

Cosmic harmony: A spirituality of creation care in Psalm 133

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Article History

Submitted: July 16, 2025

Reviewed: May 14, 2026

Accepted: August, 29 2026

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.30995/kur.v12i2.1513>

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Abstract: Harmony in Indonesia is routinely framed as a relation among human religious communities, leaving the ecological conditions of co-dwelling outside its scope. Psalm 133 has likewise been read as a text of social concord, while its ecological grammar remains unexploited. This article constructs 'cosmic harmony' as a spirituality of creation care through a constructive reading of Psalm 133. The method combines lexical exegesis, canonical-synchronic reading, Habel's ecological hermeneutics, and critical correlation with the political ecology of water. Four findings emerge. First, *shevet* marks harmony as a mode of dwelling rather than merely a mode of feeling; the lexical parallels in Deuteronomy 25:5 and Genesis 13:6 are employed canonically, not as evidence of redactional dependence. Second, the repeated participle "yarad" and "dew" as marginal moisture show that blessing arrives as matter, and the botanical composition of the anointing oil supports this. Third, 'for there' refuses a weightless cosmic spirituality: the universal is reached only through fidelity to a single watershed. Fourth, Genesis 13:6-8 supplies the limit condition. Cosmic harmony is therefore a spirituality of self-limitation.

Keywords: Christian religious education; cosmic harmony; ecological hermeneutics; ecotheology; Psalm 133; spirituality of limits; watershed

Introduction

In early March 2025, floods in the Puncak area of Bogor surged downstream and paralysed parts of Jakarta, Bekasi, and Tangerang. Forest Watch Indonesia recorded the destruction of roughly 2,300 hectares of forest in the upper reaches of three rivers (the Ciliwung, the Kali Bekasi, and the Cisadane) between 2017 and 2023, so the forest's role in storing water in the soil was lost, and rainwater ran directly into the rivers.¹ The Ministry of Forestry added that land-use conversion in areas that should have held protected status had rendered the surface impervious; in the Ciliwung watershed, settlements account for 61.78 per cent of the area and in the Cisadane watershed for 25.65 per cent, with 13,955 hectares of degraded land inside forest areas and 23,435 hectares outside them.² The event was not a natural disaster in the

¹ Forest Watch Indonesia, "Hilangnya Fungsi Lindung Akibat Kerusakan Hutan di Sejumlah Hulu Sungai Ciliwung, Kali Bekasi, dan Cisadane, press release, 11 March 2025, <https://fwi.or.id/hilangnya-fungsi-lindung-akibat-kerusakan-hutan-hulu/>.

² Pradipta Pandu Mustika, "Kerusakan Empat Daerah Aliran Sungai Memperparah Bencana Hidrometeorologi di Jabodetabek", Kompas.id, accessed 20 August 2025,

ordinary sense of the term. It was the consequence of decisions about how human beings may dwell in a place.

At the same time, Indonesians most often use the word "harmony" to describe the ideal of common life. The word underpins the Forum for Religious Harmony, is measured through the Religious Harmony Index, and is the stated aim of the Religious Moderation policy. Yet in almost all uses, harmony is understood as a relation among human beings, as the policy documents themselves can verify. Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023 on Strengthening Religious Moderation sets general guidelines, including indicators of religious moderation; the four indicators, national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture, shape human attitudes and relations.³ Ministerial Decree No. 244 of 2025 subsequently places 'harmony and love of humanity' and 'ecothology' side by side as two of the eight priority programmes for 2025–2029, with a different coordinating unit for each.⁴ That this gap is beginning to be recognised is evident in the publication of the trilogy harmony [Harmony Trilogy], which explicitly links the relations among God, humanity, and nature, together with the book ecotheology and the Roadmap for Strengthening Religious Moderation 2025–2029.⁵ This direction is right and deserves appreciation. At the level of instruments, however, harmony and ecotheology still run as two programmes standing side by side, and not a single indicator of harmony contains a biophysical variable. What is still lacking is a conceptual basis that makes the care of creation an internal condition of harmony rather than a programme running alongside it.

The same gap is visible in theological discourse in Indonesia. On the one hand, a mature ecotheology has developed, from Borrong's formulation of environmental ethics from a Christian theological perspective and Singgih's insistence on doing theology in context to recent studies that question anthropocentrism and propose a Christian education grounded in ecological awareness.⁶ Meanwhile, a fertile theology of harmony and pluralism has also flourished. The two have begun to meet: Kawangmani and Panuntun propose 'compassion for all creation' as a fifth indicator of religious moderation, drawing on the idea of the

<https://www.kompas.id/artikel/kerusakan-empat-daerah-aliran-sungai-memperparah-bencana-hidrometeorologi-di-jabodetabek>.

³ Peraturan Presiden Nomor 58 Tahun 2023 tentang Penguatan Moderasi Beragama, enacted 25 September 2023. The regulation establishes general guidelines for strengthening Religious Moderation which include, among other things, indicators of Religious Moderation; the four indicators employed are national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture.

⁴ Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, Keputusan Menteri Agama Nomor 244 Tahun 2025 tentang Program Prioritas Menteri Agama Tahun 2025. The programme 'harmony and love of humanity' (*harmony dan cinta kemanusiaan*) is coordinated by the Head of the Centre for Religious Harmony (*Pusat Harmony Umat Beragama*), while the programme 'ecothology' (*ekoteologi*) is coordinated by the Head of the Agency for Religious Moderation and Human Resource Development (*Badan Moderasi Beragama dan Pengembangan Sumber Daya Manusia*).

