

FAITH GROWING IN ACTION: IMPLICATIONS OF JOHN LOCKE'S TABULA RASA CONCEPT AND ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION FOR HKBP SUNDAY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract: This study explores applying John Locke's concept of tabula rasa and Susan Power Bratton's Eco-Dimensionality theory within the context of Sunday school education at the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) Church. It investigates how these theories influence children's teaching and understanding of ecological responsibilities. The research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, focusing on how the HKBP Church integrates ecological teachings into its Sunday school curriculum and activities. The findings suggest that while the HKBP Church acknowledges environmental issues in its doctrines, implementing these principles is still nascent. The study highlights the importance of adapting educational content to foster ecological awareness, utilizing the tabula rasa concept to develop curricula that shape children's environmental attitudes and behaviors. It also underscores the role of interactive learning methods and evaluations to enhance children's understanding and actions towards environmental sustainability. By incorporating these educational strategies into the HKBP Sunday School Handbook, the church aims to cultivate a holistic environmental consciousness among its young members, aligned with biblical stewardship and ecological responsibility teachings.

Keywords: Tabula Rasa, Sunday School, Ecological Education

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi penerapan konsep tabula rasa dari John Locke dan teori Eco-Dimensionality dari Susan Power Bratton dalam konteks pendidikan sekolah minggu di Gereja Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP). Penelitian ini menyelidiki bagaimana teori-teori ini mempengaruhi pengajaran dan pemahaman anak-anak tentang tanggung jawab ekologis. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, dengan fokus pada bagaimana Gereja HKBP mengintegrasikan ajaran ekologi ke dalam kurikulum dan kegiatan sekolah minggu. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun Gereja HKBP mengakui isu-isu lingkungan dalam doktrinnya, penerapan prinsip-prinsip ini masih baru. Studi ini menyoroti pentingnya mengadaptasi konten pendidikan untuk menumbuhkan kesadaran ekologis, memanfaatkan konsep tabula rasa untuk mengembangkan kurikulum yang membentuk sikap dan perilaku lingkungan anak-anak. Studi ini juga menggarisbawahi peran metode pembelajaran interaktif dan evaluasi untuk meningkatkan pemahaman dan tindakan anak-anak terhadap kelestarian lingkungan. Dengan memasukkan strategi pendidikan ini ke dalam Buku Panduan Sekolah Minggu HKBP, gereja bertujuan untuk menumbuhkan kesadaran lingkungan yang holistik di antara para anggotanya yang masih muda, selaras dengan penatalayanan Alkitab dan ajaran tanggung jawab ekologis.

Kata kunci: Tabula Rasa, Sekolah Minggu, Pendidikan Ekologi



1. Introduction

The concepts of *tabula rasa* and *original sin* have different philosophical and theological roots. Nonetheless, they both influence the view of human beings and education around them. *Tabula rasa* is a concept derived from the thoughts of 17th-century English philosopher John Locke. According to him, the human mind at birth is like a 'blank paper' that has not been written on. This means that a child is born with no innate knowledge or character and the absence of environmental influences and experiences that shape them.¹ Before children receive various formal educations, parents or the people closest to them must fill in the 'blank paper'. The teaching and values provided become the child's knowledge for the future.²

Meanwhile, the concept of *original sin* as one of the doctrines of Christianity has a strong foundation and roots in the Bible, especially the Book of Genesis. The doctrine of *original sin* has its roots in the teachings of Augustine of Hippo, who developed a comprehensive theory of *original sin*.³ This is related to the first sin perpetrated by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. As a result, all human beings are born sinful and have a natural inclination to sin.⁴ *Original sin* reflects man's flawed moral state and the fundamental need for divine grace to restore a right relationship with God.⁵

Sunday school children are taught about sin, redemption, and how Jesus Christ, the Savior, redeems mankind from sin. They understand that *original sin* affects the human condition, but through faith in Jesus, they can understand that they have been redeemed and freed from sin.⁶ Sunday school is important in developing children's spiritual growth. Children are taught about prayer, Christian values, and Bible stories that can shape their character.⁷

¹ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* (London: The Baffet, 1690).

² Robert Duschinsky, "Tabula Rasa and Human Nature," *Philosophy* 87, no. 4 (2012): 509–29, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819112000393>.

