

Religious Beliefs and Social Justice: A Reconsideration of the Social Functions of Religion in the Process of Modernization

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Abstract

This paper explores the intersection between religious beliefs and social justice in the context of modernization. With the rapid changes in global social, political, and economic landscapes, religion continues to play a pivotal role in shaping moral and ethical standards in modern society. This study focuses on how religion influences social justice, particularly in addressing pressing global issues such as social inequality, immigration, and environmental protection. By examining the evolving social functions of religion, the paper critically assesses its moral guiding role in contemporary debates on justice. The research highlights the transformation of religion's role in modern society, where traditional religious doctrines are being reinterpreted in response to modern challenges. It further investigates how religious institutions and communities contribute to the promotion of justice, equity, and the protection of human dignity. The findings indicate that despite the secularizing forces of modernization, religion retains a significant, albeit transformed, role in advocating for social justice, influencing public policy, and fostering collective responsibility. The paper also emphasizes the need for a reconsideration of the social functions of religion in light of contemporary global issues, proposing a more inclusive and adaptive understanding of its role in promoting a just and equitable society.

1 Introduction

In the context of the modernization process, religion has historically been viewed as a central social institution, shaping moral, cultural, and ethical values. However, in the face of rapid social, political, and economic changes, particularly those linked to globalization, secularization, and cultural diversification, the role of religion in shaping social justice has become more complex and nuanced. The interaction between religious beliefs and the concept of social justice has been evolving, as traditional religious doctrines are reinterpreted in response to contemporary global challenges^[1]. In this new globalized world, religion finds itself confronting a range of pressing issues, such as social inequality, immigration, environmental degradation, and human rights, all of which challenge both the ethical foundations and the social implications of faith communities. As these global issues increasingly transcend national borders, religion's ability to contribute to social justice debates has expanded, often taking on a more visible and transformative role. This paper explores the dynamic and evolving relationship between religion and social justice within the broader context of modernization, seeking to understand how religion both adapts to and influences the ongoing discourse on justice in the modern world^[2-3].

The research problem at the core of this study concerns the way religion continues to engage with social justice issues in contemporary society, particularly in relation to global challenges such as social inequality, migration, and environmental protection. While much has been written about the social functions of religion in the past, the growing complexity of today's globalized world requires a reexamination of how religious beliefs influence modern debates on justice. Social justice itself is a multifaceted concept that encompasses issues of fairness, equality, and human dignity, and its interpretation can vary greatly depending on cultural, political, and religious contexts^[4]. In many ways, religious institutions, doctrines, and practices remain critical in the formation of values and the implementation of justice, especially in contexts where secular political systems fail to address the needs of marginalized and vulnerable populations. This research aims to clarify how religious beliefs intersect with and shape the contemporary understanding of social justice, with particular attention to how religious communities engage with, and contribute to, solutions for global social issues. By analyzing religion's ongoing role in promoting moral standards, advocating for human rights, and addressing environmental challenges, this study seeks to highlight the ways in which faith-based perspectives can contribute to more equitable and sustainable global solutions.

The significance and innovation of this research lie in its ability to rethink the social functions of religion in light of contemporary global challenges. As secularization has advanced in many parts of the world, religion's role in the public sphere has often been questioned or downplayed, particularly in relation to policy-making and social reform. However, this research argues that religion's capacity to influence social justice remains potent, even if it is increasingly situated within a more pluralistic and multicultural environment^[5-6]. While the role of religion in public life has become more contested, the ethical frameworks and moral teachings that religions offer still provide valuable resources for shaping a more just and compassionate society. By focusing on the intersection between religion and social justice in a rapidly modernizing world, this research seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how religion can shape the social fabric and foster collective responsibility in the pursuit of justice. It challenges conventional views that often see religion as outdated or irrelevant in addressing modern issues, proposing instead that faith-based approaches have the potential to inspire transformative change in both local and global contexts. Furthermore, the study offers a fresh perspective on how religious beliefs can be a powerful force for justice, particularly when combined with broader movements for human rights and environmental protection. It argues that religion, far from being a source of division or conflict, can serve as a unifying force in advocating for the common good. In this sense, the research reinterprets religious social functions not only as tools for individual salvation but as collective resources for shaping a just and sustainable global society. By analyzing the role of religious communities in addressing contemporary global issues, the paper contributes to ongoing debates in the fields of theology, sociology, and political science, proposing a more integrative and expansive view of religion's role in the modern world.

2 Theoretical Perspectives on Religious Beliefs and Social Justice

2.1 Basic Theories of Social Justice

Social justice is a foundational concept in both philosophical and political thought, referring to the fair and equitable distribution of resources, rights, and opportunities within society. At its core, social justice seeks to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their background, have the opportunity to participate fully in society, enjoy basic human rights, and benefit from shared societal resources. However, the concept itself is multifaceted and has evolved over time, leading to the emergence of various theoretical perspectives that shape its contemporary understanding.