⁵ The three books were launched by the Agency for Religious Moderation and Human Resource Development, Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, on 14 November 2025.

⁶ Robert P. Borrong, *Etika Bumi Baru: Akses Etika dalam Pengelolaan Lingkungan Hidup* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1999), 202; E. Gerrit Singgih, *Berteologi dalam Konteks* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2000); Linus Sumule, "Melampaui Antropocentrism: Ekoteologi dan Etika Lingkungan dalam Dialog, Sebuah Pendekatan Interdisipliner untuk Keberlanjutan dan Keadilan Ekologis", *Jurnal Abdiel: Khazanah Pemikiran Teologi, Pendidikan Agama Kristen dan Musik Gereja* 8, no. 2 (2024): 166–178.

incarnation and an exposition of Romans 8:18-30.⁷ The proposal is important and runs in the same direction as this article, but its route is different: it works in an affective register and on a New Testament text, whereas this article works in a spatial register and on a single Old Testament text that has itself become the standard citation for harmony. For the most part, the two currents seldom meet at the level of the biblical text, so that harmony is never required to account for its ecological basis, and ecotheology never gains rhetorical force from the most revered word in Indonesian public vocabulary. This separation is not peculiar to Indonesia. It repeats an older pattern in Western theology, in which White's charge that the Christian tradition bears the burden of the ecological crisis prompted half a century of responses that were largely apologetic.⁸ Barr and Santmire showed that the way forward lies not in defence but in an honest reconstruction that faces the ambiguities of the tradition itself, and such a reconstruction is most convincing when it is carried out on a text that has hitherto been used for other purposes.⁹

Psalm 133 is the text most frequently cited for harmony and, for that very reason, the least often re-read. Its three verses are read as praise of social harmony, with the oil and the dew treated as poetic ornaments that embellish the message. Yet the vocabulary of the psalm is itself not affective but spatial and hydrological. It speaks of dwelling, of oil running down onto the body, of dew from one mountain falling on other hills, and of a blessing commanded for one particular place. Scholars of the Psalms have long observed that the psalm belongs to the Songs of Ascents and that both images are drawn from the material world of ancient Israel.¹⁰ What has not yet been done is to draw out the ecological consequences of this vocabulary.

For this reason, the methodological status of the present reading must be stated at the outset. This article does not claim that the poet of Psalm 133 was contemplating the climate crisis, or that אֲחֵים in verse 1 historically includes non-human creatures. The word almost certainly refers to human beings, whether in a tribal, priestly, or pilgrim sense. What is undertaken here is a constructive reading in Ricoeur's sense, that is, a reading of 'the world in front of the text,' the possibilities of life that the text opens up for readers today, rather than a reconstruction of authorial intent.¹¹ This candour is not a weakness but a condition of validity. Ecological hermeneutics, after all, was formulated from the outset as a self-aware undertaking of precisely this kind: Habel prescribes three steps, namely suspicion towards anthropocentric bias in the text and its interpretation, identification with the Earth community, and retrieval of the Earth's voice, as an explicit procedure rather than as the discovery of meaning hidden

⁷ Soleman Kawangmani and Daniel Fajar Panuntun, "Harmony Seluruh Ciptaan: Menggagas Moderasi Beragama yang Bersifat Kosmosentris, *DUNAMIS: Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Kristiani* 10, no. 1 (2025): 141–157, <https://doi.org/10.30648/dun.v10i1.1703>.

⁸ Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203–1207.

⁹ James Barr, "Man and Nature: The Ecological Controversy and the Old Testament," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 55, no. 1 (1972): 9–32; H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 1–12; cf. Jeremy H. Kidwell, "The Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible and Ecology*, ed. Hilary Marlow and Mark Harris (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 9–18.

¹⁰ Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101–150*, trans. Linda M. Maloney, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 477–480.

¹¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 87–95.

within the text.¹² Horrell maps three major approaches in the field: the retrieval of a green theology already present in the Bible, the Earth Bible Project led by Habel, and the Exeter Project, which deliberately positions interpretation as a constructive act shaped by the text, the modern context, and the tradition of reading.¹³ This article stands closest to the third. A frequently voiced objection to the Earth Bible approach, namely that authority ultimately shifts from the text to an eco-justice principle formulated outside it, is answered here by anchoring the entire argument in the lexicon and in canonical reading so that what directs the reading remains the vocabulary of the text itself.¹⁴

Against this background, 'cosmic harmony' is formulated here not as a feeling of union with the universe but as a condition in which human and non-human beings can dwell together in one living space without either destroying the conditions of life of the other. It is a material category before it is a spiritual one. The adjective 'cosmic' is used not to enlarge the scale without limit but to signal that the scope of harmony does not stop at the boundary of the species. For that very reason, as will be argued, the cosmic can be reached only through the most local.

