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IMAN DAN FIKSI: DAKWAH EKO-TEOLOGI MELALUI SASTRA

FAITH AND FICTION: PREACHING ECO-THEOLOGY THROUGH LITERATURE

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Abstract

This research aims to reveal how literature lecturers communicate eco-theological values through the teaching of literature, as well as identify the obstacles. This type of research is qualitative, with a narrative approach. The main data were taken from in-depth interviews with literature lecturers. The data analysis technique used in this research is thematic analysis with a hermeneutic approach. Data validity uses triangulation of data sources, member checking, and critical reflection from the researcher. The results showed that: 1) eco-theological becomes a theoretical reflection on the approach used by the speakers; 2) literary works can act as ecological and spiritual preaching spaces; 3) insignificant ecological literacy, curriculum limitations, and students' unpreparedness become structural and cultural challenges in literary education with an eco-theological perspective); and 4) the need for curriculum reformulation in literature to improve the eco-



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theological approach. In this pivotal point, teaching can be seen as *da'wah* and *da'wah* is not merely about religiosity in orthodox perception.

Key Words: Literature; Eco-theology; Preaching; Literacy

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap bagaimana dosen sastra mengkomunikasikan nilai-nilai eko-teologi melalui pengajaran sastra, serta mengidentifikasi hambatan-hambatannya. Jenis penelitian ini adalah kualitatif dengan pendekatan naratif. Data utama diambil dari wawancara mendalam dengan dosen sastra. Teknik analisis data yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah analisis tematik dengan pendekatan hermeneutik. Keabsahan data menggunakan triangulasi sumber data, member checking, dan refleksi kritis dari peneliti. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa: 1) eko-teologis menjadi refleksi teoretis atas pendekatan yang digunakan oleh para narasumber; 2) karya sastra dapat menjadi ruang dakwah ekologis dan spiritual; 3) literasi ekologis yang belum signifikan, keterbatasan kurikulum, dan ketidaksiapan siswa menjadi tantangan struktural dan kultural dalam pendidikan sastra berperspektif eko-teologis; dan 4) perlunya perumusan kembali kurikulum sastra untuk meningkatkan pendekatan eko-teologis. Pada titik penting ini, pengajaran dapat dilihat sebagai dakwah dan dakwah tidak melulu tentang religiusitas dalam persepsi ortodoks.

Kata-kata kunci: Sastra; Teologi Lingkungan; Dakwah; Literasi

Introduction

In the landscape of an increasingly acute global ecological crisis, where disasters, climate change, and exploitation are the main menu of unavoidable environmental problems, there is an urgent need to stimulate ecological awareness that is not only based on science and technology, but also rooted in the value of humanism, especially spirituality and morality. On the other hand, this humanist study has a tendency to involve literary texts as a medium of preaching (next will be termed as *da'wah*), in this context, literature is a symbolic and pedagogic space that presents a *narrative pulpit* to sow faith-based ecological awareness: eco-theology. This research departs from the

elementary question of how eco-theology can be communicated through the teaching of literature. This research focuses on the pedagogical and rhetorical practices of literature lecturers in communicating eco-theological values through literary works, whether fiction or poetry. The researcher wants to unravel how *da'wah*—traditionally, culturally, and conventionally, understood as the distribution of religious teachings in the form of sermons or lectures—can actually occur conspiratorially in a universal yet profound classroom through a literary approach. More specifically, this study examines how lecturers relate moral and spiritual themes in literature to religious propositions such as Qur'anic verses,

Prophetic hadiths, and faith values that live in Islamic tradition.

In general, the environmental crisis is not just a scientific or political policy issue, but also contains a crisis of meaning and spirituality. The ecological crisis itself occurs because modern humans have broken the sacred relationship with nature (Purniawan, 2020; Wasil & Muizudin, 2023). Humans no longer see the earth as God's verses, but only as an object of exploitation (Aditama et al., 2023), thus eco-theology is not just a critic to secure human race but all the things (Latour, 2009). In this context, literary works, whether fiction or poetry, can be a medium to rebuild ecological spirituality, an effort that in this study is referred to as eco-theological *da'wah*. Many Indonesian fictions contain ecological and spiritual messages. For example, in Ayu Utami's *Saman*, ecology becomes an arena for resistance to power as well as a reflection of prophetic ethics. In Danarto's short stories, nature is often depicted as a spiritual entity with divine will. Leila S. Chudori's *Laut Bercerita* can be read as a form of ecological concern that also contains spiritual depth. In the global realm, Richard Powers' *The Overstory* overtly combines ecological narratives with transcendental consciousness. That is, through these works, the relationship between humans and nature is not merely

ecological, but also unexplained. Literature has the power to bridge the rational and the spiritual, the ethical and the aesthetic, explicitly or otherwise. Literature, with this kind of vibration, opens up space for readers to reflect on the relationship between humans and nature as a sacred relationship, not just a utilitarian one (Zapf, 2006).

On the other hand, in many religious traditions, including Islam, nature is not only a physical space, but also a sacred text containing divine messages (Ibadulloh & Mutaqin, 2023). In the Qur'an, Surah Al-Anbiya: 107, God repeatedly affirms to humans to pay attention to nature. God sent human as the leader for the universe (Ahmad, 2020), or Surah Ali Imron: 190 about the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, which shows the close connection between faith and ecological awareness. In addition, Allah's power is also spread in the verses, such as Surah Ar-Rum: 41, which discusses the destruction on land and in the sea caused by human hands. There is also a hadith about the importance of protecting nature, "If the Hour occurs and in the hand of one of you is a date seed, then plant it even though the Hour will come" (HR. Ahmad) or a hadith about human relations with nature horizontally, "The world is green and beautiful, and God has made you caliphs over it ..." (HR.