One of the central theories of social justice is distributive justice, which concerns the fair allocation of resources across society^[7]. Distributive justice is concerned with how wealth, power, and opportunities should be divided among different members of society, with an emphasis on minimizing inequality and ensuring that those who are less fortunate or marginalized receive adequate support. Theories of distributive justice have been formulated by philosophers such as John Rawls, who argued that justice should be conceptualized as fairness, where inequalities are only permissible if they benefit the least advantaged members of society. Rawls' difference principle posits that any social or economic inequalities must be arranged to the benefit of those who are worst off, highlighting a deep commitment to addressing systemic inequalities.

In contrast to distributive justice, opportunity justice emphasizes equal access to opportunities, regardless of an individual's social or economic background. This perspective argues that justice should not only be about the fair distribution of resources but also about ensuring that all individuals have the same opportunities to succeed in life, including access to education, employment, and healthcare. According to opportunity justice theorists, the role of institutions should be to level the playing field and eliminate barriers that prevent certain groups from achieving success. This notion is often aligned with the ideal of meritocracy, where individuals are rewarded based on their efforts and abilities rather than inherited advantages.

Another important dimension of social justice is rights justice, which focuses on ensuring that all individuals have equal access to civil, political, and social rights. Rights justice is deeply concerned with the protection of fundamental human rights, including freedom of speech, the right to vote, and the right to a fair trial. This theory argues that justice is achieved when individuals can fully exercise their rights without discrimination or oppression, and it underscores the role of legal and political institutions in safeguarding these rights. Rights justice also emphasizes the idea of justice as a universal entitlement, asserting that every person, regardless of their status or background, is entitled to a baseline of rights and freedoms.

These different theories of social justice are not mutually exclusive but can be complementary, as they address various dimensions of fairness and equality. Together, they provide a comprehensive framework for understanding social justice in contemporary society, each offering distinct yet interconnected perspectives on how a just society should be organized and how inequalities should be addressed.

2.2 The Social Functions of Religious Beliefs

Religion has long played a central role in shaping moral and ethical values within societies. Across cultures and historical periods, religious beliefs have provided guidance on questions of justice, fairness, and the proper organization of society. The social functions of religion are multifaceted, encompassing a variety of roles that contribute to both individual well-being and societal cohesion.

One of the primary functions of religion is its role as a moral guide. Religious teachings offer frameworks for ethical behavior, outlining what is considered right and wrong, just and unjust. These moral teachings often include clear directives on how individuals should treat one another, how resources should be shared, and how power should be exercised. In many traditions, the core ethical precepts of religion emphasize compassion, charity, and fairness, all of which are central to the concept of social justice. For instance, Christianity's emphasis on loving one's neighbor, Islam's call for zakat (charitable giving), and Buddhism's principles of compassion all provide moral imperatives for addressing the needs of others and promoting justice^[8-9].

Beyond individual morality, religion also functions as a system of social norms and collective behavior. Religious institutions often set norms that regulate social behavior, guiding how individuals interact with one another and how they fulfill their societal roles. In this capacity, religion contributes to social stability by promoting shared values and practices that help maintain social order. For example, religious rituals, festivals, and collective worship foster a sense of community and belonging, while religious laws or ethical codes shape behavior in both public and

private life. These social norms play an important role in reinforcing justice, as they encourage individuals to act in ways that promote collective well-being and fairness.

Religion also serves to foster collective identity and social cohesion. Through shared beliefs, practices, and traditions, religious communities form tight-knit social groups that provide members with a sense of purpose and belonging. This collective identity can be a powerful force for social change, as religious communities often advocate for social justice on behalf of marginalized groups. Historically, religious movements have been at the forefront of social justice campaigns, from the abolition of slavery to civil rights movements, demonstrating the potential for religion to drive societal transformation. Moreover, religious communities often provide social services, such as education, healthcare, and aid to the poor, thereby addressing issues of inequality and promoting justice in practical ways.

Finally, religion functions as a source of social stability. In times of crisis or uncertainty, religious beliefs can provide individuals and communities with a sense of meaning and hope. This stabilizing effect is crucial in the context of social justice, as it helps individuals endure hardships and contribute to the collective efforts to build a just society. By offering a framework for understanding suffering, injustice, and inequality, religion can motivate individuals and communities to work toward alleviating these conditions.

2.3 The Relationship Between Religion and Social Justice

Religion's relationship with social justice is both profound and complex. As discussed earlier, religious teachings often provide moral frameworks that align closely with the principles of social justice, emphasizing fairness, equality, and the protection of human dignity. However, the way religion interacts with social justice can vary significantly depending on the religious tradition, cultural context, and historical period. In some cases, religious institutions have been instrumental in advocating for social justice, while in other instances, religion has been used to justify or perpetuate injustice.

One of the key ways in which religion influences social justice is through its role in shaping moral values and public discourse. Religious beliefs often serve as a foundation for the values that underpin social justice movements. For example, many of the principles that define modern human rights—such as the inherent dignity of the individual and the right to equality—are deeply rooted in religious traditions. Christianity's emphasis on the inherent worth of all people, Islam's focus on justice and fairness, and Judaism's teachings on charity and social responsibility all provide a moral framework for promoting justice in society. These religious values have historically influenced legal systems, political ideologies, and social movements, contributing to the development of concepts such as human rights and social welfare.

