

One iron, two economies: Isaiah 2:1-5, ecological conversion and Indonesia's agrarian conflict

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Abstract: Agrarian conflict in Indonesia escalated sharply through 2025, with cases involving the military sector rising by three hundred percent, while the state's framework of Religious Moderation, consolidated through Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023, continued to measure communal harmony exclusively as a relation between religious communities. Land, and the violence exercised over it, remained outside all of its indicators. Research on Isaiah 2:1-5 has clustered around three concerns—textual criticism and its relation to Micah 4:1-5, eschatological-theological readings, and political readings of militarism—none of which has adequately developed the material-ecological dimension of weapons transforming into farming implements. This study analyzes Isaiah 2:1-5 as a text of material-ecological conversion and argues for its relevance for a critique of the ecological deficit of Religious Moderation in Indonesia. It employs a qualitative method with socio-historical, exegetical, ecological-hermeneutical, and contextual-theological approaches. The reading finds that swords and plowshares share one metallurgy, one forge, and one biomass base, so that Isaiah 2:4 describes a reallocation of scarce resources rather than a cessation of hostilities, while Joel 4:10 reverses the same formula. The implication is that ecological conversion—at once spiritual turning, material refashioning, and defense conversion—exposes the limits of a moderation securing negative peace alone. The novelty of this study lies in constructing a relation between religious communities and land that extends Religious Moderation from peace between communities toward ecological peace, proposing land as a third party to interreligious relations.

Keywords: agrarian conflict, ecological conversion, ecological hermeneutics, Isaiah 2:1-5, political ecology, religious moderation

Introduction

In January 2026, the Consortium for Agrarian Reform (*Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria*, KPA) released a record that inverts one of the Bible's best-known imble. Over the course of 2025, it documented 341 outbreaks of agrarian conflict across 914,574.963 hectares, affecting 123,612 families in 428 villages, an increase of roughly fifteen percent over the previous year.¹ What cuts deepest is not the figure but its composition: conflicts involving the military sector surged

¹ Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria, *Catatan Akhir Tahun 2025: Tancap Gas di Jalur yang Salah: Paradoks Kebijakan Agraria Prabowo-Gibran 2025* [Year-End Record 2025: Full Throttle on the Wrong Track: The Paradox of Prabowo-Gibran Agrarian Policy 2025] (Jakarta: KPA, 2026). <https://www.kpa.or.id/publikasi/tancap-gas-di-jalur-yang-salah/>

by three hundred percent, from six cases to twenty-four, most of them triggered by operations claimed to support food and energy self-sufficiency, while violence by state security forces in the handling of agrarian conflict was recorded in seventy cases, an increase of eighty-nine percent.² These are not swords beaten into plowshares. These are swords deployed over the fields, in the name of food. Isaiah 2:4 is being read backward in Indonesia's agrarian space.

At the same time, the state administers religious life through the framework of Religious Moderation (*Moderasi Beragama*), which is now fully institutionalized. Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023 elevated it to cross-ministerial policy, complete with the Joint Secretariat mandated by Article 9, a general guideline with indicators, and an application for monitoring implementation.³ These two adjacent facts give rise to the research problem this article addresses. Every indicator of Religious Moderation measures relations among human beings—national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation to local culture—so that land never becomes a party. Within that framework, a village may be assessed as moderate while its land is seized, its forest cleared, and its water polluted, because such damage does not register as a religious matter. The problem may be formulated as a single conceptual chain broken at its final link: land sustains common life; damage to it is an ecological matter; in Indonesia that damage takes the form of agrarian conflict; and agrarian conflict is a matter of peace, yet it is precisely at that last link that the prevailing framework of harmony ceases to read.

Research on Isaiah 2:1–5 has moved along other axes, and may be grouped under three aspects. The first is textual criticism and the relation to Micah: Wildberger, Blenkinsopp, Williamson, Sweeney, and Roberts concentrate on problems of text criticism and on the intricate relation to the parallel in Micah 4:1–5.⁴ The second is the eschatological-theological reading, which situates the pericope within Zion theology and the pilgrimage of the nations as an end-time vision. The third is the political reading of militarism, as pursued by Brueggemann, who reads verse 4 as a delegitimation of a militaristic economic-political order.⁵ These three aspects make valuable contributions, but none has adequately developed the material-ecological dimension of the transformation of weapons into farming implements. The pericope is almost invariably treated as a text of peace and eschatology, and rarely as a text of material economy, even though its entire rhetorical force rests on concrete objects forged from the same metal.

In Indonesia, ecotheology and the discourse of religious moderation have developed as two currents that scarcely intersect. Emanuel Gerrit Singgih's contextual hermeneutics opened a path for readings of the Old Testament rooted in Indonesian problems, including land.⁶ The

² KPA, *Catatan Akhir Tahun 2025*, section on sectors and actors.

³ Republic of Indonesia, Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023 on the Strengthening of Religious Moderation, Article 9 and Appendix.

