

Received: August 5, 2024; Revised: August 23, 2024; Accepted: September 12, 2024

On *Laudato Si'*: Articulation of its Message and the SVD's Response

<https://doi.org/10.58870/berj.v9i1.75>

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Abstract

“Laudato Si, mi’ Signore” is a papal encyclical written by Pope Francis and published on May 24, 2015. Intended for all the people, the Holy Father discussed the state of the planet Earth, our common home, and his concern for our future and the future of the coming generations. The document dealt with environmental concerns grounded in theological and spiritual principles. This paper aims to articulate the message of the document and propose how the encyclical can be of use in mitigating global concerns about environmental degradation. This research paper used the “see-judge-act” method to do a theological reflection. For the “see” part, researchers brought to light the nation's current state of the environment of *Laudato Si’* in the Philippines. For the “judge” part, researchers discussed pieces of literature that articulated the encyclical, particularly focusing on the “Gospel of Creation.” Finally, for the “act” part, the researchers featured the SVD *Laudato Si’* Farm of the SVD (*Societas Verbi Divini*) priests, brothers, and missionaries in Tagaytay City as a concrete expression of their response to the challenges of Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’*. The research paper concluded with recommendations for urgent actions, that is, ecological conversion – an encounter with Jesus that leads to meaningful communion with God, other people, and nature. It confronts us to live *Laudato Si’* and embrace it as life’s spirituality.

Keywords: *Laudato Si’*, encyclical, see-judge-act, Gospel of Creation, SVD Farm, ecological crisis, ecological conversion

Introduction

On May 24, 2015, Pope Francis published his second encyclical, “*Laudato Si, mi’ Signore.*” Presented to all the people, his document addressed every person living on the planet. With an English title, *On the Care for our Common Home*, *Laudato Si’* appealed to the human family to protect its common home by pursuing sustainable and integral development (LS, 13). Almost a decade later, it is an opportune moment to assess the current environmental state of the whole planet, particularly in the Philippines, and scrutinize whether significant changes have been made in addressing the ecological crisis as a response to the challenges of the pontiff.

This research paper attempts to articulate Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’* particularly its teaching on integral ecology. Since its publication in 2016, *Laudato Si’* has inspired many faithful to ecological conversion and embrace ecological spirituality. However, many people are already aware of the impending catastrophe that might happen on Earth if drastic changes in man’s lifestyle do not happen; many of Francis’ teachings remain on the drawing board and are far from reality.

In Tagaytay City, province of Cavite, Philippines, the *Societas Verbi Divini* (SVD) *Laudato Si’* Farm emerged as a beacon of hope and sustainability. In the recent COVID-19 pandemic and the nearby Taal volcano eruption, the farm was conceived in adversity, embodying the call for ecological conversion articulated in Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’*. The farm’s inception is rooted in divine providence and communal care for creation. It is a testament to the transformative power of faith, environmental stewardship, and community partnership in heeding the call to save the environment. This research paper features SVD’s *Laudato Si’* Farm as a concrete expression of Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’* to inspire each one of us to live integral ecology and heed the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

Objectives, Methodology, and Conceptual Framework

This research project aims to articulate *Laudato Si’*’s salient message, particularly its teaching on integral ecology, assess its impact after publication, and propose how the encyclical can be useful in mitigating global concerns about environmental degradation. This paper also invites everyone to live the teachings of *Laudato Si’* by setting the SVD Farm as its model, inspiring everyone to heed the call of the pontiff and do big things to save the only planet Earth.

This research paper uses qualitative methods of research (Flick, 2018). It analyzes the papal encyclical *Laudato Si’* and how the SVD community contextualizes the pope’s teaching on ecological spirituality.

Limited to the Philippine context, this research paper uses the “see-judge-act” method in doing a theological reflection and serves as its conceptual framework. For the “See” part, researchers brought to light the nation’s current state of the environment in the Philippines in light of *Laudato Si’*. For the “Judge” part, researchers discuss pieces of literature that articulate the encyclical. The focus of the discussion is on the “Gospel of Creation.” For the “Act” part, the researchers feature the SVD *Laudato Si’* Farm of the SVD priests, brothers, and missionaries in Tagaytay City. Hence, its working framework follows Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’* as its input, the “see-judge-act” process as its paradigm, and the SVD *Laudato Si’* Farm as the output.