The thesis of this article is that Psalm 133 provides a biblical basis for cosmic harmony and that cosmic harmony takes the form of a spirituality of self-limitation rather than a spirituality of harmony. The argument is built in four steps. The first section shows lexically that harmony in this psalm is a category of habitation before it is a category of feeling. The second shows that blessing in this psalm arrives as matter, through plants and water. The third reads the phrase 'for there' as a rejection of a placeless cosmic spirituality and links it to the reality of watersheds in Indonesia. The fourth finds the limiting condition of cosmic harmony in Genesis 13:6-8 and draws out its implications for the spirituality and praxis of Christian religious education. From the outset, Genesis 13 is not treated as evidence that Psalm 133 refers to the story of Abraham and Lot but as a canonical text that clarifies the material limits of the common life that Psalm 133 celebrates as a blessing. The expected contribution is twofold. For the discourse of harmony in Indonesia, the article proposes an expansion of scope that comes not from outside but from within the biblical vocabulary that has long sustained it, so the expansion cannot be dismissed as the importation of foreign ideas. For ecotheology, the article contributes a reading of a psalm not yet treated in the literature on ecological readings of the Psalter, which so far has centred on Psalms 8, 104, and 148.¹⁵

Harmony as a way of dwelling, not merely a way of feeling

The customary reading of Psalm 133:1 treats the verse chiefly as an affective statement. The Indonesian rendering, 'How good and how pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in harmony,' is read as praise for the inner atmosphere of a community: there is no quarreling, there is warmth, and there is a sense of mutual acceptance. Hossfeld and Zenger read the verse

¹² Norman C. Habel, "Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics," in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, ed. Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger, SBL Symposium Series 46 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 3.

¹³ David G. Horrell, "Ecological Hermeneutics: Origins, Approaches, and Prospects," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible and Ecology*, 21–26.

¹⁴ Ernst M. Conradie, "Towards an Ecological Biblical Hermeneutics: A Review Essay on the Earth Bible Project," *Scriptura* 85, no. 1 (2004): 123–135.

¹⁵ David Rensberger, "Ecological Use of the Psalms," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 615–619.

as a statement about the art of living together, in which a willingness to engage actively for the common good takes precedence over the success of one's own claims and over group interests.¹⁶ This reading is correct and valuable. But it stops too soon, for it leaps over the verb that bears the weight of the whole sentence.

The word is שָׁבַת (*shevet*), the construct infinitive of יָשַׁב (*yashav*). The standard lexicon gives a clear range of meanings: to sit, to settle, to live, and to inhabit a place.¹⁷ None of these basic meanings is emotional. All of them are spatial. In Old Testament usage, the verb marks habitation of a land, occupation of a city, and the settling of a family on a plot of ground; it is used when someone ceases to wander and begins to settle in one place. What is praised in the psalm, therefore, is not merely a quality of feeling but the concrete condition in which brothers are able to dwell together; the affective dimension in 'good' and 'pleasant' is precisely a judgement on that condition. The phrase גַּם יַחְדָּם (*gam-yachad*) reinforces this emphasis by affirming togetherness in location, not first and foremost agreement of opinion. It should be added that the Indonesian translation contributes to this blurring: *diam bersama dengan rukun* ('dwell together with *rukun*') makes *rukun* an adverbial of manner with an attitudinal nuance, whereas in the Hebrew text 'shared location' is itself the principal content. In other words, the psalm judges a successful co-dwelling to be good and pleasant, and the affective judgement attaches to that success rather than replacing it.

This lexical shift is not a philological subtlety without consequence. It changes the question that may be put to the text. If harmony is understood chiefly as a feeling, the question is how to cultivate the right attitude. If harmony is understood as a way of dwelling, the question is what keeps a place still able to be inhabited in common. This second question opens a space for ecological construction, and that space is not opened from outside the text but by the very verb the text employs. Here, too, it becomes clear why the Greek root *oikos* gave rise to three terms at once, namely ecology, economy, and ecumene, which in our theological practice have nonetheless been separated: the study of the household, the management of the household, and the fellowship of the household's inhabitants are in truth a single matter.¹⁸

That this reading is not an improvisation is evident from the use of the same phrase elsewhere in the canon. Deuteronomy 25:5 opens with יָשָׁבוּ אָחִים יַחְדָּם, 'if brothers dwell together,' a combination of lexemes practically identical to that of Psalm 133:1. The context is not an inner mood but family law. It must be stressed that the subject of Deuteronomy 25:5-10 is levirate marriage, not land tenure as a theme in its own right, and this reading does not claim otherwise. Nevertheless, the stated purpose of the rule, namely that the name of the dead brother not be blotted out of Israel, is in Israel's legal system inseparable from the continuity of inherited property, since name and ancestral land are attached to one and the same family. Therefore, we can conclude not that harmony is in itself a matter of land tenure, but that the phrase 'brothers who dwell together' appears in Israelite legal language within an institutional framework that presupposes proximity of residence and continuity of inheritance.

¹⁶ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 3, 479.

¹⁷ Ludwig Köhler, Walter Baumgartner, and Mervyn E. J. Richardson, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, study ed., 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2001), s.v. יָשַׁב.

¹⁸ The three terms are formed from the Greek word οἶκος, 'house': οἰκολογία (the study of the house), οἰκονομία (the management of the house), and οἰκουμένη (the inhabited world). This observation is etymological and is used here as a conceptual marker, not as an argument in its own right.

Before going further, a methodological distinction needs to be stated. Lexical parallelism is a verifiable descriptive fact: the same lexeme appears in several texts. An intertextual relationship is a far stronger claim, since it presupposes a connection of production or reception between the texts. Sameness of words does not in itself prove the latter. Here, the claim is only the former at the descriptive level, while reading the three texts together occurs at the canonical-synchronic level: the reader of the canon receives all three as a single corpus and therefore reads one in light of the others. With this distinction in place, the second parallel can be examined; it is sharper still and will become the axis of the fourth part of this article. Genesis 13 narrates the story of Abram and Lot using the same lexeme: verse 6 speaks of לִישְׁכָּה, 'to dwell together', and in verse 8 Abram says בִּי־אֲנָשִׁים אֲחִים אֲנִי, 'for we are kin'. The two principal elements of Psalm 133:1, namely brotherhood and shared dwelling, are present together in a single Genesis pericope and present precisely as something that collapses. In Genesis 13 the co-dwelling fails, and the cause of the failure is stated explicitly: וְלֹא־נִשְׂאָה אֹתָם, 'the land could not bear them,' בִּי־הֶזְקָה רַב, 'for their possessions were very great'. For the moment it suffices to note that this lexical parallel exists and that the direction of the two texts is opposite.

