

**A ROCHA**

# **A Rocha Commitment to Creation Care**

## Discussion Guide

This discussion guide is designed to help groups and individuals study the A Rocha Commitment to Creation Care (ACCC). The ACCC was adopted unanimously by the A Rocha Worldwide Family in 2022 following a two-year period of consultation, involving A Rocha staff and board members from all over the world and a small number of external theological advisors. Its aim is to bring unity and clarity around why we care for God's world, to explain our motivation to others, and to encourage people to join us.

You are welcome to edit and format this discussion guide as you wish. Please acknowledge [www.arocha.org](http://www.arocha.org) if you reproduce it.

Do be flexible in how you use this discussion guide. It could be used for a weekly small group in person or online, for a one-off study day or retreat, or for individual reflection. There are 10 sections, each of which might take 30 minutes in a group setting. Do feel free to skip questions if they aren't relevant in your context or you haven't enough time. In sections A to I, the words of the ACCC are quoted in ***bold italics*** before the questions for reflection.

The ACCC is available online and as a downloadable PDF:

<https://arocha.org/en/theology-churches/faith-distinctives>

## **A. As you begin ...**

Before you study the ACCC, it may be helpful to think about and note down your answers to the following questions. If you're part of a group, discuss your answers:

- If I could be another species for a day (animal / bird / plant), what would I be and why?
- How would I sum up the Christian Gospel in one sentence?
- How would I define Christian mission in one or two sentences?
- Is there a creed or doctrinal statement that I / my church accept as our basis of faith? If so, what is it, who wrote it, and when? Does it say anything about God's creation or our calling to creation care, and if so, what?
- What are the top 3 objections to creation care that I hear from other Christians?

We'll return to our answers to these questions at the end of this discussion guide.

## **B. Introduction:**

*'As disciples of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, we bear witness to the divine authority of the Bible. This is summarized in the Nicene Creed and is the basis for the following affirmations of the historic Christian faith and is the foundation of our work.<sup>[1]</sup> We come from many cultures and church traditions, yet are united in our desire to be faithful to Jesus, and to demonstrate Christ's Lordship in caring for God's world.<sup>[2]</sup>'*

- What does the phrase 'the divine authority of the Bible' mean to you?
- Do you see creation care as a modern development or as part of 'the historic Christian faith'?
- Can you think of any examples from history of Christians appreciating and caring for the natural world? Share these.
- How does caring for God's world demonstrate Christ's Lordship?
- How can creation care bring people of diverse cultures and church traditions together?
- Footnote [1] refers to A Rocha's origins in the Evangelical Christian movement. In some contexts, 'Evangelical' has become politicized, but its root meaning is 'evangel' or gospel / good news. The early 'evangelicals' were people like Wilberforce and Shaftesbury whose understanding of the gospel was that Jesus is to be Lord of all of life. This included abolishing slavery, prison reform, and protecting women, children and animals from abuse and exploitation. Is 'evangelical' a term you identify with, and do you find it helpful or unhelpful?

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<sup>1</sup> A Rocha's origins lie within the Evangelical Christian movement as reflected in our foundational Basis of Faith. Within our leadership, we welcome those of all Christian traditions who accept the A Rocha Commitment to Creation Care.

<sup>2</sup> We work with a range of national and global denominations and networks. In addition, we partner fully in practical action to care for God's world with those of other faiths and none, and with scientific and environmental organizations.

## C. God and Creation:

*'1. God and Creation: We believe in one God, existing eternally in mutual loving relationship as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In love, God created all that exists from the farthest reaches of the cosmos to the complex ecosystems of Earth. God delights in the natural world in all its wildness, beauty and mystery, declaring it 'very good'. Creation, in turn, is a source of wonder and wisdom, and a witness to God's divine nature and eternal power.*

- *We rejoice in the beauty, diversity and complexity of the natural world, and commit ourselves to delighting in and treasuring God's good creation.'*

Each of the seven sections of the ACCC has a statement of belief and then a short response, because faith should always lead to action.

- What phrase jumps out at you from this section, and why?
- Think of [i] a wild creature, [ii] a plant / tree, and [iii] a natural place that bring you delight and wonder. What is it about them that touches you deeply? Do they show you something about God's character and nature?
- The Bible starts with creation, not with sin or salvation. God declares all creation 'very good'. How should this affect how we see other people, whether or not they share our faith?
- Do we see the natural world as essentially and originally 'very good'?
- Christians disagree on *when and how* God created all that exists. In A Rocha, we often say that discussion has been a distraction from thinking about *why and what for*. What answers do Psalms 19:1–6, 24:1–2, 148 suggest to 'why and what for'?
- Do you or your church spend time outdoors worshipping God in and with creation? Share any experiences of this and what you have experienced or learned from it.