Ecological spirituality serves as its theoretical framework for doing this research. This spirituality necessitates the renewal of man’s attitudes toward the earth (de Diego-Cordero, 2024) and deconstructs the previous anthropocentric point of view that God’s other creations are subservient to man (Piro, 2020).

The study is limited to the experience of the SVD community in Tagaytay, particularly on how they are living the teachings of *Laudato Si’* since the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of logistical limitations, researchers only focused on the available literature as its source of information and did not utilize person-to-person interviews for additional information.

This research paper aims to educate and convert man’s attitude towards the environment. Accordingly, man necessitates ecological conversion, for previous man’s actions led to unimaginable ecological destruction. This ecological conversion should lead to a spirituality of stewardship, ordaining each of us to a vocation to care for and protect God’s creation.

While many studies have been presented and articulated regarding *Laudato Si’* and the topic of ecological study, the impending ecological crisis remains. There is a need for a drastic change in man’s attitude towards ecology. There is a gap in a study on how people can truly live the teachings of *Laudato Si’*. More research studies are necessary to inspire people to convert to ecological spirituality.

Discussion

The following discussions attempt to articulate the teachings of Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* and present the lived experience of the SVD community during the COVID-19 pandemic and how their project, SVD Farm, emerged as a place of eco-spirituality.

The See Part: The Country's Ecological State and *Laudato Si'* a Decade After

The Philippines has one of the most unique and diverse natural environments in the world (Lasco, 2022). The archipelago, hosting at least 20,000 endemic wildlife species, is a global conservation priority area and is recognized as "the hottest of the biodiversity hotspots" by Conservation International (2024). It is home to various ecosystems generally classified as terrestrial, freshwater, brackish/estuarine, saltwater/marine, and special. In particular, forest, mangrove, agricultural, marginal, urban, coral reef, freshwater, seagrass, and soft-bottom are some of the most prominent naturally-occurring ecosystem types in the country (Foundation for the Philippine Environment, 2024). The country's terrestrial and marine habitats contain some of the "richest biodiversities of flora and fauna," and its waters are considered part of the "Coral Triangle" (Department of Environment and Natural Resources, 2024, 25).

Biodiversity and ecosystems are "key to lifting people out of poverty, contributing to our economy, and strengthening our resilience to climate change" (Department of Environment and Natural Resources, 2024, 20). However, Lasco (2022) claims that the "massive destruction of natural ecosystems in the past century" has led to system degradation and loss of habitats and biodiversity resources and that the deterioration and rising pollution of land, water, and atmosphere can be attributed to "rapid urbanization" (233). The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (2024) attributed the degradation of biodiversity to the following: indiscriminate logging, overlapping mining claims and rights with defined protected areas, ancestral lands, and planned conservation areas, forestland conversion, unsustainable production and consumption of medicinal and ornamental plants and wild animals for trade and domestic use; narrowing of food bases; introduction of invasive alien species; degradation from climate change; weak capacities on natural resources management; undervaluation of ecosystem services from natural resources, and weak integration of biodiversity concerns in landscape planning. Lasco (2022) proposes that the management of natural resources, particularly forests, inland water/wetlands, and coastal/marine ecosystems, can

contribute to climate change mitigation and climate resilience in the Philippines.

Pollution and Waste Management

Earth.Org reported the four biggest environmental issues in the Philippines. These are air, plastic, marine pollution, and rising sea levels (Raji, 2024). Further, DENR admitted that mitigation efforts have not been very successful and has announced a plan to build infrastructure such as flood control, pumping stations, box culverts, and effective drainage systems. The following are some of the current states of the country’s waste management, particularly focusing on the nation’s capital region.

On Solid Waste Management. Despite the enactment of RA 9003, solid waste disposal and management remain a problem in the National Capital Region. Accordingly, the local government units shall enforce waste segregation at the barangay level, and close all the country’s dumpsites, and replace them with sanitary landfills (PNA, 2022).

Coracero et al. (2021) identified solid waste management as one of the pressing ecological issues in the Philippines associated with the increasing amount of solid waste due to the increasing population, scarcity of sanitary landfills, improper disposal of solid wastes, and weak law implementation. They assert that, ultimately, the solution is the proper and strict implementation of Republic Act (RA) 9003, also known as the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000. The law prescribes waste segregation and collection, material recovery and processing, proper waste disposal and diversion, and people’s participation and community mobilization. Zero Waste Philippines programs, as envisioned by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, have been established, such as the “*Bayan Ko, Linis Ko* Program,” notably in Alaminos, Pangasinan, and Portero, Malabon City, and waste valorization is currently proposed as a potential solution. Lasco (2022) also affirms that an exemplary implementation of waste management can mitigate global climate change and promote resiliency.