Muslim). The arguments about these values (ecology) explains that Islam immerses the nuance of preserving nature (Ibadulloh & Mutaqin, 2023). It is comparatively in line with the issue that literary texts can deliver nature and spiritual discourse in the same gravity. It also explains that Islam and its value cannot be held hostage exclusively to *da'wah*, but rather narratives taught in the classroom, especially in literature classes that are rich in symbolic, metaphorical and reflective meanings. Here, Islamic ecocritical studies become the main access in unpacking this issue.

Ecocriticism itself has been a crucial issue in literary studies since the late 20th century (Kordecki, 2023; Marland, 2013; Ryan, 2019); it an approach that reads literature from an environmental perspective, but this approach is often considered secular, far from spirituality. Recent studies have tried to bridge ecocriticism with spirituality or religiosity - known as eco-theology. In the Indonesian context, this study is still rare, especially when it comes to the pedagogical and *da'wah* practices of literature lecturers. In the Islamic context, some studies have begun to explore the relationship between eco-theology and environmental interpretation, but very few have specifically looked at literature as an eco-theological *da'wah* narrative, let alone

from the perspective of teaching in classroom discussions. Even in educational studies, the separation between the teaching of values and the analysis of literary texts is still common, so that the *da'wah* space becomes something that is considered outside the academic realm. This is the research gap that this study aims to bridge: that the teaching of literature is not only possible, but an effective epistemological *da'wah* space, especially in building ecological awareness based on faith values.

Some previous studies have alluded to the role of literature in the formation of ecological awareness, for example, an article entitled "Representation of Islamic Ecotheology in the Novel *Si Anak Kuat*, Tere Liye" which explains that environmental conservation in Islam is part of religious commandments reflected in the Qur'an, and literature can be an effective means of conveying this message; the results show that the novel contains Islamic eco-theological values such as *Tawhid*, *Khilafah*, *Amanah*, *Fairness*, and *Istislah* (Masyhuda et al., 2021). Another one, an article entitled "Hope of a Hopeless World: Eco-Teleology in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*" which argues that Atwood's ecological critique is a manifesto of de-secularisation that envisions a messianic form of ecotheology.

This article elaborates on the concept of over-humanisation as Atwood's critique of scientism which transform Atwood's ecotheology to be eco-teleology (Bahrawi, 2013). Other one, an article entitled "Eradication of Dichotomies between Theology and The Natural World in Wendell Berry's *Jayber Crow*" which analyse the novel from an ecocritical perspective, specifically ecotheology and environmental humanities. It finds that a person's relationship with the earth reflects their divine and human interactions. Religion and agricultural ideas show that self-improvement and work in the natural world are interrelated (Blessy & Alexander, 2019). Other one is an article entitled "Ecocritical Analysis of R. K. Narayan's *The Man-eater of Malgudi*" which explains literature, through ecocriticism, plays an important role by analysing representations of nature in literary works and responding to environmental disturbances (animal abuse) (Sarker, 2019). There are many more research discussing literary works as a reflections, "Nature and Environmental Security in Philip Onuoha's *Song for my Mother*" (Iwuji, 2023), "Exploring the Symbiosis of Nature and Culture in Caribbean Literature through Ecocritical Prisms: Insights from De Lisser's *Jane's Career* and Selected Poetries of Derek Walcott" (Oburumu, 2023), "A

Posthumanist Ecocritical Approach to Children's Literature: José Saramago's *An Unexpected Light, The Lizard, and The World's Largest Flower*" (Yanar, 2023), "Estrangement of Man from Nature: An Ecocritical Study of Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*" (Wani & Tiwari, 2023), and "Ecocriticism: Relevance of William Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* and *The World is too Much with Us*" (Afzal Farooq & Chandra, 2012). Those position literary works as a media to learn, not many have explored how the lecturers optimise the works are sewn with religious cores in the teaching of ecologically sound literature. This is where this research gap lies: the researchers find no study that traces the practice of eco-theological *da'wah* in literature teaching concretely and narratively, through the experiences and reflections of the teachers.

The novelty of this research lies in the interdisciplinary approach that combines literature, *da'wah*, and teaching communication. This research not only positions literary texts as aesthetic materials, but also as a space for *da'wah* communication that conveys spiritual implications subliminally. Through interviews with lecturers who teach literature and consciously induce moral values in the environmental issues, this research reveals how this pedagogical practice becomes a form of contemporary

da'wah that is contextual, non-dogmatic, and transformative. Literature lecturers in this case are not only knowledge conveyors, but also spiritual mentors who, through fictional texts, poetries, and narratives, convey the message that loving the earth is part of faith. In other words, the purpose of this study is to understand how *da'wah* on eco-theology is manifested through the teaching of literature, as well as how teachers link Islamic values about the environment to the implicit messages in literary works. This research also aims to develop a holistic and transformative model of literary pedagogy, in which *da'wah* communication is no longer exclusive to the religious space, but rather melts into every educational process, including in the appreciation of works of fiction. Through this approach, it is hoped that the teaching of literature can become a means of *da'wah* that not only touches the mind, but also touches the heart and inspires action.