## D. How we know God:

*'2. How we know God: God is known supremely in Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Bible, through the Holy Spirit and also through creation. Our knowledge of God, therefore, comes through our relationship with Christ, commitment to the Word of God and our experience of creation, in worship, relationship, creativity and the scientific investigation of life and its intricate interconnections and dependencies.*

- *We commit ourselves to worshipping and following Jesus as Lord, studying the Bible and seeking to glorify God as we study, learn from and care for God's created world.'*
  
- How do you know God? For example, has God spoken to you through the Bible, through worship, through other people, through science, through creation? Write a timeline of your spiritual journey marking key moments and how God spoke to you at these times. Share and discuss as much as you feel able to.
- List some of what we can learn about God through creation / nature / science.
- Augustine of Hippo wrote about 'God's two books', scripture and nature. Most Christian leaders / pastors are trained only from one book, the Bible. What difference would it make to train leaders, and disciple new Christians, using both 'books', scripture and nature?
- What would it (does it) look like in your church or A Rocha team to follow Jesus as Lord, both studying the Bible and also studying, learning from and caring for God's created world? What is (should be) the balance between these?

## E. Humanity and Creation:

*'3. Humanity and Creation: Human beings exist as creatures of the Earth, made in the image of God and given responsibility to reflect God's character in knowing, delighting in and caring for their fellow creatures and the whole Earth. Yet, human sin and rebellion against God mean alienation and brokenness in our relationships with God, people and the rest of creation. Sin leads to God's judgment, and it permeates and damages every area of life, including creation, which is subject to frustration and groans under the weight of human selfishness and sin.'*

- *We confess our involvement in selfish choices and sinful behaviours which damage God's creation. We commit ourselves, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to repent, to lament and to renew our vocation to serve and conserve God's creation, living in it and using it responsibly and sustainably.'*
  
- Genesis 1 & 2 teach that humans are made both in the image of God (1:26–28) and from the dust of the earth (2:7). Which of these have you heard or read most about? Why do you think that is?
- What happens when we only emphasise that we're made in God's image?
- What happens when we only emphasise that we're made from the dust of the earth?
- Creation care is described here as a God-given 'responsibility' and a 'vocation'. Do you agree that this applies to all humanity, or do you think it's only for some and if so, who?
- People have used different words to describe this vocation including 'stewards', 'guardians', 'Priests of creation', 'shepherds', 'servants', 'caretakers'. You may be able to think of others. Which do you find more or less helpful, and why?
- Look at the verbs ('doing' words) for humanity's relationship to creation in the section above (including the response and confession). List them and discuss which you resonate with.
- What does it mean to repent and lament about our involvement in spoiling God's world? What is the practical result of that repentance? How do we live as forgiven sinners in seeking to let Jesus be Lord of our lifestyles and decisions?

## **F. God's Covenant with Creation:**

*'4. God's Covenant with Creation: We believe God does not abandon creation, but in love continues to sustain and renew the Earth and all of creation. As recounted in the biblical narratives, God reaches out to a wounded world both in judgment and with the anticipation of renewal. God's covenant promise through Noah includes a future and a hope not only for people, but for all life on Earth and the Earth itself. In the accounts of land and people in the Old Testament, in times of both exile and settlement, and through prophetic visions of restored peaceful relationships, God's purposes consistently include not only people, especially the poor and marginalized, but also non-human creatures and the land itself.*

- *We respond to God's initiative by committing ourselves to pursue justice and peace, mutual learning and collaboration in our relationships, and the thriving of the communities and ecosystems within which God has placed us.'*
  
- Look at Genesis 9:8–17. How many times does God emphasise that the Covenant is wider than human beings? Just how wide is it? What does that mean for our understanding of God's priorities?
- What evidence do you see in the natural world that 'God does not abandon creation'?
- Are there things that make you doubt God's ongoing care for creation? How do we reconcile suffering, cruelty and death in nature with what we know of who God is?
- Is there a tension between caring for the poor (pursuing justice) and caring for the planet (thriving ecosystems)? Do we sometimes have to choose and if so, what are God's priorities?
- In your context (local, national) how can creation care also help marginalized or victimized human communities?

