

Summary of the Seminar

Fr. Tesfaye Tadesse Gebresilasie, MCCJ, in his opening address said, “Once again SEDOS is happy to dedicate time to prayer and reflection on the issue of taking care of the Creation and the attention needed to heal to the ecological wounds...” The Seminar on Living Green Mission organized by SEDOS, with very valuable speakers, awakened our spirit and mind, convinced us to take care of our one and only One Planet-Mother Earth with all it’s being with praise, gratitude, care, work, justice, humility, and respect.

The Opening Prayer, the Opening Address and the Opening Speech on the *Ten Green Commandments of Laudato Si’*, placed us in the context of the Seminar ‘Living Green Mission’. Indeed, we feel enriched and illumined by the hope-giving eco-spiritual reflections, sustainable living and agriculture, training rural communities, our Church’s ongoing efforts in the aftermath of the Synod, and the initiative of JPIC committee on Sowing Seeds for the Future. Daily short meaningful prayers presented an atmosphere of openness to the day’s topics. Above all, a call to personal and communal ecological conversion, a call to take the lead in the carbon accountability, a call to Living in Communion, inspired us and made us determined to join “Living Green Mission in the Spirit of Laudato Si’” as the mandate of our present time.



Opening Session

Fr. Joshtram Kureethadam, SDB, from the Dicastery for Human Development, Rome, in his opening speech on *The Ten Green Commandments of Laudato Si’* helped us capture the spirit of Laudate Si as the Mission awaiting us today. He took Saint Francis’ anecdote where he was missioned by the Lord to “go and repair my house which is falling into ruin (1205-Assisi) with “Care for our common home” as the mission given by the Lord to Pope Francis for our present time. Pope Francis calls all people to care for our common home before it is too late. He explained in a nutshell, using the ‘see, judge, and act’ methodology. The first three commandments are summarized in seeing – listen to the cry of the earth, listen to the cry of the poor and rediscovering the Gospel of creation. Fr. Joshtram stressed that the core message of *Laudato Si’* is: “*Creation is, indeed the very first epiphany of God, and caring for our common home is our original vocation and is the first commandment to humanity, our ‘Job description’!*”

Jane Mellett’s talk “*The call to ecological conversion*” enriched us with her climate pilgrimage experiences and the heart touching story of her friend Joanna Sustento who is an example of real people behind the crisis. Jane’s reflections on the environmental crisis was a call to each of us to a profound interior conversion. We must see with the eyes of Christ those on the frontlines of this crisis, victims of climate disasters, displacement due to sea-level rise, drought, etc. She reminded us of Pope Francis’ question, which stirs hearts and minds:

“What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?”

Education Aspect

Fr. Petero Matairatu, SM presented *'The Practices and Principles of Tutu Rural Training Centre'* in Fiji. He shared with us their enormous efforts, to bring up the young people to be self-employed farmers with dignity. They train young farmers, single women, farming couples to practice traditional farming, constructing their own houses, to build up their own livelihood through various village courses and to give rural adult non-formal education. It was amazing to see their growing self-confidence and their joy at harvesting the fruits of their labor through applying what they have learned. The commendable work of Fr. Petero and his co-brothers are an inspiration.

Second session was on *"Loving Sister Earth"*. Fr. Brian Grogan, SJ, led us into deeply reflect on Ecological Mourning and our response. It is an invitation, as Fr. Brian said, to explore together the dimensions of Ecological Mourning to integrate it into Living Green Mission. On a daily basis, the media presents the disasters. Disasters can lead to a great outpouring of creative energy, but also to anxiety, desolation, depression, paralysis and fatalism. He asked us: *Does the spirituality of Finding God in All Things include Finding God in Ecological disaster? If yes, how do we find God in them?*

Fr. Brian gave some historical examples of the failure to mourn. Firstly, we must allow the disturbing reality of ecological disaster to enter our soul deeply. Secondly, with a deeper realization of what is wrong, we can cultivate a deeper love of Creation. Loving and mourning go hand in hand. Redemptive mourning arises only when we realize that in the ravaging of Nature, part of our very being is lost, because we are part of Nature. This ecological mourning must be honest: 'We have sinned!' And we place each disaster trustingly in the Father's hands and to intercede to change human hearts, to make good what is not good, and to bring about the universal restoration that is promised (*Acts*

3:21). Indeed, the silent reflection helped us to be in touch with the core of our being.



Sr. Helen Grealy shared their *'Loving Sister Earth Movement'* of Ireland. 'Loving Sister Earth' is their humble attempt to live 'green mission'. Their aim is to foster a movement of prayer and care for our Common Home to be rooted in our own sacred ground and carried by our people. A deep prayer involves entering the transformative inner journey and bringing about harmony between body, mind, feelings, and spirit.

