

From Individual Existence to Ecological Responsibility: Søren Kierkegaard’s Private Theology and Its Implementation in the Congregation of GMIBM Sion Tonom

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		Abstract
Received:	07 July 2025	<i>This article explores the relevance of Søren Kierkegaard’s concept of private theology in addressing the ecological crisis within the congregation of GMIBM Sion Tonom. Employing a qualitative-descriptive approach and theological reflection, the study finds that a personal, existential spirituality has the capacity to foster authentic and contextually grounded ecological engagement. Notions such as the leap of faith and the teleological suspension of the ethical demonstrate that personal faith can transcend prevailing social norms in pursuit of divine obedience. Amidst the structural limitations of the institutional Church, private theology emerges as a participatory and transformative spiritual foundation, enabling the development of grassroots ecotheological movements. A faith lived intimately becomes a source of moral courage for acting towards the integrity of creation.</i>
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INTRODUCTION

The global environmental crisis in contemporary times no longer merely presents itself as a technical issue concerning ecological degradation, but has evolved into a multidimensional challenge encompassing moral, spiritual, and theological dimensions. Climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and the depletion of natural resources can no longer be adequately addressed solely through scientific or technocratic approaches (Leo, 2025; Rahmayanti, 2022). In the local context, such realities are palpably experienced by the congregation of the Christian Evangelical Church in Bolaang Mongondow or “Gereja Masehi Injili di Bolaang Mongondow” (GMIBM) Sion Tonom, which faces severe ecological damage due to exploitative mining practices, uncontrolled land clearing, and a general lack of public awareness regarding the sustainability of creation.

The problem lies not merely within the environmental domain itself but also in the apparent failure of religious institutions—including local churches—to cultivate an ecological ethos rooted in the spirituality of faith. Many churches, both at the synodical and congregational levels, tend to approach environmental issues administratively or programmatically, thereby failing to engage the existential depth of the faith community. Faith formation, often dominated by

routine and formal activities, frequently lacks the capacity to awaken personal awareness of the congregation's responsibility towards creation as God's handiwork.

In this light, Søren Kierkegaard's reflections on private theology become especially pertinent. Kierkegaard asserts that authentic faith is grounded in a radical, existential relationship between the individual and God—a relationship that is direct, personal, and transcends institutional structures (Tjaya, 2022). Private theology does not reject the faith community per se, but resists the standardisation of belief according to external norms. Instead, it promotes subjective courage to act within the bounds of responsible spiritual freedom, including in responding to current social and ecological crises.

This study departs from the assumption that Kierkegaard's private theology offers a viable foundation for fostering personal ecological consciousness with implications for communal life. Using a case study of the GMIBM Sion Tonom congregation, this research focuses on the central question: How can Søren Kierkegaard's concept of private theology be implemented in shaping personal and contextual ecological responsibility within the local church?

The aims of this study are threefold: (1) to elaborate systematically Kierkegaard's conception of private theology; (2) to analyse the ecological crisis currently facing the GMIBM Sion Tonom congregation; and (3) to propose a contextual model for implementing private theology in developing an ecological ethos grounded in personal spirituality.

Methodologically, this research employs a qualitative approach through a combination of literature review and fieldwork. The theoretical analysis centres on Kierkegaard's primary texts alongside contemporary interpretations of private theology, while limited field observations and interviews were conducted within the GMIBM Sion Tonom congregation to map the community's responses to environmental issues.

The findings indicate that when individuals within the congregation undergo ecological conversion arising from personal faith awareness, a deeper transformation of attitude toward the environment takes place. This awareness fosters tangible action, both at the personal and communal levels, that proves more enduring than top-down, instructive approaches.