Together, the three texts, Psalm 133, Deuteronomy 25, and Genesis 13, form a single canonical conversation about the conditions of dwelling together. Psalm 133 praises its success; Deuteronomy 25 regulates its institutions; Genesis 13 documents its failure together with the causes. To read Psalm 133 without the other two texts yields weightless praise; to read it together with them yields praise that knows what is at stake. This is the step of suspicion in Habel's sense, directed not at the text but at the history of its reading. The shift can be demonstrated at three levels. At the level of translation, the adverbial יחד ('together'), which in the Hebrew text marks togetherness of location, is customarily rendered by an abstract noun that marks a relation, namely 'in unity' in the English tradition and with harmony in the Indonesian New Translation, so that an adverbial of place becomes an adverbial of attitude. At the level of interpretation, the same shift appears when verse 1 is treated as a statement about the art of living together and the willingness to put the common good first, while its verb of habitation is not discussed as a verb of habitation. At the level of use, the psalm circulates chiefly as a text about unity, while its images of oil and dew are treated as ornaments of that message. These three levels show that what has shifted is not the text but the question customarily put to it.¹⁹

The consequences for Indonesian discourse are considerable. If harmony is a way of dwelling, then harmony conducted through dialogue, ceremony, and the measurement of indices, but not addressing who controls the upper reaches of a river and who bears the flooding downstream, has lost its verb. The critique of anthropocentrism already advanced in Indonesian ecotheology applies here too, and even more sharply, since what is anthropocentric is not only the doctrine of creation but also the very concept of living together.²⁰ Postcolonial hermeneutics adds a relevant layer of critique: readings that concentrate on moral lessons for human beings tend to push aside the silenced parties in the

¹⁹ Habel, "Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics."

²⁰ Sumule, "Melampaui Antropocentrism"; Marthinus Ngabalin, "Ekoteologi: Tinjauan Teologi terhadap Keselamatan Lingkungan Hidup" *CARAKA: Jurnal Teologi Biblika dan Praktika* 1, no. 2 (2020): 118–134.

text, and the Earth is among those silenced parties.²¹ In the Indonesian context, the silenced party is usually twofold: the communities around areas undergoing land-use conversion and the ecosystems that sustain them vanish together from the negotiating table. A harmony that does not ask about the carrying capacity of its place is not an incomplete harmony; it is a harmony that is exhausting the conditions of its own possibility.

If harmony is a way of dwelling, then the material conditions of dwelling are not a technical matter lying outside theology. They are a theological subject. The next section shows that Psalm 133 itself already treats them in this way, for in this psalm blessing is not merely symbolised by nature but also arrives through nature.

Oil that descends, dew that descends

The poetic structure of Psalm 133 rests on two similes arranged in stages. Verse 1 states the thesis; verse 2 gives the first simile, the good oil upon the head; verse 3 gives the second, the dew of Hermon. Both are built on a repetition that rises and widens, a pattern characteristic of Hebrew poetry that Alter calls a movement of intensification, in which the second line does not repeat the first but pushes it further.²² Berlin shows that the difficulty of Psalm 133 lies precisely in how these two images work and that its interpretation cannot be settled merely by translating it into a moral message.²³

What binds the two similes together is a single verbal root that occurs three times in verses 2-3: יָרַד (*yarad*), 'to descend'. All three occurrences are in the participial form יָרֹד (*yored*), not a conjugated finite form, so what is presented is not three completed events but a single ongoing, repeated movement.²⁴ The oil runs down onto the beard and runs down onto the collar of the robe; the dew descends upon the hills of Zion. In a song whose superscription calls it *Shir hamma'alot*, a song of ascents, the whole movement of blessing is in fact downward. The pilgrim ascends; the blessing descends. This tension must not be smoothed over, for it expresses a theological direction: grace flows toward the lower place, and its recipients are those below. It must be stated openly that the term 'gravitational', which is tempting to use here, is the interpreter's construct and not a category of the text. What comes from the text is only the direction of movement: the three participles of *yarad* express downward movement, and the recipient named is always in a lower position than the source, namely the beard beneath the head, the cloth of the robe beneath the beard, and the hills of Zion beneath the summit. The modern term is used as a summary of that pattern of direction, and the claim advanced does not depend on the term. From the ecological standpoint, that direction is not figurative but descriptive. Water does move down from the heights, and the whole order of life of a region is determined by what happens at the higher place. Psalm 133 contains, in its most compact form, a statement about upstream responsibility: the party above determines whether what descends upon the party below is blessing or ruin. A serious theology of

²¹ Madipoane Masenya, "Ecological Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible and Ecology*, 58–60.

²² Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 3–26.

²³ Adele Berlin, "On the Interpretation of Psalm 133," in *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry*, ed. Elaine R. Hollis, JSOTSup 40 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 141–147.

