

NOTES FOR TEACHERS

THE ENVIRONMENT AND STEWARDSHIP



The most commonly-held Christian beliefs about the environment include

- The world or creation does not belong to humans - it is a gift from God that is for the benefit of all created things and is a place for everything to flourish.
- Humans have the responsibility of being responsible stewards and have been provided with certain abilities and talents in order to undertake this role. Showing love to God and to one's neighbour, as Jesus taught, includes looking after the environment. However, a minority of Christians have interpreted the idea of dominion as allowing humans to exploit the environment.
- Damage to the environment is contrary to the plan of God and can, on some levels, be seen as being the result of human sinfulness.
- Christians also believe that the world can 'point to God', i.e. it reveals something about his nature (although this will always be seeing through the glass darkly as St Paul made clear).

The creation narratives in Genesis

While some Christians read Genesis 1-3 as a literal account of how the world was created, many, both historically and currently, see it as a symbolic story with themes of God's power as creator and that the world is the creation of a good God for a good purpose.

Most biblical scholars conclude that, along with the other books of the Pentateuch, Genesis was probably written down in the 6th or 7th centuries BC, and was based on older stories which had been circulating orally. Some see parallels with other creation myths from the ancient middle east, such as the order things are created in the Babylonian creation story. There are also significant differences. In some of these stories the world was seen as an afterthought or an accident that arose from fighting between different gods, while the story in Genesis has the world being deliberately made by God, as good place demonstrating his power and authority.

The Parable of the Three Servants

In the ancient world, a talent was a monetary unit of immense value, approximating to 15-20 years' wages. The CEV translation refers to 'five thousand coins' rather than the 'five talents' found in the NRSV .

The scenario from this parable was not uncommon in the ancient world. Wealthy people would often delegate the actual carrying out of business transactions to a trusted slave. There is a similar parable in Luke's gospel, in which there are ten servants who are each given a smaller amount of money known as a mina.

Like most parables, there are different interpretations of the Parable of the Three Servants. A common understanding places Jesus in the role of the master and uses the master's return and the accounting to represent the final judgement. Sometimes this parable is understood to be specifically about financial stewardship, more often it is understood to be about using one's talents in a more general sense. Interpretations of parables can be contentious, and some Christians would argue against drawing parallels from them about the nature of God.

Other names by which this parable is known include The Parable of the Talents and The Parable of the Unproductive Servant.