⁴ Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12: A Commentary*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), ad loc. Isa 2:1–5; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, Anchor Bible 19 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), ad loc.; H. G. M. Williamson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 1–5*, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 2006), ad loc.; Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*, FOTL XVI (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), ad loc.; J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), ad loc.

⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1–39*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), ad loc. Isa 2:4.

⁶ Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, *Dua Konteks: Tafsir-tafsir Perjanjian Lama sebagai Respons atas Perjalanan Reformasi di Indonesia* [Two Contexts: Old Testament Interpretations as a Response to the Course of Reformasi in Indonesia] (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2009), passim.

sharpest critique of Religious Moderation, meanwhile, comes from Joas Adiprasetya, who reads it as a top-down political initiative oriented primarily toward national stability and security, and who offers a model of religious mediation grounded in friendship as an alternative.⁷ That critique is apt, but it still moves within an interhuman frame. As far as this study has been able to determine, no work has yet interrogated Religious Moderation specifically from the side of its ecological deficit, that is, the framework's blindness to land as an injured party; and studies connecting a material reading of Isaiah 2:4 with an ecological critique of the framework of harmony in Indonesia remain very limited.

This study occupies that gap, with a twofold novelty. Its exegetical novelty lies in an ecological reading of Isaiah 2:4 that treats sword, spear, plowshare, and pruning hook not as four symbols but as four products of a single material base: the same ore, the same furnace, the same fuel, and the same smith's labor. Archaeometallurgical research in the Timna Valley shows that wood fuel was the single greatest limiting factor for the metal industry of the Iron Age southern Levant.⁸ Its constructive novelty lies in the proposal of land as a third party in Religious Moderation, that is, a construction of the relation between religious communities and land that extends the concept of Religious Moderation from peace between communities toward ecological peace.

This study aims to analyze Isaiah 2:1–5 as a text of material-ecological conversion and to construct its relevance for a critique of the ecological limits of Religious Moderation in Indonesia. From that aim is derived the thesis to be tested: Isaiah 2:4 is not a sentimental appeal to make peace but a statement about the reallocation of scarce resources between two economies competing for the same ecological base; a war economy that is consumptive and short-horizoned, and an agrarian economy that is regenerative and multigenerational in horizon. One iron, two economies. To test it, this study employs socio-historical, exegetical, ecological-hermeneutical, and contextual-appropriative approaches, set out in the Research Method section below.

Three contributions are claimed. Exegetically, this article offers a material reading of Isaiah 2:4 that has not been undertaken in Indonesian-language scholarship. Ethically, it shows that ecological conversion carries three registers at once—spiritual conversion in the sense of *Laudato Si'*,⁹ material refashioning, and defense conversion in the sense of peace studies—and that Isaiah 2:4 is the text at which all three coincide. Contextually, it proposes land as a third party in relations between religious communities, a category absent from every indicator of Religious Moderation.

This is qualitative, library-based research of an exegetical-constructive kind, pursued through four mutually supporting steps. The first step is a socio-historical analysis of the two economies competing in eighth-century BCE Judah under the pressure of Assyrian tribute, drawing on Old Testament textual sources together with relevant archaeological and archaeometallurgical findings. The second step is the exegesis of Isaiah 2:4 together with its

⁷ Joas Adiprasetya, "Befriending Religious Others: From Religious Moderation to Religious Mediation in Indonesia," *The Ecumenical Review* 76, no. 5 (2024): 488–499.

⁸ Mark Cavanagh, Erez Ben-Yosef, and Dafna Langgut, "Fuel Exploitation and Environmental Degradation at the Iron Age Copper Industry of the Timna Valley, Southern Israel," *Scientific Reports* 12 (2022), doi:10.1038/s41598-022-18940-z.

⁹ Francis, *Laudato Si'* (2015), §§216–221. The term was coined by John Paul II, "God Made Man the Steward of Creation," General Audience, 17 January 2001.

reversal in Joel 4:10, comprising lexical analysis of the Hebrew words *'ēt* and *mazmērâ*, examination of the verbal form *kittatû*, and intertextual reading with Micah 4:1–5, Isaiah 2:7–8, and Isaiah 5:1–8. The third step is constructing a hermeneutical-ethical framework. The principal framework of this study is Hilary Marlow's interrelational model, the ecological triangle of YHWH, humanity, and non-human creation.¹⁰ This framework is chosen as principal because it was developed through exegetical study of Isaiah 1–39 and because its triadic structure allows land to emerge as a party. The supporting framework is Johan Galtung's distinction between negative and positive peace, together with the concepts of structural and cultural violence,¹¹ which translates the results of the ecological reading into ethical-political categories rather than serving as a parallel interpretive framework. The fourth step is contextual appropriation to agrarian conflict in Indonesia through Emanuel Gerrit Singgih's two-contexts hermeneutical model.

Two methodological limits must be stated at the outset. First, this study distinguishes strictly between the historical meaning of the Isaianic text and the contemporary theological construction built upon it: the former is produced through the first and second steps, the latter through the third and fourth, and the movement from the former to the latter is made at the level of the structure of the problem, not at the level of historical correspondence. Second, this study is exegetical-constructive rather than an empirical field study; agrarian data function as a contextual anchor, not as primary findings.