In this context, *da'wah* is no longer limited to lectures and *mosque pulpits*, but can be transformed into sublime, dialogical and reflective communicative practices in academic spaces, especially literature classes (Tahir, 2023). The teaching of literature offers a hidden preaching space-a narrative pulpit where lecturers consciously and consciously contest the message of faith through aesthetics; in this

point, literature can be understood as practices, conventions, and expectations within a specific cultural context, rather than as isolated works of art (Knight, 2007; Phelan, 2006). Therefore, *da'wah* through literature demands intellectual as well as spiritual sensitivity, because the message disseminated is not in the form of dogma, but through symbols, metaphors, and existential contemplation, which is full of discourse and arguments. Literature becomes an alternative tongue of *da'wah* that is able to convey divine messages without having to be instructive, but rather interpretative and humanistic. The position of the lecturer in this context is not only as a teacher of texts, but as an intellectual *da'i* - a deliverer of wisdom through aesthetics. In Surah Al-Alaq: 1-5, "Recite in the name of your Lord who created. Created man from a clinging substance. Recite, and your Lord is the most Generous, who taught by the pen, taught man that which he knew not," it is implied that the command to cognise the role of knowledge and education is very essential in life. The command to read, which means to *pursue* knowledge, and gives an important role to reason and science to enlighten the people. In the context of education, this implies that in order to enlighten the *ummah*, critical-based education is an indispensable foundation of a Muslim's duty (Demirel Ucan &

Wright, 2019; Hussien, 2007; Saada & Magadlah, 2021; Sahin, 2018). When a lecturer crafts critical issues for a debatable discussion, connecting the metaphor of a tree being cut down in a poem with verses about the destruction of the earth, he is not just teaching, but is preaching: *gnawing* the surface of both the minds and hearts of students. This *da'wah* takes the form of a spiritual pedagogy that raises ecological awareness based on faith - a form of *da'wah* that emphasises action, awareness, and exemplary understanding of the relationship between humans and nature as a divine mandate. More crucially, this approach also dismantles the dichotomy between science and religion, between beauty and truth, between aesthetic and ethic, between education and *da'wah*.

In this research, literature is interpreted as a vehicle for epistemic *da'wah*, where divine values are not only preached, but instilled in the minds of students through aesthetic experiences. Therefore, designing literature teaching that contains eco-theological values is not just a pedagogical choice, but a contemporary *da'wah* mandate that must be carried out intelligently, wisely and creatively. In other words, if so far *da'wah* is understood as a verbal transfer of teachings, then this approach offers a new formation: *da'wah* as a practice of critical

and contemplative reading. *Da'wah* is not only present in the pulpit, but also in class dialogues, in discussions about fictional characters, in questions about character morality, and in contemplation of the meaning of life implied in the narrative. In surah Al-Mujadilah:11, "O believers! When you are told to make room in gatherings, then do so. Allah will make room for you *in His grace*. And if you are told to rise, then do so. Allah will elevate those of you who are faithful, and 'raise' those gifted with knowledge in rank. And Allah is All-Aware of what you do." There is an implication that the classroom for scholarly discussion has a noble position before Allah SWT, a place where people of knowledge dialogue and talk about enlightenment. Implicitly, there is the formation of a humanitarian responsibility to share knowledge and insights, in order to create a literate generation, and of course, this is a priority in the life of a Muslim. In this context, literary literacy with an eco-theological perspective, in this case, becomes a medium for intellectual *da'wah* that is able to balance reason, taste and faith simultaneously.

Methodology

This research uses a qualitative approach with a narrative approach. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore in depth the

experiences, beliefs, and teaching practices of literature lecturers who consciously integrate eco-theological messages in their teaching process, as well as the subjective meanings formed in the experience. The main data in this study came from in-depth interviews with 3 literature lecturers (with initial names X, Y, Z) who teach in higher education. The participants were purposively selected based on certain criteria, namely: (1) having a background in teaching literature and (2) teaching at an Islamic-based university. The interviews were semi-structured to allow the interviewees to explain their experiences, reflections, and strategies in conveying moral and spiritual messages about the environment. There were 5 in-depth interview questions designed to explore reflective experiences, pedagogical praxis, and spiritual-ecological meanings: 1) In the process of teaching literature, how do you interpret the connection between religious values (such as Qur'anic verses or hadith) and the moral or ecological messages contained in the literary text? 2) Can you share a particular moment or experience when you conveyed a message about responsibility for nature and the environment to students through literary works? What was the response of the students at that time? 3) Is there a particular literary work that you consider to be particularly strong in reflecting

spiritual values towards nature? How do you integrate da'wah values in your reading of these works? 4) How do you see the role of literature lecturers in Islamic universities in shaping students' ecological awareness through religious and literary approaches at the same time? 5) In your view, to what extent is the rhetoric of da'wah based on literary works effective in building students' sensitivity to environmental issues? Are there any obstacles or challenges in delivering it? Data collection techniques are carried out in several stages: 1) identification and mapping of potential interviewees through academic network recommendations and publications; 2) initial communication to explain the purpose and objectives of the research and obtain ethical approval; and 3) interviews (recorded with the interviewees' permission and then transcribed verbatim). The data analysis technique used in this research is thematic analysis with a hermeneutic approach. Thematic analysis aims to identify the main themes that emerge from the interviewees' narratives, while the hermeneutic approach allows the researcher to interpret the meaning behind the statements. The steps of analysis started from (1) reading the interview transcripts thoroughly, (2) conducting open coding to find initial themes, (3) grouping the codes into larger categories,

and (4) interpreting the themes by linking them to relevant theoretical frameworks, such as eco-theological theory, da'wah rhetoric, and communication and literary literacy studies. Data validity uses triangulation of data sources, member checking, and critical reflection from the researcher. Triangulation is done by comparing sources from various sources and supporting documents. Meanwhile, member checking was done by sending a summary of the interpretation to the source to obtain clarification or reinforcement. Critical reflection is to position the researcher's subjectivity in reading the data, given that this approach involves a non-neutral space of interpretation.

Result

In an effort to understand how eco-theology is articulated and integrated in literature teaching, this research explores the experiences and thoughts of three literature lecturers through in-depth interviews. The interviewees involved not only reflected on the connection between literary texts and religious teachings, but also provided a correlative space for students' humanism and spirituality so that it could raise their ecological awareness. The presentation of the following interview results implies literature as a vehicle for contemplative *da'wah* space

for the encounter between aesthetics and ethics.

Question 1 is about exploring the lecturers' subjective meanings and spiritual reflections on literary works as a medium for da'wah and ecological awareness. The answers to this question reflect the extent to which they make literature a bridge between faith and ecology. Interviewee X explained that he sees a very close connection between the value of Islamic religiosity and the ecological meaning contained in literary works. He also emphasised that in the Qur'an there are verses that emphasise naturalism and human responsibility as khalifah [leader], "I've read the novel *Life of Pi* [Yann Martel] ... when I teach, I explore the meaning of the narrative about nature and its relationship with humans ... humans are very dependent on nature, but humans can manage [control] ... the Tiger in the main character is very correlative with anthropocentrism, Islam also puts [humans] the same thing' (X, Q1). In the Qur'an, Surah Ar-Rahman verse 6 is about living things bowing down to God. X continued by linking Chairil Anwar's poetry *Doa* with the concept of Islamic spirituality that is reflective of transience and nature as a mirror of the Divine presence, "... in those stanzas [Doa] ... we are invited to realise that the silence of nature is like us in the middle of the night,

try to study or worship at that time, just feel it!" (X, Q1). In another perspective, according to Y, literary works are prophetic texts that hold humanist and even spiritual meanings-social and cultural revelations, "I don't teach literature only as a beautiful text, but also as a space for spiritual resistance to ecological capitalism," (Y, Q1). He mentions, "... there is a verse about the prohibition of excessive consumerism" (Y, Q1). Here, he refers to the Qur'anic verse in Surah Al-A'raf: 31, that is about overdoing of eating and drinking because God dislikes those who exaggerate. In addition, Z, discussed the critique of consumerism in Saman, urban lifestyles, sexuality, and socio-economic inequality, where there are characters with glamorous, liberal, and often hedonistic lifestyles, he continued, "We are living in the midst of gluttony that is packaged with advertisements, literature can unmask it," he continued. Z opened his view with a statement full of irony, "We live in an age where people are more sensitive to issues on social media than the deep meaning of literary works... I don't know, does this have anything to do with their ethics that tend to decline?" (Z, Q1). For him, literature becomes a space for repentance with logic and sensitivity in the midst of the blind flow of consumptive desires, which actually destroys nature. He emphasises that the narrative of spirituality

in Islam is not just a dogma, but a cosmic interpretation of harmony and attachment between the creature and the Creator. He continued, "When I read Chairil Anwar's poetry *Doa*, or examine T.S. Eliot's *The Dry Salvages*, I am not studying poetry. I am unpacking the forms of prayer that we no longer recite because they have been drowned in the noise of pollution and industrial logic ... I am trying to teach that to students" (Z, Q1).

Next, question 2, this question assumes to stimulate the narrative space to find transformative stories and concrete experiences in teaching practices that may reflect the success or challenges in inserting eco-theological messages through literature. In class, resource person X used Richard Powers' *The Overstory* to engage students in a discussion about ecological awareness from Sufistic perspective, "I explained how the narrative structure of *The Overstory* resembles the concepts of *tawakkul* (surrender) and *tajalli* (manifestation) in Sufism, where trees symbolise cosmic patience ... but Yann Martel's novel *Life of Pi* is also rich in ecological and spiritual themes, about a teenager stranded in a lifeboat in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, who must navigate the prohibitions and commands of the three religions he believes in ..." he said (X, Q2). One of the most touching moments, according to him, was when a

student appeared sad after reading and discussing the Emha Ainun Nadjib' poetry "Tuhan, Kita Begitu Dekat", "The student said that he had just realised that loving God also means loving His creation, including the environment," he explained (X, Q2). On the other hand, Y also recounted a class session where he encouraged students to read Wordsworth's *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey* in an intertextual manner with Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 164, about the creation of the heavens and the earth, "... I provoked them, how can we call ourselves believers, yet still throw trash into the river? That doesn't make any sense at all!" (Y, Q2). According to him, the students' responses were varied, some defensive, but many began to realise, "I don't want them to just understand the poetry; I want them to be angry. Because from spiritual anger, true ecological awareness is born," he said firmly (Y, Q2). On the other hand, Z admitted that he often combines local and international poetries in his teaching. He stated, "Wordsworth is the prophet of romanticism, not because he worshipped trees, but because he knew that God could be present in the nature we inhabit," he said with a smile (Z, Q2). He uses *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey* to show that contemplation of nature is a form of silent prayer. From Joko Pinurbo's poetry, he shows how

silence becomes a spiritual space that dissolves the boundaries between the sacred and the profane. Meanwhile, he uses novels such as *The Overstory* and *Saman* to show the contradiction between capitalism and ecological submission, "I don't read *The Overstory* as a story about trees, I read it as an alternative gospel that was forgotten in our Holy Scriptures" (Z, Q2).

