

The Catholic Church's Resistance to Geothermal Projects in Flores: Rethinking the Role of Religious Institutions in Environmental Justice

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Abstract

This study examines the Catholic Church's resistance to a geothermal energy development project in Flores, Indonesia, by highlighting the theological, ecological, and social perspectives that underlie it. This resistance is motivated by concerns about potential environmental damage, health impacts, and threats to the socio-economic well-being of local communities. For the Catholic Church, preserving God's creation is not only a spiritual mandate but also a moral responsibility related to a commitment to sustainable development. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study method. Data were collected through interviews and supported by secondary sources such as media reports and relevant academic literature. Through thematic analysis, this study examines various forms of advocacy carried out by the Church, including the use of moral discourse, grassroots mobilization, and collaboration with indigenous communities and environmental organizations. This study also examines how the Church plays a role as a religious institution and social agent in challenging the narrative of state and corporate development that ignores ecological sustainability and community rights. The findings show that the Catholic Church in Flores plays a significant role in shaping public opinion, encouraging community resistance, and influencing policy debates related to geothermal energy. This study contributes to a broader understanding of ecotheology and the role of religion in environmental justice movements. By analyzing this case, the study invites a rethinking of how religious institutions can orient their theological and moral frameworks toward active engagement in environmental justice. The Church's resistance reflects a contextual theological response that connects spirituality with social-ecological activism and offers a model for just, sustainable, and inclusive development.

Keyword: *Catholic Church, Geothermal, Environmental Justice, Resistance*

Abstrak

Studi ini mengkaji penolakan Gereja Katolik terhadap proyek pengembangan energi panas bumi di Flores, Indonesia, dengan menyoroti perspektif teologis, ekologis, dan sosial yang mendasarinya.

Penolakan ini dilatarbelakangi oleh kekhawatiran akan potensi kerusakan lingkungan, dampak kesehatan, dan ancaman terhadap kesejahteraan sosial-ekonomi masyarakat setempat. Bagi Gereja Katolik, melestarikan ciptaan Tuhan bukan hanya mandat spiritual, tetapi juga tanggung jawab moral yang berkaitan dengan komitmen terhadap pembangunan berkelanjutan. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus deskriptif. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara dan didukung oleh sumber sekunder seperti laporan media dan literatur akademis yang relevan. Melalui analisis tematik, studi ini mengkaji berbagai bentuk advokasi yang dilakukan oleh Gereja, termasuk penggunaan wacana moral, mobilisasi akar rumput, dan kolaborasi dengan masyarakat adat dan organisasi lingkungan. Studi ini juga mengkaji bagaimana Gereja berperan sebagai lembaga keagamaan dan agen sosial dalam menantang narasi pembangunan negara dan korporasi yang mengabaikan keberlanjutan ekologis dan hak-hak masyarakat. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa Gereja Katolik di Flores memainkan peran penting dalam membentuk opini publik, mendorong perlawanan masyarakat, dan memengaruhi debat kebijakan terkait energi panas bumi. Studi ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman yang lebih luas tentang ekoteologi dan peran agama dalam gerakan keadilan lingkungan. Dengan menganalisis kasus Gereja Katolik di Flores, penelitian ini mengajak untuk meninjau kembali bagaimana institusi-institusi keagamaan dapat mengarahkan kerangka teologis dan moral mereka menuju keterlibatan yang lebih aktif dalam keadilan lingkungan. Perlawanan Gereja mencerminkan respons teologis kontekstual yang menghubungkan spiritualitas dengan aktivisme sosial-ekologis, dan menawarkan model pembangunan yang adil, berkelanjutan, dan inklusif.