Two economies on one material base: The socio-historical context of Isaiah 2:1–5

Isaiah 2:1 opens with the second superscription in the book—"the word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem"—a redactional marker that separates this pericope from the chain of accusations in chapter 1 and opens a new block. The pericope 2:2–4 has a nearly word-for-word parallel in Micah 4:1–3, a problem that has generated three principal positions in scholarship: Isaianic priority, Micah priority, or the dependence of both on a third and older liturgical source.¹² Verse 5, "O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD", is distinctively Isaianic and has no counterpart in Micah, and thus functions as a bridge to the following unit. This article does not intend to settle the question of textual priority. What is decisive for the argument here is placement: the vision of the conversion of weapons in verse 4 is deliberately set immediately before the denunciation of a particular economy in verses 6–22.

Its socio-historical setting is eighth-century BCE Judah under the pressure of Neo-Assyrian expansion. From the point at which Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 BCE) shifted imperial policy from periodic plunder to permanent annexation and vassalage, the small kingdoms of the southern Levant were bound into a system of annual tribute demanding precious metals in large quantities.¹³ The narrator of Kings records that Ahaz sent silver and gold from the

¹⁰ Hilary Marlow, *Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics: Re-Reading Amos, Hosea, and First Isaiah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), chaps. 3 and 7.

¹¹ Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167–191, doi:10.1177/002234336900600301; Galtung, "Cultural Violence," *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no. 3 (1990): 291–305, doi:10.1177/0022343390027003005.

¹² Williamson, *Isaiah 1–5*, ad loc. Isa 2:1–5; cf. Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, ad loc.

¹³ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, historical introduction; Roberts, *First Isaiah*, historical introduction.

temple treasury to Tiglath-pileser (2 Kgs 16:8), and later that Hezekiah handed over three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold to Sennacherib (2 Kgs 18:14). It should be noted that the magnitude of that tribute, as Röthlin and le Roux have shown, could most likely not have been financed from agricultural surplus alone, so that Judah's war economy also required revenue from trade and from the temple treasury.¹⁴ Yet for precisely that reason its pressure on the agrarian economy was not lessened: what was seized was not primarily the farmers' money but their land, their timber, and their labor. That burden demanded corvée labor to build fortifications and water systems, along with maintaining a standing army, horses, and chariots. This is what the present article calls the war economy: consumptive, centralized, and short-horizoned.

Standing over against it was an economy whose logic was altogether different: small-scale family agriculture resting on the *nahalah*, the patrimonial land that could not be alienated because it was not a commodity but part of the identity of the kin group (cf. 1 Kgs 21:3). This economy turned on wheat and barley, olives, figs, and above all the vineyard—perennial crops requiring long-term capital investment before yielding.¹⁵ Isaiah himself testifies to the pressure upon it. The Song of the Vineyard (Isa 5:1–7) makes viticulture the central metaphor for YHWH's relation with his people, while the first woe in the ensuing series, “woe to those who join house to house and add field to field” (Isa 5:8), indicts a process of land consolidation that erased family agriculture.¹⁶ This pairing in Isaiah 5:1–8 matters for the argument of this article, since it shows that the same book that envisions the conversion of weapons in 2:4 also documents the seizure of land as a sin denounced. Micah voices a parallel accusation (Mic 2:1–2). This agrarian economy is regenerative, decentralized, and multigenerational in horizon.

What has received too little attention is that Isaiah himself sets the two economies over against one another within one and the same chapter. Immediately after the vision of the conversion of weapons, the prophet denounces a land “filled with silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures; their land is filled with horses, and there is no end to their chariots” (Isa 2:7). The following verse continues: “their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their own hands” (Isa 2:8). The three things named in sequence, precious metals extracted as tribute, military equipment, and cast images, are three products of one and the same technological chain.¹⁷ The same furnace yields plowshare, sword, and idol. Isaiah 2 as a whole may therefore be read as a meditation on what metal is used for: the chapter sets conversion (v. 4) directly over against accumulation (vv. 7–8), and judges both as theological choices rather than merely economic ones. What thus takes shape is a single argumentative arc within the book itself, running from the vision of conversion in 2:4, through the denunciation of accumulation in 2:7–8, to the denunciation of land seizure in 5:8.

¹⁴ Gail A. Röthlin and Magdel le Roux, “Hezekiah and the Assyrian Tribute,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 34, no. 2 (2013): a809, 1–8, doi:10.4102/ve.v34i2.809; Oded Lipschits, “Judah under Assyrian Rule and the Early Phase of Stamping Jar Handles,” in *Archaeology and History of Eighth-Century Judah*, ed. Zev I. Farber and Jacob L. Wright (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 337–339; cf. Avraham Faust and Ehud Weiss, “Judah, Philistia, and the Mediterranean World: Reconstructing the Economic System of the Seventh Century B.C.E.,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 338 (2005): 71–92.

¹⁵ Oded Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1987), passim.