The more inner harmony we experience, the more we can contribute to the harmony of our world. It may encourage people to explore the native wisdom in our own area more fully and learn how that can contribute to our green mission of today. Our relationship with God and each other will be a pulsating powerful energy of pure love being poured out on our bio-diverse universe. Sr. Helen shared with us some beautiful Irish prayers on nature.

Day 3: Sustainability Aspect.

Prof. Yvan Brakel explained the effort the engineering faculty of the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium, is making to take the lead in carbon accountability and sustainability. He described through examples, how a sustainable infrastructure can play an essential role in offering vital services to communities being improved of their quality in the protection of environment. Infrastructures are urgent. Climate change is destroying the life of the planet. This situation cannot improve unless the world realizes and achieves the climate objectives. The infrastructure plays a vital role by providing

services; firstly, as guardians of the modern development.

The presentation with videos helped us to see how bamboos can be used in place of cement constructing bridges or other constructions. Prof. Yvan emphasized that deteriorated or destroyed materials can be recycled instead of buying new things, especially in the constructing a house.

Fr. Richie Gomez, MSC, presented on Ecological living and agriculture for indigenous peoples. Fr. Gomez used the methodology of “SEE – DISCERN – ACT” for our better hermeneutical understanding and a more balanced interpretation. Fr. Gomez presented; “We are in One Boat of globalization. We have no choice but to continue our journey being in the boat of capitalistic, consumeristic, commercialistic, materialistic and profit-driven community”. The adverse impact of climate change on the farmers has already effected their day-to-day hardship. For more than three decades, we use the method of modern farming (*Green Revolution*) which is based on chemical products. This became conventional for massive production, worldwide. Surplus products from First World countries under International Free Trade Agreement resulted in the Philippines becoming the dumping ground of surplus food and non-food products. Endless production, consumption, and the pursuit of profit, in the name of economic growth, progress and development have become the most cherished goals of the modern economy. But the end goal should be the well-being of people and the integrity of the Planet Earth. Local production should be appreciated and given importance. If production and consumption, money, and economic growth damage nature and exploit people then such economic activities must be stopped at once. Fr. Richie gave a clear recent picture of rice harvest situation in the Philippines.

Fr. Gomez shared the inspiring and impressive core values and principles for the well-being of farming communities:

- Love- Shared- Blessing Academy
- *Sapat na* (Enough) Principle
- Care for the Environment (*Laudato Si'*)
- Zero Waste or Best Green Practices and 9R's
- Back to Basic, Simple Life-Style
- Natural Sustainable Farming

As an action, The *Center for the Poor* is working closely with the Department of Agriculture, other NGO's, individual farmers, fisher folks, and Indigenous People tribes/communities, in order to preserve organic seeds not dependent on chemicals.

Ezrah Schraven closed the day with her encouraging sharing on the lessons we can learn from the corporate world regarding the importance of taking care of our “ecological footprint”. As missionaries we too should take care of the Creation, not because we have to, but because the People of God are in dire need and because it is not right to spoil this beautiful world by our unlimited desires.

Day 4: Spirituality Aspect

We had a deeply inspiring reflection on “*What hope for a small blue planet*” by Fr. Brian Grogan, SJ, and the profound personal experiences of Fr. Amado L. Picardal, CSsR, on “*Deep Relationality: Living in Communion*” with God, self, and one another.

Father Brian led us through reflections exploring the six reasons for hope drawn from the divine order of things. He pointed out that God is a God of Life, and His glory is the human person fully alive. The main reason for hope for our future is the Spirit-led change of heart being shown in the current ‘ecological conversion’ of so many people. The richness of the Christian tradition must strengthen our hope and liberate our energies to protect our Common Home. Because Christian hope is not wishful thinking or naïve optimism: it comes from God and is focused on God and it is founded on God's interventions in human history. God is Almighty and great, but God is also God the God of small things. We live

small lives and our efforts to protect our world may seem small and futile — such as conserving water when washing, avoiding plastic, saving foxes, growing herbs in a window-box. Small though these gestures may be, they are rich in God’s sight.

Another reason for hope for our planet is the divine command: ‘Go! The simple divine command, ‘Go!’ rings out across the Scriptures when things are at their lowest, and when that command is obeyed divine power swings into action. In the course of time, when our time boundaries melt away, what was past will be present again, including every detail of Nature. In this perspective, everything worthwhile, beautiful and meaningful, everything that constitutes the richness of human life, is being transferred to the divine order of things even as our lives go by and will be for our communal enjoyment, human history, Creation, and we ourselves will glow with transfigured meaning.

Fr. Amado L. Picardal, CSsR, led us into ‘*Deep Relationality: Living in Communion*’. His presentation focused on the spirituality of communion, in the light of the *Laudato Si*. He shared his experience of ecological spirituality as a three-fold communion: Communion with others, with nature and with God. He emphasized that everything is interconnected, interrelated, and that all live within a web of relationships as Pope Francis echoes in *Laudato Si*, “*Human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself*” (n. 66) as the heart of integral ecology. His experience reflected his closeness to the Divine amidst natural wonders during his pilgrim with fellow pilgrims.