Thus, the novelty of this research lies in its integration of Kierkegaard's existential dimension with a contextual ecological praxis. Private theology—often read within the confines of spiritual individualism—reveals itself to hold substantial potential as a foundational framework for a more authentic, personal, and transformative Christian ecological ethic.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach within a reflective theological framework to explore and comprehend the dimension of personal spirituality as it relates to ecological consciousness in the context of the GMIBM Sion Tonom congregation. This methodological choice is based on the nature of

the phenomenon under investigation, which is rooted in existential experience and individual faith reflection—realities that cannot be adequately explained through numerical or generalised analysis (Jimmy, 2024; Wibowo, 2024). The principal aim of this approach is to uncover how ecological awareness among congregants emerges from an intimate faith relationship with God, and how such experience gives rise to a contextual sense of ecological responsibility.

Methodologically, the study integrates a reflective theological approach as its interpretative foundation. Theology, in this context, is not treated as a rigid dogmatic system, but rather as a hermeneutical process continually shaped by the lived experiences of believers within their historical, social, and ecological contexts. Within this framework, the faith experiences of congregants are not only described but also theologically interpreted as concrete expressions of the relationship between humanity, God, and creation, illuminated by Søren Kierkegaard's thought.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth, open-ended interviews with a range of key informants, including congregants actively involved in environmental preservation, the local pastor, GMIBM synod leaders, village officials, and indigenous elders with knowledge of local wisdom. These interviews aimed to elicit insights into the spiritual motivations, ecological awareness, and personal expressions of faith that inspire ecological action. In addition, the researcher engaged in participatory observation within the GMIBM Sion Tonom congregation, directly witnessing the community's interaction with the natural environment, their religious practices, and the social dynamics that shape their ecological lifestyle. This observation was supported by field documentation, including activity notes, photographs, recorded interviews, and internal church archives, which served to substantiate and triangulate the findings obtained through interviews and direct observation.

For data analysis, the study adopts an interpretative framework grounded in Kierkegaardian existential philosophy, particularly two key concepts: the *leap of faith* and the *teleological suspension of the ethical*. The *leap of faith* is utilised to interpret the courage of congregants in undertaking ecological actions inspired by personal faith, even when such actions appear to contravene prevailing social norms or public policies. The concept of *teleological suspension of the ethical* serves to frame these prophetic actions as acts of obedience to divine calling that transcend formal ethical calculations.

Thus, this research methodology is not merely designed to document ecological phenomena from an empirical standpoint, but also to interpret the theological meaning of individual acts of faith. This dual emphasis facilitates a deeper understanding of how Kierkegaard's private theology may be contextually implemented to cultivate an ecological ethos within Christian congregational life in marginalised regions.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Søren Kierkegaard: Existence, Crisis, and Theological Contribution

Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813–1855) stands as one of the most influential figures in modern Western intellectual history, particularly in the development of existential philosophy and personal theological reflection. Born and raised in Copenhagen, Denmark, within a devout Lutheran household, Kierkegaard was shaped by a rich intellectual environment and a deeply complex spiritual upbringing. His father, Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard, a wealthy and highly educated businessman, exerted a profound religious influence on him through intense theological discussions from an early age. Yet, this relationship also became a source of inner conflict, as Kierkegaard wrestled with guilt, existential anxiety, and a longing for authentic faith untainted by institutional rigidity and religious formalism (Evans, 2006).

Kierkegaard pursued his studies at the University of Copenhagen, earning a Master's degree in philosophy with a dissertation entitled *The Concept of Irony* (1841). Nevertheless, his most renowned contributions extended beyond formal academia, encompassing a series of pseudonymous writings and theological explorations that fused literary expression, philosophical insight, and spiritual depth. Works such as *Fear and Trembling* (1843), *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849), and *Either/Or* (1843) reflect Kierkegaard's intensely personal and existential approach to the human relationship with God. He consistently rejected the prevailing Hegelian system of thought, asserting that the truth of faith cannot be attained through rational dialectic or philosophical speculation alone, but rather through the subjective courage to believe and to engage fully in one's relationship with the Divine (Westphal, 2014).