¹⁶ Marlow, *Biblical Prophets*, chap. 6, “The Vineyard of the Lord of Hosts: YHWH, the People and the Land in Isaiah 1–39.”

¹⁷ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, ad loc. Isa 2:6–22; Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1–39*, ad loc.

The unity of that material base is not a merely theoretical construct. The tradition in 1 Samuel 13:19–22 shows that the smith was a strategic figure precisely because one and the same hand sharpened plowshares, mattocks, axes, and sickles while also forging swords and spears; to control the smith was to control both economies at once.¹⁸ At the level of resources, the two competed for the same ore, fuel, and furnace. At the level of labor, they competed for the same bodies in the same season: the note that kings went out to battle “at the turn of the year” (2 Sam 11:1) places the campaigning season in overlap with the barley and wheat harvest of the southern Levant.¹⁹ Every adult male on the march is labor, not harvesting. The two economies, in other words, did not stand side by side; each nullified the other.

Archaeometallurgical evidence gives an ecological dimension to that competition, and methodological caution is most required here. Anthracological analysis of hundreds of charcoal samples from two clearly stratified slag mounds in the Timna Valley, southern Israel, shows that the Iron Age copper industry there depended heavily on local vegetation—chiefly *Retama raetam* and *Acacia* spp.—and that the availability of woody fuel was the single greatest limiting factor on the continuity of operations.²⁰ The analogical distance must be acknowledged openly and not minimized: Timna is a copper site, not an iron site; it lies in the hyper-arid zone of the Arabah, not in the Judean highlands; and its period precedes Isaiah by roughly two to four centuries. The Timna findings are therefore not used here as evidence for eighth-century Judahite iron production, but as an illustration of a general principle of pre-industrial metallurgy: metal production is biomass-limited. It is that principle which is maintained, not its quantitative extrapolation.

The same caution applies in the opposite direction. The temptation to conclude that ancient metallurgy caused large-scale deforestation, the thesis popularized by Theodore Wertime under the formula of the furnace versus the goat, now faces serious challenge.²¹ Spatio-temporal modeling of the fuelwood requirement for iron smelting on Elba Island concludes that the felling of the island’s entire forest cannot have occurred as has long been assumed, and proposes that the deforestation narrative itself be read as an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historiographical construction.²² A study of iron production in the North Pare region even concludes that metallurgy was probably not the principal contributor to local deforestation.²³ This article therefore does not claim that militarization causes deforestation. The claim it defends is more restricted and, for that reason, more secure: armament and agriculture compete for one and the same base of biomass, land, and labor, so every armament decision is fundamentally a decision of ecological allocation.

¹⁸ P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *I Samuel*, Anchor Bible 8 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), ad loc. 1 Sam 13:19–22.

¹⁹ Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*, section on the agricultural calendar.

²⁰ Cavanagh, Ben-Yosef, and Langgut, “Fuel Exploitation and Environmental Degradation,” results and discussion sections.

²¹ Theodore A. Wertime, “The Furnace versus the Goat: The Pyrotechnologic Industries and Mediterranean Deforestation in Antiquity,” *Journal of Field Archaeology* 10, no. 4 (1983): 445–447, doi:10.2307/529467.

²² Fabian Becker et al., “The Furnace and the Goat — A Spatio-Temporal Model of the Fuelwood Requirement for Iron Metallurgy on Elba Island, 4th Century BCE to 2nd Century CE,” *PLOS ONE* 15, no. 11 (2020): e0241133, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0241133.

²³ Louise Iles, “Exploring the Impact of Iron Production on Forest and Woodland Resources: Estimating Fuel Consumption from Slag,” *STAR: Science & Technology of Archaeological Research* 5, no. 2 (2019): 195–197, doi:10.1080/20548923.2020.1718366.

From here the consequence for the reading of Isaiah 2:4 becomes clear. When the prophet envisions swords beaten into plowshares, he is not envisioning a change in the mood of the nations but a change in the direction of resource flows: metal, fuel, land, and above all the human labor hitherto absorbed into the war economy are redirected into an economy that grows things. Every sword, within this framework, is a plowshare not made; every military campaign is a harvest not gathered. Peace in Isaiah 2 is therefore not the negative condition of an absence of fighting but the positive condition of reallocation. The following section tests that reading at the lexical and syntactic levels while comparing it with the reversal that Joel 4:10 performs upon precisely the same formula.

Reallocation, not ceasefire: The exegesis of Isaiah 2:4 and the reversal in Joel 4:10

The pericope 2:2–4 is composed of four interlocking movements in logical sequence. The first is the raising of the mountain of the LORD’s house as the highest and the streaming of the nations toward it (v. 2). The second is instruction: the nations go up in order to be taught his ways, for out of Zion goes forth instruction and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (v. 3). The third is arbitration—“he shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples”—with the verbs *šāpaṭ* and the hiphil of *yākaḥ*, both forensic terms presupposing a judicial institution rather than merely informal mediation.²⁴ Only in the fourth movement does the conversion of armaments appear. This sequence matters: conversion is not the first step but a consequence. Armaments can be reforged precisely because an authority now exists to settle disputes, so weapons lose their function.