In question 3, which asks about the choice of text and how communication strategies and rhetoric of *da'wah* are applied in spiritual-ecological text interpretation, X mentions Leila S. Chudori's *Laut Bercerita* as a work that has both spiritual depth and ecological criticism, "this novel does discuss traumatic history, but I want to show them that the most sacred and noble place for warriors is the sea, returning to nature. The sea is a symbol of heaven and hell, white and black, mercy and punishment. In Surah Al-Furqan, there is a verse about two seas that do not mix, to explain that the sea can be a boundary and also a protector," he explained (X, Q3). This means that the way of communicating eco-theology here uses parables, analogies, and metaphors. He also uses Emerson's *The Rhodora* to introduce the concept of Marwah or fitrah in Islam, that nature is beautiful because it comes from the will of God, "I convey that beauty is not empty

aesthetics, but an existential witness of God," he said (X, Q3). Y saw *The Overstory* as a post-modern book that students should read, especially those in Islamic boarding schools, "I call it an ecological interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve. The trees in the novel are not just living beings, they are reminders that humans have forgotten their primordial covenant with nature," he explained (Y, Q3). In class, he assigned students to write an interpretation of Joko Pinurbo's poetry *Doa dalam Sunyi* as a form of *muraqabah* (contemplation) on the climate crisis, "... education is not just a lecture, but more like preaching, providing enlightenment. Literary texts, I believe, have a magical quality in giving us space to reflect. I remember how Robert Frost, with his poetry *Fire & Ice*, gave us a reflection that two with contrast elements that can also kill, can be good or bad depending on our perception," he emphasized (Y, Q3). In other words, Y also uses metaphors to communicate the meaning of nature and religious values through literature. In his teaching, Z does not explicitly use the word *da'wah*, because according to him, "... *da'wah* is not a one-way lecture, but a reflective practice that makes students hear themselves. The best *da'wah* is, of course, in the form of a discussion, if it is one-way like traditional practices, I think what

happens is just doctrine. Literary works provide space for interpretation [for discussion]" (Z, Q3). He encourages students to rewrite ecological verses in the form of poetry, to interpret verses such as Surah Ar-Rum, verse 41, about the destruction of the land and the sea. When the researcher asked about the novel *Laut Bercerita* (The Sea Speaks), informant Z saw it as a reflection of the silence of the sea that holds the cries of history and ecological wounds, 'I have read that novel, but if it is related to ecology... I challenge students, if the Prophet Jonah could repent in the belly of a fish, why can't we repent in the midst of reclamation and deforestation? The deaths of the fighters with the sea should be a reflection' (Z, Q3). The way of communicating eco-theology uses discourse comparisons and metaphors. All three use metaphorical rhetoric in communicating eco-theology through literary works.

In Question 4, the ethos and academic vision of the informants are examined, as well as their strategic position in the Islamic education system. This can also be the basis for findings regarding the moral and intellectual authority of a literature lecturer. There is an interesting answer when this eco-theological issue is linked to university policy. Source X states, "Literature lecturers do not only talk about beauty,

they do not only educate students about humanity, but also instil wisdom. We have a dual responsibility: we educate and also bring them closer to their God; perhaps I would call it *da'wah*" (X, Q4). According to him, Islamic universities hold a strategic position to make literature a field for interpreting nature and revelation. It is not Jalaluddin Rumi's poetry that he, an English literature lecturer, uses as an example of how T.S. Eliot's *The Dry Salvages* is used in class to discuss time, nature, and human spiritual responsibility within the framework of destiny and effort, "I encourage students to think: if the river in Eliot's poetry can be a witness to human history, why have the rivers around us never been a subject of reflection?" he said (X, Q4). On the other perspective, Y stated, "The role of literature lecturers at Islamic universities is paradoxical. We stand between sacred texts and a broken reality, so I personally always propose ideas of intersection, deconstruction ... the point is, I don't want to make authoritative claims. I let them think freely," he said sharply (Y, Q4). He believes that many Islamic educational institutions are trapped in formalistic morality that does not seriously address environmental issues, "I often tell my students that if we uphold dogma but kill trees, then our faith is no more than rhetoric ... the narratives of ghosts and demons in haunted trees are

actually prohibitions against damaging nature [big haunted trees]," he criticised (Y, Q4). According to him, literature lecturers should be interpreters of the times, connecting religious exegesis and ecological context. On the other hand, Z explained that every literary text he reads is like a second exegesis. He said that Surah An-Nur, verse 35, about divine light, can be read in conjunction with Emerson and his poetry *The Rhodora*—both are treated as texts that illuminate each other, although poetry and Al-verse in Qur'an is different cake. Students, according to him, are more motivated to engage in dialogue when this approach is used. Discussions about sensitive religious topics can be accessed through critical discussions of literary works, "When students read Taufiq Ismail's *Dengan Puisi* and analyse the interpretation of Surah Al-A'raf, verse 56, they are not just learning poetry, they are asking: do our prayers and words have life? Or are they just echoes in a space we have destroyed ourselves?" (Z, Q4).

Finally, question 5 summarises the dimensions of communication effectiveness, audience acceptance, and rhetorical challenges, which would be very rich if examined with a hermeneutic approach in reading their narratives. X replied that literature-based *da'wah* rhetoric is much more touching because it

is not patronising, coercive, or absolute. This means that class and literature as teaching materials provide space for discussing complex and sensitive issues in a multi-perspective manner, “I believe Gen Z considers art or literature sharper [in satire] than sermons they always ignore. When I read Taufiq Ismail’s *Dengan Puisi*, the students looked at me deeply; I felt I had touched them. Moreover, its content about environmental responsibility is not merely ethical but also spiritual aesthetic,” he admitted (X, Q5). However, he also acknowledged challenges, “Some students are not yet accustomed to reading symbolically or hermeneutically. We must patiently guide them to be sensitive to literary metaphors that carry ecological and spiritual messages,” he explained (X, Q5). On the other hand, source Y also stated that “... the effectiveness [of preaching through literary works] is relative. But I believe that poetic words can change the course of someone's life” (Y, Q5). According to him, the biggest obstacle is not the students, but the education system that lacks ecological spirituality. He criticised the curriculum for not providing space for contextual reading, “... we are too busy memorising texts, pursuing innovation, science and technology, that we forget to learn to be humanists and spiritualists, we forget to reflect on meaning, even though

environmental issues are very urgent,” he said (Y, Q5). He said that preaching through literature must be a form of prophetic outrage against ecological and spiritual injustice. On the other hand, with a stirring rhetorical style, Z emphasised that literature lecturers are not merely teachers of works, but guardians of collective consciousness, “... we are not just educating to know, but teaching to be aware. Aware that nature has its own prayers, and we often become disruptors of their worship. Imagine suddenly arriving, clearing them all away, then claiming it as our own. Humans sometimes forget who they are on this earth” (Z, Q5). Z urged students to see that spiritual literacy is not merely memorising doctrines, but sensitivity to not trample on an ant with human arrogance. He even suggested that students’ final assignments be an *ecological interpretation of a novel* as a form of academic *da’wah*, “for me, literacy is the quietest but most enduring form of *da’wah*. Try reading literary works; we will become more sensitive as human beings and, of course, we will value humanity, nature, and the universe more” (Z, Q5).

