



By:Laudato Si Movemen

LESSON PLAN—THEOLOGY OR PHILOSOPHY

Our better future is a shared endeavor, held by older and younger generations alike. As an educator, you have a precious opportunity to guide the conversations that will help determine the future for all of us.

If you have any questions about a screening in your classroom, please contact us at movie@laudatosimovement.org.

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INTRODUCTION

This lesson plan is appropriate for secondary school students and university students. The film may be overwhelming for primary school students, and it is not recommended that they watch it.

As a classroom instructor, your guidance and moral authority are essential. Please be sure that you have reviewed and agreed to the [safeguarding policies](#).

[Register your in-class screening](#) to gain access to the full suite of resources, receive exciting communications about the film, and join the global conversation around *The Letter*. By registering, you will also receive a file to be used in community events.

RESOURCES REQUIRED

For this class, you will need:

- Time. *The Letter* is around 80 minutes long, and the proposed lesson will take about two hours. If your classes are normally shorter, you might either divide the lesson into parts or watch the film as a special event or assembly.
- A laptop or desktop computer
- A screen or whiteboard with a projector to show the film
- Materials such as pens and paper. You can make this lesson as sustainable as possible by reducing the amount of printed materials. Re-use classroom materials and encourage students to reduce waste.

A small number of DVDs are available for very remote communities that have no Internet access. To request a DVD please email movie@laudatosimovement.org. DVDs will take approximately 6 weeks to arrive after shipping.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This lesson plan will enable students to do the following.

- Explore the concept of **integral ecology** and its roots in Catholic teaching
- Discover **Laudato Si'** and understand the key messages of the encyclical

SUGGESTED READING

We recommend sharing [Laudato Si'](#) with students prior to the class. While students may not be able to read the full encyclical, specific sections such as the following may be helpful:

- Chapter 2: The Gospel of Creation (paragraphs 1-61)
- Chapter 4: Integral Ecology (paragraphs 138-162)
- Chapter 6: Ecological Education and Spirituality (paragraphs 202-246)

For students who aren't able to read the encyclical itself, Laudato Si' Movement offers a reading guide for the encyclical.

In addition, guides on ecology in faith traditions may be useful:

- [Christianity and Ecology](#)
- [Hinduism and Ecology](#)
- [Islam and Ecology](#)
- [Buddhism and Ecology](#)

Further useful materials

- [Summary of The Letter](#)
- [People of The Letter](#)
- Science and the planetary crisis

LESSON PLAN

Introduction (5 minutes)

Begin the class by introducing *The Letter* (find a summary of the film here), and explaining why you are bringing students together to watch it. This introduction could include a brief summary of the science behind the planetary crisis and your thoughts about why this topic connects with your course. You could also share a summary of the Laudato Si' encyclical.

Invite students to take a moment for reflection or prayer before watching the film. You might wish to share a quotation from Laudato Si' and invite students to reflect on this statement. Some recommendations are provided below:

- The majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers. This should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity. [Laudato Si', 201]
- Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience. [Laudato Si', 201]
- Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*. [Laudato Si', 49]

Watch the film (80 minutes)

For information on how to watch the film, [visit our website](#). The screening guide for *The Letter* includes useful information about how to screen the movie during your class.

Reflection (5 minutes)

After the film, invite your students to take a brief moment for reflection, or lead the students in prayer. You could share another quote from Laudato Si' before moving into the discussion.

Invite students to share their initial reactions to the film, either with the entire class or with the person seated next to them. Alternatively, invite students to share one word for how they feel in this moment.

Share key information (10 minutes)

At this stage, you may wish to share some further information with your class to inspire meaningful discussion. We've provided some suggestions for talking points based on some of the key themes explored within The Letter. You may wish to add specific talking points relevant to your school or university and local community.

The history of teaching on ecology within the Catholic tradition

- The Christian Scriptures are rich with references to God as the creator and filled with examples of God's presence in creation.
- Earlier Church leaders such as St. Benedict, St. Augustine, and St. Hildegarde, along with many others, made prayer in creation a cornerstone of their daily lives.
- More recently, popes from the past five decades have spoken about the need to protect our common home and address the planetary crisis.

The role of faiths

- In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis calls on "all people of good will" to care for our common home. [*Laudato Si'*, 62] He also highlights the importance of open, respectful dialogue with scientists and
- people of other faiths in addressing the ecological crisis.

[Approximately 80%](#) of the people on Earth belong to a faith. The Letter demonstrates how common ground can be found in people of different faiths and backgrounds by addressing shared values.

Science and faith

- Science has given us windows of insight into the planetary crisis. Thanks to the efforts of scientists, we understand the mechanisms by which climate change is [already causing](#) dangerous disruption to nature and affecting the lives of billions of people around the world.
- Science has also given us insight into [how we can](#) address the planetary crisis. By restoring degraded ecosystems, protecting our lands and waters, switching to renewable energy, and changing the ways we consume goods, we can protect the people and places we love.

Suggested Activity 1 (20 minutes)

In small groups, ask students to review statements from Catholic leaders. A few examples are below and also available in the separate document linked [here](#).