³ Ian A. McFarland, "In Adam's Fall: A Meditation on the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin," in *In Adam's Fall: A Meditation on the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin*, 2010, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444327656>.

⁴ Daniel W. Houck, *Original Sin and the Challenge of Evolution, Aquinas, Original Sin, and the Challenge of Evolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108642927.007>.

⁵ Aaron Henderson, "Falsely Identifying Original Sin and Pure Nature: Christological Implications," *New Blackfriars* 102, no. 1100 (2021): 472–85, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12590>.

⁶ Tony Andrean and David Ming, "The Study Of Theological Sin And The Meaning Of Transformation Based On Romans 12:1-2," *Journal KERUGMA* 3, no. 1 (2020): 60–76, <https://doi.org/10.33856/kerugma.v3i1.158>.

⁷ Elaine Champagne, *Little Theologians: Children, Culture and the Making of Theological Meaning, International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, vol. 27 (McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/1364436x.2022.2047431>.

Thus, in the implementation of teachings for Sunday school children, through combining the concept of *tabula rasa* (the formation of knowledge through experience) with an understanding of original sin and redemption through faith, then all of this can be the basis of spiritual education that has practical implications for ecological education that fosters awareness for Sunday school children about the importance of the environment. This awareness is based on God's words written in Isaiah 24: 4-5 about human actions that damage the environment. Through Isaiah 43: 18-19, humans are reminded to change because God promises to restore everything to newness, including the restoration of the environment. Therefore, children are taught that although original sin has damaged man's relationship with God and nature, through Jesus' atonement and behavioral changes, they can contribute to the restoration of the environment. Children learn that through authentic experiences and actions, they can participate in the restoration of the earth, which is in line with God's promise to make all things new.

2. Method

This research employs a descriptive qualitative method to explore John Locke's concept of *tabula rasa* in the context of Sunday school teaching at the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) Church, Indonesia's third-largest religious organization. The study aims to deepen understanding of the cultural and social contexts of ecological teaching within HKBP, highlighting the contextual differences that influence practice. Utilizing Susan Power Bratton's Eco-Dimensionality theory, the research examines the development of ecological teachings to align them with HKBP Church's context. A key outcome is the integration of ecological principles into the HKBP Sunday School Handbook, linking faith with environmental responsibility and fostering comprehensive environmental awareness among the children in the church community.

3. Results and Discussion

Overview of the *Tabula Rasa* Concept

The most fundamental question is to what extent is the concept of *tabula rasa* relevant today? Although Locke's thinking was highly influential during his time, subsequent researchers have critiqued his concept of *tabula rasa* from various angles, shedding light on its complexities and implications. Rekret approached the concept from a posthumanist perspective, proposing that *tabula rasa*, with its implications of innate innocence, has political implications for equalizing human rights. He suggested that if everyone starts as a blank slate, it theoretically supports the idea of equal potential and rights for all individuals. However, Rekret also noted the difficulty in realizing this

equality practically, given societal and structural inequalities.⁸ In other words, achieving genuine equality is a significant challenge. Social and structural inequalities-such as economic disparities, discrimination, and unequal access to education and resources-create significant barriers. These barriers prevent the realization of the equality implied by the concept of *tabula rasa* in real life. So, while *tabula rasa* promotes equality, the reality of achieving it is complicated by existing social and structural problems.

Nicholas G.L. Petryszak argued that Locke's formulation of *tabula rasa* was a response to the tension between divine determination and individual freedom. According to Petryszak, Locke did not completely deny the existence of innate biological aspects, such as genes, which influence a person's traits, character, and behavior based on inherited characteristics from their ancestors. This suggests that while Locke emphasized experience and learning, he acknowledged the role of biology to some extent.⁹ Matthew Eddy provided historical context by illustrating how the metaphor of the mind as blank paper was popularized during the Enlightenment era. He explained that this metaphor was reinforced through the material and visual conditions of schoolchildren's notebooks at the time, which served as tangible representations of Locke's ideas.¹⁰

Collectively, these critiques highlight the multifaceted nature of Locke's concept of *tabula rasa*. They reveal that while Locke's ideas emphasized the importance of experience and environmental influence on knowledge and behavior, they also intersect with biological, political, and historical dimensions. If asked, how relevant is the concept of *tabula rasa* today? I argue that biological factors, such as genetics, cannot be ignored in understanding how a person's traits and behaviors are formed. Experience, as the main factor of character formation, cannot be ignored either. Through experience, humans can remember and learn from their surroundings, and experience also plays an important role in developing human character. So, that 'blank paper' should be filled with good experiences.