National and local governments have implemented measures to address the growing challenges brought by waste disposal, including the capital region, Metro Manila. Some programs include waste segregation, recycling programs, operation of sanitary landfills, and waste-to-energy facilities (Waster.com). Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA) reported that total garbage adequately disposed of in the dumping site has an average of 29,645 cubic meters each day, which is equivalent to 55%

compared to the remaining 45% that which was not disposed of properly (Waster.com). The uncollected waste remains in the streets, accumulating in the canals and other public places, which becomes a potential threat to flooding when rain comes.

On Air Pollution. During the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, when community quarantine was implemented in many parts of the country, the air was seen as clean and clear in many cities and municipalities in the metropolis. When life became normal, the air quality monitoring stations reported that Manila was marked as “good” but far from the ideal air quality prescribed. Accordingly, 80 percent comes from vehicles such as jeepneys, cars, and buses, among others, and the remaining 20 percent comes from factories (IQAir.com). Exposure to the environment of high atmospheric particulates is dangerous to health and may cause heart and lung problems (Tiseo, 2023). The air quality index in the country is marked as “moderately unsafe,” and the 2020 air quality average is two times higher than the acceptable standard prescribed by the World Health Organization (Interactive Country Fiches).

On Water Risk Management. According to the report, the Philippines is one of the biggest plastic pollutants on the planet, amounting to 0.28 to 0.75 million tons of plastic leaking into the rivers and seas annually from coastal areas in Manila Bay, including thousands of tons of plastic waste dumped in the rivers (Filipenco, 2023). The water quality monitoring in 2009 reported that the condition of the Pasig River continued to worsen, and the target quality had not been achieved since 2003. Further, the Pasig River was found to be the most polluting river, which poses a serious threat to the largest freshwater lake in the country, the Laguna Lake and Manila Bay (Interactive Country Fiches).

Laguna de Bay is the national capital region’s source of fresh fish. Currently, it is enduringly subject to eutrophication and pollution, with numerous fish die-offs that have serious socio-economic implications (Filipenco, 2023). Data shows that both biodiversity and the quality of water in the country’s largest lake are deteriorating. This declining diversity is attributed to plastic waste. Further, Filipenco (2023) reported that research in the Science Advances journal of the AAAS released in April 2021 found that plastic particles mixing in the water may increase the risk of becoming hazardous to living things.

The Challenge Remains

Almost a decade after its publication, the challenge to mitigate the global climate change crisis and its environmental threats remains the same. The encyclical only created noise in many nations, including numerous forums, conferences, and academic discussions. However, *Laudato Si’* must be translated into consistent concrete actions.

In our country, religious and government sectors, both public and private, agreed that there is a need for a drastic change to save our planet and to ensure life for future generations. In a survey conducted by the Social Weather Station (SWS), 83 percent expressed that they had already experienced the effects of climate change. Moreover, 87 percent said that this phenomenon can bring health risks to Filipinos (Inquirer.Net). Almost all sectors agreed that the call of Pope Francis is valid and legitimate, but as of today, the plan remains on the drawing board, and no clear actions have been implemented.

The Judge Part: Catholic Teachings on Ecology

The Church has a vast wealth of teachings on ecology, as evidenced by the various documents. The tenth chapter of the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (451-487), among others, beautifully lays down the biblical and theological principles on how Catholics should safeguard the environment (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace [PCJP], 2006). However, in recent memory, the year 2015 may be considered a year of profound importance to the environment and climate: Pope Francis published *Laudato Si’*, and in the same year, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its seventeen (17) goals (SDGs). Accordingly, by the year 2030, the United Nations will achieve peace and prosperity for people and the planet (United Nations, 2015). The Church is one with the global community in its struggle to find viable means, identify approaches, and present an ecological spirituality deeply rooted in the Christian faith to address the present ecological crisis.

Contemporary perspectives and theories on ecology provide insights into attitudes and approaches to how one can change man’s relationship with nature. The mechanistic and utilitarian approach to ecology has led to abuses affecting not only the integrity of creation but also the dignity of a person. While the Church maintains that the earth is God’s gift to be utilized for human progress and scientific advances, it necessitates responsible stewardship as God’s co-creators and acknowledging the sacramentality of creation.

