to listen, learn, and experience challenges alongside the community is imperative before making pronouncements. This localized approach recognizes that environmental stewardship strategies must be adaptable to particular circumstances, considering cultural, social, and economic factors.

Top-down approaches often fail to resonate with local communities, leading to impractical or counterproductive solutions. For example, well-meaning environmental policies may overlook traditional knowledge and practices of Indigenous peoples, resulting in resistance or harm to ecosystems. Words from uninformed individuals can be met with resistance and rejection, especially from outside the community.

4.3. *Communicating to Energize*

In religious prophetic communication, the role of the prophet transcends mere information transmission, becoming a transformative force that illuminates an eschatological perspective. The prophetic speaker highlights destinations that can be positive or negative, depending on the situation. Energizing prophetic communication serves as a herald, offering visionary glimpses into divine providence and articulating paradigms that challenge entrenched norms. According to theologian Walter Brueggemann, the prophet's primary task is to bring forth new realities that contrast with the old order. Prophetic communication energizes communities by presenting visions of a future aligned with God's plan of salvation [31].

This form of communication challenges the mindset that genuine transformation is illusory. By proclaiming transcendental promises and calling for radical shifts in attitudes and behaviors, especially towards the environment, prophetic communicators inspire communities to envision and work toward transformative futures. Central to this is the infusion of hope grounded in soteriological beliefs, emphasizing that present actions have lasting implications for the future.

Energizing prophetic communication involves embracing diverse perspectives and empowering marginalized voices. Engaging with scientific and technological communities through dialogue is essential. Despite environmental harms, modern technology, particularly AI, offers sustainable resource management and conservation solutions. Engaging with scientists enhances the credibility and effectiveness of environmental messages. Recent religious statements on climate change often cite scientific facts before laying out relevant teachings, countering misinformation and climate denial.

Religion also significantly highlights Indigenous wisdom, which encourages sustainable behaviors and provides valuable ecological understanding. Collaborating with Indigenous communities can lead to practical solutions. Religion, in its prophetic capacity, can amplify the voices of Indigenous peoples globally [32].

Energizing prophetic communication involves collaborative efforts for tangible environmental actions, including advocacy, educational initiatives, conservation projects, sustainable investments, awareness campaigns, and global-local partnerships. Interreligious dialogue allows faith actors to find common ground and shared values, contributing to positive environmental outcomes.

Most importantly, religious prophetic communication must adopt a “with” rather than “for” approach in addressing ecological concerns. This means dialoguing with those most impacted by environmental degradation, especially women, children, and the poor [33,34]. These vulnerable groups must be empowered to be part of the solutions rather than having solutions imposed on them without consultation.

4.4. Communicating to Criticize

The converse of energizing prophetic communication is criticizing prophetic communication, which often involves speaking truth to power [35] or speaking “against the moral evil and apostasy of the world and societies” [36]. Prophetic critics strive to cut through societal norms that obscure moral truths.

By raising counter-cultural voices to challenge prevailing narratives and expose systemic injustices, prophetic communicators disrupt complacency and provoke introspection. Their critique calls for recognizing and confronting uncomfortable truths about inequality, exploitation, environmental degradation, and other social and ethical issues threatening human dignity and planetary well-being.

Central to criticizing prophetic communication is the imperative to confront structures of authority that perpetuate injustice and inequality. Prophetic critics hold those in power accountable to moral standards derived from religious teachings and human rights principles. They challenge policies and practices that prioritize profit over people, exploit natural resources unsustainably, and perpetuate oppression.

In the context of the ecological crisis, religion promotes a different paradigm for human development that does not jeopardize environmental and societal well-being. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a Muslim scholar, has highlighted scientism as a major cause of the ecological crisis. In his seminal book, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (first published in 1968), Nasr critiqued Western philosophical traditions for prioritizing empirical observation and technological progress, leading to a worldview that marginalizes spiritual dimensions of knowledge and fosters anthropocentrism. Nasr warned, “Nothing is more dangerous in the current ecological debate than that scientific view of man and nature which cuts man from his spiritual roots and takes a desacralized nature for granted” [37].