Potential and Challenges of the *Tabula Rasa* Concept

Considering the previous discussion, it can be said that *tabula rasa* still has the potential to be applied today. This concept has significant implications for children's education. Androne and Raniszewska-Wyrwa support this concept, emphasizing the role of

⁸ Paul Rekret, "The Posthumanist *Tabula Rasa*," *Research in Education* 101, no. 1 (2018): 25–29, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034523718792162>.

⁹ Nicholas George Ladislaus Petryszak, "Tabula Rasa--Its Origins and Implications.," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 17 1 (1981): 15–27, <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:38633909>.

¹⁰ Matthew Daniel Eddy, "The Nature of Notebooks: How Enlightenment Schoolchildren Transformed the *Tabula Rasa*," *Journal of British Studies* 57, no. 2 (2018): 275–307, <https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2017.239>.

education in shaping children's moral development and social integration. They argue that education should be tailored to each child's abilities and focus on instilling moral values and self-discipline.¹¹ Enver Uysal discusses the importance of parents' role in children's moral education and the impact of various environmental factors on their development.¹²

However, the concept of tabula rasa in children's education is challenged by some researchers. Gallagher and Driver argue that children bring pre-existing ideas and beliefs to their learning rather than being blank slates.¹³ Duschinsky further questioned the validity of the tabula rasa concept, stating that it has been used to signify an initial state of formlessness.¹⁴ Eddy adds a historical perspective, showing how the tabula rasa metaphor was partially successful due to the material and visual conditions of the students' manuscript culture.¹⁵ These studies collectively suggest that children's education is not a process that starts from zero but rather a process. Nonetheless, the practical implications of Locke's concept for child education remain relevant.

While the concept of Tabula Rasa has sparked much debate, its relevance in child education is recognized. It necessitates adaptation and integration with the understanding that education is not a blank slate but rather an evolving process. This conclusion reflects a broader interpretation of the Tabula Rasa idea, acknowledging the complexities and dynamics of educating children. It also asserts that the practical applications of Locke's ideas are valuable in crafting effective educational strategies.

Understanding of Ecology in the Context of the HKBP Church

The HKBP Church has long recognized the term ecology. This is evident from one of the ecclesiastical documents, *Konfessi HKBP 1951 & 1996*. In one of the *Konfessi HKBP 1996* articles, article 5 discusses Culture and Environment. It is written,

We believe and testify that God created man with a place to live and work in this world. It is He who owns it all, who gives life to all that He has created. The places where man works are the land, the sea, and the sky. God gave man the power to

¹¹ Agnieszka Raniszewska-Wyrwa, "Johna Locke'a Koncepcja Wychowania Moralnego," *Bulletyn Historii Wychowania*, no. 31 (2019): 161–75, <https://doi.org/10.14746/bhw.2014.31.9>; Mihai Androne, "Notes on John Locke's Views on Education," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 137 (2014): 74–79, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.05.255>.

¹² Enver Uysal, "Kinalizade's Views on the Moral Education of Children," *Journal of Moral Education* 36, no. 3 (2007): 333–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240701552844>.

¹³ Kathleen Gallagher, "Tabula Rasa: Starting Afresh with Classroom Drama," in *Insights in Applied Theatre: The Early Days and Onwards*, 2022, 176–86, https://doi.org/10.1386/9781789385243_12; Rosalind Driver, "Pupils' Alternative Frameworks in Science," in *European Journal of Science Education*, vol. 3, 1981, 93–101, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0140528810030109>.

¹⁴ Duschinsky, "Tabula Rasa and Human Nature."