For Kierkegaard, the essence of Christianity lies not in institutional doctrine or social conformity, but in the radical personal decision to live in the presence of God. Faith, in his view, is not inherited nor culturally absorbed; it is an existential leap—*leap of faith*—a bold act of entrusting oneself entirely to God, absent empirical or rational guarantees. Within this framework, the individual is seen as *the single individual before God*, called to live authentically and responsibly in spiritual freedom (Tjaya, 2022).

Kierkegaard's critique of contemporary Christianity was both sharp and uncompromising. He perceived the Danish churches—especially the state-affiliated Lutheran Church—as having forfeited genuine spirituality by becoming entangled in societal comfort, ritualism, and hollow moral formalities. He referred to this phenomenon as “Christendom without Christ,” arguing that the church no longer challenged believers to risk their faith, but rather offered them a false sense of security (McGrath, 2011). As a result, many of his writings assume a prophetic tone, calling for the purification of faith and repentance from compromised religiosity.

Kierkegaard's theological contribution cannot be separated from the intensity of his spiritual life and existential crises. His decision to end his engagement to Regina Olsen, for instance, was not merely a biographical detail but a reflection of his radical spiritual commitment to pursue God's calling without worldly attachments. For Kierkegaard, personal experience is not a hindrance to theology

but rather the very locus in which God encounters the human subject in profound reality. In this respect, he became the principal pioneer of existential theology, influencing major figures such as Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, and Rudolf Bultmann (Watkin, 2011).

Thus, an understanding of Kierkegaard's life and thought forms a crucial foundation for examining the relevance of private theology in addressing the ecological crisis. His insistence on faith as a responsible existential decision opens up new theological space for reinterpreting Christian spirituality in contemporary contexts—including the urgent ecological crisis, which demands both authenticity of faith and moral courage.

From Existential Theology to Private Theology: A Reflective Inquiry into Kierkegaard's Thought

The thought of Søren Kierkegaard marks a critical turning point in the history of modern theology, particularly through his formative contribution to what later came to be recognised as existential theology. Emerging from his critique of religious institutionalisation and his rejection of the speculative philosophical system upheld by Hegel, Kierkegaard proposed that the essence of Christianity lies not in rational consensus or adherence to social norms, but in the individual's courage to enter into an authentic existential relationship with God. Within this framework, Kierkegaard's theology does not centre on established dogmatic systems, but rather on the inner dynamics of a person struggling before God—a relationship marked by tension, paradox, and radical personal decision (Westphal, 2014).

In seminal works such as *Fear and Trembling* and *The Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard portrays faith not as the product of rational calculation, but as a *leap of faith*—a subjective, paradoxical spiritual act that transcends conventional ethical categories. Faith, in his view, cannot be inherited or objectively acquired; it must be born within the individual through suffering, silence, and intense spiritual struggle. For Kierkegaard, to be a true Christian is to become *the single individual before God*—a person who stands alone in full responsibility, without reliance on religious systems or collective moral guidance (Evans, 2006).

Building upon this foundation, the authors propose the term *private theology* as a reflective construct rooted in Kierkegaard's thought, yet interpreted within a contemporary context. Private theology does not merely refer to the personal aspect of faith; it denotes a spirituality that arises from existential courage to live in authentic and responsible obedience to the divine call, even if such obedience entails departing from social expectations or normative ecclesial frameworks. It is personal not in opposition to community, but because it places primacy on inner transformation as the authentic basis for all moral and religious action.

Within the structure of private theology, faith is not institutionally collectivised, but rather originates in the silent space of the human heart seeking and responding to divine truth. This theological orientation focuses on the intimate spiritual bond between human and God, a bond that cannot be substituted by liturgical structure or doctrinal system. As Kierkegaard famously asserted,

“truth is subjectivity”—that is, true religious insight is only to be found in the vulnerable and risky subjective existence before God (Kierkegaard, 1985).

Far from being a form of spiritual individualism, private theology also carries profound ethical implications. Because it demands existential responsibility, it also compels the individual to act according to an inner voice refined through divine encounter. Herein lies the ethical and prophetic potency of private theology: it forms persons who do not passively conform to social consensus but who are willing to resist it when necessary, in fidelity to the will of God. In times of social and ecological crisis, private theology offers space for the emergence of spiritual courage to say “no” to life-destroying practices—even in the absence of communal support (Ambun, 2025).