Based on interviews with three lecturers’ implications, eco-theological values are communicated through the teaching of literary works using an interdisciplinary and contextual approach.

The lecturers utilise poetry, short stories, and novels that explore the relationship between humans and nature as reflective mediums to instil spiritual and ecological awareness. They emphasise the importance of reading literary works not only as aesthetic objects but also as texts containing transcendental messages about sustainability, simplicity, and moral responsibility towards God's creation. The strategies employed include critical dialogue, symbolic analysis, and linking with Islamic values such as *Tawhid* (the oneness of Allah), *Amanah* (trustworthiness), and *Khalifah* (Caliph). However, the speakers also face several challenges, such as low ecological literacy in literary teaching materials, limited curriculum space for in-depth exploration of theological values, and students' lack of awareness of environmental issues as matters of faith and religious diversity. These findings indicate a strong pedagogical commitment to making literary education a platform for eco-theological outreach, despite ongoing structural and cultural challenges that require further development.

Discussion

There are four discussions outlined in this section: 1) Theoretical reflections on the approaches used by the informants, for example, in relation to critical

education theory, literary hermeneutics, or value-based transformative pedagogy; 2) The role of literary works as a space for ecological and spiritual preaching (how literary texts can become a vehicle for contemplation and eco-theological awareness); 3) Analysis of obstacles (how low ecological literacy, curriculum limitations, and student unpreparedness become structural and cultural challenges in eco-theological literature education); and 4) Practical and theoretical implications (e.g., the need for curriculum reformulation, the development of new, more ecological teaching materials, or training for lecturers to strengthen the theological approach in teaching literature).

1. Theoretical Reflection

In tracing how the sources communicate eco-theology through literary teaching, there is a correlation between critical education and literary hermeneutics. In the perspective of critical education, learning is a process of escalation and expansion of knowledge by removing existing boundaries that hinder the thinking process. This will only happen through a process of activation, stimulation, and discussion (Alves & De Oliveira, 2021; Bohórquez, 2020; Terzi et al., 2020; Torres & Morrow, 1998). In other words, learning is not merely a

process of knowledge transfer or indoctrination, but rather the ignition of a space for discussion. Creating intersections between disciplines, in this context, ecological awareness and theology, can occur when the educational space transforms into a space for discussion. According to Paulo Freire, true education must be based on democratic and critical dialogue, where students do not merely receive knowledge but actively participate in the construction of meaning and understanding (Giroux, 2021; Mahmoudi et al., 2014; Delgadillo, 2020). In this study, the lecturers who intertwine ecological values with theology, then synthesise the two into eco-theology and immerse it in the ocean of literature, open up a discursive discourse on the importance of understanding literary works not only as aesthetic texts but also as a medium for creating awareness of the relationship between humans, nature, and God.

On the other hand, this approach can also be influenced by literary hermeneutics, particularly as developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer, who argues that the meaning of a text cannot be separated from the dialogue between the reader, their repertoire, and the text itself (Darmaji, 2014; Hayatuddiniyah, 2021; Rockmore, 2012). Here, in the context of eco-theology, hermeneutics involves not only

understanding textual meaning but also a deeper interaction between literary texts and readers, where readers are expected to feel and understand the moral and spiritual messages contained in literary works, including ecological and theological values. This theoretical perspective emphasises that the teaching of literature is not only about imparting language skills but also about introducing students to larger values that involve morality, ecology, and spirituality (Prihananto, 2014). Of course, the way the lecturers (in this research) communicate influences how the internalisation of eco-theological meaning takes place in the thoughts and hearts of students. A communication style that tends to be conventionally didactic contrasts sharply with the expectations of students living in contemporary culture, who prefer flexibility, dynamism, and deconstruction to rigidity and authorisation (heaven and hell, good and evil, and other binary oppositions).

From this point, a deconstructive pedagogical approach emerges. Deconstructive pedagogy can be relevant to transformative pedagogy. The focus of the transformative paradigm is on how learners perceive the world and themselves (Fleming, 2022). In teaching literature with eco-theological values, lecturers do not merely transmit knowledge but also encourage students to reflect on how

literary texts reflect and influence their views on the environment, social justice, and spiritual relations with the universe, enabling learners to reflect on themselves to see things with more passion and freedom. Of course, this is the primary goal of education. Education is not the magnum opus of the state system to create knowledge slaves or educators' fetish, but rather to foster new ideas that support the future of a nation. With this point, learning relates to identity formation (Illeris, 2014; Nesbit, 1999). In this context, when a nation is immersed in mystical logic, where the community tends to believe in shamans and misguided rituals that explain how low their literacy level is, theology should be the enlightenment for that. When this nation is exploited by conglomerates that violate rules, systems, and even the environment for profit, ecology must become an inevitable system educated from an early age in schools and universities. Both can be combined in literature; literature can build people who are aware of their role in preserving the environment and interacting with nature responsibly.