However, religion's relationship with social justice is not always straightforward. Religious institutions and leaders have sometimes aligned themselves with the status quo, using religious teachings to justify inequality, oppression, and social divisions. In many parts of the world, religious elites have historically supported hierarchical social structures that perpetuated discrimination, whether based on class, race, gender, or other factors. For instance, in pre-modern societies, religious doctrines were often used to legitimize feudal systems, slavery, or colonialism. Even today, some religious groups may resist social justice reforms that challenge traditional hierarchies or threaten established power structures^[10].

Despite these challenges, religion remains a powerful force for social justice in many parts of the world. In recent decades, religious leaders and movements have played key roles in advocating for social justice, particularly in areas such as human rights, poverty alleviation, and environmental protection. The global influence of religious organizations, from the Vatican's advocacy for the poor to the role of Islamic charities in addressing poverty, demonstrates the continued relevance of religion in shaping social justice agendas. Moreover, religion's capacity to mobilize large numbers of people and inspire collective action gives it the potential to drive meaningful social change.

In conclusion, the relationship between religion and social justice is multifaceted and dynamic, with religious beliefs playing both a positive and negative role in the promotion of justice. While religion has historically contributed to the development of social justice values, it has also been implicated in reinforcing unjust systems. Nevertheless, the enduring influence of religious beliefs in shaping moral frameworks, social norms, and public discourse makes religion a central actor in the ongoing conversation about social justice. This chapter has outlined the basic theories of social justice and explored the traditional social functions of religion, highlighting the complex and evolving role that religion plays in the pursuit of a just society.

3 The Transformation of Religious Social Functions in the Context of Modernization

3.1 Review of Modernization Theories

Modernization theories have long sought to explain the profound transformations in society resulting from industrialization, urbanization, and technological advancement. As a result, they offer valuable insights into how modernization influences both social structures and value systems, including the shifting role of religion. The central premise of modernization theory is that as societies progress, they move through a linear path of development that gradually transitions from traditional to modern forms of social organization, with religion often losing its traditional place at the center of social and political life.

One of the earliest proponents of modernization theory, Max Weber, argued that the process of rationalization inherent in modernization leads to the disenchantment of the world, a process through which religious and mystical explanations of the world are gradually replaced by scientific reasoning and technological advancements. Weber's theory of the "secularization thesis" suggests that as societies modernize, religion becomes less relevant in the public sphere, and its influence diminishes in various areas of life, including politics, education, and social organization. This process of secularization was believed to be an inevitable outcome of modernization, as societies adopted more rational, bureaucratic, and capitalist forms of organization.

However, later critics of secularization theory, including thinkers like José Casanova and Peter Berger, have challenged the assumption that modernization leads to the inevitable decline of religion. Casanova, for instance, argued that while religion might retreat from the public sphere in certain contexts, it does not necessarily disappear. Instead, he contended that religion adapts to new forms of modernity and continues to play important roles in the private and public spheres, especially in post-colonial contexts and in non-Western societies. This critique suggests that while modernization may change the form and function of religion, it does not necessarily lead to its obsolescence.

In this chapter, we will explore how the modernization process has shaped religion's role in society, with a particular focus on its impact on religious institutions and beliefs, and the challenges that modernization poses to the traditional religious function of promoting social justice. We will also examine how different religious traditions have adapted to these changes and continued to influence social structures, values, and justice systems in the contemporary world.

3.2 Adaptation and Transformation of Religion in Modern Society

As modernization continues to reshape societies, religions have found ways to adapt and transform to meet the challenges posed by these changes. One of the most significant transformations in the role of religion has been the shift from its traditional function as a unifying force within society to a more pluralistic and individualized role. In the modern era, religion is no longer the monolithic institution it once was. Instead, it has become one of many competing ideologies and belief systems that individuals can choose to follow, often in highly fragmented and secularized environments.

Religion's adaptation to modernization is most clearly evident in the ways that religious institutions and communities have redefined their social functions in response to globalizing forces and secular ideologies. This process of adaptation often involves the reinterpretation of religious teachings in ways that address contemporary concerns such as human rights, gender equality, environmentalism, and social justice. For example, many religious communities have re-examined traditional doctrines to incorporate more progressive values, such as the recognition of gender equality or the acknowledgment of environmental stewardship as a moral imperative. This shift in religious thought reflects an attempt to reconcile the traditional moral teachings of religion with the realities of a rapidly changing world^[11-12].

Moreover, religion in the modern world often functions in a more individualized and subjective manner. In a globalized, multicultural society, religious beliefs are increasingly seen as personal choices rather than collective identities. The rise of religious pluralism has forced religious communities to rethink their roles within society, particularly in the context of the modern state, which tends to favor secularism and religious neutrality. As such, religion's role in the public sphere has been redefined, with many religious communities focusing on issues of personal morality, spirituality, and social service rather than on overt political engagement.