Thus, Kierkegaard’s theology, traditionally identified as existential, may, through this reflective reading, be reinterpreted and further developed as *private theology*—a theological vision born not of system or consensus, but of the personal existence that stands faithfully and boldly before God. This theology returns faith to the realm of authentic interior experience, and at the same time elevates it as a transformative source for both personal and social life. In a world increasingly inclined to objectify faith and institutionalise spirituality, private theology reclaims the deepest meaning of being a religious person: to stand alone, yet not apart from the calling to manifest God’s love and justice amidst the world.

Private Theology as Existential Spirituality and the Basis of Congregational Ecological Consciousness

The concept of private theology, as developed by Søren Kierkegaard, emerged as a response to the religious formalism and institutional dominance that characterised nineteenth-century Christian life. Kierkegaard sharply criticised the tendency of faith to rely on systems, traditions, or collective ethics while losing the intimate, personal encounter with God. For Kierkegaard, the essence of Christianity does not reside in ecclesiastical participation or conformity to external norms, but in the authentic existential relationship between the individual and God—a relationship marked by spiritual freedom, moral responsibility, and the courage to believe amid existential tension (Kierkegaard, 1985).

In the context of the GMIBM Sion Tonom congregation, this paradigm finds striking practical resonance. Congregants inhabit a reality shaped by economic hardship, limited access to education, environmental degradation caused by mining activities, and a deteriorating local ecosystem. In such conditions, both ecclesiastical structures and public policy have thus far proven insufficient in offering effective support. Yet, it is precisely within this independence from formal systems that a spontaneous and deeply rooted ecological awareness has emerged—one that springs from personal faith.

Field findings reveal that some congregants demonstrate forms of ecological responsibility not dictated by church programmes or social initiatives, but by personal spiritual struggle. Actions such as preserving ancient trees, refusing employment offers from mining companies, regularly cleaning local riverbanks, and teaching children to cherish ancestral lands reflect a form of ecological piety

grounded in conscience and faith. These practices are not undertaken for public recognition or ecclesiastical compliance but arise from a spiritual calling to care for God's creation.

The spirituality embodied in such actions represents what may be termed *existential spirituality*: a religious posture that grows from concrete lived experience, rather than from formal doctrine or communal identity. Individuals engaged in this form of spirituality stand alone before God as *religious subjects*, personally accountable for what they believe to be right, even when in opposition to majority opinion or societal pressure. This is consonant with Kierkegaard's notion of "*the single individual before God*", which emphasises the courage to act in faith rather than out of ethical or institutional conformity.

Accordingly, private theology serves not merely as a basis for personal spirituality but also as a framework for contextual ecological consciousness and action. From this perspective, environmental care is not merely a social obligation, but an act of worship—an expression of spiritual relationship with God and His creation. Spirituality and ecology are not conceived as separate realms, but as integrated dimensions of everyday faith. This awareness enables congregants to perceive the earth not merely as a utilitarian space but as an essential element of Christian vocation.

Moreover, challenging socio-ecological conditions appear to intensify the formation of authentic faith. When liturgical instruction or institutional programmes prove limited in their effectiveness, personal faith experience emerges as a source of strength and moral direction. In this setting, private theology is not a retreat into spiritual subjectivism, but a foundation for contextually grounded and even prophetic action.

The findings of this study thus affirm that private theology, interpreted through Kierkegaard's thought, has the capacity to inspire a spirituality that is both relevant and responsive to contemporary ecological challenges. It empowers congregants to become responsible agents of faith within their local contexts, cultivating ecological consciousness not through external control but through personal repentance and theological reflection. In this way, private theology opens new possibilities for the Church to foster an authentic and transformative ecological ethos amid an ongoing environmental crisis.