The results of this part indicate that teaching literature that integrates eco-theological values not only marks an epistemological shift in literary pedagogy, but also paves the way for a more reflective, transformative, and contextual

practice of *da'wah*. In this framework, *da'wah* is no longer positioned as the normative transmission of halal and haram, heaven and hell, but as a dialogical process that simultaneously fosters moral, ecological, and spiritual awareness (Affandi et al., 2022; Karimullah et al., 2023; Sikumbang et al., 2024). Literature becomes a vehicle for cultural *da'wah*—a *da'wah* strategy rooted in a culture of reading, reflection, and the creation of shared meaning between text and reader. When lecturers present eco-theological values through literary hermeneutics, they are actually reviving *da'wah bil hikmah* (preaching with wisdom), which is conveying messages of faith intertwined with beauty, ecological awareness, and human sensitivity. In the classroom, this *da'wah* takes the form of liberating pedagogy—an *epistemological da'wah*—that frees students from false dichotomies between faith and knowledge, spirituality and rationality, religious texts and literary texts (Muchtar & Alam, 2019; Muhyiddin, 2010). Therefore, this approach emphasises that *da'wah* does not have to be instructive and monological, but is most effective when it is discursive, imaginative, and participatory. When students are invited to read stories about forests being burned, oceans being destroyed, or creatures losing their habitats, and then invited to reflect on

humanity's role as stewards of the earth, da'wah is truly present—through words, through empathy, through literature. Here lies the true power of da'wah in modern Islamic higher education: not in dogma, but in dialogue; not in repetition, but in reflection.

2. The Role of Literary Works as a Space for Ecological and Spiritual Da'wah

Literary works can be seen as a space for exploring various aspects of life, ranging from morality, culture, society, politics, to spirituality. In the context of eco-theology, literature offers potential as a medium for ecological preaching that can touch on the spiritual aspects of human beings. Eco-theology, which internalises theological understanding into ecological awareness or vice versa, can be understood more deeply through literary texts and their narratives. Literary works do not only talk about horizontal conflicts, but also vertical conflicts, and often reveal the relationship between humans and nature and God, which is often neglected in modern discourse that prioritises technological and economic progress (Price, 2003). In a theological context, eco-theology-based literary teaching invites students to see that nature and God are inseparable. Simply put, for those who believe that nature is God's creation,

destroying nature or the environment is the same as destroying His creation. In other words, protecting and even preserving the beauty of the universe is a reflection of the obedience of the people to religion, servants to God. Literature can serve as a space for contemplation for readers to understand social, cultural, religious things (Ogundokun, 2021). Thus, it can reflect, ponder, and absorb a deeper ecological touch. Literary works are not just entertainment, not just companions when boredom strikes, but a medium that provides space for meditation through the conflicts between characters. By delving into the conflicts within, it can remind us of who we are, why we are here, what we have done so far, and other existential questions. Literary works escalate the level of empathy and sympathy (Slamet, 2018). In novels that explore eco-theological themes, for example, fiction that projects the destruction of nature often reflects the corruption, decay, and spiritual decay of humanity, which is connected to how they treat the universe. Through such narratives, eco-theological-based literary teaching encourages students to see nature not only as an object to be exploited, but as an entity with intrinsic and spiritual value that must be respected, preserved, and coexisted with. Within this framework, literature serves as a medium of preaching that not only offers a touch of

magic and moral gravity but also builds a deep ecological awareness, in line with religious teachings that emphasise the preservation of the earth as a trust from God. In the teaching process, lecturers can optimise literary works containing elements of eco-theology as teaching materials that encourage students to reflect on their position within the cosmic order and how their behaviour towards nature reflects their faith in God.

This discussion confirms that literary works are not just aesthetic containers or pedagogical instruments, but also a medium of *da'wah* that is full of contemplation, touching power, and transformative power (Nurhayati et al., 2020). In the context of eco-theology, literary works can be a form of *da'wah bil qolam* – *da'wah* through the pen – that raises spiritual and ecological awareness through evocative stories, characters, and narrative conflicts. When students are invited to read novels or poems that imply the destruction of nature as a representation of human moral decay, they are actually being invited to explore the path of *tazkiyatun nafs* – purification of the soul through contemplation of the position of humans as creatures entrusted with the earth (*khalifatullah fi al-ardh*). Thus, Islam and Al-Qur'an seems provide aesthetic verses about ecology (Quddus, 2017; Ragozina, 2023) and literary imitate the

way. In a world increasingly hegemonic by materialistic and anthropocentric views, teaching ecotheology-based literature is a form of *da'wah tanwiriyah*-enlightenment that connects faith with ecological mandates, between the beauty of language and the depth of divine messages. Literature provides space for students to *ask questions*, not just *receive*; to *contemplate*, not just *listen*. This is in line with the principle of *da'wah bil hikmah*, where messages are conveyed not dogmatically, but through narratives that touch the mind and heart. When students begin to understand that littering is a form of violation of God's creation, or that the exploitation of nature is a manifestation of greed that violates human nature, then the teaching of literature has succeeded in conveying the *divine message* through aesthetics. Therefore, in this approach, literature is not only a means of education, but also a field of *da'wah* that balances spiritual, social, and ecological awareness, with the main mission: to make humans as faithful guardians of the earth, not destroyers who disbelieve in His blessings.