In the realm of social justice, this transformation has led to a rethinking of how religion can contribute to contemporary debates about equity, fairness, and human rights. While traditional religious institutions may have focused primarily on questions of salvation and moral behavior, modern religious movements often emphasize social activism, political engagement, and the pursuit of justice in areas such as poverty, racial equality, and human dignity. This shift represents a significant adaptation to the demands of modern society, where religious communities are increasingly called upon to respond to global issues and challenges rather than merely focus on local, doctrinal matters.

3.3 Reconstructing Religious Functions in the Modernization Process

As societies become more globalized, multicultural, and technologically advanced, religion faces increasing pressure to redefine its social functions, especially in relation to social justice. The challenges of global inequality, environmental crises, migration, and human rights have placed religion in a position where it must confront both local and global injustices while reconciling traditional doctrines with contemporary moral demands. In this section, we will examine how religion is reconfiguring its role in addressing these modern challenges, particularly through its engagement with the pressing issues of social justice.

Globalization has brought about new ethical concerns that require religious responses. Issues such as climate change, income inequality, migration, and the protection of human rights demand religious reflection and action. While secular ideologies have become dominant in shaping global policy frameworks, religion still plays an important role in shaping moral discourse and social action, particularly in communities where secularism has not been fully embraced. For example, religious leaders and organizations often advocate for environmental sustainability, not only as a matter of stewardship but also as a moral responsibility to future generations. Similarly, in the context of global migration, religious groups frequently position themselves as advocates for the rights and dignity of displaced persons, framing these issues through theological perspectives that emphasize compassion, solidarity, and hospitality.

Religion's role in modern social justice movements is further evident in the way that religious communities have become involved in political advocacy and social reform. In countries where religious organizations remain influential, they often serve as key players in challenging unjust laws, promoting civil rights, and ensuring the protection of vulnerable groups. The Catholic Church, for instance, has long been a vocal advocate for economic justice and the rights of the

poor, particularly through its commitment to the concept of preferential option for the poor. Similarly, Islamic organizations have been at the forefront of addressing social inequalities in the Muslim world, calling for economic redistribution and the protection of marginalized communities.

Technology and secularization also pose unique challenges to the religious function of social justice. On one hand, advances in communication and technology provide religious organizations with unprecedented opportunities to mobilize global networks in support of justice-related causes. On the other hand, the secularization of public institutions, coupled with increasing skepticism toward religious authority, has led some to question the legitimacy of religious voices in social and political discourse. Nonetheless, many religious leaders have successfully adapted to these changes, using technology to spread messages of social justice and to engage with broader audiences on issues such as climate change, economic disparity, and international conflict^[13].

Ultimately, the modernization process has redefined religion's social function, particularly in relation to social justice. Religion is no longer a static or purely institutional force; it has become a dynamic and evolving player in the global conversation about justice. As religious communities continue to grapple with the challenges posed by globalization, secularization, and technological change, they are increasingly finding new ways to contribute to the ongoing discourse on human rights, environmental justice, and social equity. This transformation represents both a challenge and an opportunity for religious communities to reshape their traditional roles and to make meaningful contributions to the creation of a more just and equitable global society.

4 The Moral Response of Religious Beliefs to Social Inequality

4.1 The Current State and Challenges of Social Inequality

Social inequality has emerged as one of the most pressing global issues of the 21st century. Despite decades of economic growth and technological advancement, inequality within and between societies has not only persisted but in many cases has deepened. It manifests in various forms, including economic disparities, unequal access to education, healthcare, and housing, as well as systemic discrimination based on race, gender, ethnicity, and other socio-economic factors. Inequality is not merely an economic issue; it is deeply embedded in the social fabric, influencing political power, social mobility, and individual well-being.

Globally, the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen, with wealth being increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few individuals and corporations. According to reports from international organizations like the United Nations and the World Bank, the richest 1% of the global population now controls a disproportionate share of wealth, while billions of people live in poverty with limited access to basic resources. This economic divide is compounded by social inequalities that persist along lines of gender, race, ethnicity, and geography. For example, women, racial minorities, and people from developing countries often face significant barriers in accessing opportunities, resources, and rights that others take for granted.

Social inequality poses a serious threat to social justice, as it undermines the principles of fairness, equality, and human dignity. When a significant portion of the population is excluded from meaningful participation in society, it not only exacerbates feelings of resentment and alienation but also stymies social cohesion and economic development. As a result, addressing social inequality has become one of the central challenges facing governments, civil society, and religious communities alike. While political and economic measures to reduce inequality are essential, the moral and ethical dimensions of the problem also require careful consideration, as they speak to the heart of what it means to live in a just and fair society.

4.2 Religious Moral Responses to Inequality

Religious traditions have long played a crucial role in shaping ethical responses to social inequality. Across different faiths, religious teachings and practices offer moral frameworks for understanding and addressing inequality. Whether through charity, social justice advocacy, or calls for systemic change, religion has been both a source of comfort and a catalyst for action in addressing the moral dimensions of inequality.