¹⁵ Eddy, "The Nature of Notebooks: How Enlightenment Schoolchildren Transformed the Tabula Rasa."

care for this world with responsibility. He also gave man languages, musical instruments, arts, and knowledge as man's tools and rules to praise God and as means to nurture and beautify friendships between people so that God's kingdom would grow through culture. However, culture that is mixed with heresy and contradicts God's Word must be rejected. The work of Jesus Christ is to liberate mankind, the entire creation and the world. We hereby testify to man's responsibility to preserve all of God's creation so that people can work, be healthy, and prosper. We oppose any activity that damages the environment, such as burning and cutting down trees in forests or deserts. We oppose any business that pollutes water and air, as well as toxic waste water from factories, due to neglect of waste disposal and air pollution, thereby damaging drinking water and human breathing (environmental pollution).¹⁶

In other words, over the past 28 years (1996-2024), the HKBP Church has been actively addressing environmental concerns, including messages about the importance of environmental sustainability in one of its official documents. Additionally, the HKBP Church acknowledges the term Synod Godang HKBP, which refers to the highest deliberative body within the church. The Synod Godang meets annually to discuss and establish HKBP policies. During the 2022 Synod Godang, environmental issues were one of the topics addressed.

...Synod Godang also deliberated on public issues such as environmental degradation, customary land issues, sexual harassment and violence. In line with the HKBP Confession, HKBP people and ministries must participate in addressing environmental degradation, sexual harassment and violence....¹⁷

If we examine further, the HKBP Church already has a solid doctrinal foundation regarding ecology. However, the church is generally still in the early stages of implementing these principles. Several key features characterize an ecological church: a) *Creation Care*: This aspect involves a commitment to being responsible stewards of the earth, recognizing the importance of caring for God's creation. It encourages both awareness and action to protect the environment.¹⁸ b) *Sustainable Practices*: An ecological church incorporates sustainable practices into its operations. This includes conserving energy, minimizing waste, and using eco-friendly materials in construction and maintenance.¹⁹ c) *Education and Advocacy*: An ecological church educates its

¹⁶ HKBP, "Panindangion Haporseaon 1951 & 1996" (Pematangsiantar: Percetakan HKBP, 2010).

¹⁷ Robinson Butarbutar, "Sinode Godang HKBP Ke-65 Tahun 2022" (Seminarium, Sipoholon, 2022), <https://online.fliphtml5.com/qxled/kply/#p=2>.

¹⁸ Arnold Donozo, Julius Tutor, and Kim Guia, "Church's Response to the Earth's Healing in the Face of Ecological Crisis," *Bedan Research Journal* 4, no. 1 (2019): 191-214, <https://doi.org/10.58870/berj.v4i1.10>; Dominic Wilkins, "Pope Francis, Care for Creation, and Catholic Environmental Imagery," *Environmental History* 25, no. 2 (April 1, 2020): 361-71, <https://doi.org/10.1093/envhis/emz085>.

¹⁹ David N. Field, "I Believe in the Holy Earthy Church: Toward an Ecological Reinterpretation of the Holiness of the Church," *Scriptura* 111, no. 0 (2013): 333, <https://doi.org/10.7833/111-0-20>; Jens Koehrsen and Fabian Huber, "A Field Perspective on Sustainability Transitions: The Case of Religious

members about environmental issues and encourages them to take meaningful action. This might include organizing workshops, seminars, and initiatives to raise awareness and advocate for environmental justice.²⁰ d) *Land Use and Conservation*: An ecological church might feature green spaces or community gardens. These areas provide opportunities for the congregation to connect with nature and promote biodiversity, enhancing the church's commitment to ecological stewardship.²¹ e) *Worship and Liturgy*: In an ecological church, themes of creation care and environmental justice are woven into worship and liturgical practices. This can involve prayers, hymns, and sermons that emphasize the importance of environmental stewardship, encouraging the congregation to reflect on their role in caring for the Earth.²² f) *Collaboration*: Ecological churches often partner with other organizations and communities dedicated to environmental sustainability. By collaborating, they can amplify their efforts and more effectively address ecological challenges.²³

The following highlights HKBP's efforts in environmental conservation in recent years, indicating its progress as an ecological church. Bastian Simangunsong et al., in their article, noted HKBP's leadership urging central and local governments, the private sector, and communities to take immediate action to protect the forests in the Lake Toba region. They also suggested that the Church around Lake Toba should promote eco-literacy, eco-prophetic teachings, and eco-social principles to its community, particularly its congregation.²⁴ Ranto P. Hamonangan and Martin Gultom (2021) highlighted several activities and actions carried out by the HKBP church related to ecology, such as the development of livestock waste into alternative energy (biogas) and planting tree

Organizations," *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions* 40, no. April (2021): 408–20, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2021.09.005>.