Kata Kunci: *Gereja Katolik, Panas Bumi, Keadilan Lingkungan, Perlawanan*

1. Introduction

Flores is an area that has significant potential for geothermal energy development (Mongabay, 2025). It is estimated that the geothermal potential in Flores has a geothermal potential of almost 1,000 MW with reserves of 402.5 MW (Mongabay, 2023). In 2020, the Indonesian government made Flores part of a plan to make it a national “geothermal hotspot,” to increase renewable energy capacity in Indonesia (Arti, 2020). This project emerged as a solution to the urgent need for sustainable national energy fulfilment and reducing dependence on fossil fuels.

However, although this project is considered an environmentally friendly solution that can replace fossil fuels, geothermal energy development in Flores is not free from controversy. The rejection came from various parties, including local communities and the Catholic Church in Flores. This rejection was based on ideological, ecological, and health reasons (Arti, 2020). Geothermal fluids containing arsenic, fluorine, hydrogen sulfide, and radon can pollute air, soil, and water, causing respiratory problems and lung cancer. Therefore, strict monitoring and environmentally friendly technology are necessary to ensure the safe and sustainable use of this energy (Husodo et al., 2020; Dhar et al., 2020).

Shallow geothermal energy can also cause water pollution and soil instability if not managed properly, requiring disciplined technical policies (Zhou et al., 2013; Yilmaz & Kaptan, 2017). Furthermore, long-term exposure to H₂S gas or *hydrogen sulfide* from geothermal activities carries the risk of causing disorders of the respiratory, nervous, and circulatory systems, necessitating a more integrated health policy (Bustaffa et al., 2020). For instance, geothermal projects in Sumatra, Java, East Nusa Tenggara, and Banten have resulted in environmental pollution, loss of living space, and loss of life due to H₂S gas. Cases such as those at the Sorik Merapi, Dieng, and Sarulla geothermal power plants demonstrate weak operational safety. In other areas, such as Poco Leok (NTT) and Padarincang (Banten), indigenous communities have even experienced land grabbing and criminalization for opposing these projects (Bagaskara, 2025).

In responding to the geothermal impacts in Flores, the Catholic Church, through a Pastoral Letter issued by the bishops of the Ecclesiastical Province of Ende, emphasized that the geothermal project has the potential to damage the fragile ecosystem of Flores, which is dominated by mountains and

forests (Mongabay, 2025). They are also concerned about the sustainability of natural resources, especially those that depend on springs and fertile soil, which are sources of life for local communities.

The rejection is based on ecological concerns and the social impacts that can harm local communities that depend on agriculture and their natural ecosystems for their livelihoods. In this case, the Catholic Church speaks in theological terms and is involved in socio-ecological advocacy. They demand protection for the rights of communities vulnerable to environmental damage and social injustice arising from large-scale development with little consideration for socio-ecological sustainability (Renoth et al., 2023). The Catholic Church in Flores has disapproved of projects that are detrimental to the environment and the community's social welfare, even though the goal of developing renewable energy drives these projects.

On the other hand, geothermal energy development promises to bring progress to the local economy by creating new jobs and facilitating more equitable access to electricity (Arti, 2020; Astro, 2023). However, despite this hope, the debate about the pros and cons of socio-ecological impacts continues to roll among the people of Flores. The Catholic Church emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balance between energy development and the sustainability of the existing ecosystem (Further discussions on this, read Okore, 2024; Nguyen, 2023; Sadowski, 2021). Flores has unique ecological characteristics with hilly topography, high rainfall, and abundant biodiversity (Mongabay, 2025). The negative impacts on this vulnerable environment have the potential to worsen natural disasters such as frequent landslides and floods, which could add to the difficulties for local communities who depend on the agriculture, fisheries, and livestock sectors (Greiner et al., 2023).

This issue has put the Flores community in conflict with the local government. The community believes that humans must maintain harmony with their environment, with each other, and with God. In contrast, the local government aims to grow and develop the economy. At the same time, liberation theology has influenced the reform movement of the Catholic Church, which instills the defense of human rights and environmental justice (Arti, 2020). This has brought Catholicism into line with the indigenous movement that opposes mining.