The parallel with Micah 4:1–3 has long been one of the classic puzzles of prophetic scholarship, with three principal positions: Isaianic priority, Mican priority, or the dependence of both on an older tradition.²⁵ This article does not attempt to settle it. What is decisive here, however, is the divergence after the shared portion. Micah 4:4 adds a clause absent from Isaiah: “they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid.” Further, Micah 4:5 openly acknowledges religious plurality: “for all the peoples walk, each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God.” These two additions supply what Isaiah 2:5, an exhortation to the house of Jacob, does not provide: a concrete agrarian horizon and an acknowledgment of diversity.²⁶ For this reason the present article reads Isaiah 2:1–5 together with its parallel in Micah rather than in place of it.

Lexical analysis of *’ēṭ* (תֵּט) supplies surprising evidence for the material thesis. The word is extremely rare: it occurs only five times in the entire Hebrew Bible: 1 Samuel 13:20 and 13:21, Isaiah 2:4, Micah 4:3, and Joel 3:10 (Id. 4:10). What is decisive is not its rarity but its distribution. Not one occurrence stands in a neutral agricultural context. The first two fall within the narrative of the Philistine monopoly over smithing; the remaining three fall within the sword, plowshare formula itself. In other words, the Hebrew vocabulary for this object is lexically bound to the question of who controls the forging of metal. Its precise identification is admittedly uncertain: the ancient versions generally read it as a plowshare, while Symmachus and some Jewish interpreters read it as a hoe or mattock, and the Septuagint in Samuel uses

²⁴ Williamson, *Isaiah 1–5*, ad loc. Isa 2:2–4.

²⁵ Williamson; Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, ad loc.

²⁶ Delbert R. Hillers, *Micah: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Micah*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), ad loc. Mic 4:1–5. Some catalogs list 1988 as the year of publication for the same printing.

the generic word *skeuos*.²⁷ That uncertainty, however, does not damage the argument, since on every proposed reading *'ēt* remains an iron-edged agricultural implement requiring periodic sharpening by a smith.

Its counterpart, *mazmērâ* (מִזְמֶרֶה), derives from *zmr* II, meaning to prune vines, and occurs four times. Notably, one of these is found within Isaiah itself: at 18:5 the prophet describes the cutting away of shoots with pruning hooks in an explicitly viticultural context.²⁸ The book therefore possesses its own vineyard vocabulary, and 2:4 calls it back—the same vocabulary that sustains the Song of the Vineyard at 5:1–7. As for the verb, *kittatû* (כִּתְּתוּ), a piel from the root *ktt*, means at once to hammer out and to crush: a verb of metalworking, not a verb of disarmament. The Hebrew here does not speak of surrendering, storing, or destroying weapons; it speaks of laying them back upon the anvil.

From this emerges the exegetical thesis of the present section. Isaiah 2:4b is not a depiction of a ceasefire but a depiction of refashioning. The distinction is not a linguistic nicety. A ceasefire is restrictive and reversible: the weapons remain, merely unused, and can be taken up again the next day. Refashioning is productive and costly: the same metal is now bound to a new function, and restoring it would demand equivalent labor of forging. Peace in this vision is therefore not the negative condition of an absence of fighting but the positive condition of transferring resources into an economy that grows things. This reading accords with the redactional placement discussed above, namely that immediately after this vision the prophet denounces a land filled with silver, gold, horses, and chariots (2:7).²⁹

Two markers in the text strengthen that reading. First, the pruning hook presupposes a long time horizon. A sword works in an instant and destroys; pruning vines makes sense only for someone who plans to harvest from the same vineyard for several decades, since viticulture demands years of investment before yielding.³⁰ Conversion in 2:4 is thus a conversion of temporality, not merely a conversion of objects. Second, and this is often overlooked, the verse closes with “neither shall they learn war any more,” with the verb *lāmad*. War here is not an instinct but a curriculum: something taught, drilled, and handed down. Peace therefore demands not only disarmament but relearning, a pedagogical dimension that makes this pericope relevant not only to Christian religious education but also to political ethics.

The same formula appears in reverse in Joel 4:10 (Eng. 3:10): “beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weakling say, ‘I am a warrior.’” Joel does not quote verbatim. He uses a different word for spear, *rōmah* rather than the *hānîṭ* of Isaiah and Micah, and changes the verbal form to an imperative, so that what was an eschatological description becomes a call to mobilization. Most scholarship places Joel later and reads this verse as a conscious reversal of an already familiar saying, though a minority position

²⁷ *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v. נֶסֶךְ: an edged iron implement conventionally rendered “plowshare,” with five occurrences at 1 Sam 13:20, 13:21; Isa 2:4; Mic 4:3; Joel 4:10. Cf. Wilhelm Gesenius, s.v. נֶסֶךְ, who notes that the ancient versions generally read it as “plowshare” while Symmachus and a number of Jewish interpreters read it as “mattock.”

²⁸ Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*, section on viticulture and agricultural implements.

²⁹ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, ad loc. Isa 2:4.