²⁴ F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 233–324. Dobbs-Allsopp shows that the three occurrences are non-finite participles placed in the middle of the strophe, so that the movement described is at the same time enacted by the arrangement of its lines.

blessing, following this verb, becomes by its own logic a theology of who holds the upper reaches.

The first simile is often read merely as an image of the priesthood. Yet the composition of the oil itself deserves examination. Exodus 30:22-33 itemises the ingredients of the holy anointing oil: myrrh, sweet-smelling cinnamon, aromatic cane, cassia, and olive oil. All of them are of plant origin. That is, Israel's most sacred act of worship is performed through botanical compounds. The plant world is not the background to consecration; it is its medium. This is not a sentimental observation but an observation about how holiness operates in the Old Testament. Davis shows that the Hebrew Bible as a whole thinks within an agrarian framework, so the fertility of the soil, the health of plants, and the faithfulness of the people form a single weave, not three separate topics.²⁵ Psalm 133 provides a compact example of that weave: the materials that mark a person as holy are materials available only if the land is still able to grow them. Land degradation is therefore not merely an economic problem; by this text's logic, it is also a liturgical one. It should be added that the argument about the oil functions as a support for the principal claim of this section and not as its foundation; the foundation lies in the participle *yarad* and in the dew.

The simile also affirms that blessing has arrived in the body. The oil wets the head, runs down onto the beard, and then reaches the cloth. Blessing in this psalm is not only declared as an abstract idea but also visualised through matter that moves and touches the body. A relational theology of creation has stressed that in the Old Testament God works through creation, not against it.²⁶ Psalm 133 offers a compact instance: what conveys the blessing is pressed plants and condensing water.

The second simile works in the same way. Dew (טֹל) in the climate of Palestine is not a morning decoration. Ancient Israel's agricultural regime ran on a long dry season, when rain practically ceased from about April to October, so nocturnal condensation became the margin of moisture that determined whether crops survived.²⁷ Interpreters have long noted the abundance of the dew of Hermon as a fact verifiable through experience.²⁸ When the psalm chooses dew as the image of blessing, it chooses not the grand but the thin, the almost invisible, that without which there is no life. This choice of image carries its own theological weight. Blessing is portrayed as a margin, not as abundance, as the thin difference between surviving and crop failure, not as accumulation. A theology of blessing built from Psalm 133 is therefore centred on flow and not on accumulation: its unit of blessing is the overnight dew that arrives, is used, and then arrives again, and not a reserve that is stored. Westermann observes that the Psalms speak of God's providence in very everyday and very bodily language, and that this is precisely where their strength lies.²⁹

²⁵ Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1–25.

²⁶ Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 269–283.

²⁷ Oded Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 47–52. For a recent measurement of the contribution of dew to the water balance of the Mediterranean basin during the dry season, see M. Tomaszewicz et al., "Projected Climate Change Impacts upon Dew Yield in the Mediterranean Basin," *Science of the Total Environment* 566–567 (2016): 1339–1348, which records cumulative monthly dew yields exceeding 2.8 mm at the end of the dry season in an area where rainfall over the same period was less than 1 mm.

²⁸ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 3, 478.

²⁹ Claus Westermann, *The Living Psalms*, trans. J. R. Porter (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 250.

It is here that the step of retrieval in ecological hermeneutics becomes productive. If the step of suspicion exposes anthropocentric bias in the history of interpretation, the step of retrieval seeks to listen again for the voice and role of the Earth in the text.³⁰ In Psalm 133, the mountain, the dew, and the plants are not stage props borrowed to clarify a message about human beings. They are agents through whom blessing becomes reality. The eco-justice principles of the Earth Bible Project, especially intrinsic worth and interconnectedness, find here a textual basis that is not forced. Caution is nonetheless required. Ecofeminist readings have warned that retrieving the Earth's voice easily slides into romanticisation, in which nature is praised as passive, giving, and never demanding, a pattern that has historically also been imposed upon women.³¹ Psalm 133 itself resists that temptation, for its dew is not portrayed as an unlimited gift but as a delivery from one particular place that can be exhausted and cut off.

The placement of this article within the literature needs to be stated precisely. Ecological readings of the Psalter have developed considerably. Walker-Jones provides a thorough study of the genre and metaphors of the Psalms concerning the Earth and living creatures and shows that the Psalms hold rich resources for an ecological spirituality.³² Rensberger reads Psalms 8, 104, and 148 as three models of the human relationship with creation, while Viviers reads Psalm 104 from the perspective of dark green religion.³³ A recent survey of this trend confirms that ecological hermeneutics is now a mainstream current in Old Testament research on the Psalms.³⁴ Nevertheless, attention has focused almost entirely on the creation psalms. Psalm 133 does not enter the reckoning, precisely because it is classified as a social text. It is in this gap that the present article works.

The conclusion of this section can be stated briefly. There is no harmony that is not mediated by matter. A community may profess to live in harmony while exhausting the water that sustains the neighbouring community, but according to the grammar of Psalm 133, that profession is incoherent, since what conveys blessing in this psalm is precisely the water and the plants that are being exhausted. The next question is where all this takes place, and this psalm, unlike many cosmic spiritualities, answers it with great specificity.

‘For there’: The cosmic through the local

Verse 3 contains a geographical problem that has long been known. Hermon stands far to the north, some two hundred kilometres from Zion, and dew forms locally from the air above the ground on which it falls. Literally, the dew of Hermon cannot descend on Zion. Classical interpreters noted this without hesitation, and modern commentators treat it as poetic intention rather than a poetical error.³⁵ The question is not whether the poet erred but what is being claimed through a statement that is literally impossible.