The Leap of Faith as Spiritual and Ecological Transformation within the Congregation

One of Søren Kierkegaard's most prominent contributions to Christian existential philosophy is his concept of the *leap of faith*. This notion refers to the existential moment in which an individual makes a radical, personal decision of faith without reliance on rational certainty or social approval. For Kierkegaard, authentic faith does not arise from logical deduction or compliance with collective religious tradition, but is an act of spiritual courage that transcends the desire for certainty and ventures into the realm of the unknown in obedience to God (Anggoro, 2025). In the leap of faith, the individual dares to make choices that

may appear socially unwise or logically irrational, yet are spiritually compelled by an inner call to submit to the divine will.

Within the context of the GMIBM Sion Tonom congregation, this concept finds concrete expression in the daily lives of congregants who, in defiance of prevailing social currents, choose to safeguard the integrity of creation. Amidst severe economic pressure and the lure of instant financial gain through extractive industries, some members have opted not to participate in environmentally destructive activities. Instead, they persist with traditional farming practices, decline employment from mining corporations, protect ancestral forest land, and adopt environmentally conscious lifestyles—choices that frequently run counter to both social expectations and local economic reasoning.

These actions embody the praxis of the *leap of faith*, not in spectacular or dramatic form, but in ordinary decisions grounded in deep spiritual conviction. These individuals act not out of conformity to communal expectations or the pursuit of external incentives, but from an internal spiritual struggle that calls them to live in alignment with God's will and to care for His creation. Often, such decisions entail significant social consequences: they may be deemed impractical, accused of hindering development, or even suspected of subverting collective interests. Yet it is precisely within this existential solitude that they live out the most authentic form of faith, as Kierkegaard envisioned.

The effects of this *leap of faith* do not remain confined to the personal sphere. The consistent witness and moral courage of these individuals gradually shape a wider ecological awareness within the congregation. Slowly but surely, the initially quiet and solitary ecological movement begins to gain communal resonance. Neighbours join in local clean-up initiatives, church youth engage in reforestation efforts, children are involved in tree-planting activities, and the church begins to incorporate environmental responsibility into its regular fellowship and liturgical life.

From the perspective of Kierkegaard's private theology, these developments affirm that genuine transformation within the ecclesial community need not be driven by synodical programmes or structural interventions. Rather, it may emerge from personal and sincere acts of faith. The *leap of faith* becomes a spiritual foundation from which individuals draw courage to choose the good—despite difficulty—for the sake of fidelity to God and the well-being of creation. Such spirituality forges an intrinsic link between faith and ecological action, between existential courage and social transformation.

Thus, in the midst of the ecological crisis affecting the GMIBM Sion Tonom area, the *leap of faith* emerges not merely as a theological metaphor but as a tangible praxis that charts a new trajectory of change. It constitutes a decisive movement towards a life that is more accountable, more attuned to the divine will, and more just towards creation. Through these actions, private theology proves its capacity to foster a spirituality that is transformative—not only renewing the individual, but also offering fresh hope for the wider community and the surrounding environment.

Teleological Suspension of the Ethical and Prophetic Ethics in the Congregation's Ecological Response

One of Søren Kierkegaard's most radical conceptual contributions to Christian existential philosophy is the notion of *teleological suspension of the ethical*—a suspension of conventional ethics in obedience to divine purpose. This concept asserts that, in certain circumstances, the demands of obedience to God may transcend socially accepted moral norms. Drawing upon the biblical narrative of Abraham's command to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22), Kierkegaard contends that an act which appears ethically indefensible may, when undertaken in faith and submission to divine will, represent the highest form of authentic obedience (Kierkegaard, 2024). This line of thought strikes at the heart of prophetic spirituality, which entails the courage to act in accordance with God's call, even when it entails defying normative values or enduring social consequence.