³⁰ Marlow, *Biblical Prophets*, chap. 6; Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*, section on viticulture.

reversing the direction of dependence persists.³¹ For the argument of this article, the direction of dependence is not decisive. What is decisive is that the Hebrew tradition itself was already aware of the reversibility of the formula: the same anvil can be worked in both directions, and there is no guarantee that its direction always tends toward peace.

Exegetical honesty demands acknowledging one tension that must not be concealed. Isaiah 2:2–3 is centripetal: the nations go up to one mountain to learn one instruction from one God. This is not a vision of pluralism but a vision of eschatological convergence, and its naïve use as a foundation for religious moderation would produce the very religious triumphalism it seeks to avoid.³² That tension, however, can become a strength when read through verse 4a. The one who judges and arbitrates among the nations is YHWH, not Zion as an institution, not the king, and not any political power whatsoever. The text therefore refuses every political arbiter that claims the highest position in disputes between nations, a refusal that, as the following section shows, carries critical force against a state that positions itself as the sole mediator of religious life.

The ecological triangle and positive peace: A hermeneutical–ethical framework

Ecological hermeneutics has developed over the past two decades with the Earth Bible Project as its most influential landmark. The project, led by Norman Habel, formulated a series of ecojustice principles and a three-step reading procedure (suspicion, identification, and retrieval) that positions Earth as a subject with a voice and a right to have its interests represented before the text. Its strength lies in the boldness with which it reads against the anthropocentric current that has long dominated interpretation. Yet that strength is at once its limit: by fixing ecojustice principles as a filter at the outset, the procedure tends to yield verdicts already known in advance, namely that the text either is or is not friendly toward Earth. Hilary Marlow criticizes that framework precisely as too restrictive for careful exegetical work.³³

In its place, Marlow proposes an interrelational model—often called the ecological triangle—that positions YHWH, humanity, and non-human creation as three mutually determining corners, and reads prophetic texts by asking how those three relations are portrayed rather than judging whether the text passes a particular ecological test.³⁴ As stated in the Research Method section, Marlow’s model serves as the principal framework of this article, for three reasons. First, it was developed precisely through exegetical study of Isaiah 1–39, so that it need not be transferred across corpora. Second, it is descriptive before it is normative, and thus fits the socio-historical step already undertaken. Third, and most

³¹ Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos: A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, trans. Waldemar Janzen, S. Dean McBride Jr., and Charles A. Muenchow, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), ad loc. Joel 4:10.

³² Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), ad loc. Isa 2:2–4; Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1–39*, ad loc.

³³ Norman C. Habel, ed., *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, The Earth Bible 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), methodological introduction; Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger, eds., *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), introduction; cf. Marlow, *Biblical Prophets*, chap. 3, “Ecological Hermeneutics: Meaning and Method.”

³⁴ Marlow, *Biblical Prophets*, chaps. 3 and 7, “The Old Testament Prophets and Environmental Ethics: A Dialogue.”

decisively, its triadic structure allows land to appear as a party rather than merely as the setting in which interhuman relations take place.

Applied to Isaiah 2:2–4, all three corners of the triangle are simultaneously active. The divine corner is present as the arbiter who decides cases among the nations (v. 4a). The human corner is present as the agent of conversion: the nations do the forging, not God working a transformation by fiat. The corner of non-human creation is present in its most concrete form—ore, fuelwood, vineyard, and the land that will be plowed and pruned—and at the same time as the direct beneficiary of that transfer of resources. The advantage of this triadic model shows itself precisely at the difficult point: the Earth Bible procedure would promptly indict 2:2–3 as anthropocentric and Zion-centric, and stop there. Marlow's triangle allows a finer reading, namely that the divine arbitration at the first corner is the condition for the conversion at the second corner that restores the third.

To translate that reading into ethical categories, this article employs Johan Galtung's framework as a supporting framework. Galtung's decisive contribution is extending the concept of violence beyond deliberate physical acts: violence is present whenever the actual realization of human beings is forced below what would in fact be possible, so direct violence committed by an identifiable actor is only one form among several.³⁵ The second form is structural violence, embedded in social arrangements and requiring no actor who can be pointed out. The third form, formulated by Galtung two decades later, is cultural violence: those aspects of culture in the symbolic sphere that can be used to justify or legitimate direct as well as structural violence.³⁶ From that distinction arise two concepts of peace: negative peace as the absence of direct violence, and positive peace as the establishment of relations that no longer generate structural violence. It must be stressed that Galtung is not used here as a framework for interpreting the text, but as a translating device carrying the results of the Marlovian reading into the language of political ethics.

Read within that framework, the limits of religious moderation become more visible. Its official indicators—national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation to local culture—all measure the absence of direct violence among religious communities. Not one of them measures the arrangements that generate structural violence against shared living space. Joas Adiprasetya's critique that the program is a top-down political initiative oriented primarily toward national stability and security can be reformulated in Galtung's terms: an orientation toward stability is, by definition, an orientation toward negative peace.³⁷ The consequence is not that Religious Moderation is mistaken, but that it measures the wrong thing, or more precisely, only a small part of what needs to be measured.