In Christianity, the moral response to inequality is often rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ, who emphasized compassion for the poor and marginalized. The Gospel narratives consistently highlight the importance of social justice, urging believers to care for the needy, feed the hungry, and welcome the stranger. In the New Testament, for example, the parable of the Good Samaritan teaches that love and care for one's neighbor should transcend social, cultural, and ethnic boundaries. Furthermore, Christian doctrine emphasizes the dignity of all human beings, created in the image of God, and calls for the establishment of a just society where the oppressed are uplifted and the powerful held accountable. Liberation theology, particularly prominent in Latin America during the 20th century, directly addresses the issue of inequality, arguing that the church must be actively involved in the struggle for social and economic justice for the poor and oppressed.

Islam also provides a strong ethical framework for addressing social inequality. The Quran emphasizes the importance of charity (zakat) and the fair distribution of wealth. It stresses the moral obligation of Muslims to care for the less fortunate, support the vulnerable, and engage in acts of social justice. The Quran condemns the hoarding of wealth and exploitation of the poor, urging believers to engage in acts of generosity and kindness toward those in need. Islam's teachings on social justice are not only concerned with charity but also with creating systems that promote fairness and equality. The concept of *adl* (justice) in Islam is central to the belief that social and economic systems must be aligned with the moral principles of equity and fairness. The teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, who himself came from a humble background, consistently emphasized the rights of the poor, the importance of communal responsibility, and the obligation of society to eradicate poverty and inequality.

Buddhism, while often viewed as a more individualistic faith focused on personal enlightenment, also provides a moral response to social inequality. The core teachings of Buddhism—particularly the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path—highlight the interconnectedness of all beings and emphasize the cultivation of compassion (*karuna*) and loving-kindness (*metta*). These principles extend beyond individual practice to encompass social ethics, advocating for the alleviation of suffering in all its forms. In Buddhist societies, the practice of *dana* (generosity) is a key virtue, and it extends to efforts to address social inequality. Buddhist monks and nuns have often been involved in social welfare activities, including providing care for the sick, educating the poor, and promoting peace and reconciliation. Moreover, Buddhist teachings on non-attachment and the impermanence of material wealth challenge the very foundations of economic inequality, offering a spiritual perspective that highlights the moral dangers of greed and excessive attachment to worldly goods.

Other religious traditions, such as Hinduism, Judaism, and indigenous spiritual practices, also offer significant ethical responses to inequality, emphasizing concepts such as compassion, justice, and the duty of the wealthy to support the disadvantaged. These religious frameworks, while differing in specific doctrines and practices, share a common commitment to addressing social injustice through moral teachings and practical action.

4.3 The Dual Role of Religion in Alleviating or Exacerbating Inequality

While religion has long been a force for promoting social justice and addressing inequality, it is important to recognize that its role in both historical and contemporary contexts is not without ambiguity. In many cases, religion has served as a powerful tool for social change, mobilizing believers to challenge the structures of inequality and advocate for a more just society. However,

in other instances, religion has also been complicit in perpetuating inequality, either by reinforcing existing social hierarchies or by failing to confront the injustices within its own institutions.

Historically, religion has sometimes played a conservative role in maintaining social inequality. For example, in the context of colonialism, various religious institutions were complicit in justifying and perpetuating systems of racial and economic inequality, often portraying the colonized as "heathens" or "inferior" and using religious doctrines to legitimize their oppression. In the United States, the Christian church, particularly during the era of slavery, was used to justify the subjugation of African Americans. Some religious leaders argued that slavery was divinely sanctioned or that it was part of God's will. Similarly, the caste system in Hinduism has, at various points in history, been upheld by religious doctrine, with religious texts and practices reinforcing the social stratification of society.

In contemporary society, the relationship between religion and inequality remains complex. On the one hand, religious groups continue to advocate for the poor and marginalized, seeking to challenge systems of oppression and inequality. On the other hand, religion has sometimes been used to justify inequalities, particularly in areas related to gender, sexuality, and race. For example, religious teachings in some contexts continue to restrict the rights of women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and minority groups. Conservative religious interpretations often resist social change and maintain traditional hierarchies, even when such hierarchies contribute to inequality.

Despite these challenges, the overall impact of religion on social inequality cannot be reduced to a simplistic dichotomy. Religion, at its best, can inspire profound acts of social justice and compassion, driving individuals and communities to work toward a more just and equitable society. However, when religious institutions become entrenched in political and social systems that uphold inequality, their role in perpetuating injustice cannot be ignored. In this way, the dual role of religion in both alleviating and exacerbating inequality underscores the need for a critical examination of religious teachings, practices, and institutions in their contemporary contexts. Religion's role in social justice is not predetermined, but rather contingent on how its teachings are interpreted and how its communities respond to the challenges of inequality in the modern world.

5 Ethical Considerations of Religious Beliefs in the Migration Issue

5.1 The Global Challenge of Migration

Migration is one of the most significant global phenomena of the 21st century, and it has profound implications for social structures, political policies, and notions of social justice. The movement of people across borders—whether voluntary or forced—has become an increasingly complex issue that involves not only economic and political factors but also deep cultural and ethical concerns. The causes of migration are diverse, ranging from economic disparity, political instability, and environmental degradation, to the pursuit of better opportunities and the escape from conflict or persecution. As such, migration is inherently linked to broader global issues of inequality, human rights, and social justice^[14].