Nasr’s perspective resonates with Pope Francis’s critique of the “technocratic paradigm” in the influential encyclical *Laudato Si’: On the Care for Our Common Home*, which criticizes a worldview prioritizing technological progress and economic growth over ethical considerations and ecological sustainability. This reductionist view commodifies nature and leads to environmental degradation, pollution, and resource depletion. Pope Francis argued that instrumental rationality reduces complex ecological issues to technical challenges, neglecting moral considerations and exacerbating inequalities, especially among the poor and vulnerable.

In similar vein, writing from the Confucian perspective, Tu Weiming asserted that the Confucian worldview contrasts with the Enlightenment mentality, which focuses on the self and community but neglects Earth and Heaven. On the other hand, Confucian worldview calls for the integration of the body, heart, mind, soul, and spirit of the self. This integration results in actions and interactions that promote harmony at all levels, from the home to the world and beyond [38].

Buddhist voices have also continually called for the re-examination of the present model of development. Buddhist prophetic voices have pointed out that we cannot cling to the misguided belief that endless economic expansion and ever-increasing GDP are the hallmarks of a successful society. We cannot continue to believe that high levels of production and consumption are synonymous with national progress. This delusion blinds us to the interconnectedness of all things, fostering a system that prioritizes short-term gains over long-term well-being.

The consequences of this delusion are far-reaching and dire. We exploit natural resources at an unsustainable pace, leading to deforestation, water scarcity, and climate change. The delicate balance of ecosystems is disrupted, jeopardizing the very foundation of life on Earth. Engaged Buddhist scholar Sulak Sivaraksa highlighted the fallacy of this approach: “Development can emphasize quantity or quality. We can measure results, but it is presumptuous to assume that more factories, schools, hospitals, food, clothing, jobs, or income will necessarily enhance the quality of life” [39]. True progress, Sivaraksa argued, must encompass the well-being of both humanity and the environment.

Prophetic communication also requires actively confronting entities responsible for unethical innovations detrimental to the environment. Rapid technological advancements, such as data centers and e-waste, contribute significantly to environmental degradation and health risks. Calls for digital sustainability are crucial, advocating for practices that minimize the negative impacts of digital technologies and promoting mindful consumption.

Religious prophetic communication must advocate for responsible stewardship, holding corporations, policymakers, and individuals accountable for environmental harm. This includes emphasizing the importance of

sustainable practices and denouncing actions that exacerbate environmental degradation, ensuring the well-being of present and future generations.

4.5. *Communicating Beyond Words*

Communication takes place not only with words but also with action. Religious prophetic communication in environmental care extends beyond rhetoric to tangible actions, with religious leaders and institutions leading by example to foster greater environmental awareness and responsibility within their communities and beyond. These organizations play a pivotal role in environmental stewardship by implementing sustainable practices such as reducing energy consumption, increasing recycling efforts, and using eco-friendly materials for construction and maintenance. Embracing renewable energy sources like solar or wind power not only reduces carbon footprints but also demonstrates a commitment to clean energy and sustainability. For instance, under Pope Benedict XVI's leadership, the Vatican installed 2400 solar panels in 2008 and later took steps such as banning single-use plastic bags in 2019 [40]. Moreover, the Vatican has committed to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, setting a significant precedent in environmental leadership.

Another influential religious figure exemplifying prophetic environmental leadership is the Gyalwang Drukpa, spiritual leader of the Drukpa Lineage in Tibetan Buddhism and founder of the humanitarian organization Live to Love. Recognizing the Himalayan region's ecological fragility, he has spearheaded initiatives to restore degraded areas through tree-planting campaigns, mobilizing monastic communities and locals alike. His efforts have been recognized globally, earning him the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Award from the United Nations in 2010 for his commitment to turning compassion into action [41]. The Gyalwang Drukpa's dedication is testimony to his role as a prominent advocate for environmental preservation and spiritual stewardship, resonating with communities worldwide.

Another notable voice in Buddhist environmental advocacy is Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi, an American scholar and Theravada monk renowned for his proactive approach to addressing the ecological crisis.

As the founder and chair of Buddhist Global Relief (BGR), Bhikkhu Bodhi has focused on combating hunger and poverty, aligning these efforts with Buddhist principles of compassion and social responsibility. BGR implements projects that promote sustainable agriculture and community development in vulnerable regions, reflecting Bhikkhu Bodhi's commitment to translating Buddhist values into practical solutions. Additionally, he serves as a spiritual ambassador for the interfaith climate change movement Our Voices, advocating for environmental awareness and policy change on a global scale [42].