The meeting point between the exegetical reading and the ethical framework lies in a single word that bears three loads at once. In Catholic social teaching, ecological conversion is a term coined by John Paul II in the general audience of 17 January 2001 and developed by Francis in chapter six of *Laudato Si'*, where the ecological crisis is called a summons to profound interior conversion, and where it is insisted that a conversion producing lasting

³⁵ Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," 170; on rank equilibrium and structural violence, see 176–177.

³⁶ Galtung, "Cultural Violence."

³⁷ Adiprasetya, "Befriending Religious Others."; cf. Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023, Appendix, section on indicators.

change is also a communal conversion, not merely the sum of individual good deeds.³⁸ In the material sense, conversion means the refashioning of objects as read in Isaiah 2:4. In peace studies and defense economics, conversion is the standard term for the transfer of military capacity to civilian use, and it is worth noting that this literature itself names its project by borrowing Isaiah's formula.³⁹ These three registers meet in modern vocabulary, not in Hebrew vocabulary; what unites them is not a word but the structure of action to which Isaiah 2:4 refers, namely a transfer of resources demanding interior decision, material labor, and institutional change all at once. All three require one another: conversion without refashioning remains a feeling; refashioning without a transfer of institutional capacity remains an individual gesture; and a transfer of capacity without conversion remains a budgetary adjustment.

The framework to be used in the following section may therefore be formulated in three propositions. First, a healthy religious relation is triadic, not dyadic: it involves two communities and the land that sustains both, as Marlow's triangle requires. Second, a peace worthy of the name is positive peace, so that the absence of open conflict between religious communities is no proof of success while arrangements that dispossess living space remain in operation. Third, the conversion demanded by Isaiah 2:4 is at once interior, material, and structural, so that any program of moderation touching only one of these has not yet touched anything decisive. These three propositions are tested below in Indonesia's agrarian space.

Land as a third party: Ecological conversion in Indonesia's agrarian space

Contextual appropriation demands a stricter discipline than merely affixing an ancient text to a current problem. Emanuel Gerrit Singgih formulates its condition through the idea of two contexts: the interpreter moves between the context of the text and the context of the reader without fusing the two, so that the text retains the power to resist a forced reading.⁴⁰ Discipline means that this article must not claim that Isaiah speaks about Indonesia. What is claimed is far more restricted: that the structure of the problem analyzed in the first section—two economies competing for one material base—has a structural counterpart, not a historical counterpart, in contemporary Indonesia. This path is not without precedent in Indonesian theology; readings of the Old Testament in relation to agrarian conflict have already been undertaken, among others through the interpretation of 1 Kings 21 on Naboth's vineyard.⁴¹

The map is national in scale. Over the course of 2025, 341 outbreaks of agrarian conflict were recorded across 914,574.963 hectares, affecting 123,612 families spread over 428 villages in 33 provinces, an increase of roughly fifteen percent over the previous year.⁴² The plantation

³⁸ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, §217 and §219; John Paul II, "God Made Man the Steward of Creation," General Audience, 17 January 2001.

³⁹ Seymour Melman, "Swords into Ploughshares: Converting from Military to Civilian Production," *Technology Review* 89 (1986): 62–71; cf. Ann Markusen and Joel Yudken, *Dismantling the Cold War Economy* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), chap. 9; Seymour Melman, *The Demilitarized Society: Disarmament and Conversion* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1988).

⁴⁰ Singgih, *Dua Konteks*, introduction.

⁴¹ Admadi Balloara Dase, "Kontribusi Hermeneutis 1 Raja-Raja 21 terhadap Konflik Agraria di Indonesia" [The Hermeneutical Contribution of 1 Kings 21 to Agrarian Conflict in Indonesia], *BIA': Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Kristen Kontekstual* 2, no. 1 (2019), doi:10.34307/b.v2i1.88.

⁴² KPA, *Catatan Akhir Tahun 2025*, sections on general findings and sectoral distribution.

and agribusiness sector accounted for the highest number, followed by infrastructure, forestry, mining, and military facilities. Most relevant for this article is the shift in composition: conflicts involving the military sector surged from six cases in 2024 to twenty-four cases in 2025, with operations framed as support for food and energy self-sufficiency triggering roughly forty-one percent of them, while violence by state security forces in the handling of agrarian conflict was recorded in seventy cases.

To keep the analysis focused, this article concentrates on a single case. The National Strategic Project (*Proyek Strategis Nasional*, PSN) known as the Merauke Food and Energy Development Area in South Papua Province, listed among the National Strategic Projects since November 2023, was designed over an area promoted as more than two million hectares, of which more than one million hectares were targeted for new rice-field development (*cetak sawah*) across fifteen districts. Its management involves the Ministry of Defense together with the Ministry of Agriculture and private partners. This case is chosen not for its scale, but because agriculture and defense are officially fused within a single institutional framework.