- Describe the ways that Catholic leaders have used science to inform ethics in these statements.
- These statements come from various points in time, and they express various concerns about the planetary crisis. They all stand on an understanding of God and an understanding of humanity's role on earth.
- How do these statements point at a shared understanding of God?
- What does this vision of God imply for us as the human members of creation, those who are made in God's image?

Pope Paul VI, 1970

- The progressive deterioration of that which has generally come to be called the environment, risks provoking a veritable ecological catastrophe. Already we see the pollution of the air we breathe, the water we drink. We see the pollution of rivers, lakes, even oceans—to the point of inspiring fear of a true «biological death» in the near future, if energetic measures are not immediately and courageously taken and rigorously put into practice. . . . In brief, everything is bound up together. You must be attentive to the great consequences which follow on every intervention by man in the balance of nature, whose harmonious richness has been placed at his disposal in accordance with the living design of the Creator. [Cf., for example, Ps. 64: 10-14].

Pope Paul VI, 1971

- Man is suddenly becoming aware that by an ill-considered exploitation of nature he risks
- destroying it and becoming in his turn the victim of this degradation. . . . This is a wide-ranging social problem which concerns the entire human family. [Octogesima Adveniens, 21]

Pope John Paul II, 1990

- Christians, in particular, realize that their responsibility within creation and their duty towards nature and the Creator are an essential part of their faith. [World Day of Peace Message, 15]
- The most profound and serious indication of the moral implications underlying the ecological problem is the lack of respect for life evident in many of the patterns of environmental pollution. [World Day of Peace Message, 7]

Pope Benedict XVI, 2009

- The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole. [Caritas in Veritate, 48]
- On this earth there is room for everyone: here the entire human family must find the resources to live with dignity, through the help of nature itself—God's gift to his children—and through hard work and creativity. At the same time we must recognize our grave duty to hand the earth on to future generations in such a condition that they too can worthily inhabit it and continue to cultivate it. [Caritas in Veritate 50]

Catechism of the Catholic Church

- Our Creed begins with the creation of heaven and earth, for creation is the beginning and the foundation of all God's works. [198]
- The right to private property, acquired or received in a just way, does not do away with the original gift of the earth to the whole of mankind. The universal destination of goods remains primordial, even if the promotion of the common good requires respect for the right to private property and its exercise. [2403]

Suggested Activity 2 (20 minutes)

In small groups, students are invited to consider the various faith perspectives represented by the people featured in the film.

Ridhima Pandey, the student leader from India, is Hindu. Arouna Kandé, the educator and climate refugee from Senegal, is Muslim. Cacique Dadá, the Indigenous leader from Brazil, follows an animist tradition. Greg Asner and Robin Martin, the scientists from the United States, do not belong to any religion but adhere to generally humanist values.

Using Venn diagrams or a similar mapping method, students should identify how these various faith perspectives share common values that encourage better care of our common home.

After completing their mapping exercise, students should consider the area of overlap.

- What are the common values shared by all?
- How would the students describe the ecological actions that these values encourage? Do they encourage individualistic or communal ecological actions? Do they encourage incremental or urgent and ambitious ecological actions? How would the students discern whether any ecological action serves the values shared by all?
- Distribute recent news stories about ecological actions taken in the country or local community. These headlines will be available via an Internet search for the name of the community or the name of the country plus climate change. Ask the students to use the criteria they have developed to analyze whether these actions adhere to the common values they have identified.

Suggested Activity 3 (20 minutes)

In small groups, students should create a table that outlines the ways in which science can help inform ethical teaching and the ways in which its application is more limited. For example, science can tell us that an ecological crisis is happening. It cannot tell us why we should care.

A blank template for small groups to complete together is [here](#).

As an additional step, students may research what various scientific leaders (such as professors, popular science authors, or government science bodies) and theological/ethical authorities (such as professors, popular theologians, or leaders within denominations) have already said about each item on their list.

Take action (10 minutes)

After discussion, you can help your students to identify ways in which they can take action which will help to bring integral ecology to life within your school or university and wider community. Present a few options to the group:

- **Create a Laudato Si' Plan for the school or university via the Laudato Si' Action Platform.** The [Laudato Si' Action Platform](#) is a Vatican programme that empowers institutions to achieve full sustainability in the spirit of Laudato Si'. Schools and universities that enroll are equipped with tailored tools to help them create their own plans, and the platform helps schools to take impactful and meaningful actions. The Vatican warmly invites your school or university to participate.
- **Invite your students to host further screenings of The Letter for their youth groups or university societies.** They can register and find all of the resources they need to host at [theletterfilm.org](#)
- **Join a group for young people:** A movement focused on the needs and gifts of young people can be a wonderful way to continue taking action over the long term. [Laudato Si' Generation](#) and other programs offer tailored resources and connections with people around the world.

Join the global conversation (5 minutes)

We would love to hear how your class went and any updates on how you're taking action afterwards. Your story may be shared in a blog post to inform and inspire educators around.

Let us know what your classes are doing by emailing us at movie@laudatosimovement.org If you're sharing any photos of minors, please be sure that photography consent forms have been completed.

Educators and students can also follow The Letter on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) to get the latest news from the film team and global community.