Gandhi's enduring counsel, "Be the change that you wish to see in the world", resonates deeply within religious leadership. Religious leaders entrusted with guiding congregations and communities have a unique opportunity to elevate environmental consciousness by embodying sustainable practices in their personal lives. This includes advocating for simplicity, choosing eco-friendly transportation options, and minimizing personal carbon footprints. When religious leaders align their actions with their teachings on environmental stewardship, they enhance credibility and inspire others to follow suit.

By visibly integrating sustainable practices into their daily lives and institutional operations, religious leaders communicate a powerful message of environmental responsibility to their followers and the broader community.

When religious leaders actively live out environmental values, it motivates their followers to adopt similar practices. This creates a ripple effect, leading to positive changes where individuals and communities contribute to a healthier, more sustainable world.

5. Promoting an Ecological Ethos through Religious Prophetic Communication

While various environmental ethics inspired by religious and secular thoughts have been proposed, achieving ecological civilization requires the presence of an ecological ethos. According to John Chryssavgis, "It is an ecological ethos rather than ecological ethic that we need today" [43]. One of the aims of religious prophetic communication is to promote the realization of an ecological ethos in society, where individuals and groups are imbued with a well-formed ecological conscience and heightened ecological consciousness. An ecological ethos can be defined as a widely shared belief system and guiding principles that motivate individuals and groups to prioritize environmental stewardship and justice. It goes beyond mere compliance with laws and regulations, urging responsible actions even in the absence of enforceable legal measures. This ethos encompasses anthropocentric concerns for human well-being and broader biocentric perspectives that value the natural world for its intrinsic worth. Communities guided by an ecological ethos

recognize the interconnectedness of human activities and environmental health and thus prioritize long-term sustainability over short-term gains. This commitment entails making personal sacrifices to minimize environmental harm, fostering voluntary cooperation, and promoting conscientious behavior across society to ensure a healthy planet for future generations [44].

Ecological ethos, however, is rooted in various cultures and religions [45]. Within these cultural and religious contexts, the ethos is a fundamental organizing principle that shapes and regulates the essential ecological relationship between humans and nature. Historian Lynn White Jr. asserted that people's actions toward their ecology are influenced by their beliefs about themselves and their relationship to their surroundings. White suggested that religion plays a crucial role in shaping our beliefs because our understanding of our own story and destiny, and our relationships with others and nature, are all influenced by our religious beliefs. Therefore, religious beliefs impact how societies perceive and interact with the natural environment, guiding norms, values, and practices related to environmental stewardship and sustainability. In societies where the line between religion and culture is not clearly defined, such as East Asian societies, one can assert that cultural values also contribute significantly to establishing an ecological ethos.

An important aspect of an ecological ethos is the presence of an ecological conscience. Here, religious prophetic communication also plays an essential role in forming an ecological conscience. The concept of "ecological conscience" is not new. In the 1940s, in his book *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold had already called for the development of an ecological conscience regarding land ethic [46]. This was a recurrent theme in Leopold's writings and advocacy. According to Aldo Leopold, an ecological conscience arises from considering our relationship with the environment beyond that of individuals and society. He wrote:

The first ethics dealt with the relation between individuals; the Mosaic Decalogue is an example. Later, accretions dealt with the relation between the individual and society. The Golden Rule tries to integrate the individual into society; democracy integrates social organization into the individual. There is currently no established ethic addressing human relationships with the land and the animals and plants that grow on it. Land, like Odysseus' slave-girls, is still property. The land-relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations. If I read the evidence correctly, the extension of ethics to this third element in the human environment is an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity. It is the third step in a sequence. The first two have already been taken. Since the days of Ezekiel and Isaiah, individual thinkers have asserted that the despoliation of land is not only inexpedient but wrong. Society, however, has not yet affirmed their belief. I regard the present conservation movement as the embryo of such an affirmation.

Though Aldo Leopold introduced the concept of ecological conscience many years ago, the journey toward ecological civilization requires continued efforts to promote this essential ethos. Religion, perhaps more than any other institution, must lead the charge. From a religious perspective, a deep respect for the interconnectedness of all living things is central to ecological conscience. This reverence extends to the natural world, seen as a gift entrusted to humanity by a higher power. It emphasizes the responsibility to cherish and protect this precious resource.