Within the context of the GMIBM Sion Tonom congregation, this concept is not merely of theoretical interest but acquires profound practical relevance. Certain individuals within the congregation exhibit spiritual courage by resisting policies or customs which, although ethically entrenched and socially endorsed, no longer align with the integrity of creation. For instance, some members refrain from large-scale deforestation despite the practice's long-standing cultural acceptance and perceived economic benefit. Others reject infrastructural projects that threaten environmental degradation, even when such projects enjoy the backing of village authorities or traditional leaders. From the perspective of prevailing social norms, such actions may be perceived as disruptive or uncooperative. Yet, in the light of the *teleological suspension of the ethical*, these are expressions of faithfulness to a divine imperative which, in these instances, calls for the stewardship of the earth as a sacred responsibility.

The findings of this research indicate that such spiritual boldness does not stem from a spirit of rebellion, but from a deep faith awareness formed through theological reflection and existential struggle. These individuals transcend general moral frameworks because they are compelled by a higher spiritual calling—the will of God concerning the integrity of creation. They are not simply acting “differently”; they are acting *prophetically*—embodying and articulating values of the Kingdom of God which often run counter to the dominant moral paradigms of the world.

This phenomenon demonstrates that, in the context of ecological crisis, prevailing social norms and customary traditions are not always congruent with an ecological ethic grounded in Christian revelation and spirituality. When local policy and custom become complicit in ecological exploitation, the faithful suspension of conformity to such norms—in obedience to God—constitutes a legitimate prophetic act. The *teleological suspension of the ethical* thus does not represent an abandonment of ethics, but rather a reinterpretation of ethics in the light of a higher divine *telos*: justice, the care of creation, and unconditional obedience to God.

Furthermore, such actions embody what in moral theology may be described as *prophetic ethics*. This ethic does not rest upon generalised notions of right and wrong, but seeks divine truth that is transcendent and rooted in the prophetic voice of faith. Prophetic ethics often emerge within contexts of tension, marked by social resistance and the risk of marginalisation. Precisely because of their unpopularity, such ethical expressions reveal the authenticity of faithfulness. Within the GMIBM Sion Tonom congregation, prophetic ethics are visible in the courage of congregants who defend their environment despite economic pressure, exploitative local policies, or conflict with traditional authorities.

Thus, the *teleological suspension of the ethical* is not merely an abstract philosophical construction; it serves as a practical framework that legitimises spiritual courage and ecological responsibility. It provides theological grounds for prophetic action amidst complex social realities. In the face of environmental crisis, authentic faith cannot be confined by social consensus or public comfort, but must be willing to act radically in order to proclaim and embody the will of God concerning creation. From this vantage point, Kierkegaard's private theology proves its relevance—not merely as a spirituality of personal intimacy with God, but as the source of an alternative moral vision committed to life and the wholeness of the cosmos.

Private Theology as the Foundation for a Contextual Eco-Theological Movement

In the development of contemporary theology, eco-theology is generally understood as a systematic endeavour to relate the doctrines of Christian faith to the responsibility of sustaining creation. Nevertheless, in practice, eco-theology is often constructed from a top-down approach—emerging from institutional church documents, moral exhortations issued by spiritual leaders, or formal programmes conceived at synodal or academic levels (Ambun, 2025). While such frameworks are valuable, they frequently fail to reach the existential reality of grassroots communities, especially when the theological language employed remains overly abstract and disengaged from the lived experiences of ordinary believers.

It is within such a context that Søren Kierkegaard's conception of *private theology* offers a fresh and transformative perspective. Private theology asserts that authentic faith is not merely a product of social or institutional construction, but arises from a deeply personal and reflective existential encounter—a direct relationship between the individual and God. Within this framework, ecological responsibility does not originate from social obligation or external compulsion; rather, it emerges from an internal awareness of faith in which the believer recognises God as Creator and themselves as steward of creation.

Field research conducted among the congregation of GMIBM Sion Tonom reveals that ecological initiatives within the community have not been initiated through formal church directives or structural mandates. On the contrary, environmentally responsible actions have surfaced from profound, personal faith reflections. Several members of the congregation have chosen, of their own volition, to clear waterways, preserve agricultural land, and abstain from engaging

in mining activities—not in obedience to synodal decrees or local church programmes, but because they experience a spiritual sense of accountability for the condition of their natural surroundings. They perceive the “voice of God” through concrete experiences that trouble their conscience, thus giving rise to responses that are authentic, contextual, and theologically grounded.