Based on this background, this study aims to uncover several important things: Why does the Catholic Church in Flores oppose the planned geothermal project? How does the Catholic Church view the relationship between geothermal energy development and the ecological sustainability and social welfare of its people? In addition, how is the church involved in defending the rights of communities threatened by this large-scale development project? This study focuses on the Catholic Church's perspective on the geothermal project and explores the deeper reasons behind this church's stance.

This study explores the forms of resistance the Catholic Church in Flores has carried against the geothermal development project. Using an approach involving theological, ecological, and social perspectives, it will also examine how the church's attitude reflects the larger socio-ecological struggle to defend the environmental rights of the Flores community. The study will analyze the church's role in defending local communities' rights through social advocacy and public dialogue, and policy participation.

Thus, this study has important significance in understanding the role of religion, especially the Catholic Church, in social movements and resistance to development projects that can potentially damage the environment. In addition, this study provides insight into how religion and ecological movements can strengthen each other in fighting for socio-ecological justice. Through this study, a policy model can be identified that accommodates the need for sustainable energy without sacrificing the environmental and social sustainability of local communities. This also highlights the critical role of religious institutions in shaping such policies by integrating moral, social, and ecological considerations into decision-making.

2. Literature Review

The emergence of geothermal projects, claimed as good development efforts, has, in fact, hurt the community. Although the term “green energy” or “green development” is often touted as an alternative to reducing emissions, in reality, the impacts caused by traditional geothermal projects remain the same, even the appropriation of community living space continues to occur, reducing cultural values long maintained by local communities. In this context, resistance is necessary to prevent greater harm, supported by religious institutions that bear moral responsibility for the consequences of such appropriation. Accordingly, the researcher highlights several studies that examine the relationship between resistance by marginalized communities and the role of religion in supporting it.

Joan Martínez Alier’s (2002) *Environmentalism of the poor* theory suggests that ecological resistance often comes from marginalized local communities threatened by large, environmentally damaging development projects. According to Alier (2002), development projects that ignore socio-ecological impacts often exploit natural resources without considering long-term sustainability, threatening local communities’ lives. This concept is relevant to the Catholic Church’s resistance in Flores carried out against the geothermal project.

Furthermore, the concept of “*Laudato Si*” introduced by Pope Francis (2015) contains an affirmation that the ecological crisis is closely related to social injustice and human spirituality. Environmental damage often affects the poor and demands an integral ecology, in the form of an awareness that nature, society, and faith are interconnected. Pope Francis (2015) criticized the technocratic and anthropocentric paradigm that places humans above nature and continues ecological conversion as a form of moral responsibility towards creation. The encyclical invites the Church and society to fight against ecological injustice and care for the earth as a shared home. In line with Lucas Johnston (2013), through his book *Religion and sustainability: Social movements and the politics of the environment*, he emphasized that spiritual values, language, and religious symbols are often used to strengthen ecological awareness and social solidarity, making religion an ethical and effective force in fighting for environmental justice.

Similarly, Mary Evelyn Tucker’s (2021) *Religion and ecology: Can the climate change?* highlights that the current crisis cannot be resolved through science and policy but requires a moral and spiritual transformation. Tucker (2001) offers a cosmological reorientation, shifting humanity’s perspective from being a ruler to being part of the created world. Tucker also highlights the ethical potential of religious traditions to foster ecological awareness and dialogue between science, ethics, and spirituality to create a holistic sustainability paradigm. In his work, *Dark green religion: Nature spirituality and the planetary future* (2010), Bron Taylor discusses the position of nature as a place of spiritual and intrinsic value. He calls it “dark green religion,” a religiosity that inspires environmentally friendly behavior and a global ecological movement, both through religious practices and popular cultural expressions. This work also demonstrates how ecological spirituality becomes a moral and cultural force in strengthening contemporary environmental awareness and activism, as demonstrated by the Catholic Church’s resistance to geothermal projects in Flores.

3. Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a single descriptive case study method to deeply understand the forms of resistance carried out by the Catholic Church against the geothermal energy development project in Flores. This approach is chosen to capture the complexity of connection between human, nature, and religious values, and socio-religious dynamics that underlie the church’s attitude, especially in defending the rights of local communities and maintaining environmental sustainability. Focusing on one case allows researchers to deeply examine the specific context faced by the Catholic community in Flores, including their strategies in building discourse, advocacy, and cross-actor collaboration.

Research data was obtained through two main sources. Primary data was collected through interviews via the Zoom platform with three key informants consisting of church and community activists. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from various written documents such as reports from civil society organizations, scientific journal articles, online media news, and relevant academic literature. The data collection process was carried out by observing the principles of research ethics.

All data collected were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Researchers examined the data in depth to find patterns, meanings, and main thematic categories related to the role of the Church in resistance to geothermal projects. Themes such as theological discourse on God's creation, social advocacy for the rights of local communities, and cooperation between the Church and environmental organizations and indigenous groups were the main highlights in the analysis process. Researchers use the theory of *environmentalism of the poor theory* by Joan Martínez Alier (2002), which emphasizes that ecological resistance often arises from communities whose survival is highly dependent on local ecosystems. This resistance challenges structural injustice and exploitative development models. Through this theory, researchers examine how the involvement of the Catholic Church in Flores reflects local community solidarity in facing various socio-ecological threats.

This process was carried out systematically by utilizing Microsoft Word software to mark and group data based on emerging themes. To increase validity, this study used source triangulation, namely by comparing data from various sources to ensure consistency and depth of information. This study reveals how the Catholic Church in Flores is not only a religious institution but also a social actor that plays an active role in fighting for ecological justice and the sustainability of local communities' lives amidst the flow of exploitative development.

4. Results

4.1 Geothermal Projects in Flores: Impacts and Controversies

Geothermal projects in Flores have the potential to significantly impact ecosystems, local communities, and the economy. On the one hand, the project aims to provide renewable energy that can reduce dependence on fossil fuels and support energy security (Jemadin, 2024). However, there are major concerns regarding the ecological, social, and economic impacts caused by the development (Greiner, 2023; Mongabay, 2023).

Regarding ecological impacts, the project risks damaging the local environment, especially regarding land use, soil erosion, and hydrological changes that could threaten the natural balance in the area (Mongabay, 2025). For example, geothermal development in *Waesano* has the potential to damage water quality, which is vital for agriculture and local water needs (GEUDP, 2019). Likewise, geothermal exploration near *Sano Nggoang*, which is located in a highly sensitive volcanic area, increases its vulnerability to natural disasters such as landslides and floods (Jemadin, 2024). Although the project promises energy potential, its impact on already limited natural resources is a significant concern.

From a social perspective, the project also presents deep tensions, mainly due to resistance from local communities who feel directly affected. For example, Indigenous communities in areas such as *Wae Sano* and *Sano Nggoang* are concerned about losing agricultural land, which is their primary source of livelihood. They are also concerned that this development will damage the ecosystem that they have long protected (Jemadin, 2024; Albab, 2023). This resistance is compounded by dissatisfaction with the lack of community involvement in decision-making related to the project, which further reinforces the impression that their voices are not being heard (Jemadin, 2024; Ibrohim et al., 2019).

Floresa's report in December 2023 revealed the growing concerns of residents living around the project site, who have experienced the direct impact of the development (Floresa, 2023). They are residents who feel the direct impact of the project. In *Matalako*, the project has damaged agricultural land, made roofs of houses porous, and caused various illnesses. Residents also expressed concerns about the potential emergence of mud pits mixed with hot steam around their settlements. Meanwhile,

in *Sokoria*, the same report revealed several alleged manipulative practices by the company, including the involvement of military personnel in deceiving *Mosalaki* (traditional leaders) into handing over their land, as mentioned in the JPIC-SVD Ende letter (Floresa, 2023).