## G. Jesus' Life and Death:

*'5. Jesus' Life and Death: We believe in Jesus Christ, God's Son, in whom God's good and glorious purposes for humankind and all creation come to fulfilment. In Jesus, God dwelt among us, taking on flesh and entering into creation, participating in the very life and matter of the world. In Christ, God entered into the suffering and brokenness of the world and revealed a new way of living within God's Kingdom of justice, peace and joy. In Christ's death on the cross, God defeated the power of sin and death and accomplished the reconciliation of all things – human and nonhuman – giving hope for all that is broken and spoiled, and eternal life to all who receive Him.*

- *We care for creation motivated by our affirmation that Jesus is Lord. His birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension give us purpose and hope for humanity and all creation.'*
  
- List a few worship songs / hymns about Jesus. How much do they say about him as Creator, Sustainer and Saviour of the whole created order (see Colossians 1:15–20)?
- If you're a poet or musician, why not have a go at writing a song about Jesus and creation?
- What problems can it cause if we only emphasise a personal, spiritual relationship with Jesus, and fail to teach that he is Lord of all, including creation?
- In John 14:1 we read that, in Jesus, 'the word became flesh' (*sarx*). This Greek word can apply to all animal flesh. What are the implications for our worship and our lifestyles if, in Jesus, the creator became a creature?
- Jesus' death and resurrection are at the heart of our Christian faith. Discuss how your understanding of Jesus' saving work has grown through passages like Colossians 1:19–20. How does that change how you view the Gospel?



## H. Future Hope:

*'6. Future Hope: The bodily resurrection of Jesus is the sign and guarantee of hope for humanity and for the whole creation. Christ will come again to renew all things, to destroy evil and death, and to bring the fullness of the Kingdom of God to Earth. The Bible speaks of both judgment and hope, discontinuity and continuity regarding God's new creation. We affirm, with the Apostle Paul, that creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay, to share in the freedom of God's children.'*

- *We seek to live in the power of Christ's risen life, through delighting in, learning from and participating in God's renewal and re-creation of the world.'*
  
- What difference does it make to how we see creation that Jesus rose with a material, physical body?
- What is your understanding of the 'end times' when Jesus will return to judge and to save?
- How do you hold together the biblical themes of discontinuity (judgment, destruction) and continuity (resurrection, renewal)? What will be destroyed and what will be renewed?
- Romans 8:21 says that 'the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God' (NIV). In Acts 3:21, Peter says that heaven must receive Jesus 'until the time comes for God to restore everything' (NIV). Discuss these verses.
- What is your 'hope for the whole creation'? Is that reflected in your / your church's priorities?
- How does A Rocha's work participate in God's renewal and re-creation of the world? Share some examples ...

## I. The Church's Mission in Caring for Creation:

*'7. The Church's Mission in Caring for Creation: Creation care is integral to the gospel, the good news of Christ. As those who follow Jesus as Lord, we are called to live as citizens of Christ's Kingdom and members of Christ's body on Earth, the Church. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we participate in Christ's healing and reconciliation of relationships with one another and with all creation.'*

- *We respond to the call to follow Jesus joyfully and sacrificially in loving our neighbour, living simply, and caring for creation. We call upon churches and all who follow Christ to join us in prayer, advocacy, and practical action on behalf of God's world. We delight in working with individuals, communities, and organizations of many kinds as we fulfil this calling.'*
  
- Romans 8:19 says 'For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed' (NIV). If 'children of God' is Paul's way of speaking about the redeemed community, the Church, what does this mean? Does the image of the church as 'the body of Christ' help?
- In practical terms, what is the role of the Church in creation care? How should our priorities and plans change in the light of this?
- How does A Rocha relate to churches in your context?
- If all churches were caring for creation effectively, would A Rocha still be needed?
- The Lausanne Movement's 'Cape Town Covenant' speaks of creation care as 'a gospel issue within the Lordship of Jesus Christ'. Do you agree?
- Should 'living simply' be a priority for all Christians or is it just needed by western Christians in a context of materialism and over-consumption? You might want to consider some of Jesus' comments on wealth and money.

## J. What next?

In this concluding section we will revisit some of the questions from Section A:

- How would I sum up the Christian Gospel in one sentence? *Write this down before looking back at what you wrote in Section A, and then compare your answers. What, if anything has changed, and why?*
- How would I define Christian mission in one or two sentences? *Write this down before looking back at what you wrote in Section A, and then compare your answers. What, if anything has changed, and why?*
- What are the top three objections to creation care that I hear from other Christians? *Look back at what you wrote in Section A and discuss (or write down) how you would answer those now.*
- Overall, how do you feel this ACCC sums up the biblical case for creation care? Is there anything you would change or add? Would you be happy sharing it with your church or another Christian organization?
- What actions does the ACCC prompt you to take:
  - In your personal walk with God?
  - In how you see and treat other species?
  - In your lifestyle?
  - In your church?
  - In your A Rocha team? (if relevant)
  - With your neighbours in your local community?
  - In influencing national policy on environmental issues?
  - In engaging with global issues such as biodiversity loss and climate change?