Creation and the earth have acquired an anthropocentric image – the earth is at the service of humanity. This image has led to ecological abuses nearing a point of no return. Theoretically, anthropomorphism is the view that human beings have an intrinsic value in themselves. In contrast, other created beings are valued only because of their usefulness and relationship to human beings, also known as “instrumental value” (Edwards, 1992). Human attitudes toward other creatures could be summed up in four: ruthless exploitation, respect for conservation, a belief in the intrinsic rights of animals, and the belief in the intrinsic value of creation. The stewardship ecology tries to deconstruct this anthropocentric image and construct an image of creation and the earth based on the principles that value human life and respect the integrity of creation (Edwards, 1992).

Catholic social thought has long maintained the primacy and supremacy of human persons over other created entities following the natural law (*Rerum Novarum*, 1891; *Quadragesimo Anno*, 1931). However, re-appreciation of the value of nature has tended to move away from the anthropocentric image towards the aesthetic value of nature (*Mater et Magistra*, 1961; and *Pacem in Terris*, 1963; *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965). The Second Vatican Council teaches that humans are God’s co-creators. While the primacy of the human person is to be upheld over the earth, it is so for God’s glory. Post-Vatican II documents have increasingly pointed out ecological problems that lead to global injustices and poverty, and they call forth active participation of all concerns to solve this crisis. It stressed the principles of human dignity, the integrity of creation, intergenerational justice, solidarity, and dignity of the earth in identifying human beings as “workers.” Catholic social thought maintains the primacy of the human person over creation. In this case, the former prevails over the latter under an anthropocentric, hierarchical image of creation. This model sets aside the egalitarian image but lacks an eschatological vision – salvation should be the whole of creation, not just the human person (*Gaudium et Spes*).

Pope Francis’ Laudato Si’

Pope Francis’ encyclical, *Laudato Si’* (LS), is addressed to all people of goodwill. The encyclical focuses entirely on the environment and urges people to look at the realities of environmental degradation and how one’s treatment of planet Earth has caused damage to man’s common home and one’s treatment of the poor. After identifying the human roots of the ecological crisis, Pope Francis proposes an integral ecology by elevating the state of the environment to a moral and spiritual challenge. The main thrust of the document is to go beyond economic principles and toward a more holistic approach by acknowledging social and environmental issues. The

second chapter of the encyclical, *The Gospel of Creation*, highlights themes such as environmental stewardship, respect for the natural order and sustainable practices, and human responsibility and interconnectedness of human beings and other created beings (Kroeger, 2023).

The Gospel of Creation (LS, 62-100) begins by highlighting the faith convictions and the rich contributions that religions can offer towards integral ecology, motivating believers to care for nature (LS, 62-75). Drawing strength from the biblical account of creation, Pope Francis stresses how “good” God’s creation is because He created it out of love. The first chapter of Genesis tells us about the creation of man and woman, how God created them in his “image and likeness” and made them his masterpiece over other creatures. He blessed them with fertility and multiplicity so they could fill and subdue the earth, dominate animals, and give them fruit-bearing trees to eat. And God found it very “good.” The second creation story in Genesis chapter two is another beautiful account narrating how God put man above all other species and how humanity was put in charge by God to “cultivate and care” for all His creation. He gave Adam the power to name animals and presented him with a suitable partner with whom he could work together as one. Humans were created in God’s image and likeness and given dominion over the earth. Dominion can be interpreted not as an authority to abuse but as the responsibility to care for the earth. Human life, therefore, is fundamentally connected and intertwined with God, our neighbors, and the earth itself (LS, 66). But this bond was broken by sin, evidenced by destruction, violence, abandonment, and abuse of nature; thus, Pope Francis’ call for healing and reconciliation, respect for the laws of nature, and re-establishing equilibrium in the way God designed creation (LS, 69).

Creation stories in Genesis orient us to God’s original plan for human beings and their eventual downfall due to the sin of disobedience. It is a theological story or “a narrative concerning fundamental symbols which are constitutive of or paradigmatic for human experience” (Komonchak et al., 1991). The Genesis creation stories attempt to express reality through the use of symbols that go beyond reasoning and expression in common language; it serves as a vehicle of meaning, and they claim and refer to timeless truths that explain the present reality (Komonchak et al., 1991). They convey an unbearable, inconceivable, and inconvenient truth; they not only convey meaning, but they also tell us of the imbalance in the present situation far from what should be perceived as perceived “at the beginning” of time.