The report also highlights environmental impacts, such as the loss of water sources and the company's broken promises to provide clean water access for residents. Furthermore, there is criticism of gender-based injustice, where women in the area are often marginalized in planning and decision-making related to the project (Aziziah et al., 2023).

Economically, although the government and project developers claim that geothermal development will create jobs and boost the local economy, many communities feel that the benefits are enjoyed mainly by outsiders and business elites. At the same time, those living in the area are increasingly marginalized (Albab, 2023). Land acquisition and community displacement are significant problems, causing further economic marginalization in *Manggarai* (Jemadin, 2024). The short-term impacts on agriculture and traditional livelihoods tend to be more pronounced, exacerbating economic inequality.

While the geothermal project in Flores has the potential to support energy sustainability and reduce dependence on fossil fuels, the project's ecological, social, and economic impacts cannot be ignored. Therefore, it is imperative to adopt a more inclusive approach in the planning and implementation of this project, involving the consent and active participation of local communities and considering the long-term impacts on the environment and the socio-economic well-being of communities, especially the marginalized.

4.2 Catholic Church's Rejection of Geothermal Projects

Sustainability is at the heart of agrarian transformation and is a fundamental teaching of Abrahamic religions. As Johnston (2013) states, sustainability is essential for a religion. According to Johnston (2013), sustainability is necessary for religion because religion highlights the affective and emotional dimensions of political issues such as extractivism. Religion offers a means to promote sustainability in the public sphere. As Johnston (2013) states, Abrahamic and indigenous religions offer public space for important discourses. The narrative of desire has been received through religious teachings. Such narratives have been used to underscore the importance of maintaining a close relationship with nature (Johnston, 2013). Ecological sustainability is important in religious activities and expressions. Devotion to God can be represented through ecological thinking and behavior.

Catholicism and indigenous religions, globally, are united in their support for ecological sustainability and the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). Precisely, the World Conference of Indigenous Peoples on Territory, Environment and Development was held in *Kari Oca*. This conference provided an alternative channel for understanding the environment and expressing religious beliefs (Harcourt & Nelson, 2015). The Catholic Church subsequently transformed itself, adapting its social curriculum to promote environmental justice (Erb, 2003). This encourages the Church to build relationships with indigenous communities, such as being involved in religious events oriented towards ecological advocacy.

Abrahamic and Indigenous religions have collaborated worldwide, not only in *Manggarai* (Cleary, 2004; van Cott, 1994; van Cott, 2000; Yashar, 2005). In Latin America, for example, religious activities cross the boundaries between religious and secular institutions, with bishops, pastors, indigenous leaders, and secular leaders working together to promote change and challenge authoritarianism (Gill, 1998; Smith, 1996). In the context of Flores, the Church has assisted residents in dealing with companies and the government. Beyond local efforts, this case has also been reported to the UN human rights body in Geneva through VIVAT International, indicating the seriousness of raising this issue internationally (Ngozo, 2025, personal interview).

The primary concern underlying the rejection of geothermal is the potential environmental damage that geothermal projects can cause (Ngozo, 2025, personal interview). For example, areas

such as *Sano Nggoang* and *Poco Leok*, surrounded by high rainfall hills, are very vulnerable to natural disasters such as landslides and floods. This threatens the livelihoods of local communities largely dependent on agriculture (Mongabay, 2023). In addition, these projects often involve land conversion that can damage local ecosystems, converting agricultural land into energy project areas that have the potential to disrupt the balance of nature (Advocacy Team for the People of Manggarai [TARM], 2003; ATSDR, 2015; Arif et al., 2023; Ibrohim, 2019).