More broadly, ecological awareness recognizes the far-reaching consequences of our actions. It extends beyond immediate surroundings and compels us to consider the impact on the entire planet and its inhabitants. This awareness is triggered by witnessing environmental destruction, species loss, and resource depletion [47].

It manifests as a sense of guilt when we realize our actions, even seemingly insignificant ones, contribute to environmental harm. Images of oil spills harming marine life or reports of deforestation destroying habitats can trigger this feeling.

Similarly, everyday choices like using single-use plastics or wasting food can ignite a sense of responsibility. We begin questioning our consumption patterns: Do I truly need a straw to drink water out of a glass? Can I source food locally? Do I need one more pair of shoes or jeans? Can I walk or cycle instead of driving? Can I reduce the amount of time I take to shower?

An ecological conscience is rooted in the belief that humanity and the natural world deserve respect and care. It represents the internalization of environmental knowledge and concern, encompassing a cognitive understanding of ecological issues like climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, coupled with an emotional connection to the natural world. This translates to a moral imperative, a sense of responsibility for the environment's well-being that compels individuals to strive for greater human and environmental flourishing.

The development of an ecological conscience is a multifaceted process. Educational exposure to ecological challenges lays the groundwork for understanding the complex web of environmental issues. However, mere knowledge is insufficient. Cultivating an ecological conscience necessitates introspective reflection on personal habits and consumption patterns. This self-examination fosters a sense of agency, motivating individuals to identify areas where they

can minimize their ecological footprint. Additionally, fostering a connection with nature through immersive experiences strengthens the emotional bond with the environment, further solidifying the moral imperative for its protection.

Through various means, religion can play a significant role in shaping an ecological conscience [48]. By leveraging their spiritual teachings, practices, and community frameworks, religions can promote a deeper respect and care for the natural world among adherents. Many religious traditions have sacred texts that emphasize the sanctity of nature and the responsibility of humans to act as stewards of the earth. By highlighting these teachings, religions can cultivate an understanding that caring for the environment is a moral and spiritual duty. Moreover, regular engagement in spiritual practices, such as prayer, meditation, and worship, can deepen an individual's connection to self, Earth, and Heaven. These practices nurture a sense of gratitude and reverence for the natural world, fostering a greater commitment to its care.

Religious leaders and visionaries can also serve as powerful role models in environmental stewardship. Through both words and actions, religious figures can inspire adherents to engage in ecological activism, taking concrete steps to reduce their environmental impact. This can include activities such as conserving water, reducing energy consumption, recycling, and supporting policies promoting sustainability. One of the advantages of religious communities is that they can offer a supportive environment where individuals can collectively engage in ecological initiatives. Through communal efforts, religions can amplify their impact on environmental safeguarding.

A well-developed ecological conscience is manifested in heightened ecological consciousness by the individual. Religious teachings contribute greatly to promoting ecological consciousness, which is undergirded by various virtues that hold ecological import. Ecological consciousness transcends mere environmental appreciation. It signifies a profound awareness of the inextricable relationship between humanity and the natural world. This awareness extends beyond aesthetics, acknowledging our absolute dependence on healthy ecosystems for sustenance (clean air, water, food) and countless other services. Ecological consciousness entails having a sense of responsibility, transforming us from passive observers into active stewards.

This heightened awareness is accompanied by a set of virtues that guide our interactions with the environment. In the Confucian milieu, the five cardinal virtues of Confucianism—benevolence (*ren*), righteousness (*yi*), propriety (*li*), wisdom (*zhi*), and fidelity (*xin*)—not only serve as values governing harmonious social relationships but also play a role in promoting an ecological ethos. For example, *ren* embodies kindness, benevolence, and humanity toward others. It emphasizes treating others with compassion, empathy, and understanding, forming the foundation of all other virtues. *Ren*'s core tenet of compassion and empathy for others can include the environment. Wang Yangming, a later Confucian scholar, proposed a perspective that sees the unity of human beings and the universe. He believed that the benevolent heart connects with all things, leading to a sense of solidarity with the natural world [49]. This interconnectedness implies a moral responsibility to care for the environment as an extension of caring for humanity. *Ren*, contextualized to ecological concerns, condemns negative behaviors that harm the environment as morally wrong, while positive actions that respect and preserve the natural world are praised as virtuous.