He also explained another aspect with regard to the rupture of the three-fold communion. These three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin.... The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the

place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. This in turn distorted the mandate to “have dominion” over the earth. As a result, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual (cf. Gen).

Day 5: Closing session

Sr. Sheila Kinsey, from the JPIC desk of UISG/USG, shared on ‘*Sowing Seeds for the Planet*’. In the first part of her presentation, she introduced the main role of the JPIC. It is to transform the world in the spirit of the Gospel; to promote justice and care for the integrity of creation; to listen to the poor and vulnerable, and support their voice, and advocate for human rights for all persons, and the importance of a life imbued with the loving presence of Christ. Our relationship with Christ can be the source of creating new ways of being compassionate to comfort our fragile world.

Sowing seeds for the future: Sr. Sheila referred the biblical parable of the mustard seed in Matthew 13:3-8. The tiny mustard seed shows that great things grow from the smallest of beginnings. Just like the mustard seed, the ideas of *Laudato Si* must be scattered everywhere so that they might flower in the hearts, minds, and souls of as many people as possible. The USG/UISG members are also encouraged to coordinate their congregational efforts with Sowing Hope for the Planet. The *Laudato Si* Action Platform provides a framework for responding to the urgency of the ecological crisis, enables like-minded partnerships and provides critical planning. She also shared the JPIC Agenda and future plans.

As the closing speech for the Seminar, Fr. Augusto Zampini Davies from the *Dicastery for Human Development*, Rome, spoke of the Church’s new pathways for integral ecology in the aftermath of the *Synod for the Pan-Amazon Region*. Fr. Augusto explained the Social, Cultural, Ecological, and Ecclesial dreams for the Amazon Region. It is however also applicable to where we live. Fr. Augusto outlined an action plan to realize these four

dreams by implementing the methodology of ‘Listen, Connect and Inspire’. He explained a complex and interconnected ecological, economic, political, and social crisis and that these crises are an opportunity for people to create something new. He called for a prophetic voice, alternative models of development to make changes. The Church too builds up new structures for new paths for evangelization, implementation from dream to reality and walking together for a better world.

LEARNING FROM THE SEMINAR...

Creation is God’s first and primordial revelation. The very first manifestation of God. God has a purpose for creation. God gave us only one blue planet as our home. And we share this home with other people and the rest of creation. Everything is interconnected, interrelated and inter dependent. This applies from the sub-atomic level up to the entire cosmos including the biological, the eco-system and society. We all live within a web of relationship with all of LIFE!

The Seminar was a profound call to a personal, communal and on-going ecological conversion. Creation today is crying out as never before, labouring to be set free (*Romans* Ch. 8). All nations and peoples need an ecological conversion if we are to be honest guardians of this wonderful planet. We can change the course of history by adopting a radical new way of living with Creation to sustain and preserve its resources for future generations.

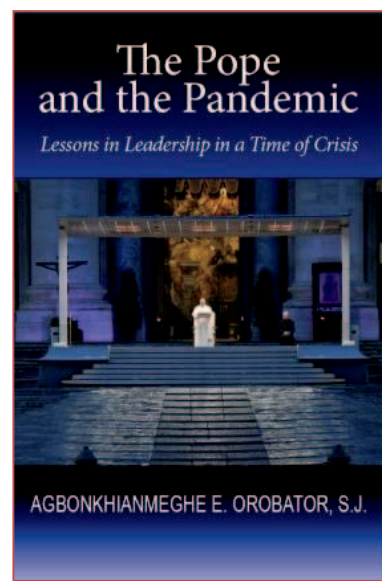
In the Encyclical *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis says, “*a whole new way of living opens as a consequence of a personal and passionate relationship with Jesus. We get the grace to transcend ourselves*”. (LS, 217)

We get new strength to care for others and for creation. We can live with a new horizon, embracing Jesus’ vision of the Kingdom of God, of a renewed and transformed world and ecosystem where we are all brothers and sisters, each responsible for the other.

In this vital time of our world’s history, we are called to take responsibility as God’s people, and contribute to change this situation: doing small things such as recycle trash, saving energy and water, buy eco-friendly products, buying what is really needed, planting trees, learning about the ecological issues, support pro-ecological agenda, etc. Let us hear and respond to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, rediscover the Gospel of Creation. Let us practice the Ten Green Commandments of *Laudato Si’*. Let us join our hearts and minds to make God’s dream for our common home a reality.

We thank SEDOS, Fr. Peter Baekelmans, CICM, and his team and all those who were part of organizing this important Seminar. With over a 165 participants there is hope that together we can make a difference wherever we are present, and help people to become aware of the infinite beauty of God’s creation. As Pope Francis reminds us, “*All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents.*” (LS n. 14).

As agents of hope, let us dare to take our responsibility as true stewards of God’s Creation!



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