³⁰ Habel, "Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics."

³¹ Anne Elvey, "Ecological Feminist Hermeneutics," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible and Ecology*, ed. Hilary Marlow and Mark Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 35–48.

³² Arthur Walker-Jones, *The Green Psalter: Resources for an Ecological Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 16–20.

³³ Rensberger, "Ecological Use of the Psalms," 615–619; Hennie Viviers, "Is Psalm 104 an Expression (Also) of Dark Green Religion?" *HTS Theological Studies* 73, no. 3 (2017): 1–8.

³⁴ Hermiene Ferreira and Lodewyk Sutton, "Ecological Hermeneutics as a Current Trend in Old Testament Research in the Book of Psalms," *Acta Theologica* 44, no. 1 (2024): 306–321.

³⁵ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 3, 478; cf. Berlin, "On the Interpretation of Psalm 133."

Three readings are available. First, hyperbole: the dew of Hermon means the heaviest dew, so that the phrase expresses only quality. Second, a political reading: Hermon in the north and Zion in the south are brought together so that the psalm envisages the restoration of northern Israel and southern Judah as one whole. Third, a hydrological reading: Hermon is the real headwater of the Jordan, and what the psalm declares is that north and south in fact lie within one and the same system of flow. The three are not mutually exclusive. This article develops the third and states openly that this development is constructive: it is not a claim about the poet's intention but a reading of the possibility opened up by the text.

The strength of the third reading lies in what it says about the basis of unity. Because the dew of Hermon literally cannot descend on Zion, the psalm's statement cannot be read as a weather report; it must be read as a claim about connectedness. When the psalm nevertheless declares that the dew of Hermon descends upon the hills of Zion, the claim is not that the same droplets travel two hundred kilometres, but that north and south belong to one and the same order of water-giving. On this reading, what unites the two is not sameness of identity, political agreement, or geographical proximity, but participation in a single system of flow. Connectedness of this kind is not negotiated; it is discovered. What is negotiated is its management, and this distinction matters. Parties may quarrel and make or break agreements about how water is divided, but they cannot agree that they stand outside a single system of flow. The connection exists before anyone consents to it and persists when all parties deny it; what is open to negotiation is the rules of the game, not the fact. This is the form of harmony that is hardest to deny and easiest to forget.

For the discourse of harmony in Indonesia, the implications are fairly fundamental. The instruments that support harmony in Indonesia are designed as devices of agreement and institution-building among human beings. The Joint Regulation of the Minister of Religious Affairs and the Minister of Home Affairs No. 9 and No. 8 of 2006 defines the maintenance of harmony as a joint endeavour of religious communities and government and establishes the Forum for Religious Harmony as a forum whose members are religious leaders.³⁶ Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023 measures religious moderation through four indicators, all of which concern human attitudes and relations.³⁷ Not one of these instruments names land, water, or ecosystems as a party. It must be stressed that what is stated here is not a judgement that the framework is mistaken, but an observation about its scope: because it is drawn up as a device of agreement, the framework can be annulled or abandoned when one party withdraws, and the biophysical conditions that sustain the agreement lie beyond its reach. The harmony read from Psalm 133 departs from this point. It rests on a condition already given: we drink from the same water, so withdrawal is not an option. What remains available is only the choice between tending it well and ruining it together.

The next phrase locks the whole movement in place. *כִּי־יִשָּׁם צִוְּהָ יְהוָה אֶת־הַבְּרָכָה*, 'for there the LORD has commanded the blessing'. The blessing has a locus. It has an address. The psalm refuses to present blessing as a universal principle available everywhere and therefore nowhere. For contemporary theology, this refusal serves as a critique of weightless cosmic

³⁶ Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia and Kementerian Dalam Negeri Republik Indonesia, Peraturan Bersama Menteri Agama dan Menteri Dalam Negeri Nomor 9 Tahun 2006 dan Nomor 8 Tahun 2006 tentang Pedoman Pelaksanaan Tugas Kepala Daerah/Wakil Kepala Daerah dalam Pemeliharaan Harmony Umat Beragama, Pemberdayaan Forum Harmony Umat Beragama, dan Pendirian Rumah Ibadat, arts. 1 and 8–9.

³⁷ Republik Indonesia, Peraturan Presiden Nomor 58 Tahun 2023.

spirituality, that is, a spirituality that loves the universe in general and is therefore obliged to no particular place in particular. It is here that the adjective 'cosmic' in the title of this article acquires its content: it is not a widening of scale but a deepening of obligation.

The movement of watershed discipleship supplies the apt theological vocabulary for this. Myers sets out three convictions at once: that we are at a decisive moment of crisis; that the locus of life as a follower of Jesus is always within a particular watershed, whether we realise it or not; and that we are called to be disciples of our watershed.³⁸ What is striking about this formulation is not its novelty but its simplicity: it demands only that faith acknowledge the place where it actually takes place. Studies of common-pool resource governance offer institutional confirmation, and it should be stressed that they are used here at the descriptive-empirical level, not as a theological foundation. Ostrom shows that communities of users of common-pool resources are able to build rules that endure without privatisation or centralisation, provided that the boundaries of the resource are clear, the rules are adapted to local conditions, and the users take part in formulating them.³⁹ This finding proves no theological claim; it shows only that the form of common life demanded by this reading is empirically not impossible. The archipelago offers its own example: the *subak* system in Bali, which Lansing reads as a network of water temples that simultaneously regulates water allocation, planting schedules, and pest control at the scale of a single watershed.⁴⁰ This example, like Ostrom's study, serves as an institutional analogy rather than a theological basis, and the difference in its faith framework need not be disguised.