Pope Francis notes the impact and effect of human activities, such as loss of biodiversity and pollution, among others, that exacerbate climate change and environmental destruction. These activities are symptomatic of a throwaway culture that values consumerism, profiteering, and individualism. Appealing to our sense of responsibility and Christian convictions, he calls for a collective response to identify the root causes of environmental degradation by putting forward integral ecology, which calls for conservation, sustainability, and care for one another.

To avert the impending danger of a more catastrophic scenario, man needs not only scientific approaches to address the problems but also a moral disposition to change ways. The book of Genesis narrates that first, God tasked humans to take care of His creation. The sacramental principle tells us that every creature and everything can be a way to reveal God. Thus, human beings are stewards and trustees tasked with preserving the dignity of creation. We must think and act globally and consider that all the goods and beings on earth are God's gift to everyone and that each one of us has a duty and responsibility to make sure that our habitat is not abused. It follows then that the ways we treat our environment and our fellow human beings, especially the poor, must be a sign of our respect for God, our creator. "The best way to restore men and women to their rightful place, putting an end to their claim to absolute dominion over the earth, is to speak once more of the figure of a Father who creates and who alone owns the world" (LS, 75).

Ours must be a faith that sees God not only in our neighbors but also in the environment – our reflection about grace and salvation must include the whole of creation. The earth, our habitat, must also be the earth for future generations. An egalitarian mode of thinking, a heightened moral consciousness, and environmental-theological ethics are prerequisites to a new vision for the earth. Pope Francis reminds us that we are connected not only with one another but "linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family" (LS, 89), yet while some are mired in degrading poverty, others have the luxury of wasting resources entrusted to their care (LS, 90). He also reminds us that we are also connected with nature because God ordered creation, wherein "everything is connected" (LS, 91).

The Christian doctrine of creation is Trinitarian in the sense that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit partake integrally in its generation. The three persons of the Trinity partake in the act of creating. Thus, in the Christian formulation of creation, *the Father creates through the Son in the Spirit*. It is also Christological because Christians put a premium on their faith in Jesus Christ as the redeemer of humanity (LS, 99) and the faith conviction

that the destiny of creation is bound with the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God (LS, 100). The Christian view highlights God’s immanence, presence, and communication in Jesus Christ, the Son. In the Christian understanding of reality, the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ, present from the beginning: “All things have been created through him and for him” (Col 1:16).”

Pope Francis’ Critique of Our Notion of Progress

Towards the end of the encyclical, Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’* criticizes our notion of progress and development based solely on metrics of production and consumption as he argues that a decrease in consumeristic outlook and redefining our notion of progress will give rise to another kind of progress and development. “A technological and economic development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress” (LS, 194). The encyclical not only articulates the merit of Christian doctrine on ecology and relevant social principles but also considers the realities on the ground and suggests necessary steps to improve and reverse the impact of the ecological crisis. The call to invest in renewable energy, the marginalization of the poor, the challenges of climate change, and sustainable development activities are important themes in the encyclical. Christians must rethink a new model of ecological praxis borne out from the depths of our Christian conviction, ecological spirituality, and sustainable development to be manifested in concrete ways, not just in ideas (Piro, 2020).

Pope Francis invites Christians to appropriate and develop spiritual treasures bestowed by God to the Church as he calls for ecological conversion. This invitation is geared towards a spirituality that embraces Christian doctrines of creation - an “ecological spirituality grounded in the convictions of our faith, since the teachings of the Gospel have direct consequences for our way of thinking, feeling and living” (LS, 216). This ecological spirituality necessitates ecological conversion, considering that the consequences of our actions lead to unimaginable ecological crises. These personal and interior conversions call for Christians to live out their “vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork,” which is essential to a life of virtue because such is “not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience” (LS, 217). Eventually, our heightened awareness of the state of our environment and the crises that we face bring us to spiritual renewal and make us commit ourselves to ecological conversion that will “inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm in resolving the world’s problems and in offering ourselves to God” (LS, 220).