²⁰ Stefan Altmeyer, "Religious Education for Ecological Sustainability: An Initial Reality Check Using the Example of Everyday Decision-Making," *Journal of Religious Education* 69, no. 1 (2021): 57–74, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40839-020-00131-5>.

²¹ Joanne M. Moyer and A. John Sinclair, "Faith-Based Environmental Engagement in Canada: An Environmental Governance Perspective," *Society and Natural Resources* 35, no. 8 (August 3, 2022): 836–55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920.2022.2079786>.

²² Yusak Budi Setyawan, "The Church as an Ecological Community: Practising Eco-Ecclesiology in the Ecological Crisis of Indonesia," *Ecclesiology* 17, no. 1 (2021): 91–107, <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455316-bja10009>.

²³ Fr. Benigno P. Beltran, "Earth Stewardship, Economic Justice, and World Mission: The Teachings of Laudato Si'," *Missiology: An International Review* 48, no. 1 (January 1, 2020): 39–56, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091829619897432>; Mehdi Khedmati, Mohammed Aminu Sualihu, and Alfred Yawson, "Does Religiosity Matter for Corporate Labor Investment Decisions?," *Journal of Contemporary Accounting and Economics* 17, no. 2 (2021): 100264, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcae.2021.100264>.

²⁴ Bestian Simangunsong et al., "Article History Tanggung Jawab Gereja Membangun Gerakan Eco-Literacy Di Kaldera Toba UNESCO Global Geopark Institut Agama Kristen Negeri (IAKN) Tarutung" 5, no. 2 (2021): 262–75, <https://medan.tribunnews.com/2019/06/24/pt-tpl-sosialisasi-tentang-luas-lahan-konsesi-hutan-dan-klaim-tanah-adat>.

seedlings in various regions.²⁵ Musdodi Manalu criticizes Padang worship which is not considered as an official worship in HKBP.²⁶ Several newspaper articles recorded various activities of the HKBP Church in environmental conservation such as the distribution of fruit seedlings to various regions²⁷, the sowing of fish seedlings in Lake Toba²⁸ and the simultaneous celebration of HKBP Ecology Week on Sunday, 24 September 2023, where HKBP planted hundreds of seedlings in several regions.²⁹ Apart from the above data, until March 2024, there is no data on the actions, efforts, and measures taken by HKBP in general to pursue environmental sustainability.

Some religious organizations are recognized as environmental conservationists. Nahdlatul Ulama demonstrates its commitment to environmental conservation through various initiatives, including regular tree planting and forest conservation campaigns, waste management and waste banks to reduce landfill waste, anti-burning campaigns, and the use of renewable energy through the Tabung Wakaf Indonesia (TWI) institution, among other efforts.³⁰ Muhammadiyah, as the second largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, also plays an active role in environmental conservation efforts, such as routinely holding environmental campaigns through education to the public, planting trees through Muhammadiyah charities such as schools and universities, preserving forests and open spaces, advocating for environmental protection, waste recycling and anti-plastic waste, clean and renewable energy through the Environmental Assembly (MLH), and so on.³¹

While Nahdlatul Ulama and HKBP may have larger congregations, organizations

²⁵ Ranto Praja Hamongan and Martin Gultom, "Batak Christian Protestant Church's View Concerning Ecology," *Tumou Tou* 8, no. 1 (2021): 46–52, <https://doi.org/10.51667/tt.v8i1.473>.

²⁶ Musdodi Frans Jaswin Manalu, "Grounding Church Initiative Church Initiative to Develop Environmental Awareness," *Journal of Asian Orientation in Theology* 05, no. 02 (2023): 201–22, <https://doi.org/2656-7997>.

²⁷ PristiwaNews, "Masyarakat HKBP Kota Jakarta Salurkan Bibit Pohon Buah Untuk Pelestarian Lingkungan Di Siborongborong," Pristiwa News, 2023, <https://pristiwa.com/masyarakat-hkbp-kota-jakarta-salurkan-bibit-pohon-buah-untuk-pelestarian-lingkungan-di-siborongborong/>.