For the Indonesian reader, this place need not be sought far away. The Jabodetabek region (Greater Jakarta) sits on several interlinked watersheds, including the Ciliwung, the Cisadane, the Kali Bekasi, and the Kali Angke-Pesanggrahan, with headwaters in the Bogor and Puncak areas and lower reaches in Jakarta, Bekasi, and Tangerang. The data already mentioned in the introduction acquire their meaning here. Land-use conversion in the upper reaches is not merely a matter of spatial planning for Bogor Regency; it moves downstream as water. Forest Watch Indonesia also shows that spatial-planning policy has facilitated this, with the shrinkage of protected areas in the spatial pattern plan estimated at tens of thousands of hectares.⁴¹ Decisions about land use in upstream areas can produce hydrological consequences borne by communities downstream who were not directly involved in making those decisions.

From the standpoint of Psalm 133, this upstream-downstream relation is one of harmony, not merely a technical one. A church in Tangerang and a church in Cisarua lie within one and the same hydrological body, as Hermon and Zion do. Neither can choose not to be in relation, because water has already connected them. All they can choose is whether the relation takes the form of blessing that flows down or of disaster that flows down. Because water does not recognise administrative boundaries, a harmony that follows the logic of water also does not stop at the boundary of a regency, a denomination, or a religion. At this point, the agenda of harmony and the agenda of ecology are not two agendas that need to be set side by side but

³⁸ Ched Myers, ed., *Watershed Discipleship: Reinhabiting Bioregional Faith and Practice* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), xvii–xxii.

³⁹ Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 96–102.

⁴⁰ J. Stephen Lansing, *Priests and Programmers: Technologies of Power in the Engineered Landscape of Bali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 11–17.

⁴¹ Forest Watch Indonesia, "Hilangnya Fungsi Lindung."

one agenda that has hitherto been split in two. Ghosh reminds us that the modern extractive project, which began in the archipelago in the Banda Islands, operates by muting the Earth, treating soil, plants, and rivers as dead matter with no interests of their own, so they can be reckoned solely as stock.⁴² That muting is what is quietly repeated when a recharge area changes its status through a spatial plan: what is lost is not only trees but also the standing of that place as a party.

The claim of this section can therefore be formulated as follows: the cosmic can be reached only through the local. Cosmic harmony is not a feeling of being connected with all creation but fidelity to one concrete watershed, with a name, boundaries, and problems that can be verified. Yet fidelity to one place is still not enough, for a community can love its place while continuing to accumulate until the place is no longer able to bear it. That limiting condition is what the final section discusses.

The spirituality of limits: When the land can no longer bear them

Returning to Genesis 13. After Abram and Lot have left Egypt with livestock, silver, and gold, the narrator offers an unusual explanation in verse 6: וְלֹא-נִשָּׂא אֹתָם הָאָרֶץ לְשָׁכֶת יַחְדָּו, 'the land could not bear them to dwell together', כִּי-הָיָה רְכוּשָׁם רָב, 'for their possessions were very great'. This sentence matters precisely because it rejects the simplest explanation. It does not say that Abram and Lot quarrelled because of bad character, misunderstanding, or a lack of tolerance, although a dispute between herdsmen is indeed mentioned.

What requires attention first is the grammar. The subject of the verb נִשָּׂא, to bear or to carry, is הָאָרֶץ, the land. The land is not an object to be divided but an agent that possesses a capacity and therefore has limits. It can bear, and it can cease to be able to bear. From the perspective of ecological hermeneutics, this is one of the clearest places in the Old Testament where the Earth appears as a subject, not a resource, in line with the principle that the Earth is a community capable of speaking and even resisting.⁴³

The second is the diagnosis. The cause of the failure of co-dwelling is stated as רְכוּשָׁם רָב, very great possessions. Not hostility, but accumulation. This is a sharp diagnostic reversal of how we usually think about conflict. We are accustomed to regarding division as the result of a deficit of goodwill, and so we address it with programmes of attitude. Genesis 13 declares that division can arise precisely from unbounded economic success. Two kinsmen who love each other still have to part when their possessions exceed the capacity of their land.

Contemporary science gives a modern name to that ancient sentence. The planetary boundaries framework concludes that six of the nine boundaries have been transgressed, so the Earth is now well outside humanity's safe operating space, with the degree of transgression increasing across all previously identified boundaries.⁴⁴ The sentences 'the land could not bear them' and 'six of the nine boundaries have been transgressed' say the same thing in two different languages. Both declare that there is a threshold, that the threshold is not the outcome of agreement but a property of the system, and that crossing it results in separation, whether

⁴² Amitav Ghosh, *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 16–20.

⁴³ Habel, "Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics"; cf. Horrell, "Ecological Hermeneutics."

⁴⁴ Katherine Richardson et al., "Earth beyond Six of Nine Planetary Boundaries," *Science Advances* 9, no. 37 (2023): eadh2458.

the separation of Abram from Lot or the separation of the Earth from the state that for ten thousand years enabled civilisation. The difference lies in what the text of Genesis adds, and what science cannot supply: it names the cause as a moral problem, not merely a technical one. Science can measure overshoot; it cannot name greed. It is here that theology has work that cannot be handed over to any other discipline.