In the modern era, migration flows have increased dramatically due to globalization, which has facilitated easier movement across national borders. This has resulted in large-scale migration from poorer regions to wealthier countries, with individuals seeking better employment opportunities, education, and safety. For instance, many refugees and asylum seekers have fled war-torn regions like Syria, Afghanistan, and parts of Africa, while economic migrants often come from Latin America, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. These migration flows have created new challenges for host countries, including questions of resource allocation, national security, and social cohesion.

At the heart of the migration issue is the question of how societies address the needs and rights of migrants, while also ensuring that the values of justice, equality, and human dignity are upheld. This complex challenge is amplified by the differing political, economic, and cultural contexts in which migration occurs. While migration can contribute to economic growth and cultural exchange, it can also lead to the marginalization and exploitation of migrants, particularly when they are viewed as a threat to national identity, labor markets, or social services. The ethical questions surrounding migration are deeply intertwined with ideas of inclusion, exclusion, and fairness, and they raise fundamental issues about who deserves to belong to a society and under what conditions.

5.2 Religious Positions and Interventions on the Migration Issue

Religious traditions around the world have long been engaged with the ethical dimensions of migration. For many religious communities, migration is not merely a political or economic issue but one with deep moral and spiritual implications. Across different faiths, the treatment of migrants, refugees, and displaced persons is often framed in terms of compassion, hospitality, and justice. Religious teachings on migration emphasize the moral responsibility of individuals and societies to welcome strangers, provide for those in need, and ensure that migrants are treated with dignity and respect.

In Christianity, for example, the biblical command to "love thy neighbor" is often cited as a guiding principle in how to treat immigrants and refugees. In the New Testament, Jesus himself is depicted as a migrant — born in Bethlehem, a child fleeing Herod's massacre in Egypt, and eventually crucified in Jerusalem. These aspects of Jesus' life are often interpreted as a call for Christians to show compassion for the displaced, the oppressed, and the marginalized. The Catholic Church, in particular, has been active in advocating for migrant rights, with the Pope and various bishops regularly speaking out on behalf of refugees and asylum seekers. Catholic social teaching emphasizes the dignity of the human person and the importance of solidarity, arguing that migrants should not be viewed as mere economic assets or security risks but as human beings deserving of compassion and respect.

Islamic teachings also emphasize the importance of hospitality and assistance to migrants. The Quran encourages followers to care for the "stranger" and to offer shelter to those in need, citing the example of the Prophet Muhammad's migration (the Hijrah) from Mecca to Medina as a model of solidarity and support for those facing hardship^[15]. In Islam, the concept of ummah (the global Muslim community) reinforces the idea that Muslims have a responsibility to assist one another, including those who are displaced or marginalized. Islamic charity (zakat) is also an important mechanism through which support for migrants and refugees is provided, promoting social justice and the equitable distribution of resources.

In Buddhism, the ethical treatment of migrants is rooted in the principles of compassion (karuna) and non-harming (ahimsa). Buddhist teachings on interconnectedness suggest that all beings are part of a shared human family, and that the suffering of one is the suffering of all. Buddhist leaders often speak out in favor of refugees and displaced persons, emphasizing the importance of providing aid and creating welcoming environments for those who seek refuge. The Dalai Lama, for instance, has been a vocal advocate for the rights of refugees and migrants, particularly those who flee political persecution or violence, calling on the global community to practice compassion and understanding toward displaced populations.

These religious traditions, among others, offer moral frameworks that emphasize the human dignity of migrants and stress the ethical responsibility of both individuals and societies to care for those who are vulnerable. By grounding the migration issue in ethical and spiritual teachings, religions provide a lens through which the treatment of migrants can be understood not only as a legal or political matter but also as a moral imperative. This moral guidance plays a crucial role in

shaping public opinion, influencing policy, and motivating faith-based interventions on behalf of migrants.

5.3 The Role of Religion in Social Justice for Migrants

Religious beliefs have a significant influence on how societies address the issue of migration and the social justice concerns that arise from it. Religious communities and organizations are often at the forefront of advocating for the rights of migrants, working to ensure that they have access to basic necessities such as shelter, healthcare, and legal protection. Religious groups are also instrumental in promoting social acceptance and integration, often providing support for the social and cultural adaptation of migrants to their new environments.

In terms of policy, religious organizations frequently lobby governments to adopt more inclusive and just migration policies. For example, the Catholic Church has been vocal in advocating for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, calling for a more compassionate approach to border control and immigration laws. In the United States, faith-based groups have played a central role in lobbying for the protection of undocumented migrants and in providing sanctuary for those facing deportation. These religious organizations often argue that immigration policies should be guided by principles of human dignity and compassion, rather than political expediency or national security concerns.

Religious groups are also key players in fostering social integration and cohesion in migrant communities. Many religious organizations offer language classes, job training, and social services to help migrants navigate their new lives. In addition to practical assistance, religious institutions provide a sense of belonging and community for migrants, particularly in the case of those who have been displaced due to conflict or persecution. For many migrants, religious communities offer a space for spiritual growth, emotional support, and social connection, helping to mitigate the isolation and alienation that can accompany migration.