This model signals a critical shift in the practice of eco-theology: from command-driven mobilisation to inner-driven transformation—originating from hearts that have undergone repentance and spiritual encounter. It is contextual, in that it arises from the specific lived reality of the community; participatory, in that it does not wait for external authorisation; and sustainable, in that it is driven by spiritual conviction rather than moral exhortation alone. From this perspective, private theology functions as the spiritual energy behind a community-based eco-theological movement—one that does not begin with grand theological constructs, but with the courage of a single individual to obey God amid the tensions of the age.

Such an approach also enables the Church to perceive ecological concern not as an optional supplement to its spiritual ministry, but as an integral expression of holistic Christian spirituality. When faith is not confined to the sanctuary but imbues the believer’s habits of waste disposal, water usage, land cultivation, and the ecological education of children, eco-theology ceases to be mere discourse and becomes an embodied way of life.

Thus, private theology yields not only personal piety, but also becomes the bedrock of a collective ecological ethic imbued with prophetic character. It teaches that social transformation need not be initiated by macro-level policies or large-scale programmes, but may begin with quiet, small, and radical acts of faith. In the solitary courage of one individual to remain faithful to the voice of God, the seeds of an authentic eco-theology are sown—a faith that does not merely pray for the world, but participates in its care and renewal as a concrete and meaningful act of spiritual devotion.

The Integration of Existential Spirituality and Ecological Consciousness: From Private Silence to Communal Prophetic Voice and Holistic Spirituality

One of the most profound strengths of Søren Kierkegaard’s concept of *private theology* lies in its capacity to foster inward transformation that gives rise to tangible, outward change. Existential spirituality, within the Kierkegaardian framework, is not a passive or introspective piety withdrawn from the world; rather, it constitutes a morally conscious, reflective, and dynamic spiritual orientation. In the context of the GMIBM Sion Tonom congregation, such spirituality has emerged as a transformative force—beginning in the interior silence of the individual conscience and gradually unfolding into a communal moral and ecological movement with prophetic character.

Field findings indicate that the transition from personal spirituality to collective ecological awareness has not resulted from institutional intervention or externally imposed ecclesiastical directives. Instead, it has grown organically through the incarnational outworking of faith in everyday life. Individuals who

have taken the *leap of faith*—resisting environmentally destructive practices despite lacking social support—have experienced faith as a concrete struggle. In seeking fidelity to the divine voice within, they have chosen to defy economic temptation, customary expectation, and the fear of social isolation. In this process, existential spirituality becomes manifest, not merely as an internal disposition, but as bold ecological action.

Over time, these seemingly minor yet consistent acts have begun to generate spiritual resonance within the broader community. Children are taught to plant trees by their parents; rivers are cleansed not by official programmes but by a shared sense of responsibility; liturgical prayers begin to reflect upon the integrity of creation (Hura & Mawikere, 2020). What began as an invisible conviction within individuals has gradually entered the spiritual narrative of the congregation. Existential spirituality transforms into communal spirituality. In Kierkegaard's terms, the single individual standing alone before God now imparts their courage to others—and from this courage emerges a new prophetic voice: one born in inner silence, but echoed throughout the life of the collective (Mawikere & Hura, 2022).

This transformation reveals that genuine spirituality is neither isolated nor self-contained. Rather, it is intrinsically relational and socially consequential. Authentic faith yields prophetic consciousness: a disposition that refuses to remain silent in the face of ecological injustice, one that is unsatisfied with prayer and liturgy alone, and is compelled to act for the wholeness of creation. In GMIBM Sion Tonom, such consciousness takes the form of spiritual resistance against ecological exploitation and simultaneously functions as a communal witness to a living faith.