Pope Francis called for an urgent challenge to protect our common home and to bring the whole human family together to seek sustainable and integral development (LS 13, 15) in 2020. Five years after the publication of *Laudato Si*, an inter-dicastery document was issued presenting “various *operational proposals, with the aim of inspiring action* on the part of church institutions, believers, and all people of goodwill” (Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See, 2020). Responding to the Pope’s challenge, the SVD Fathers in Tagaytay City, Philippines, responded through their initiative to build the SVD *Laudato Si’* Farm, which was conceived and began in 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and the destructive nearby Taal volcano eruption.

The Act Part: SVD Farm as a Concrete Expression of Ecological Conversion

SVD “*Laudato Si’*” Farm, commonly called SVD Farm, is a six-hectare eco-spirituality place built by the SVD priests, missionaries, and seminarians. The place is in the middle of the Divine Word Seminary, the Pink Sisters convent, and the Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit convent in Tagaytay City. It is a work in progress and dedicated to the Virgin of the Poor, who serves as its patroness. Almost half of the farm is dedicated to organic farming, where most of the food served to the visitors comes from. SVD Farm has a beautiful chapel built of natural materials such as wood, logs, nipa, bamboo, and the like. Nipa huts and pavilions are scattered in the place where pilgrims conduct their prayers, bible study, and personal stories, among others, including their meals. The newest additions to the SVD Farm are the huge image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus strategically installed in the highest spot of the farm called the Sacred Heart Hill, the Retreat House, St. Peter’s Pond, and the Station of the Cross trails. The farm is beautifully landscaped, well-maintained, and home to different varieties of plants, trees, flowers, and birds. Even before the SVD Farm was built, SVD Seminary had a mini forest home to different floras and faunas, which is proof of SVD’s long and steadfast commitment to integral ecology.

The Humble Beginning

The SVD *Laudato Si’* Farm was born out of circumstances. The farm's journey began with a vision fueled by faith and a commitment to stewardship. It was conceived in the last quarter of 2020 following the call of Pope Francis upon all peoples of any age or gender, color or culture, nation, or religion to join minds, hearts, and hands in caring for the only cosmic home of humankind in the vast universe, the planet Earth (Agcaracar, 2023). During this time, Tagaytay was recovering from the

gruesome effect of the Taal Volcano eruption on January 12, 2020, and the prolonged community lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Divine Word Seminary in Tagaytay City was one of the institutions that bore the whip of time. The situation requires a sensible and strategic plan for the community’s survival. Because of the uncertainty of the situation, not knowing when the pandemic and community lockdown would end, with the goal of becoming self-reliant, the SVD priests decided to find a natural source of living by converting idle lands into farms, planting vegetables and fruit-bearing trees.

In June 2020, Fr. Samuel N. Agcaracar, S.V.D., was elected as the seminary's rector. His office commenced on a mission to revitalize the seminary's operations towards self-reliance, which eventually led to an ambitious ecological sustainability program. Accordingly, on September 5, 2020, the SVD Tagaytay priests and seminarians, led by the vision of the newly elected Rector, began cleaning the idle lands, which eventually became the SVD *Laudato Si’* Farm. Coincidentally, the Universal Church has recently embarked on the Season of Creation 2020. The Season of Creation is the annual call of commitment among Christian churches to prayer and action for our common home. The month-long endeavor begins on September 1, with the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation. It ends on October 4, the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology, beloved by many Christian denominations (Casafus, 2024).

Central to the farm's development is the devotion to the Virgin of the Poor, whose intercession and presence have played a pivotal role in the farm's growth. The attachment of a statue of the Virgin of the Poor, the chapel erected in her honor, and the subsequent healing experienced by visitors underscore the spiritual significance of the farm as a place of solace and transformation. The farm is a sanctuary for rediscovering one's value under the healing presence of God.

The SVD Farm’s Vision and Mission

The Farm envisions and aspires “to become a unique spiritual haven where one can commune with God, others, and nature while relishing totally organic products (Yap, 2023).” As a professor of missiology, one of the courses being taught by Fr. Samuel Agcaracar or Fr. Sam is *Laudato Si’*. It influenced him to translate it into something concrete, the SVD Farm. Accordingly, it “embodies our missionary calling to integrate ecological concerns into our everyday lives, to advocate for environmental justice, and to form missionary communities that prioritize creation care” (Agcaracar, 2023). The project opens the opportunity to transform idle land into a

thriving sanctuary of sustainability. Despite initial challenges, Fr. Sam pressed forward, guided by a fervent belief in the program's potential to serve the community and the environment. Inspired by Pope Francis, Fr. Sam, in an interview with Veritas, said that SVD Farm commits to “strengthen the spiritual welfare of guests and employees through its solemn ambiance and liturgical services” (Virola, 2023).

