**Lesson Plan 9: The Exeter Project**

**Lesson aims**

* To introduce the work of one research project on the Bible and environmental ethics
* To illustrate how the Bible can be used to shape and inform Christian environmental ethics, without a focus on stewardship

**Resources**

* Beyond Stewardship website
* Padlet.com (teacher to set up a Padlet board in advance)
* ICT suite or access to tablet/PC for each group

**Starter Activity**

Show the introductory video from the ‘Exeter Project’ section of the Beyond Stewardship website. Invite the students to respond to the key question posed at the end of the video. See: [**http://ex.ac.uk/beyondstewardship**](http://ex.ac.uk/beyondstewardship)

**Group work**

Project up your Padlet board ([www.padlet.com](http://www.padlet.com)) in the classroom. Give the students the address and password. Each small group will work for up to 30 minutes on the same two questions (listed below, and supported by the Beyond Stewardship website, which needs to be read carefully). Titling their contributions with their group number, each group should put up one response box on the Padlet board to each key question. By the end of the 30 minutes, each group will have two boxes on the Padlet board: Group 1a (Group 1’s response to question a) and Group 1b (Group 1’s response to question b), etc. If the board is set up to allow freeform organisation of the responses, the teacher can then group together the responses to question a, and group together the responses to question b. The class can then discuss each other’s responses.

If you think it necessary, and before you set the students off on the task, make sure everyone is clear about the meaning of the word ‘reconciliation’.

Key questions:

1. How does the theme of reconciliation feature in the work of the Exeter Project? Which biblical texts does it draw upon and why?
2. Do you think that this is relevant to scientifically-informed approaches to the environment? Why, or why not?

**Plenary Discussion**

At the end of the lesson, discuss the following questions as a whole class:

* How valuable do you find the “ecological” ideas drawn out above from the Bible?
* If we “construct meaning” when we read a text like the Bible, does that mean we can make it mean anything we like?
* Does the approach outlined above simply mean taking the bits of the Bible we like and ignoring the bits we don’t? What are the alternatives?
* Do you think that ecological readings of the Bible will help Christians to be more “green”? Why? Or why not?

TEXT EXTRACTS

1. BIBLICAL TEXTS (FROM THE LETTERS OF PAUL)

**Romans 8:19-23 (NRSV)** 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; 20 for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; 23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

**Colossians 1:15-20 (NRSV)** 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16 for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers-- all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

**2 Corinthians 5:17-20**  17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. 20 So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

1. QUOTATIONS FROM THE BOOK, GREENING PAUL

‘At the center of the Pauline story of creation, then, stands the transforming act of God that provides the solution to the problem afflicting both humanity and the wider nonhuman creation. This transforming act can best be summarized as one of reconciliation. Reading from the perspective of our ecologically-focused hermeneutical lens, with Colossians 1 (and Romans 8) at the centre of our vision of the wider Pauline material, this can plausibly be seen as a vision of cosmic reconciliation which includes and incorporates all things.’ (David G. Horrell, Cherryl Hunt, and Christopher Southgate, *Greening Paul: Rereading the Apostle in an Age of Ecological Crisis.* Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2010, p. 170)

‘If Christ’s death encompasses “all things” in its reconciling, peace-making action, then the “living for others” which follows as the ethical consequence of this act may certainly be argued, logically if not in Paul’s own expressions of the notion, to include all things… within its scope.’ (*Greening Paul*, p. 196)

‘We do not pretend to be presenting what Paul “really said” or thought; nor do we pretend that Paul – or any other biblical tradition – could alone supply clear and substantial ethical guidance on matters related to our complex contemporary environmental challenges. But we do intend to allow the Bible – and Paul in particular – a generative and constructive role in the formulation of ecotheology and ethics, such that these can plausibly be presented as Christian contributions, persuasive reappropriations of the tradition.’ (*Greening Paul,* p. 217)

‘Romans 8 and Colossians 1 use different images and motifs in describing the future hope of all creation: in Romans 8 the picture is of liberation and glory after futility and bondage, while in Colossians 1 the dominant image is that of reconciliation. The images from Romans 8, we have suggested, lend themselves especially well to an appropriation informed by evolutionary science. The idea of reconciliation, on the other hand, needs careful thought before it can be related to ecological issues, though we have argued that it is a crucial theme in terms of the ecological reading of the Pauline tradition.’ (*Greening Paul*, p. 218)