However, religion's role in migration-related social justice is not without its complexities. While many religious teachings emphasize the importance of welcoming the stranger, certain religious and cultural groups have at times expressed resistance to migration, particularly when faced with large influxes of migrants or refugees from different religious or cultural backgrounds. In some cases, religious rhetoric has been used to justify exclusionary or discriminatory practices, highlighting the potential for religion to either promote or hinder social justice in relation to migration.

Despite these challenges, the overarching role of religion in promoting social justice for migrants remains significant. Religious beliefs continue to shape public discourse and inform policy debates surrounding migration, pushing for a vision of society that is inclusive, compassionate, and just. As the global migration crisis deepens, religious communities will undoubtedly continue to play a pivotal role in advocating for the rights and dignity of migrants, contributing to the ongoing conversation about what it means to live in a just and welcoming society.

In conclusion, religion offers valuable ethical insights and practical frameworks for addressing the challenges of migration and social justice. By grounding the moral response to migration in religious teachings that emphasize compassion, solidarity, and human dignity, religious traditions provide a strong foundation for promoting justice for migrants in a globalized world. In this context, the role of religious beliefs and communities remains vital to ensuring that migration is not seen as a threat but as an opportunity for humanity to come together and build a more just and inclusive society.

6 The Moral Responsibility of Religious Beliefs in Environmental Protection

6.1 Environmental Crisis and Social Justice

Environmental issues have increasingly come to be recognized as central to modern understandings of social justice, particularly in relation to the ethical responsibility we owe to future generations. In recent decades, the environmental crisis — manifested through climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and pollution—has reached unprecedented levels. These challenges not only pose a threat to the ecological stability of the planet but also raise profound ethical questions about justice, equity, and responsibility, especially regarding the intergenerational fairness of our actions. The environmental degradation we are witnessing today has long-term consequences, disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities and future generations who will bear the burden of the environmental damages caused by past and present actions.

Social justice, in the context of environmental issues, calls for the equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens. This includes ensuring that marginalized and impoverished communities, who are often the least responsible for environmental degradation, are not disproportionately affected by its consequences. It also involves the recognition of a moral responsibility to preserve the planet for future generations, who will inherit the environmental state we leave behind. The notion of "intergenerational justice" emphasizes that our actions today must not jeopardize the ability of future generations to meet their needs and live in a sustainable world. This concept calls for a global effort to address environmental harm in ways that are fair and just, offering equal protection and opportunities for all, regardless of geographical location or socio-economic status.

As environmental issues have become more urgent, they have come to be seen not only as technical or scientific problems but also as ethical and moral challenges. Addressing these issues requires a paradigm shift that incorporates environmental stewardship into broader discourses of social justice, equity, and human rights. Environmental protection, then, must be understood not only as a political and scientific matter but also as a moral obligation to ensure the well-being of both current and future inhabitants of the Earth. In this regard, religion can play a critical role in shaping ethical frameworks that guide environmental responsibility and promote sustainable practices.

6.2 Religious Ethical Advocacy for Environmental Protection

Religious traditions across the world have long been concerned with questions of moral responsibility and human stewardship over the Earth. Many of the world's major religions contain teachings and ethical frameworks that address the relationship between humans and the natural world. These teachings often provide a foundation for understanding the moral imperative of environmental protection, urging adherents to care for creation, live in harmony with nature, and protect the Earth as a divine gift. In this section, we will explore the environmental ethics within the three major world religions: Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, highlighting their moral teachings regarding environmental protection and how these traditions have influenced contemporary environmental movements.

In Christianity, the ethical imperative to protect the environment is often derived from the Biblical principle of stewardship. According to Christian teachings, humans are entrusted with the responsibility of caring for the Earth and all living creatures. In Genesis 2:15, the Bible states, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it," signifying the divine responsibility to manage the Earth's resources. This idea of stewardship is central to Christian environmental ethics, emphasizing that humans are not the owners of the Earth but rather its caretakers. Contemporary Christian environmental advocacy has expanded this concept to include climate change action, conservation efforts, and sustainable development. For example, the Catholic Church, through Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*, has called for urgent action to address environmental degradation, urging people of faith to recognize the

ethical implications of ecological damage and to act in solidarity with the poor and marginalized, who are often most affected by environmental harm.

Similarly, in Islam, the concept of khalifa (stewardship) plays a key role in Islamic environmental ethics. The Qur'an emphasizes that humans are stewards (khalifa) of the Earth, tasked with maintaining its balance and protecting it from corruption. In Surah 2:30, Allah states, "It is He who has made you successors upon the Earth." Islamic teachings stress that the Earth and all of its resources are a gift from God, and that humans are responsible for using them in ways that are sustainable and respectful of the natural world. Islamic environmental activism has grown in recent years, with religious leaders calling for increased awareness of climate change, conservation of natural resources, and ethical consumption practices. In many Muslim-majority countries, religious scholars are increasingly incorporating environmental protection into their sermons and educational initiatives, highlighting the moral duty to care for creation.