Integration of Laudato Si for Sustainable Spirituality and Lifestyle

The emergence of Laudato Si into the farm's ethos is evident in its commitment to the Six Pillars of Ecological Sustainability, namely, sustainable farming, sustainable energy, sustainable water, sustainable livelihood, sustainable knowledge, and sustainable lifestyle. Through sustainable practices and community engagement, the farm embodies the principles of Laudato Si. It serves as a model for ecological conversion. It ensures that its entire existence benefits the planet and its inhabitants.

The farm utilizes 70 percent solar-powered and generated electricity and incorporates the 5Rs of waste management— reduce, reuse, recycle, recover, and residual management (Agcaracar, 2023). The collected rainwater is used for irrigation and fishpond. In return, the water from the fishpond is also used to water plants and vegetables.

Since its launching and after the community lockdown eased up, many pilgrims have started flocking to the SVD Farm to breathe fresh air, reflect and pray, and receive sacraments. Accordingly, people are coming to have a sense of peace, find God, and eat organic food. To serve the increasing volume of visitors, the farm has been training staff and employing nearby community indigents to provide a livelihood. Ecological awareness and familiarization tours have also been organized to promote environmental education and awareness for both the staff and pilgrims. It aims to entice patrons and guests to shift and adopt a sustainable lifestyle practiced on the farm.

The Three Anchors of the SVD Farm

The farm's mission is further bolstered by its three-fold approach: farming services, food services, and faith services. This holistic model sustains the farm's operations and fosters a deep connection between visitors, nature, and spirituality. In an interview with Radio Veritas Asia, the Executive Director of SVD Farm narrated that the farm produces fruits and organic vegetables they serve to their guests. Moreover, SVD Farm becomes a place of spirituality where one can encounter God and nature.

Visitors can breathe air through its quiet and solemn ambiance and find solace to reflect, pray, and commune with nature and God. The farm has also helped surrounding communities through livelihood and becoming its farmers, food servers, maintenance, and the like (Virola, 2023). Fr. Sam adds that the farm’s beneficial practices, such as reducing waste, conserving energy, and adopting eco-friendly measures, are a way of living the Gospel values of stewardship of creation, reverence for God's creation, and harmony with all life (Agcaracar, 2023).

SVD Farm as a Haven of Ecological Dialogue and Commitment

The spiritual journey embarked upon at the farm transcends religious boundaries. It welcomes individuals of various faiths to commune with nature and finds solace in its embrace. The farm becomes a sacred space for reconciliation and healing through dialogue and a shared reverence for the earth.

As the farm blossoms into a post-pandemic sanctuary, its impact reverberates far beyond its borders. Visitors are not only nourished by organic food and spiritual services but also inspired to adopt sustainable practices in their own lives. Cardinals, bishops, and religious groups flock to the farm, seeking guidance on integrating sustainability into their respective ministries and offices.

As the farm envisions further developments, including a gourmet-style restaurant and enhanced waste management systems, it serves as a concrete expression of Pope Francis' invitation to live the way of *Laudato Si'*. The farm is a perfect place where one can find God, nature, and human beings communing with one another and intermingling harmoniously. SVD Farm serves as a model of how all of us, citizens of this planet, can help save our common home, heed the challenges of the Pope, and ensure the future of the coming generations.

Insights and Recommendations

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, SVD *Laudato Si'* Farm emerged as a testament to the efforts of the missionary community to achieve ecological development and sustainability. With the government-imposed community lockdown, the need to protect themselves from the virus, and the need for self-sufficiency, SVD priests, seminarians, and the community were forced to utilize its idle place for self-sufficiency and convert it to a farm.

Inspired by Pope Francis' teachings on integral ecology and ecological conversion, the community started engaging in organic farming. Initially, the main intention was to feed the SVD community and become self-reliant. Drawing strength from the Gospel of Creation, which highlights ecological stewardship, respect for the natural order and sustainable practices, and the interconnectedness of human beings and other created beings (Kroeger, 2023), SVD came up with a plan for developing the SVD *Laudato Si'* Farm.