In other words, the demonstration of *ren* towards animals, plants, and ecosystems is part and parcel of the overall ethos concerning human relationships that begin with the self, reaching out to the entire cosmos. Tu Weiming posited that for the human community to thrive, we must move beyond our self-centered and limited viewpoints and engage in ongoing self-transcendence through self-cultivation. This process requires extending our empathetic concern from ourselves to our families, communities, nations, and ultimately all of humanity. Such an approach helps us to overcome selfishness, nepotism, parochialism, chauvinistic nationalism, and even anthropocentrism, thereby connecting with the broader cosmic reality. Nepotism disrupts family harmony, chauvinistic nationalism opposes genuine patriotism, and anthropocentrism hinders both human and environmental flourishing. According to Tu, achieving locally and cosmic harmony requires humans to view themselves as both socialistic and naturalistic. We must move beyond being solely anthropological or anthropocentric and adopt an 'anthropocosmic' perspective, recognizing that we encompass more than just socialistic or materialistic qualities.

Ecological consciousness reflected in the display of the Confucian virtue of *ren* can be discerned through a whole host of other virtues. For example, respect compels us to treat nature with reverence, discouraging actions that exploit or degrade its resources. Humility reminds us of the limitations of human knowledge and dominance over nature. We recognize ourselves as just one thread in the intricate tapestry of life. The virtue of justice extends fairness and equity to all living things—including future generations who will inherit the Earth after us. We are driven to consider the impact of our choices on various species, ecosystems, and fellow human beings, especially those most vulnerable. Moderation, another key virtue, promotes responsible consumption and living within the Earth's carrying capacity. It encourages us to avoid excess and embrace sustainable practices. Finally, gratitude fosters a deep appreciation for the

gifts and services we receive from nature. It inspires us to care for the environment to express our thankfulness—an expression of mutuality and reciprocity.

It must be noted that all these mentioned virtues and many others that are ecologically meaningful, can be supported by teachings embedded in various religious traditions. By cultivating these virtues with support and guidance, individuals imbued with ecological consciousness are empowered to make informed decisions and take actions that benefit both themselves and the planet.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, this paper has explored the pivotal role of religious prophetic communication in advancing the ideals of ecological civilization. Beginning with exploring the concept's multifaceted dimensions, we have highlighted the urgent need for a pervasive ecological ethos that integrates spiritual, cultural, and ethical dimensions into the fabric of society. Through the lens of prophetic communication within religious traditions, we have provided an approach for how these traditions can serve as catalysts for environmental safeguarding and sustainable living.

Key insights from this examination include the transformative potential of prophetic voices to inspire collective action and challenge prevailing norms that perpetuate societal and ecological harm. By critically engaging with environmental issues through prophetic lenses, religious leaders and institutions can articulate compelling moral imperatives and ethical frameworks that resonate deeply with their followers and communities. This engagement reinforces the ethical thrust of ecological stewardship within religious teachings and empowers individuals to embrace their roles in environmental safeguarding.

Moreover, our analysis has highlighted the interreligious applicability of the approach of prophetic communication, demonstrating its adaptability across different religious worldviews and contexts. Such diversity positively contributes to the discourse on ecological civilization by offering a rich mosaic of perspectives and practices that can inform global efforts toward sustainability. In this regard, one question that would benefit from more extensive research pertains to how prophetic communication can be utilized in various societal, cultural, and religious contexts. While this article has laid out the general framework of prophetic religious communication, the scope of the article does not allow for going deeply into individual religious traditions, especially specific local contexts. This would best be done through research projects focusing on particular situations of ecological concerns.

The practical implications of integrating prophetic communication into environmental discourse are profound. We propose that religious leaders, communities, and policymakers take concrete steps to cultivate ecological consciousness, advocate for environmental justice, and promote sustainable practices within their spheres of influence. This involves implementing environmental education, advocating for policy reforms, and mobilizing collective action to achieve the goals of an ecological civilization.

Indeed, the journey towards ecological civilization demands a collaborative and inclusive approach—one that harnesses the moral authority of religious traditions to inspire profound shifts in attitudes, behaviors, and policies towards our planet. As we continue to navigate the challenges of our contemporary world, this paper lends its voice by calling on individuals, communities, institutions, and governments to heed the call of prophetic voices across traditions. We also think many profound prophetic voices exist beyond the religious sphere. Therefore, the practice of giving credence to religious voices can, in turn, help society also to take heed of non-religious prophetic voices that are equally valuable and transformative for the contemporary world.

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Informed Consent Statement

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