3. Barriers in Preaching Eco-theology through Literary Works

Despite its great potential, involving eco-theology through literature is not without various technical and cultural challenges and obstacles. One of the main obstacles found in this study is the low

level of ecological literacy among lecturers and students. Often, literature teaching in higher education still focuses on linguistic and aesthetic aspects without considering the ecological and spiritual dimensions of literary texts. In language learning system, literature and its offering, cultural understanding, is urgent to learn (Ningsih, 2019), thus some lecturers appear to have limited knowledge of literary works, both fiction and poetry, that directly intersect with ecological issues. Moreover, religious concepts are often considered sacred and untouchable, let alone questioned or improvised. This reflects a gap between the development of literary theory and its practical application in teaching based on eco-theological values. From what the researcher found, the selected informants may have the competence to integrate eco-theology through literature, but this may not necessarily be the case elsewhere. It is possible that most lecturers do not fully understand the relevance of integrating eco-theology into literature teaching, and this poses a major challenge in creating a curriculum that is more responsive to environmental and spiritual issues. Moreover, literature is often perceived as a discipline closely associated with art, criticism, and social phenomena, rather than environmental or spiritual phenomena (Slamet, 2018).

Additionally, curriculum limitations also act as a barrier. The current curriculum often emphasises mastery of classical literary theory, with the dominance of canonical literature becoming a feudalistic formation in the development of the literary curriculum, as if English literature is Shakespeare, Indonesian literature is Chairil Anwar and Pramoedya Ananta Toer. This canonisation clearly narrows the space for eco-theology to become a form of responsibility for lecturers in dissemination. These limitations not only make it difficult for eco-theology to dance in the minds of students. Ultimately, these limitations also limit the space for students to develop a broader understanding of the connection between literature, ecology, and theology. The impact is that students are unprepared to accept and internalise eco-theological values through literary works. Students who are accustomed to a normative approach to teaching literature (text and social phenomena) and are not intimately connected with issues of nature and spirituality often find it difficult to understand the relevance of eco-theological values in the context of their daily lives.

The illiteracy of ecological and spiritual standpoint among lecturers and students as well as the literature curriculum that is still held hostage by the

classical canon indicate an epistemic crisis in the teaching of literature, which should be a fertile ground for *da'wah bil qalām-da'wah* through words, reflection, and awareness. In this context, these weaknesses are not merely technical obstacles, but reflect our failure to make education a space for prophetic values. *Da'wah* is not only about calling to goodness verbally and dogmatically, but also infusing love for God's creation, including the universe, which today is continuously being devastated by human gluttony (Abdelzaher et al., 2019; Khayat et al., 2019). When the curriculum stays dwelling on the trap of political great literary works and ignores works that touch ecological and spiritual issues, then education loses the soul of *tabligh* and only becomes an academic galaxy that is mute to the agony of the earth. This is where the urgency of *epistemological da'wah*, which is an effort to reawaken academic awareness so that literature is not only read as art, but as *cultural verses* that carry the message of ecological tawhid: that between humans, nature and God there is an inseparable sacred knot. The lecturers' artistic obligation, then, is not just to teach literary theory, but to be an intellectual *da'i* who opens students' horizons to see poetry as a prayer for the earth, prose as a cry for the forest, and drama as the spiritual struggle of humans

who strive to be just caliphs for all creatures. This restrictive curriculum is not only a pedagogical obstacle, but a *da'wah* challenge that demands courage for *curriculum ijtihad*, so that literary education can become a spiritual bridge to ecological awareness and submission to God through the beauty of literacy.

4. Practical and Theoretical Implication of Eco-theological-based Literature

The results indicate that there are several theoretical and practical consequences that can be drawn to address the issue of eco-theology-based literature teaching. Reformulating the curriculum to be more responsive to issues of spirituality and the environment is one important step that must be taken. Education that integrates eco-theological principles must be incorporated into the current curriculum. This enables teachers to not only teach students language and text structure, but also encourage them to consider and interact with the moral and environmental principles contained in literary works. These new, more ecological and theological teaching materials can enrich students' understanding of the relationship between humans and nature and God. They can also be introduced to important concepts in eco-theology. Furthermore, it is inevitable that lecturers

must be trained to strengthen the theological approach in teaching literature. It is crucial for lecturers to gain a deeper understanding of eco-theology so that they can teach in a more contextual and relevant manner to current environmental issues. One of the things that can be learned in this training is how to incorporate eco-theology into literary analysis and study literary works that address ecological and spiritual themes. Therefore, teachers do not only teach the basics of literature, but also provide students with the knowledge to understand and apply these principles in their daily lives. Theoretically, eco-theology-based literature teaching offers a new way to teach literature more comprehensively. By incorporating theological and environmental values into literature teaching, we not only enrich students' understanding of literary works, but also build their character so that they realise the importance of protecting the environment and being spiritually responsible towards the Earth. In addition, this approach opens the door to new discussions in literature teaching. In it, more modern ecological and spiritual perspectives unite classical literary theories.

Conclusion

Eco-theological through literary works can be seen as a form of epistemic

resistance against modern ways of thinking that separate spirituality from intellectuality and remove nature from spaces of interpretation. The interviewed lecturers—despite being constrained by an inflexible curriculum, insignificant student literacy, and an academic culture that often normalises the distance between knowledge and life—have endeavoured to dismantle all of this through contemplative and subversive readings of literature. They revive literary texts as spaces of silent radical preaching (*da'wah*): awakening ecological awareness, bringing faith and imagination together, and returning education to its liberating nature, rather than preserving it. This finding highlights an ugly truth: as long as literature is just considered as a solely media to teach a set of language skills or mere moral-value knowledge, we are just uprooting it from the soil of life. Therefore, the future of teaching literary works must be reimagined as a cosmic advocacy arena—a place where humans learn not only to interpret texts but also to interpret their existence, relationships, and spiritual responsibilities toward the wounded earth; that is the heart of eco-theology. Furthermore, literature serves as a communication tool that provides and offers discussion which deconstructs religious dichotomy and replaces it with strong spiritual undertones, particularly

regarding humanity's responsibility toward the environment. An amalgamation of religion and nature presented through literary works is actually a form of aesthetic.

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