The voice of the Church and civil society against geothermal projects is not simply a rejection but a prophetic and pastoral call. It is rooted in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas and the personalism of Pope John Paul II, who emphasizes that development must prioritize human dignity and the preservation of nature, not just energy efficiency (Ngozo, 2025, personal interview). Philosophically, Aquinas emphasized the *bonum commune* (or common good) as the political goal; policies without distributive justice are considered illegitimate. Pope John Paul II views humans as subjects and the environment as integral to human existence. The Church proposes national dialogue, independent ecological audits, and hybrid energy designs (solar, wind, and limited geothermal). Development that sacrifices human dignity and the integrity of creation is a betrayal of God the Creator (Ngozo, 2025, personal interview).

Catholic doctrine emphasizes the importance of preserving nature and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples, as well as rejecting the destruction of natural habitats for economic gain alone (Arti, 2020). The principles of justice contained in Church teachings, such as fair treatment of marginalized communities, are an important basis for this rejection, with the hope that geothermal energy development will be carried out by considering the welfare of local communities and the impact on the environment (Erb, 2003).

In addition, the Church is also committed to fighting for the empowerment of local communities, especially indigenous peoples, who are often less informed or uninvolved in decision-making regarding large projects. The Church's rejection reflects an effort to ensure that such projects are carried out with informed consent and prioritize the needs and interests of local communities (Arti, 2020). In this case, the Catholic Church is a mediator that bridges the relationship between local communities and the government or companies involved in the project by advocating for social and environmental justice (AMAN, 2025; Floresa, 2025; Ngozo, 2025, personal interview). This rejection is not only about rejecting geothermal projects but more about encouraging sustainable development, which not only prioritizes economic benefits but also maintains the sustainability of the ecosystem and the sustainability of the lives of local communities (Baskin, 2015; Erb & Widyawati, 2018; AMAN, 2025). In this context, the Catholic Church carries out its social mission by fighting for environmental sustainability and social justice and ensuring that every development project considers the welfare of society and the preservation of nature (Guha & Martinez-Alier, 1997; Johnston, 2013).

4.3 Forms of Resistance of the Catholic Church

Advocacy Through Moral and Religious Discourse

The Catholic Church in Flores acts as a religious institution and a social agent that actively influences public opinion regarding geothermal projects (Ngozo, 2025, personal interview). The Church uses moral and theological discourse to voice the importance of protecting God's creation, which includes the environment, which is an integral part of the universe (Mongabay, 2023; Arti, 2020). The Church emphasizes that unsustainable development, such as geothermal projects that have the potential to damage local ecosystems, is contrary to the basic principles of religion, which require humanity to protect and preserve the earth as a mandate from God in line with "ecological justice as a value of faith" (Ngozo, 2025, personal interview). This advocacy aligns with the encyclical "Laudato Si'" principles written by Pope Francis (AMAN, 2025). The Catholic Church advocates the understanding that preserving the environment is a moral obligation that impacts the current generation and future generations (Arti, 2020; Dhakidae, 2017; Ibrohim, 2019). From this

perspective, the rejection of geothermal projects is seen not only as a response to development policies but also as part of an effort to maintain the sustainability of God's creation and the balance of the universe. One of the activities carried out on May 28, 2025, In commemoration of Anti-Mining Day 2025, more than a hundred participants from various regions in Flores and Indonesia gathered at the Tabor Mataloko Tent Hall, Ngada, East Nusa Tenggara, to attend a seminar with the theme "Extractivism, State-Corporate Violence, and People's Resistance" (Ngozo, 2025, personal interview).

Social Action and Community Involvement

The role of the Catholic Church is not limited to moral discourse but also involves direct action in various forms of social action. The Church mobilizes its people, both clergy and congregations, to participate in social protests, awareness campaigns, and audiences with the government and related parties to voice concerns about the social and ecological impacts of geothermal projects (Arti, 2020; Albab, 2023; Floresa, 2025; Antonius, 2025, personal interview). This action reflects the Church's understanding that the desired social change will not be achieved only through moral statements but also through direct involvement in efforts to fight for social and ecological justice (Antonius, 2025, personal interview). The Church encourages its people to be part of social movements that demand the protection of the rights of local communities and the sustainability of their environment (Mongabay, 2023; Arti, 2020; Floresa, 2025). Thus, the Catholic Church acts not only as a religious institution but also as a leader in a social movement that seeks to prevent environmental damage caused by unsustainable development projects (Jemadin, 2024; Arti, 2020; Erb, 2010; Cleary, 2004).