When the pandemic was over, the farm slowly shifted its thrust from self-sufficiency to a place of eco-spirituality. They gradually developed the haven as an avenue to nurture faith by encountering God in nature. Involving the community in the process, the farm became the center for ecological spirituality and contributed to sustainable development as explicitly advocated by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

In SVD Farm, integral ecology is manifested. Everything can be seen to be truly interconnected. One's relationship with God deepens as one finds oneself reconnected with God's creation. Likewise, this farm also proved that while caring for the common home, one can also look after the needs of the people in need by employing workers from nearby communities. In this way, they are not mere charity beneficiaries but collaborators in this endeavor. Even the visitors are educated through informative signposts and living integral ecology that encourages communal ecological conversion. Thus, the community involved is being educated and formed by SVD's commitment to integral ecology so that they themselves can be personally committed and take the initiative to care for the common home, even in their own homes.

The SVD clergy and its community have demonstrated pastoral action for the environmental protection of the planet Earth. The Catholic laity in education, business, and public governance are challenged to do social action in the context of corporal and spiritual work of mercy. Finally, in *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, the Catholic Laity was challenged in Vatican II Decree on the Apostolate of the Lay People (Pope Paul VI, 1965), "To take on as their distinctive task this renewal of the temporal order... to be renewed in such a way that while its principles are fully respected, it is harmonized with the principles of the Christian life and adapted to the various conditions of times, places, and peoples."

Conclusion

Pope Francis created a huge impact by publishing his second encyclical, the *Laudato Si'*. Many people - Catholics and not, government and private entities, religious and scientists, and almost all sectors of society agreed that a drastic change is necessary in order to mitigate the impending environmental catastrophe of our only planet. Drawing strength from the gospel of creation, Pope Francis successfully explained integral ecology, which states that humans have a responsibility to care for nature. Pope Francis explained how beneficial all of God's creation was, due to too much anthropocentric point of view, abused it.

Since its publication, many academic conferences, forums, and discussions have happened. Luminaries have presented and discussed the ecological problem and the drastic changes that are necessary to reverse, such as global climate change. People are already aware of the impending calamity, but little or no effort has been made since *Laudato Si'* was published. Accordingly, today is man's last chance to be able to save our planet. There is only one way to achieve it; humans must change their lifestyle and attitudes towards nature to be able to save our common home. Otherwise, global environmental catastrophes cannot be avoided. Some have heeded the call. In their own little way, they started to live a kind of life that prevented exacerbating the forecasted calamity. However, Pope Francis' call for a collective response and a change in attitude and behavior towards nature remains. While the root causes of environmental degradation have already been identified, concrete actions to mitigate global crises remain and have not been implemented.

The SVD *Laudato Si'* Farm is an eminent example of what can be achieved when faith, commitment, and the community converge. It is a model of eco-spirituality mentioned by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*. It is a testament to the transformative power of belief and the boundless potential of humanity to nurture and protect planet Earth, our common home. Though the farm is a work in progress, it already inspires many pilgrims to live the teachings of *Laudato Si'*. By entrusting creation to humanity, God wanted humanity to accept it as a gift from Him according to His plan and purpose (Agcaracar, 2023). The SVD *Laudato Si'* Farm affirms such divine plan and purpose. Its commitment to sustainability, community engagement, and spiritual enrichment embodies the spirit of Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*. It serves as a beacon of hope for a more ecologically conscious future. Pope Francis invites Christians to appropriate and develop spiritual treasures bestowed by God to the Church as he calls for ecological conversion. This invitation is geared towards a spirituality that embraces Christian doctrines

of creation - an “ecological spirituality grounded in the convictions of our faith, since the teachings of the Gospel have direct consequences for our way of thinking, feeling and living” (LS, 216). This ecological spirituality necessitates ecological conversion, considering that the consequences of our actions lead to unimaginable ecological crises.

The SVD Farm is just one of the many ecological models where one can live the teachings of *Laudato Si'*. While many challenges are blocking the way. One serious step is important enough to start a beautiful endeavor. The challenges of *Laudato Si'* are no longer ignorable. It is a must if we want to live and save our only home - this planet Earth. We must think of ourselves. We must think of the poor. We must think of our children and our children's children. We must think of the future generations. We must heed the call.

Ethics, Funding, and Declaration of Interest

No human persons are directly involved in gathering information in this research paper. Hence, ethical approval is not needed. The authors affirm no ethical violation in the use of human subjects. Each document alluded to in this paper was appropriately cited.

No external funding was received for this academic research. The researchers declare no conflict of interest.

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