Buddhism, while not always focused on environmental protection in the same way as Christianity or Islam, also offers a deep ethical foundation for environmentalism. The Buddhist principle of ahimsa (non-harm) extends to all living beings, promoting the idea that humans should live in harmony with the natural world and refrain from actions that cause suffering or harm to other sentient beings. Additionally, Buddhism teaches the concept of dependent origination, which asserts that all beings and phenomena are interdependent and interconnected. This understanding encourages a deep respect for nature and a commitment to environmental sustainability. In recent years, Buddhist leaders have actively engaged in environmental advocacy, calling for ethical consumption, environmental conservation, and the protection of the planet's biodiversity. Buddhist monastic communities, particularly in Southeast Asia, have been at the forefront of grassroots movements to protect natural habitats, raise awareness of climate change, and promote environmentally conscious lifestyles.

Across these major religious traditions, a common thread emerges: the belief that human beings have a moral obligation to protect the environment and its resources, not only for their own benefit but for the well-being of all living creatures and future generations. These religious teachings offer a robust ethical framework that supports the moral imperative of environmental protection, urging individuals and communities to take responsibility for the Earth and its ecosystems. As such, religion can play a significant role in shaping public awareness and influencing policy decisions related to environmental protection.

6.3 The Role of Religion in Promoting Sustainable Development

Religious institutions and communities are uniquely positioned to play a transformative role in advancing sustainable development and environmental justice. Through their global networks, religious organizations have the capacity to mobilize vast numbers of people, influencing public opinion, advocating for policy changes, and fostering sustainable practices in daily life. In recent years, many religious groups have taken active steps to address the environmental crisis, using their platforms to educate their followers, promote ecological stewardship, and advocate for systemic change.

One of the most influential examples of religious involvement in environmental advocacy is the Interfaith Declaration on Climate Change, signed by over 200 religious leaders from various faith traditions in 2015. This declaration emphasized the moral and ethical responsibility of religious communities to take action on climate change, calling for an end to the exploitation of the planet's resources and urging governments to adopt policies that promote environmental sustainability and social justice. Religious organizations have also been instrumental in pushing for the integration of climate change action into international agreements, such as the Paris Agreement, by aligning religious teachings with scientific findings on the urgency of addressing global warming.

On the ground, religious communities have been involved in a wide range of sustainable development initiatives, from promoting renewable energy to encouraging responsible consumption and waste reduction. For example, many Christian organizations have launched programs aimed at reducing the carbon footprint of their congregations, while Muslim communities have focused on promoting zakat (charitable giving) for environmental causes. Buddhist monastic communities in Asia have also been leaders in promoting eco-friendly practices, such as organic farming and reforestation efforts.

Religious beliefs can also shape environmental attitudes at the individual level, encouraging people to adopt more sustainable lifestyles. Whether it is through prayer, meditation, ethical consumption, or community service, religious teachings can inspire individuals to recognize their moral responsibility to the Earth and to make choices that reflect this commitment. Moreover, by emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life, religion has the potential to foster a deep sense of solidarity and collective responsibility for the environment, encouraging people to work together to create a more sustainable and just world.

In conclusion, religious beliefs have an important role to play in advancing environmental protection and promoting sustainable development. Through their ethical teachings, religious traditions offer a moral framework for addressing the ecological challenges of our time, while religious communities and institutions can serve as powerful catalysts for change, advocating for policies and practices that support a sustainable and just future for all. As the global environmental crisis intensifies, it is clear that religion has the potential to contribute significantly to efforts to protect the Earth and promote environmental justice, ensuring that we leave a livable and equitable planet for future generations.

7 Conclusions

This study has examined the evolving relationship between religious beliefs and social justice, particularly focusing on how religion engages with contemporary global challenges such as social inequality, migration, and environmental protection. Throughout the research, it has become evident that religion, far from being a diminishing influence in the modern world, continues to play a crucial role in shaping moral and ethical frameworks for addressing issues of justice. The study has highlighted how different religious traditions provide moral guidance on social issues, advocating for a just and equitable society. Whether through the promotion of solidarity and compassion, as seen in Christian teachings on poverty, or the ethical imperatives of social responsibility found in Islamic and Buddhist traditions, religion offers both a moral and spiritual foundation for addressing the injustices that characterize our global society. However, the study has also revealed that religion's role in social justice is not without contradictions. While many religious teachings advocate for equality and justice, religious institutions have at times perpetuated social hierarchies and inequalities, thus complicating the relationship between religion and social justice.

In conclusion, this research contributes to a broader understanding of the social functions of religion in the modern world, particularly in relation to the challenges of achieving social justice in an era marked by globalization, secularization, and technological advancement. The paper has demonstrated that religion's role in social justice is multifaceted, encompassing both its moral guidance for individuals and communities, as well as its potential influence on policy and societal structures. As modern societies continue to confront pressing issues such as inequality, migration, and environmental degradation, religious beliefs will undoubtedly remain an important source of ethical reflection and action. Moving forward, it is crucial to foster interfaith dialogue and cooperation, enabling religious communities to contribute actively to global discussions on social justice, equity, and sustainability. By recognizing and engaging with the ethical teachings of various religious traditions, societies can develop more inclusive, compassionate, and just policies that address both the immediate and long-term needs of all people.

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