

# An International Perspective on Creation Care

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The idea of a global conversation about Christian environmental stewardship is something I find very exciting. Despite my experience working with creation care in a number of countries, my approach to the topic is influenced by a distinctly American perspective. Thus I am anxious to hear other voices and viewpoints.

In the United States, the church has had a particularly odd relationship with environmental stewardship, due in large part to our own domestic politics and history. In the past, environmental concern has often been viewed as a liberal or even pagan issue. Many Christians have been hostile to anything that smacked of "tree-hugging?". Thankfully, this attitude has undergone a profound shift in recent years, although creation care is still often a secondary concern, failing to draw the interest that is generated by many other social issues.

Whether this distrust of environmental concern is common in churches in other countries, I don't know, but I suspect that it is not. I still remember the shock on the face of Plant With Purpose's Dominican director when I tried to explain the suspicion with which many U.S. churches regarded the environmental aspects of our work. It was a horrifying thought to him that American Christians would be less than enthusiastic about caring for God's creation. I have also been impressed by the speed with which churches in Tanzania have taken on creation care once they began to see the impact of deforestation on the local mountains. This has been very encouraging.

On the other hand, I am not sure it is a mainstream concern in the international Christian community. For one thing, it does require making a number of connections that are not always apparent. My own interest in creation care grew out of a desire to love my neighbor, but I needed others to show me how the health of a watershed was directly connected to giving a cup of cold water in the name of Jesus. (Matt 10:42) It required some upstream thinking, both literally and figuratively, to move from the cup of water to the degraded watershed.

I imagine that Christians in societies that live closer to the earth are more cognizant of these connections. In the US, insulated from our world by computer screens, air conditioning, bottled water and fast food, it is very easy to forget our dependence on the earth as our life support system. The hillside farmer in Africa has no such insulation and often receives immediate feedback from his or her environment.

Today, as interest in creation care is growing in the United States, there is also a growing interest in making it a part of our Christian walk and outreach. There is a rapidly expanding body of literature examining the Biblical basis for creation stewardship and reminding us that the earth is still the Lord's. Most of this still comes from an American perspective, so it is with eagerness that I look forward to the insights and perspectives of our brothers and sisters around the world as our conversation moves forward.