²⁸ Jones, "Giatkan Pastoral Eko Pastoral Care, HKBP Tabur Benih Ikan Di Danau Toba," Gatra.com2, 2019, <https://www.gatra.com/news-422867-teknologi-giatkan-program-eko-pastoral-care-hkbp-tabur-benih-ikan-di-danau-toba.html>; KabupatenSamosir, "PEMERINTAH KABUPATEN SAMOSIR BEKERJASAMA DENGAN GEREJA HKBP MELAKUKAN PENABURAN BENIH IKAN DI TUKTUK SIADONG," Kabupaten Samosir Satahi-Saoloan, 2019, <https://samosirkab.go.id/2019/06/20/pemerintah-kabupaten-samosir-bekerjasama-dengan-gereja-hkbp-melakukan-penaburan-benih-ikan-di-tuktuk-siadong/>.

²⁹ BiroInformasiHKBP, "Perayaan Minggu Ekologi, HKBP Memperingati Masa Penciptaan Allah," [hkbp.or.id](https://www.hkbp.or.id/article/perayaan-minggu-ekologi-hkbp-memperingati-masa-penciptaan-allah), 2023, <https://www.hkbp.or.id/article/perayaan-minggu-ekologi-hkbp-memperingati-masa-penciptaan-allah>.

³⁰ Mar'atus Sholihah, "Efektivitas Nazhir Dalam Manajemen Pengelolaan Wakaf Menurut Undang-Undang Nomor 41 Tahun 2004 Tentang Wakaf (Studi Kasus Pada Lembaga Wakaf Dan Pertanahan Nahdlatul Ulama (LWPNU) Kabupaten Cirebon)" (S1 Hukum Ekonomi Syariah IAIN SNJ, 2023).

³¹ Musdodi Frans Jaswin Manalu, "TRANSFORMING DA ' WAH INTO INTERRELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENT : Examining the Eco-Bhinneka Muhammadiyah Initiative," *Jurnal Panangkaran* 7, no. 1 (2023).

like Walubi, the Franciscan Order of Minor Brothers in Indonesia, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) also actively engage in environmental conservation. Walubi, a Buddhist organization, undertakes initiatives such as wildlife conservation, reforestation in temple areas, environmental campaigns through sangha forums, and support for civil society environmental actions.³² The Franciscan Order of Friars Minor in Indonesia has established JPIC Indonesia, which focuses on advocacy and activism in environmental issues, organic farming, and renewable energy. In eastern Indonesia, JPIC supports sustainable environmental development and strengthens local communities vulnerable to environmental damage or potential threats from natural resource exploitation and geothermal mining activities.³³ The SDA Church promotes sustainable environmental management at the individual and community levels. Individually, SDAs advocate for a holistic lifestyle emphasizing the unity and interconnectedness of the body and soul. They also encourage healthy living practices and vegetarian diets as part of their religious beliefs. At the community level, SDAs support initiatives like the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, which focuses on sustainable development and disaster relief.³⁴

In a discussion on ecology during the HKBP Season of Creation launch on Sunday, 24 September 2023, a speaker remarked:

*"We consistently include tree planting in our ceremonies, complete with ceremonies, videos, and so forth. However, after the event, the care for the trees seems to fade, and I can point to numerous HKBP churches that have conducted tree planting ceremonies but now have no knowledge of the current status of those trees."*³⁵

The provisional conclusion is that the HKBP church does express concern for environmental issues. However, its efforts in environmental sustainability have not yet fully embodied the identity of an ecological church. This suggests that the understanding of ecology within the HKBP, from the central level to local congregations, is still

³² Santika Sari, "UPAYA TOKOH AGAMA BUDDHA UNTUK MENINGKATAN KEAKTIFAN UMAT MELALUI KEGIATAN ANJANGSANA (Studi Kasus Pada Umat Buddha Di Sidomulyo)," *PATISAMBHIDA: Jurnal Pemikiran Buddha Dan Filsafat Agama* 2, no. 1 (2021): 11–21.

³³ Jiska Gojowczyk, "From Global Goal to Local Practice: Potential Lines of Tension in Religious Environmentalism in Catholic Religious Orders," in *Religious Environmental Activism: Emerging Conflicts and Tensions in Earth Stewardship* (Routledge, 2022), 29–48, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003017967-3>.