From here, the form of spirituality this article offers becomes clear, and it is not the one customarily expected. Cosmic harmony does not take the form of a spirituality of harmony; that is, it is neither an exercise in feeling connected with nature nor a liturgy that embellishes the language of creation. It takes the form of a spirituality of self-limitation: the willingness to stop accumulating until one is within the carrying capacity of the place one inhabits. Sabbath, sufficiency, and the refusal of limitless growth are not additional themes in this spirituality but its content. Moltmann places the Sabbath not as a pause between six working days but as the crown of creation, the day on which God ceases and, by ceasing, gives creation room simply to be.⁴⁵ The Sabbath, read in this way, is the most basic theological exercise in self-limitation, and at the same time, the firmest rejection of the idea that the value of a creature lies in its productivity. A spirituality of this kind contains a demand, not a consolation, and for that very reason it does not degenerate into mere contemplation.

This formulation touches on the debate about stewardship. Bauckham objects that the idea of stewardship positions human beings too much as managers standing above creation, and instead offers the community of creation, in which human beings are fellow members alongside other creatures.⁴⁶ The objection should be taken seriously, especially since it touches the most vulnerable point in mainstream creation theology, namely the ease with which the language of mandate turns into the language of control. Nevertheless, the reading proposed here offers another way to answer it. What is problematic is not stewardship as a concept but stewardship that does not recognise the limits of its own power. Genesis 13 supplies the correction from within the Abraham narrative: what is demanded of Abram is not more efficient management of the same land but a willingness to relinquish the right of first choice and to step back. Stewardship exercised as self-limitation, and not as an extension of control, does not place human beings above creation but subjects them to the carrying capacity of the same place, so that in practice it yields what Bauckham aims at by a different route. The difference between the two remains and need not be concealed, but at the level of praxis both demand the same thing: to stop before the land ceases to be able to bear.

The descent into the praxis of Christian religious education can be made quite concrete. First, catechesis and the teaching of Christian religious education can take the watershed in which the school or congregation is located as a unit of learning, with learners mapping the upstream and downstream areas, the sources of pollution, and the parties who bear the consequences, a task that demands field visits and not only classroom discussion. Second, the theme of harmony in the curriculum no longer stops at relations among religious communities but includes relations with the land and water that sustain both communities, so interfaith encounters gain a concrete, measurable common agenda. Third, the spirituality of self-

⁴⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 276–296.

⁴⁶ Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 1–12, 204.

limitation is taught not as an exhortation to thrift but as a theological category, with Genesis 13 as its foundational text and the Sabbath as its discipline. Fourth, preaching and liturgy need to move creation from illustration to subject matter; as long as nature appears only as a comparison that embellishes a message about human beings, congregations will keep learning that nature is merely a backdrop. Research on the formation of ecological awareness through Christian education shows that experience- and context-based approaches are more effective than delivering abstract doctrine.⁴⁷ The appeal of *Laudato Si'* that the ecological crisis be read at the same time as a social crisis points to the same place, and at that point conversation across the churches in Indonesia already has a foothold.⁴⁸

The limits of this study need to be stated. This article does not conduct empirical research on a particular congregation or school, and the watershed data used serve as a contextual anchor, not as field findings. The claim concerning the connection among Psalm 133, Deuteronomy 25, and Genesis 13 is lexical at the descriptive level and canonical-synchronic at the level of reading; it does not presuppose a redactional relationship among the three. Further research could test it diachronically or test the effectiveness of a watershed-based learning model empirically. What is claimed here is limited: that the vocabulary of Psalm 133 itself requires harmony to be read as an ecological category and that the canon supplies its limiting condition.

Conclusion

Psalm 133 praises something harder than what we customarily hear from it: not first of all the mood of a community but the success of several parties in remaining in one and the same place. Its verb is one of habitation, its similes are material, and its blessing is local, so that the harmony it praises cannot be separated from the land and water that sustain it; and when the psalm is read together with Genesis 13, which uses the same lexeme to narrate a failure, it becomes clear that co-dwelling has a limiting condition of an economic kind, namely that the land ceases to be able to bear when possessions become too many. Cosmic harmony is therefore not a feeling of union with the universe but fidelity to one concrete watershed, accompanied by a willingness to limit oneself within its carrying capacity; and for the church and Christian religious education in Indonesia, this means that the care of creation ceases to be an additional theme in the agenda of harmony and becomes the condition of its possibility.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced this article.

Credit authorship contribution

The authors affirm that all three contributed to the development and completion of the manuscript. Fransiska contributed to the initial conceptualisation and formulation of the main

⁴⁷ Agnes Relly Poluan, "Membangun Kesadaran Ekologis melalui Pendidikan Kristiani: Studi Kasus pada Mahasiswa IAKN Manado" *Kurios* 9, no. 2 (2023): 454–466.

⁴⁸ Paus Fransiskus, *Laudato Si': Ensiklik tentang Perawatan Rumah Kita* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), §§ 49, 139.

ideas, while Pintakhari and Pardede provided critical insights, expanded the discussion, and collaborated in revising and refining the manuscript for final submission.

AI disclosure

The authors acknowledge using artificial intelligence tools to support preliminary idea development and identify relevant references. All AI-generated suggestions were critically reviewed and carefully evaluated by the authors, who retain full responsibility for the accuracy, academic integrity, and final content of the manuscript.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Injili Indonesia Bali Research Ethics Committee (No: 815/LPPM/STTII/Bali/VIII/2026).

Funding information

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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