Accordingly, the integration of existential spirituality and ecological awareness is not a juxtaposition of disparate realms but a convergence of mutually reinforcing dimensions. The former provides depth and authenticity; the latter gives embodiment and commitment in practice. When believers come to recognise that their relationship with God cannot be divorced from their responsibility towards creation, the Church is no longer merely a place of worship but becomes a site of ecological transformation rooted in faith.

Ultimately, Kierkegaard's theological thought not only underscores the intensity of personal relation with God but also culminates in a spirituality that is distinctly holistic. Holistic spirituality in the Kierkegaardian sense combines the existential courage to encounter God personally with an awareness of human interconnection with the world and with others. Such a spirituality encompasses not merely vertical (transcendent) relations, but horizontal ones as well—immanent, relational, and concrete—including our relationship with the natural world. Kierkegaard rejects the false dichotomy between personal faith and social responsibility. For him, authentic belief engenders a heightened sensitivity to the suffering and degradation present in the world. Thus, spirituality cannot remain confined to individual moral reflection; it must also be embodied in concrete actions that address the social, ecological, and cultural dimensions of human life.

In this respect, holistic spirituality serves as a bridge between profound personal faith and the collective courage to act for the renewal of creation.

In conclusion, *private theology* in Kierkegaard's thought is not merely a philosophical construct of faith, but a foundation for prophetic and holistic spirituality, uniquely suited to the ecological crisis of our time. It reveals that significant change may begin in the stillness of the soul, but must not end there—it must move outward, inspire others, and ignite a collective awareness willing to speak and act for a more just and sustainable world for all creation.

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that the theological insights of Søren Kierkegaard—particularly through the existential framework articulated in the concept of *private theology*—hold significant transformative potential in responding to the contemporary ecological crisis. Within the context of the GMIBM Sion Tonom congregation—situated amidst structural limitations, ecological pressures, and social tensions—*private theology* emerges as a spirituality that is contextual, profound, and prophetic.

First, *private theology*, as proposed by the authors through a reflective appropriation of Kierkegaard's existential thought, provides a space wherein the personal relationship between the individual and God becomes the primary impetus for ecological ethics. This relationship is existential and unmediated—not filtered through formal systems or doctrinal structures—and thereby possesses the capacity to awaken moral courage and authentic ecological repentance.

Second, through the concept of the *leap of faith*, Kierkegaard illustrates that true acts of faith do not rest upon systemic rationality or societal comfort, but upon the individual's willingness to remain faithful to the voice of God amid uncertainty. In the context of GMIBM Sion Tonom, such faith is embodied in concrete actions such as rejecting employment in the mining industry, preserving ancestral land, and safeguarding rivers and forests—acts that exemplify the ecological dimension of the leap of faith.

Third, the principle of the *teleological suspension of the ethical* reveals that fidelity to divine will may, at times, require the courage to transcend stagnant social norms. Members of the congregation who refuse to comply with destructive communal policies, even at the expense of their social standing, exemplify the prophetic voice of a reflective and living faith. In this regard, *private theology* does not amount to spiritual isolation but serves as the foundation for constructive and spiritually grounded social critique.

Fourth, the study demonstrates that *private theology* may serve as a foundational framework for grassroots ecotheological movements that are participatory and contextually grounded. It does not arise as an abstract theory formulated by theological elites, but as a spiritual awareness born from the lived faith of the people themselves. This renders *private theology* more incarnational and enduring than institutional ecological approaches that are typically top-down in nature.

Thus, in the face of the Church's structural limitations in addressing the complexities of the ecological crisis, *private theology* offers an alternative paradigm: that genuine ecological transformation begins with the courage of individuals to embody their faith authentically before God. A faith not merely conceived in thought, but lived in action; not merely proclaimed from the pulpit, but enacted in daily decisions that affirm life. In this sense, Kierkegaard's thought proves relevant not only as a philosophical inheritance but as a living theological summons—calling believers to become agents of faith who stand individually before God, yet bring forth tangible impact for the world and its creation.

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