³⁴ M Rizal Abdi and Ferry Goodman Pardamean, "Christianity and Ecology a Critical Study on the Contribution of Sda Theology Toward Ecology," *Jurnal Kawistara* 8, no. 3 (2019): 275, <https://doi.org/10.22146/kawistara.29789>; Erik C. Carter, "The Practice and Experience of the Sabbath among Seventh-Day Adventist Pastors," *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 1 (2013): 13–26, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-012-0482-8>; Floyd E Hayes and William K Hayes, "Seventh-Day Adventist Faith and Environmental Stewardship," *Biology: A Seventh-Day Adventist Approach for Students and Teachers*, 2014, 141–60.

³⁵ (HKBPYoutube, 2023, "Perayaan Masa Penciptaan Ini Untuk Menjaga Perdamaian Keutuhan Ciptaan | Podcast HKBP" minutes 28-29)

inadequate and not sufficiently developed to be recognized as an ecological church.

Eco-Dimensionality and Tabula Rasa: Ecological Education for Sunday School Children

Susan Power Bratton introduces Eco-Dimensionality, which explores how religious practices influence perceptions of nature. This concept emphasizes incrementalism and sustainability, utilizing existing social forces within the Christian ethos to ease the adoption of new ideas. It provides insights into how the HKBP Church integrates its teachings with environmental sustainability. This theory underscores the importance of engaging congregation members in ecological education. In HKBP's organizational structure categorizes groups by age, ecological education should extend beyond adults, who generally have limited ecological understanding, to include Sunday School children.

Specifically, the relationship between the concept of tabula rasa and eco-dimensionality can be seen from several aspects, such as educational aspects, learning methods, and evaluation.

Educational aspect. The concept of tabula rasa can form the basis for developing an ecologically responsible Sunday school curriculum. The Sunday school curriculum serves as a guide in teaching values and knowledge to children. By including topics on the environment, nature conservation, and ecological responsibility, the curriculum can help children understand the importance of these issues. Leonard C. Epafras highlights that religious teachings can influence behaviors related to environmental issues, such as resource use and pollution control. For instance, if religious teachings frame the environment as a gift from God, they may encourage responsible behavior towards the environment. Conversely, if the environment is viewed merely as a resource to exploit, it could lead to further environmental degradation.³⁶ Therefore, the HKBP Church can use educational aspects to guide Sunday school children in understanding the importance of ecological issues. To leverage this potential, the HKBP Church should incorporate ecological teachings into the HKBP Sunday School Handbook, which guides teachers in their weekly sessions. This handbook is published by the HKBP Pusat twice a year, once in January-June and again in July-December. Thus, the concept of tabula rasa provides an essential foundation for developing education in Sunday school, allowing the curriculum to shape children's understanding and behavior towards environmental issues effectively.

Aspects of learning methods. The concept of eco-dimensionality can be the basis for developing ecological learning methods for Sunday school children. Such learning

³⁶ Leonard Chrysostomos Epafras, "The World Is Utterly Unsafe: Gauging Religious Talk on Risk and Danger," in *The World Is Utterly Unsafe: Essays on Religion Online and Risk* (Yogyakarta, 2024).

methods can actively involve children in activities related to the environment, such as cleaning the environment, planting trees, or reducing the use of plastic. This approach is based on studies conducted by Yang Ning et al. showing that children's receptivity to education is influenced by factors such as the relevance of information to their experiences and the quality of the living environment.³⁷ In line with this, the creative activities carried out by children in Sunday School in their neighborhood are a significant first step in building their awareness, care, and love for the ecological world.

4. Conclusion

The HKBP Church does not directly recognize the concept of tabula rasa in its doctrine and teaching. However, in practice, this concept can be adopted to raise awareness that has implications for teaching Sunday school children about various matters, especially environmental issues. Regarding eco-dimensionality, tabula rasa can be the basis for developing ecological awareness in Sunday school children. By understanding that humans are born with an empty mind, children can be taught the importance of protecting the environment regardless of their background. From the tabula rasa side, the concept of eco-dimensionality can be a way to develop the potential of Sunday school children in ecology. Teaching children about the importance of protecting the environment can help them learn and develop to become individuals who care about the environment. In this way, it is hoped that HKBP Sunday School children will become the next generation of the Church told to environmental sustainability.

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