One of the meetings was initiated by the Church and the community by meeting with government officials and representatives from PLN to convey aspirations and reasons for rejecting the geothermal project. This meeting was held openly and peacefully as a form of dialogue that shows the commitment of residents and the Church to finding a fair solution and respecting community rights and environmental sustainability (Ngozo, 2025, personal interview). Through this approach, they hope that the voices of affected communities can be truly heard and considered in decision-making.

Collaboration with Local Networks

In facing the challenges of the geothermal project, the Catholic Church has built strong collaborations with various local community groups, including environmental organizations and indigenous groups. This collaboration aims to strengthen resistance to the geothermal project and to raise public awareness of the environmental impacts of the activity. The Church works with these groups to urge governments and related companies to consider broader social and ecological impacts and to promote more sustainable and locally friendly solutions (Jemadin, 2024; Antonius, 2025, personal interview). For example, the Church and the community organize educational activities based on scientific data and direct experiences of affected residents to make the community understand the project's impacts. Strong advocacy efforts are also carried out by the Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Commission (Ngozo, 2025, personal interview).

Through this network, the Church and indigenous communities jointly oppose projects that could damage their customary lands and threaten the sustainability of local ecosystems (Erb & Widyawati, 2018; KSI, 2015). This kind of collaboration shows that resistance to geothermal projects is not a struggle carried out by the Church or indigenous community groups separately but rather a collective effort involving various social actors to achieve the same goal, namely protecting community rights and environmental sustainability (Kriswibowo, 2024; Arti, 2020; Jemadin, 2024). Resistance to geothermal projects in Flores reflects the important role played by religious institutions in shaping society's moral views and encouraging social action aimed at protecting community rights and environmental sustainability.

4.4 The Impact of Catholic Church Resistance on Policies and Society in Flores

The Catholic Church's resistance in Flores to geothermal projects and other mining activities has significantly impacted government policies, the companies involved, and the socio-economic life of local communities. The Church has played a significant role in influencing policies related to these projects. The Church advocates protecting God's creation and preserving the environment as humanity's moral responsibility. The rejection of the geothermal project in Flores has also impacted government policy, which has finally reviewed the development plan, encouraged policy revisions, and paid attention to the social and ecological impacts caused (Arti, 2020; Erb, 2003; Erb, 2010). In this case, the Church is an institution that voices criticism of government policies and a driver of change that invites the community to encourage more sustainable development policies (TARM, 2003; Erb & Widyawati, 2018).

On the other hand, the people of Flores feel the social impact of rejecting the geothermal project, especially those who depend on traditional natural resources. Many groups, especially those who work as farmers and fishermen, feel threatened by mining activities that damage the environment and disrupt their livelihoods. By mobilizing the congregation and indigenous peoples, the Church urges the government and companies to consider the rights of local communities and maintain the sustainability of their livelihoods (Arti, 2020; AMAN, 2025; Antonius, 2025, personal interview). The involvement of the Church in this social action provides a platform for vulnerable communities to fight for their rights to their customary lands and natural resources that have long been part of their traditions. The Church plays a vital role in ensuring that affected groups have a voice in planning and decision-making that concerns their lives (Jemadin, 2024; Erb, 2010).

In addition, the resistance of the Catholic Church also contributed to increasing awareness of environmental sustainability in Flores. Environmental sustainability is an important issue raised by the Church in its resistance to mining projects, which often ignore the balance of the ecosystem for short-term economic gain. Through collaboration with indigenous groups and environmental organizations, the Church encourages communities to actively preserve the environment and defend their rights to customary land. Thus, this resistance does not only focus on changing government and company policies but also on changing public awareness to pay attention to environmental sustainability in the development process (Baskin, 2015; Beckford & Demerath, 2007).

5. Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Environmentalism of the Poor and the Resistance of the Catholic Church

Joan Martínez-Alier (2002) states in his theory that marginalized communities, which depend directly on natural resources for survival, are often at the forefront of resistance against environmental damage caused by large-scale development projects. This is particularly relevant to the context of the Catholic Church's resistance in Flores, especially against geothermal projects that could potentially harm local ecosystems. Communities in Flores, which mainly depend on agriculture, fisheries, and local biodiversity, are vulnerable to environmental changes caused by geothermal exploitation. The Catholic Church in Flores realizes that this geothermal project threatens their lives in the short term and long term (Arti, 2020; Jemadin, 2024). According to the *Environmentalism of the poor* lens, the Church's resistance to this project is about preserving nature and protecting the fundamental rights of communities threatened by the socio-ecological injustices caused by unsustainable development.

With its moral and spiritual influence, the Church also fights for social justice so that destructive development does not ignore the fundamental rights of local communities. The Catholic Church links this resistance to religious teachings that teach about the responsibility of humanity towards God's creation. In this context, the Church views resistance to the geothermal project as part of an effort to protect and preserve God's creation, which includes the environment and natural resources that are part of the lives of indigenous people in Flores.

5.2 Ecological Resistance and the Theology of Sustainability

Catholic theology on creation and preservation of nature also plays an important role in this resistance. Church teachings emphasize that humans act as managers of nature and guardians of the balance of nature, which is a mandate from God. The Catholic Church teaches that development that does not pay attention to environmental sustainability is contrary to the basic principles of religion, which require humans to preserve the earth (Jemadin, 2024; Erb, 2003). In this case, resistance to geothermal projects is not only seen as a response to destructive development policies but as an effort by the Church to uphold moral principles in preserving God's creation. The Catholic Church, influenced by liberation theology, has expanded its mission to involve itself in socio-ecological issues. Using the perspective of sustainability theology, the Church emphasizes that development that sacrifices the environment for short-term gain will damage the future of local communities and future generations (Erb, 2003; Erb, 2010; Arti, 2020). Therefore, the Church advocates for development that is not only economically profitable but also protects and preserves nature for the welfare of the wider community. The Church's resistance to the geothermal project in Flores, thus, focuses on the interconnectedness of social-environmental justice and environmental sustainability.

6. Conclusion

This study shows that the Catholic Church's resistance to the geothermal project in Flores is more than just a rejection of development policies. The Catholic Church plays an important role in fighting for environmental sustainability and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples through moral and theological teachings. The rejection of this project aims to protect the Flores ecosystem, which is highly dependent on natural resources, while maintaining the socio-economic life of the community, which is threatened by the destructive exploitation of natural resources. The Catholic Church plays a significant role in social movements focusing on environmental sustainability and social justice. Through its moral influence, the Church has educated the community and influenced development policies to pay more attention to social and ecological sustainability. In the future, development policies, especially those related to the geothermal project in Flores, should be more inclusive by involving local communities in every stage of planning and decision-making. This will ensure the development is economically profitable, environmentally friendly, and supports community welfare.

Beyond the Flores case, this study highlights that the orientation of religious institutions in environmental justice often combines moral advocacy, community empowerment, and ecological spirituality. Religious institutions, such as the Catholic Church, interpret environmental care as a spiritual and ethical responsibility grounded in their faith traditions. This orientation enables them to act as mediators between local communities and state or corporate powers, translating theological values into concrete social and ecological actions. By promoting a vision of development rooted in care for creation and human dignity, religious institutions can shape a more holistic approach to environmental justice that integrates ecological protection, cultural respect, and social inclusion.

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Informants

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- Antonius, interviewed in person on June 21, 2025.
- Anonim, interviewed in person on June 22, 2025.