**Lesson Plan 7: Criticisms of Stewardship**

**Lesson aims**

* To show that stewardship is not universally accepted as a good basis for environmental ethics
* To highlight some of the main criticisms made of the idea that humans should see themselves as stewards of the earth

**Resources**

* PowerPoint presentation
* Signs to attach to walls
* Question sheets (one question per group)

**Starter Activity**

Show the introductory video from the ‘Criticisms of Stewardship’ section of the Beyond Stewardship website (find a link on Slide 2 of the PowerPoint or see **[http://ex.ac.uk/beyondstewardship](http://ex.ac.uk/beyondstewardship" \t "_blank)**). Invite the students to respond to the key question posed at the end of the video.

**Starter 2**

Attach the two signs to walls at opposite ends of the classroom. Ask the students to stand between the two signs according to their own views about the role of human beings in relation to the environment.

You might like to encourage students to think about issues such as natural disasters, the development of vaccines to prevent illness, human responsibility for damage already done to the environment and the superior intelligence of the human species when making their decision.

Choose a few students to explain why they have chosen to stand in that particular position and how they reached their view.

Where do the students think stewardship lies on the continuum? To what extent do they think we really can control nature? To what extent should we try to control nature?

Explain that all these questions are to do with the tension between humans as powerful over the environment, and yet at the same time unable to control nature. These questions lead into the topic of the lesson – problems with idea of stewardship.

**Whole class work**

As a class, work through the PowerPoint presentation. Explain the criticisms of stewardship expressed on each slide and the accompanying quotations by eco-theologian Clare Palmer. Students to take notes.

**Group work**

Divide the class into four groups. Each group is given a different question sheet and has 10 minutes to discuss the questions on it. One speaker is to be nominated by each group to give the rest of the class a 2 minute summary about their group’s discussion.

**Plenary**

As a class, discuss the statement by Clare Palmer on the final slide. Do the students agree with her views on stewardship? Why or why not?

**Signs**

**(Attach to walls at  
opposite ends of classroom)**

**Humans should seek to  
control the natural world**

**Humans should seek to live as part of the natural world  
without control**

**Questions sheets**

**(One per group)**

**Group One: Biblical Questions**

* Does the Bible teach that humans should be stewards of the earth? If so, where and how?
* When people claim that the Bible teaches stewardship, how valid is that claim? Is it based on what the Bible explicitly says, or on a certain interpretation?

**Group Two: Theological Questions**

* What model of relationships between God, humanity and the non-human creation does 'stewardship' imply?
* Do you find this a good model?

**Group Three: Political Questions**

* Do the basic ideas of stewardship reflect structures within society that we might now regard as immoral (e.g. using slaves)?
* Is it good or bad to imagine humans as 'managers' of the earth?

**Group Four: Ecological Questions**

* To what extent, if at all, are humans in control of nature?
* In what ways, if any, does the natural world require human management?
* To what extent are views on such questions determined by religious convictions or by scientific insights?