That fusion need not be inferred from interpretation; it is written into the nomenclature of its own regulations. Decree of the Minister of Environment and Forestry No. 835 of 2024 grants approval for the use of 13,540 hectares of forest area, comprising Protected Forest, Permanent Production Forest, and Convertible Production Forest across four districts of Merauke Regency, for the construction of food-security facilities and infrastructure in the framework of defense and security, in the name of the Ministry of Defense. Its institutional framework was further reinforced by the revision of Law No. 34 of 2004 on the Indonesian National Armed Forces, enacted in March 2025, which expanded the scope of Military Operations Other Than War, and by Presidential Regulation No. 84 of 2025, which, among other things, provides for additional battalions in Merauke and for the formation of units literally designated food brigades.⁴³

At this point, the isomorphism with Joel 4:10 ceases to be an analogy and becomes a reading. The prophetic saying reverses Isaiah by commanding that plowshares be beaten into swords; contemporary Indonesian regulation does something structurally equivalent yet rhetorically subtler, placing food production under the category of defense and naming its agricultural units in military terminology. The compound “food brigade” (*brigade pangan*) holds both economies of the first section within a single phrase. Its ecological cost is likewise documented: Forest Watch Indonesia records that deforestation in South Papua more than doubled, to roughly 190,000 hectares in 2022–2023, a period overlapping with the running of the project.⁴⁴ The same material base, forest, land, and labor, is once again at stake, only now the direction of the forging is reversed.

Faced with a situation of this kind, the framework of Religious Moderation has almost no capacity to read. Its four official indicators all measure the quality of relations among religious communities.⁴⁵ A regency may receive a high assessment on all four while its customary forest is cleared, its sacred sites are bulldozed, and its sago groves are lost, because not one of those indicators asks what is happening to the land. In Galtung’s terms, the entire measuring

⁴³ Decree of the Minister of Environment and Forestry No. 835 of 2024; Law No. 34 of 2004 on the Indonesian National Armed Forces as amended in 2025; Presidential Regulation No. 84 of 2025 on the Organizational Structure of the Indonesian National Armed Forces.

⁴⁴ Forest Watch Indonesia, deforestation data for South Papua Province, 2022–2023.

⁴⁵ Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023, Appendix, section on religious moderation indicators.

apparatus stops at negative peace: it detects the absence of open clashes between religious communities, not the absence of arrangements that dispossess shared living space. This critique does not accuse Religious Moderation of failing at what it measures; it shows rather that what it measures is too narrow to capture the violence that is most decisive.

Conclusion

Isaiah 2:4 is not a sentimental prophecy about the end of hostilities but a statement about where metal, timber, land, and human labor will be made to flow. Sword and plowshare are born of one ore, one furnace, and one smith's hand, so that every armament decision is at the same time a decision of ecological allocation; a unity embedded even at the level of vocabulary, given that the word *'ēt* occurs only five times in the Hebrew Bible and not once in a neutral agricultural context. Isaiah sets that conversion over against the accumulation of silver, gold, horses, and chariots in verses 7–8, and the same book denounces the seizure of land in 5:8; Joel 4:10 reverses the same formula and warns that the anvil can be worked in both directions. Read through Marlow's ecological triangle as principal framework and Galtung's distinction as supporting framework, this text demands positive peace and a conversion that is at once interior, material, and structural. Measured against that demand, Religious Moderation as a state framework proves too narrow: it detects the absence of clashes between religious communities but does not see the land being seized beneath both their feet. This article therefore proposes a shift from dyadic to triadic relation, with land as a third party whose rights are also taken into account.

As exegetical-constructive research, this conclusion bears the limitation inherent in its method: it yields a theological construction rather than empirical findings, so that its testability depends upon further research. The most pressing direction for further research is an empirical study of the possibility of developing a dimension of ecological justice within the framework of Religious Moderation, in particular testing in regions officially assessed as successful in religious moderation while simultaneously experiencing an escalation of agrarian conflict. In Indonesia's agrarian space today, when food security is placed under the rubric of defense and agricultural units are named brigades, Isaiah's prophetic voice does not sound as consolation but as a question: in which direction is that iron being forged?

The limitations of this research must be stated honestly, and some of them are inherent in its method. First, as exegetical-constructive research, this article does not produce empirical findings; agrarian data function as a contextual anchor, so that field verification of the Merauke case lies beyond its reach. Second, the archaeometallurgical evidence comes from a copper site in a hyper-arid zone, temporally distant from Isaiah by two to four centuries, so only the principle of biomass limitation can be maintained, not its quantitative extrapolation. Third, the proposal of land as a third party still requires translation into operationalizable indicators, a task that demands collaboration with the social sciences and agrarian law.

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Credit authorship contribution

Rivay Palempung and Ferry Lumintang jointly developed the initial research idea and conceptual framework. Rivay Palempung was primarily responsible for developing the manuscript and coordinating the integration of the literature, methodology, and analysis, while Ferry Lumintang contributed substantially through critical review, conceptual refinement, and feedback throughout the writing process. Both authors actively participated in formulating the methodology, interpreting the findings, and revising the manuscript. Authorship was determined based on the substantive contributions of each author, and both authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

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