

Lesson Plan

Lesson aims

- To research different Christian denomination approaches towards environmentalism
- To begin to critique biblical interpretation regarding stewardship and dominion

Resources

- PowerPoint presentation
- Worksheets:
 - Information sheets (one denomination per group)
 - A3 recording sheets (one per group)
 - Additional fact sheets (four half-sheets per group)
 - A3 mapping sheet (one per student)

Starter

Ask students to look at the images on the PowerPoint presentation and attempt to interpret what each image might represent in terms of how we should care for the environment.

Development

Introduce the idea that different Christians believe different things about how we should care for the environment. Work through instructions on PowerPoint. Ensure students are aware of time limitations for each activity.

Group work

Divide the class into five groups to complete activities as instructed on the PowerPoint.

By the end of the lesson, each student should have their own mapping sheet with information regarding different contemporary Christian beliefs about how we should care for the environment.

Plenary

Quick recap on what has been learnt this lesson – give me five facts.

Information sheets

One denomination per group

The Evangelical Churches

There are a number of evangelical Christian organisations that strongly support the idea that Christians must care for the environment. Stewardship is a prominent theme.

The Evangelical Environmental Network has stated that:

Because we have sinned, we have failed in our stewardship of creation. Therefore we repent of the way we have polluted, distorted, or destroyed so much of the Creator's work.

They argue that we need to take better care of creation – to become better stewards – in order to live as God desires. (*On the Care of Creation*)

Other motivations for environmental care include an appeal to love of neighbour, encouraging people to act justly and out of consideration for those who are less fortunate. For example, the Evangelical Environmental Network includes 'human and cultural degradation' as among the ways in which we harm creation when we fail to act as stewards. Tearfund, the Evangelical Alliance's relief fund, campaigns on a variety of global humanitarian concerns including matters affecting the environment and climate change to encourage people to consider how their actions harm those who live in countries that are adversely affected by climate change. It cites a paraphrase of Romans 10.13 – 'Love does no harm to its neighbour' – as a call to responsible stewardship so that others do not suffer from the effects of climate change.

The Church of England

In 1991, the General Synod of the Church of England prepared a report on 'Christian Stewardship' with the aim of encouraging 'a critical review of human responsibility to the living environment'. It states that:

Christians believe that this world belongs to God by creation, redemption and sustenance, and that he has entrusted it to humankind made in his image and responsible to him; we are in the position of stewards, tenants, curators, trustees or guardians, whether or not we acknowledge this responsibility.

The report cites Genesis 1.26-30 as giving humans authority over the natural world. However, at the same time it reads Genesis 2.15-17 as instructing humans to both 'work' it and 'care' for it. So humans have 'dominion' over the earth but this is a gift from God. This means that humans should care for the world 'in the way God himself demands'.

Other motivations for environmental care include an appeal to love of neighbour, encouraging people to act justly and out of consideration for those who are less fortunate. For example, the Church of England writes of how 'we are tenants of the world only in our own generation', highlighting the importance of preserving the natural environment out of concern for the wellbeing of future generations. (*Christians and the Environment: Report by the Board for Social Responsibility*)

Genesis 1:26-28

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'

Genesis 2:15-17

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'

The Catholic Church

The Catholic Church understands stewardship as resulting from humans having been created in the image of God (the Catholic doctrine of the *imago Dei*).

The International Theological Commission states that humans are:

...made in [God's] image to participate in his work, in his project of love and salvation, indeed in his own lordship over the universe. Since man's place as ruler is in fact a participation in the divine governance of creation, we speak of it here as a form of stewardship. (*Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*)

Pope John Paul II, the former leader of the Catholic Church, spoke of the need for an 'ecological conversion'. He remarked that:

Man's lordship is not absolute, but ministerial...not the mission of an absolute and unquestionable master, but of a steward of God's kingdom. (*Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*)

So for Catholics, 'God appoints man as his steward in the manner of the master in the Gospel parables (cf. Luke 19:12)'. (*Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*)

The Orthodox Church

The Orthodox Church understands Genesis 1 as a call to stewardship, requiring humans to be responsible for creation. This is also linked with the Orthodox emphasis on 'deification' - the idea that humans come to share fully in God's being and nature through the process of salvation. The Orthodox Church states that:

We are called to exercise dominion over all creatures on earth (cf. Gen. 1:28), i.e. to be stewards ... of God's material world, caring for it, maintaining it in its integrity and perfecting it by opening it up to God through our own deification. (*Orthodox Perspectives on Creation*)

Some have suggested that Orthodox beliefs about the transformation of all creation, its incorporation into the divine, may be especially valuable ideas to inspire environmental care.

Genesis 1:28

God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'

Christian groups opposed to environmentalism

However, it is important to remember that not all Christians agree that we should be concerned about preserving the environment, or acting to reduce carbon emissions. Some argue that biblical teachings suggest other priorities – in particular the Second Coming of Jesus – and see environmentalism as a dangerous threat - a false, non-Christian religion.

Biblical texts that are cited include 2 Peter 3.7-13, 1 Thessalonians 4.13-5.2 and Mark 13.7-31. You will study these texts in more depth in the lesson on the future of the Earth.

2 Peter 3.7-13

But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgement and destruction of the godless. But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

1 Thessalonians 4.13-5.2

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord for ever. Therefore encourage one another with these words. Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

Mark 13.7-31

When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

‘As for yourselves, beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them. And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations. When they bring you to trial and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say; but say whatever is given you at that time, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

‘But when you see the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains; someone on the housetop must not go down or enter the house to take anything away; someone in the field must not turn back to get a coat. Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that it may not be in winter. For in those days there will be suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, no, and never will be. And if the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he has cut short those days. And if anyone says to you at that time, “Look! Here is the Messiah!” or “Look! There he is!”—do not believe it. False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be alert; I have already told you everything.

‘But in those days, after that suffering,
the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in clouds” with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

‘From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Recording Sheet (Enlarge to A3)

One per group

NAME OF DENOMINATION:

PREDOMINANT VIEWPOINT HELD:

REASONS FOR THIS VIEWPOINT:

QUOTES FROM SCRIPTURE TO SUPPORT THIS VIEWPOINT:

YOUR GROUP'S INTERPRETATION OF THE QUOTES REFERENCED:

Additional Fact Sheet

Four half-sheets per group

DENOMINATION:

VIEWPOINT:

QUOTES IN SUPPORT OF VIEWPOINT:

DENOMINATION:

VIEWPOINT:

QUOTES IN SUPPORT OF VIEWPOINT:

Mapping sheet (Enlarge to A3)

One per student

Contemporary Christian Views Regarding Environmental Ethics

EVANGELICAL

View:

Quotes in support of view:

ORTHODOX

View:

Quotes in support of view:

ROMAN CATHOLIC

View:

Quotes in support of view:

CHURCH OF ENGLAND

View:

Quotes in support of view:

CHRISTIANS OPPOSED TO ENVIRONMENTALISM

View:

Quotes in support of view: