



# MANNA matters

Newsletter of MANNA GUM.

## This edition:

**Bible & Economy:** Jonathan Cornford explores the idea of Israel as an alternative economic community (p.2).

**Aid & Development:** Jonathan unpacks some of the complexities behind that seemingly simple word 'poverty' (p.4).

**Understanding the Times:** Miriam Pepper helps us to cut through some of the complicated climate change politics in Australia (p.8)

**Home Economics:** Nick Ray outlines his five basic principles of ethical shopping (p.12).



Photo by Glenn Daniels.

*In the eye of the beholder:  
poverty or wealth?*

## News from Manna Gum

Since the last edition of Manna Matters there has been a frenetic amount of activity, with trips to Cambodia, Queensland, South Australia and Canberra, speaking at conferences, writing, advocacy and lobbying, and a bunch of other stuff! It is now a year since we sent out our first public communication and nine months since we moved into full operation, and we have probably bitten off more than we can chew. This was entirely predictable, and it has meant needing to let some expectations of ourselves slide (such as not getting this edition of *Manna Matters* out a month or two sooner) as we work our way through the backlog of things that need to be done.

In July and August we were very blessed to have five weeks working from Townsville (from whence we hale) in North Queensland (thankyou to the Aitkenvale Uniting Church for giving us an office to work from). This was a very timely opportunity to allow us to work at a slower pace. It also allowed us to reconnect with the landscape that is, in many ways, our spiritual home. As well as being places of stunning physical beauty, Magnetic Island and the waterholes around Townsville are also the sites of many of the key points of early spiritual formation for both of us, which took

place in what from outward appearances seemed to be rather anarchic youth camps. In a way these places have become sacred sites for us, and the spiritual nourishing that they provide reminds us that our dislocation from the land is part of our dislocation from God.

Upon returning to Melbourne (after a detour via Adelaide), we resolved that we needed to institute a better work/life/God balance. It is ironic, but true, that one of the temptations of attaching the word 'ministry' to your work is to become too busy to seek God. Lately I have been reading John's Gospel and Jesus directly addresses this tendency: *'Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me'* (15:4). I once heard of a book called *Too Busy Not to Pray* – I never got to read it, but the title is a reminder of one of those truths that somehow or other we have to learn. As the words of John's Gospel slowly filter through me I am discovering yet again that these really are the words that bring life. The challenge as always, for all of us, is can we let God be the God of all of our life?

*Jonathan Cornford*

*(More news on p.15)*

# No Poor Among You

The idea of Israel as an alternative economic community

by Jonathan Cornford

In the last edition of *Manna Matters* we discussed the foundational story of how the Hebrew people were sustained in the wilderness by manna from heaven. There we are given a picture of a confused and disoriented people who have been liberated from a bondage in Egypt that is at once spiritual and economic, but who cannot imagine a new way of being. Their rehabilitation requires them to unlearn all they have learned about work, production and accumulation in Egypt, and to spend forty years living by the strange manna economy. This teaches them many lessons, but most fundamentally that 'man does not live by bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord' (Deut 8:3; Matt 4:4) – the economy should never become a God.


All this is a precursor to a much bigger idea; the idea that these people are intended for a 'promised land', a land flowing with milk and honey in which they will live in harmony with God, each other, and with the land itself. And as the Israelites are led through the wilderness they are given rules for this promised land, *the Torah* – the law or instructions – which is primarily found in the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy (actually the first five books of the Bible are collectively referred to as the Torah).

For many modern Christians there is a tendency to see the 'the law' in a condescending or even contemptuous light, largely based on a misreading of the attitude of the Apostle Paul. It is viewed as a burdensome set of irrelevant religious instructions from which we have thankfully been liberated.

Perhaps a better way of understanding the Torah is as a *vision*, painted in elaborate detail, of a whole new way of living. The components of this vision cover the whole realm of issues we face in life, including religion, family, society, politics and, yes of course, economics. Indeed the Torah has quite a lot to say in the economic sphere, including property rights and land rights, debt and credit, agriculture and land use, workers' rights, charity, care for the poor, inequality, and even treatment of work animals.

The beauty of this vision is that it is given in detail; however, it also means that much of its meaning and intention can be obscure to us, who are separated by a vast chasm of history and geography from the circumstances of the ancient Middle-Eastern farmers and livestock herders to whom it was given. There is much value to be gained by unpacking the particular historical meaning and significance of the diverse elements of the Torah, and that is something we will surely do in later editions of *Manna Matters*, but for now it is enough to unpack some central principles.

Firstly, the Torah is given specifically in relation to occupation of 'the promised land', a place characterised by the economics of abundance, flowing with milk and honey. Indeed, observance of the Torah is the fundamental *condition* upon which the land is promised and it is only by following its provisions that the land will be bountiful. That is, the extent to which the community is



... a better way of understanding the Torah is as a *vision*, painted in elaborate detail, of a whole new way of living.

... the extent to which the community is economically blessed by God through creation (the land) depends on the form of economic organisation that they follow.

economically blessed by God through creation (the land) depends directly on the form of economic organisation that they follow.

Secondly, the key descriptor that is used for this community living by the Torah is that it would be a *holy* people – ‘*You shall be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy*’ (Lev 19:2). Holiness is one of those big religious words that makes people’s eyes glaze over – it is often associated with distance and other-worldliness. However, the best way to reclaim the true meaning of the word is through its root in the English language – *wholeness*. Holiness is therefore the healthy (another related word) integration of mind, body and spirit, of conviction and action, and of self and other. Far from distant and otherworldly, holiness means being *present* and *earthy*, and that is what the Torah is calling Israel to be; a community that models the integration of life, faith and action.

Thirdly, and related to the previous point, it should be obvious that a community living in this way will be counter-cultural to the world around it. A repeated refrain throughout the Torah is that this community is to live in an entirely new way: ‘*You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you.*’ (Lev 18:3) The point is not that Israel become a private fan club for Yahweh (as it tended to think of itself), but that it be a blessing and a light to the nations (Genesis 18:18, Isaiah 51:4).

Fourthly, and flowing directly from the previous point, the distinctive economic life of this community is directly dependent on its *rejection of false gods*. The Torah is quite clear, as are the prophets, that the form of economic life of a community is directly related to the God (or gods) that it worships, and vice versa. Moses and the prophets understood winning over the people to Yahweh necessarily meant winning them over to an alternative economic ethic; without it, they would inevitably end up chasing after *baals* who promised them all they could desire.

So what are the hallmarks of this economic community and how is it a witness to the character of God? Behind all the details about how people harvest their fields or lend money are some consistent fundamental intentions:

1. There shall be abundantly enough for all
2. There shall be no poor among you
3. The vulnerable are protected.
4. Obscene inequality will be impossible.
5. The land (and its animals) shall be respected and cared for.

The Torah makes clear that not only is Israel to be a distinctive religious community, it is to be a distinctive *economic* community. It demonstrates that central to God’s way of working in the world – ‘reconciling the world to himself’ (2 Cor 5:19) – is to form together communities of people whose whole lives, including their economic arrangements, are a living witness to the life that is in God. It is one of the big ideas of the Bible – a central thread that runs continuous through the Old Testament and into the New Testament. For the calling to be an alternative economic community does not end with Israel, but rather takes on an even fuller meaning in that community we call the Body of Christ. But that is a story for another day ...

The Torah makes clear that not only is Israel to be a distinctive religious community, it is to be a distinctive *economic* community.



*'The Gleaners' by Jean Francois-Millet. The laws on gleaning (Lev 19:9-10) are one of many safeguards for the poor in the Torah.*



# 'The poor will always be with you'

**Who are the poor and what do they really want?**

by Jonathan Cornford

It is early July this year. I am sitting on the edge of a paddy field in central Cambodia and I am talking with Rot Set about the last ten years of his life. The heat is unrelenting and we awkwardly adjust ourselves to stay in the meagre shade. The Mekong river flows by, two hundred metres away. Rot Set is describing how by his hard work and the assistance of some others, the life of his family is improving. They eat well, their health is better, the children go to school. We also discuss the near future. Rot Set is shaking his head: 'If we have to move, we will be poor again.'

## **There is a problem with this picture**

In 1997 Kim and I spent our first significant amount of time in a poor country – six months in Laos – while I did research for my doctorate. Since then I have been closely tracking the course of 'development' in that country, travelling back regularly, and over time visiting most of its provinces. In 1997 Laos was at a critical juncture in its history – it still had most of its natural resources intact, rural communities were basically cohesive and viable, the government had abandoned the worst absurdities of a Stalinist economy, aid money was pouring in, and it was beginning to build its connections to the outside world.

It was a time of great opportunity but also a time of great threat.

Twelve years later the moment has well and truly passed. Like so many countries before it, Laos has plummeted down what seems to be the inevitable trajectory of development in a capitalist world – the forests are disappearing, the rivers are being dammed, the land is being stolen for agribusiness or annexed for mining, and everywhere rural communities are being physically dislocated or having their basic viability cut out from under them.

Why? How did this happen? Obviously the causes are complex and multiple, and there is a crowd of usual suspects – corrupt leaders, foreign investors, free market economics, blah, blah, blah; but there is one unlikely candidate that has lurked in the shadows for too long and needs to be brought into the spotlight: it is the cause of poverty alleviation itself.

As a researcher in 1997 it was already clear to me that the defining way by which outsiders understood Laos was as a



*Rot Set in his rice field. Rot Set has been an innovator in his village, the first to trial and adopt a new system of organic rice growing - called the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) - that increases yields and removes financial risk for the farmer. Others in the village are now following his lead. Photo by Glenn Daniels.*



‘poor country’. There were so many studies, reports and books all written to address the problem of Laos’ poverty. How many times did I read that ranked by GDP per capita it was one of the poorest nations in the world? All the other ‘poverty indicators’ – health, education, access to clean water etc – also showed that Laos was a basket case. That all seemed clear enough.

However, there was a problem. As Kim and I spent time travelling in the country and visiting different communities, we wondered if it was the same place being talked about in all those reports. What we saw, or rather what struck us, was not poverty, but *life*. Here were so many people who lived dignified and meaningful lives, encompassed in a strong sense of family and community, and expressed in strong and vibrant culture. This was not to say that there was no poverty – certainly we could see real needs, and there were times we encountered people who were clearly desperately poor. Generally, however, the word ‘poverty’ did not adequately represent what we were seeing.

### **Who says who is poor?**

But what is poverty? Who says who is poor? Despite the ease with which the word poverty gets bandied around, it is not an easy concept to define. The dominant way in which the wealthy world imagines poverty is simply a lack of money – what we call income poverty. This view is enshrined in Target One of the first Millennium Development Goal: *Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day.*

However, in much of the developing world, including Laos, the \$1 a day definition of poverty can be misleading. For many people living in traditional agrarian societies, a large proportion of the family’s production and consumption may take place entirely outside of the monetary economy – they grow their own food, collect materials and medicines from the forest and catch fish from the river.

For example, in Sekong Province of southern Laos, average yearly incomes in 2003 were only \$US120 a year. Yet a study by the World Conservation Union showed that if the value of all the food and other products that people collect from the forest were to be counted in market terms, it would be equivalent to \$US525 per household per year. This shows that forest resources make a significantly more important contribution to food security and health in Sekong than monetary income, yet they do not even register on the “\$1 a day” poverty radar.

More importantly, this shows that if people lose access to forests in Sekong (as is happening), then even if they experience a doubling or trebling of income (thereby lifting them above the \$1 a day measure and supposedly “out of poverty”) they will have still experienced *a decline in their standard of living*.

From the perspective of Lao people themselves, poverty means quite a different thing, and in fact there is no good equivalent for the English word ‘poor’ in the Lao language. Here is the conclusion reached by what is perhaps the best study into poverty into Laos yet done, the *Participatory Poverty Assessment* from 2000:

“From the point of view of villagers in the assessment it is clear that poverty in the Lao PDR is ‘new poverty’, not an

What we saw, or rather what struck us, was not poverty, but *life*.

... if they experience a doubling or trebling of income (thereby lifting them above the \$1 a day measure and supposedly “out of poverty”) they will have still experienced a *decline in their standard of living*.



Logging and loss of forests to commercial plantations is one of the primary drivers of 'new poverty' in Laos. Photo by Jonathan Cornford.

endemic condition. Poverty is the result of events external to the villager over which he or she has no control, especially weather, war, resettlement, livestock diseases, and poorly implemented development programs. And, because of the externality of causality, poverty is thus associated with calamity, misfortune, fate, karma etc., and hence its substance is both physical and spiritual. Also, poverty in the Lao PDR is not synonymous with hunger. Abundant natural resources have provided sustenance for poor villagers but these resources are showing signs of dwindling through overexploitation ...

Rather than talk generically about 'poverty', it is much more meaningful to talk about what Robert Chambers calls 'dimensions of deprivation'; that is, to be specific about where people identify hardship in their lives. This gets more complicated because it means the picture will change between villages, or even within villages, or even between genders. It also means that you actually have to ask people. But there are some key 'dimensions of deprivation' that are fairly common across the country:

1. Preventable sickness, especially those which contribute to infant mortality such as diarrhoea.
2. Loss of food security due to loss or ecological decline of forests and rivers.
3. A heavy labour burden on women.
4. Loss of livestock due to disease.
5. Crop failure due to flood, drought or pests.

But there is a new dimension of deprivation which is becoming increasingly significant. As Laos becomes a smaller place with telecommunications and improving roads, people in rural areas are increasingly becoming aware of their position in relation to the rapidly growing wealth in urban centres, and are seeing themselves in a different light. Now communities that never used to think of themselves as poor are keenly feeling their poverty. This tells us that *inequality* is a fundamental dimension of deprivation, which is another way of saying that poverty is really an issue of human relationships.

### **Solving poverty or creating it?**

Nevertheless, the story of endemic, generic poverty in Laos was told unrelentingly by government ministers to the aid donors and by the aid donors back to the government ministers. And in telling this story to each other, it became clear to everybody that Laos *urgently needed development*. That meant it needed to increase its economic productivity, it needed to earn export income, it needed to become competitive, it needed to attract investment, it needed to unleash the mythical force of the private sector. The urgent need to develop and lift Laos out from poverty became the moral bludgeon with which to silence or alienate people who asked difficult questions that would slow things down.

In this rush to abolish poverty there has been no time to sit down and ask different Laotians (including the over 60 different ethnic minority groups) in what ways they considered themselves poor (if at all), what their hopes were for the future, or in what ways they would like to see their



lives change. And so the relentless rush into plundering the country's natural resources described above.

The result has been rapid economic growth (averaging over 6% for over a decade) and a triumphant proclamation of falling poverty. The Asian Development Bank reports that averaged, aggregated economic data shows that the number of people living on less than \$1 a day fell from 52.7% in 1990 to 28.8% in 2003. The international development community applauds.

However, just about every study of *actual communities* in Laos who might be described as vulnerable, has shown a very different picture. This is best captured in a 2006 follow-up study of the *Participatory Poverty Assessment* quoted above (ironically, also commissioned by the Asian Development Bank):

[Compared to the year 2000] villages that were revisited in 2006 were found generally to be either about the same or worse off ... the survey shows that poor villagers increasingly experience difficulty in providing food for their families. Natural resources were said to be seriously depleted in almost all locations ...

The reality is that many rural communities in Laos are

in the midst of an ecological crisis that for them is also an economic crisis – their way of life is becoming increasingly untenable and they are being faced with choices that they do not want to make. But thank goodness they are no longer poor.

Which brings us back to Cambodia and Rot Set, where exactly the same thing is happening. Here is Rot Set, a man quiet and dignified, who does not consider himself poor, being told that all that he owns and has worked for will soon be flooded by a massive hydropower dam spanning the Mekong river, exporting electricity to Vietnam and a new (possibly Australian) bauxite mine in eastern Cambodia. Why? Because Cambodia is a poor country and it needs such projects to develop. Rot Set is under no illusions. Whatever they say about compensation plans and national advancement, if the dam is built his life will get a lot harder.

### Sign the Save the Mekong Petition

Add your voice to the thousands struggling to protect their livelihoods from dams across the Mekong River.

[www.savethemekong.org](http://www.savethemekong.org)



*Bon Kiet is a member of the Phnong ethnic minority group living in Sambor District, Cambodia. In the last two years she has lost forest and cultivated land to three different commercial plantations (for rubber and teak). Although theoretically she should be protected under the law, she has virtually no chance of legal recourse or obtaining compensation. Ten years ago her life was, in her words, 'easy'. Now she and her family live a marginal existence.*  
Photo by Glenn Daniels.



## Cutting through the crap

An interview with Miriam Pepper on climate change politics in Australia

*Miriam Pepper is a member of Uniting Earthweb and secretary of the multi-faith network, the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change. She worships at Maroubra Junction Uniting Church, which is the home of Project Green Church and now a part of the South East Climate Action Coalition. Miriam has a PhD on "Christianity and Sustainable Consumption: A Social Psychological Investigation". Here we ask Miriam to help us disentangle the confusing mass of information and media reporting on the Australian Government's climate change response. The views expressed in this interview are hers and not necessarily those of the groups with which she is involved.*

***Currently the Australian Government has set a target to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by 5%-25%. Can you explain what that means, and what the significance of that target is?***

Broadly speaking, the aim of setting targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is to reduce our impact on the Earth's climate. Our greenhouse gas emissions are causing the Earth's temperature to increase, and the more it increases the greater the impacts, especially on the poor who have contributed least to the problem. In particular, we need to do our best to prevent what is being called 'dangerous climate change', which is generally seen as a rise in average temperature of more than 2 degrees above pre-industrial levels. A rise greater than this places us at a very high risk of reaching what is called a 'tipping point', which is a point which starts a dangerous feedback loop in the Earth's climate, resulting in things like the melting of the Greenland Ice Sheet and rapid sea level rises.

The Australian Government's target towards this goal is, at best, to aim by the year 2020 to be emitting 25% less greenhouse gases than what we were emitting in the year 2000. This target is conditional on the world achieving an international climate agreement that meets certain conditions. Otherwise our target could be as low as only a 5% reduction.

Actually, it is not even quite that much, because when the rest of the world talks about reduction targets they are



talking about reductions based on 1990 levels, while the Australian Government has chosen to use 2000 levels as its base. If we use 1990 levels, then the Australian target is for a 4-24% reduction.

***What sort of target do you think we need?***

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says industrialised countries as a whole should aim for a reduction of 25% - 40% (based on 1990 levels) to decrease the chances of an increase of 2 degrees, but this is based on old science. We are now already at the upper end of the climate projections made by the IPCC, so these targets are probably too low.

African countries, small island states (such as in the Pacific), Latin American countries, China and others are asking for *at least* a 40% reduction by 2020. Environment groups, development organisations and campaigns like Make Poverty History have also taken this position.

Personally, my view would be that we need a target of *at least* 40%. And actually, there is now a growing global movement, including the World Council of Churches, saying that we need stabilisation of carbon dioxide at lower than 350 parts per million - currently we are at about 390ppm. So we are already well beyond a safe level. We need to go as hard and fast as we can go.

***The way in which the Australian Government is currently proposing to reduce our emissions is through a 'Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme' (CPRS), which basically sets a limit on the amount of carbon that can be emitted each year, and then allows people to buy and sell permits to emit that carbon. There has been a lot of confusing media around the Labor and Liberal approaches to this scheme, which has focussed on all sorts of technical aspects of the legislation. But you have been critical of the whole concept – can you explain why?***

The CPRS is deeply flawed. Treasury modelling of the scheme says that in 10 years time our emissions won't be any less than they are now. This is because there is no limit





on the ‘carbon credits’ that we can import from other countries; that means we can get other countries to reduce emissions instead of us. Also the price of carbon within the scheme will just be too low to cause the large shifts away from fossil fuels that we need. The scheme also contains billions of dollars of subsidies for the big polluters, such as Xstrata, Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton. Effectively, the scheme will reward polluters, allowing them to continue to pollute. What this means is that taxpayers will have to pay for emission reductions – in whichever way they are sourced.

Another big problem with the scheme is that the ‘cap’ that is placed on emission levels is also effectively a floor on reductions – meaning that we are locked into producing a certain amount of pollution. The logic of emissions trading is that people who make the choice to reduce their own emissions beyond the floor effectively free up extra permits for others to pollute more.

***But couldn't some of these things be fixed by amendments to the scheme?***

It is telling that even as we see the debates about the CPRS going on in parliament and in the press, we see the fossil fuel industry expanding, with proposals for new fossil fuel power plants and also the doubling of Australia's coal export capacity. It is an indication that it is not only the CPRS that is flawed, but the whole concept of emissions trading.

International experience shows that emissions trading schemes are inevitably captured and watered down by special interests. While they do increase the price of polluting, they don't increase it by enough to foster the speed of change away from fossil fuels that we

... there is no limit on the ‘carbon credits’ that we can import from other countries; that means we can get other countries to reduce emissions instead of us.

The logic of emissions trading is that people who make the choice to reduce their own emissions beyond the floor effectively free up extra permits for others to pollute more.



*Miriam with a climate change petition for her local MP, Peter Garrett (also featured).*



need. A trading scheme tinkers around the edges instead of providing a structural shift.

Furthermore, when a trading scheme is international (which ours is) it leads to injustices in poorer countries. There are already notorious problems in developing countries, such as keeping dumps open which are earning money for carbon credits, when at the same time they are poisoning local communities; or massive commercial plantations which lower the water table and affect community agriculture. We should be taking notice of voices from poor communities, and these are being consistently raised against internationally traded offset projects. We should ask ourselves questions about what happens when you get a simple commodity – carbon – created out of systems that are so complex. Who benefits from this commodity and who is left out?

Finally, we need to pay attention to the lessons of the global financial crisis, which provides a great example of how markets go out of control. Essentially, emissions trading schemes are set to create the biggest financial derivatives market the world has ever seen – and we have seen where the excesses of derivatives markets lead us.

***What are some alternative strategies the Government could implement to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions?***

The important thing is that we need a whole raft of strategies – not one silver bullet, and certainly not a central reliance on markets. And the place we should start is to begin to roll back all the subsidies that we are currently providing to fossil fuel industries, which amount to up to \$10 billion annually.

We need much bigger investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy. For example, in NSW if we simply replaced inefficient off-peak electric water heaters with solar, heat pumps or gas, it would make new baseload power stations unnecessary for years to come.

We need fair and effective public transport systems that reduce reliance on cars, and we need much better walking and cycling facilities in our cities. We need to stop deforestation in Australia, not just overseas. We need to move towards more local food production and consumption to reduce the fuel needed to transport food, and we need more organic production which doesn't use fossil fuel-based inputs.

These are just some of the strategies.

***What about a simple tax on carbon?***

That could be part of a solution, and it avoids some of the problems of emissions trading. However, relying on a price signal can only give part of the picture. Again, it could be one tool among many.

***There has been a lot of focus on what position the Australian Government carries to the big international climate change meeting in Copenhagen in December. What would you like to***

**RESOURCES FOR TAKING ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE**

**TEAR Australia**

[www.tear.org.au/advocacy/campaigns](http://www.tear.org.au/advocacy/campaigns)

**Australian Religious Response to Climate Change**

<http://arrcc.org.au/>

***see happen at that meeting and what is Australia's role there?***

I, and others in Australia and around the world, would like to see emission reduction targets that put us on the path to reducing our greenhouse gas levels to 350 parts per million. It is also important that those who are historically responsible for where we are, now take the lead in reducing their emissions, and don't outsource them to other parts of the world. Emission reductions in low-income countries are important – but not as a substitute for reductions in industrialised countries.

I also hope that Copenhagen produces an agreement that puts money on the table for people who are worst affected by climate change, such as in Bangladesh, experiencing a worsening and increasing severity of storms, people on Pacific islands who need relocation, and those in need of drought assistance in sub-Saharan Africa. All these people need money to adapt – and for those who have to migrate, places to go.

Australia needs to take a leading role in this, but our negotiators have been trying to change the rules around land use and forests so that we can get the highest possible emission reductions on paper while minimising the changes we need to make in practice – this isn't good leadership! Australia is the highest per capital polluter among developed countries and that means we have a particular responsibility. If we are not taking responsibility, how can we ask others to?

***What do you think Manna Matters readers should be doing right now?***

Get informed and get connected with people in your local community who are active on climate issues, such as a local Climate Action Group. Write to, or visit your MP – tell them you want a fair deal at Copenhagen and that you want Australia to take responsibility to reduce our emissions and not outsource them. Organisations like TEAR and the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC) have letter writing guides that can help.

Do what you can to live out the changes we need to see more broadly. This means things like reducing electricity use, switching to GreenPower, using our cars less, and - really important - reducing our meat consumption. Consumption of meat is large contributor to a household's greenhouse gas emissions.



Talk to others in your church about the issues and why it is of concern for us as Christians. This is not an issue that is going to go away, so keep it in your prayers.

One thing that I and many others are doing is to take part in rallies and nonviolent direct action (NVDA) at coal infrastructure and at government offices, drawing attention to some of the sources of climate change and demonstrating the depth of feeling about the issues. Although NVDA

isn't for everyone, there is a strong Christian history of leadership and involvement, and it is a part of effective movements for change. I encourage readers to find out more about NVDA, and to support people who choose this path. Rallies, on the other hand, are community events where everyone can be involved – so look out for the Walk Against Warming at a place near you on 12<sup>th</sup> December.

Can't do all of this? Choose one thing and do it!

“Australia is the highest per capital polluter among developed countries and that means we have a particular responsibility. If we are not taking responsibility, how can we ask others to?”

## Lai Phal depends on the rains

Lai Phal lives in Samphin Village in Sambor District, Cambodia. She has a little over one hectare of rice paddy with which to supply her household of five with food for the year. Most years this is ample and can even produce a surplus that can be sold. However, the biggest threat to Lai Phal's rice crop is not getting regular rains through the wet season - there is no irrigation where she lives. This year the wet season began well but then the rains stopped for a couple of months - until September, when heavy rains brought major flooding. Thousands of families have lost their entire crop. Climate change models predict that this sort of weather will become more common in Southeast Asia, posing a major threat to agriculture.

*Photo by Glenn Daniels*



# Supermarket Checkout !

## Five principles for ethical shopping

by Nick Ray

Most of us either love or hate the business of shopping, but few view it as an opportunity to make a difference in the world. We are encouraged to get what we want, when we want it, at the very cheapest price. *That would be a bargain.*

Even in the light of the call to love our neighbour as ourselves and care for the earth, we often find ourselves blind to the very nature of the consumer culture of which we are a part. A reality that sees the fingerprints of our global neighbors all over our food and clothes. Their hands have picked our coffee beans, sewn our denim jeans, and mined the coltan for our mobile phones. Their struggles, hopes and fears are masked behind elaborate systems. Yet they have a story, as do the other processes behind the essential things that sustain our daily life.

Can we actually take responsibility for the wider impacts of our everyday purchases? It can seem as difficult as moving a camel through the eye of a needle.

Where to start? Perhaps with some basic principles.

### **1. Every purchase makes an impact, your choice makes a difference.**

Being stuck in a very long checkout queue the other day I was reminded that I'm one person in a world of 6.5 billion. It seemed in that instant my small purchase of a tub of yoghurt wasn't really going to make any difference at all. Especially compared with that guy up ahead with the 12 slabs of Red Bull. It took me a moment to remember that we are actually in the present environmental crisis *because* each small purchase does count and together these small impacts all add up to one big impact. A very heavy footprint!

To shop with a conscience is to start to see the connections and see your own choices as a means to enact change for a better world. It might be choosing an orange that's grown locally and traveled only 500kms from Mildura rather than 21,000 kms from California, or avoiding a company that has a boycott call.

### **2. Avoid unnecessary consumption: do I really need it?**

In the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21) Jesus draws a sharp distinction between life and possessions, between being and having. The man, though rich because of his many possessions, is a fool because he assumes that those

possessions will secure his life.

Although Australians' real income per person has risen by more than half in the past 20 years, almost two-thirds of Australians believe that they can't afford to buy everything they really need.\*

There is nothing more counter-cultural, nor more difficult, than the defiant expression of contentment: 'I have enough; I don't need anything more.' As G.K. Chesterton said, "There are two ways to get enough. One is to continue to accumulate more and more. The other is to desire less."

### **3. Learn about the issues, one at a time.**

Fairtrade, food miles, packaging, waste, genetic engineering, multinational ownership ...

When we start to delve deeper into the stories behind our 'stuff', it's easy to be struck by just how little we do know and how easy it is to be overwhelmed. Sometimes we are left with questions (what does a 'free range' label on my eggs actually mean?) and at other times there's just too much information and it's difficult to know where to start.

The first thing to remember is to take on one issue at a time. It's good to ask, "what issues are connected to the products I buy?". You'll find there are certain issues that relate to specific product types. For example, fair wages and fair conditions is one issue that is particularly relevant to coffee and chocolate.

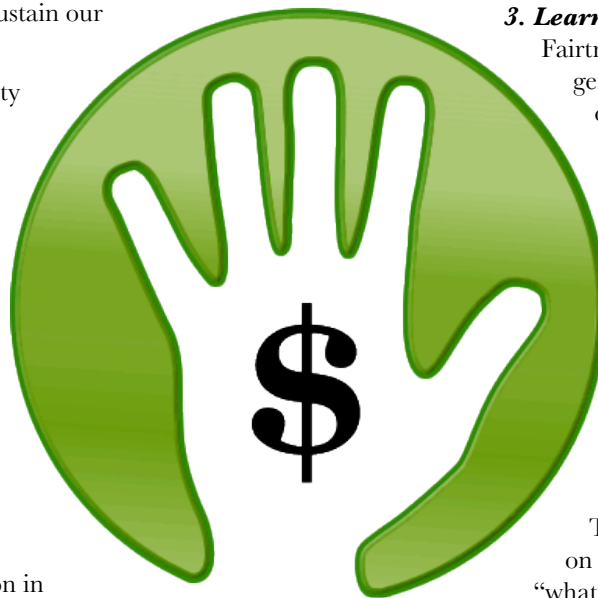
Coffee is the most traded commodity in the world after oil and illegal drugs. However, the farmers who grow the beans often receive as little as three cents from a \$3 cup of coffee. By sourcing Fairtrade chocolate you can ensure a fair deal for farmers (a minimum price of \$3.80 per kilo compared to the normal price of about 65 cents).

So think about the products you buy, and start with one issue relevant to them.

### **4. Seek out a best buy: what do you value?**

There are no right or wrong purchasing decisions. Rather a 'best buy' will depend on what you value – which criteria you think are most important.

Some products you'll find meet many criteria. SAFE toilet paper is a 'best buy' brand for me. It is made from 'post-consumer' waste paper, which is paper that has been out



amongst us as copy paper and then been collected for recycling into this new product. Each ton of post-consumer-waste recycled paper saves 17 trees, 4,100 kwh of energy - enough to power the average home for six months - and a whopping 26,000 litres of water. SAFE is also paper-wrapped and non-chlorine-bleached; it's also made in Laverton, close to where I live, so it hasn't traveled far. Lots of positive features on many levels.

This, however, is not going to happen for most products most of the time. You'll be making trade-offs - so it's important to prioritise what you value. You might decide to buy local over organic, or choose to buy with minimal packaging over local.

Think about what you value. What are the issues that you really care about, the things that motivate you to action? Animal welfare? People's wages? Multinational control?

### 5. Make lasting change

Celebrate good choices and create good habits. It can seem like a huge task to change your shopping patterns, but once you've found a best buy, remember it, and move on to the next product-type on your list or issue to address.

Share your discoveries. Change starts with you but it doesn't end there. I was extremely excited to discover I could take my tupperware container to the local deli at the Footscray market and have them put in cheddar cheese without plastic packaging. I annoyed family and friends for about a week. Perhaps you too can seed some new possibilities for those around you?

*Nick Ray is the project coordinator for The Ethical Consumer Group, who produce the pocket-book 'Guide to Ethical Supermarket Shopping' and run monthly 'Shopping with a Conscience' public workshops and supermarket tours. To find out more about how you can make a difference in your everyday purchases, check out their website at [www.ethical.org.au](http://www.ethical.org.au)*

\* "Where does the buck stop?", Research Paper No. 53, May 2008, The Australia Institute.

It seemed in that instant my small purchase of a tub of yoghurt wasn't really going to make any difference at all. Especially compared with that guy up ahead with the 12 slabs of Red Bull.

"There are two ways to get enough. One is to continue to accumulate more and more. The other is to desire less."  
G.K. Chesterton



Brand	Product	Rating
Dairy Farmers, Dair, Jacaranda, Just Natural, Max, Dairy Farmers (Kirk)	Dairy	2/5 X
Moore, Oak	Dairy	2/5 X
Big M, Divine Classic, Farm-ers Union, Masters, Pure	National Foods (Kirk)	2/5 X

Brand	Product	Rating
Bulla	Bulla Dairy Foods	4/5 ✓
Dairy Bell	Dairy Bell Ice Cream	4/5 ✓
Cape Byron, Narco	Narco Cooperative	4/5 ✓
So Good	So Good (A-beetel Church SP)	4/5 ✓
Wool	Wool freezer foods	4/5 ✓
Brownes, Collins, Connoisseur, Tip Top, Topps	Ferretia	4/5 ✓
Hagege-Datta	General Mills	4/5 ✓
Pauls	Ferretia	4/5 ✓
Nargos-Vac	Everest Foods	4/5 ✓
Galadiv	Galadiv	4/5 ✓
Hansen-Hudman	P&O Group	4/5 ✓
Sara Lee	Sara Lee	4/5 X
Dairy Farmers, Steens	Unilever	4/5 X
Nestle, Heiers, Skinny Cow	Nestle	4/5 X

**PALM OIL**

Palm oil is found in one out of every ten supermarket products including shampoo, cooking oil, chocolate cosmetics, chips, biscuits, magazines and soaps. Unfortunately, not only does palm oil promote forest disease, but the UN estimates that palm oil plantations are 'now the primary cause of permanent rainforest loss'. This threatens the survival of the Orang utan, the Sumatran tiger and the Asian rhinoceros. Additionally, burning after deforestation accounts for significant greenhouse gas emissions — 1.450 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> every year in Indonesia alone.

- Learn about the issues, find sample letters to write to retailers and the government, and sign the petition for compulsory labeling at the Palm Oil Action Group site [www.palmoilaction.org.au](http://www.palmoilaction.org.au)
- Check the ingredients — if the product contains palm oil, avoid it, and send a letter to the manufacturer telling them of your action
- See the 'Helping you buy responsibly' section on the BOS Australia website at [www.orangutans.com.au](http://www.orangutans.com.au) for a list of manufacturers who are committed to avoiding the use of palm oil.

The "Guide to Ethical Supermarket Shopping" is available at independant bookshops and selected newsagencies. Go to [www.ethical.org.au](http://www.ethical.org.au) to see stockists or to order online. RRP \$5. An ideal Christmas stocking filler!

**'We don't need electricity, we need food.'**  
**Lai Sa-at**



*Photo by Glenn Daniels.*

## News from Manna Gum (cont.)

### Save the Mekong Campaign

In July Jonathan travelled once again to Sambor District in central Cambodia, the site of one of the proposed dams on the mainstream of the Mekong River. He was accompanied by Glenn Daniels, a friend and professional photographer, who has volunteered his services to the Save the Mekong Campaign. Our main work was documenting people's way of life in interviews and pictures for the purpose of producing some materials to assist in the struggle against the dam which threatens their livelihoods. We are currently working on a few products from this trip: a publication, a photo exhibition in Feb 2010 (Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne), and a short video documentary for web use (if Jonathan's video footage cuts the mustard). Some of Glenn's fantastic pics can be seen in this *Manna Matters*.

If you haven't signed the petition, it is still going at: [www.savethemekong.org](http://www.savethemekong.org) Now 23,000 strong!



Jonathan & Glenn on the Mekong.

### Speaking Engagements

Since last Manna Matters we have done quite a lot of speaking:

- **Brisbane (late June):** Jonathan talked to Brisbane TEAR groups about the Household Covenant, and to the Waiter's Union Community Orientation Course about the church as an alternative economy.
- **Townsville (July/August):** Kim ran an ethical shopping tour for combined Uniting Churches, and Jonathan gave Save the Mekong presentations to Amnesty International groups in Townsville and on Magnetic Island (which was a real hardship).
- **Adelaide (August):** Jonathan gave a lecture on property and wealth in the Bible at Tabor South Australia; Kim and Jonathan both spent a great day heavily involved in the TEAR SA and Interserve annual gathering. The day was called 'Fairer Homes & Gardens' and was structured around the seven elements of the Household Covenant. Jonathan talked about the Biblical call to a new way of living, and gave workshops on savings & investment, and Kim ran ethical shopping tours. It was a bold venture by TEAR and Interserve, but it seemed to strike a chord.

- **Victoria (October):** we had a big weekend at the TEAR VIC annual gathering, following the theme 'All things in common' from Acts chapter 2. Kim and Jonathan, along with Nick and Janet Ray from the Ethical Consumer Group, coordinated one of the elective streams, 'Living Well', where we covered issues such as the church as an alternative economic community, frameworks for living by God's economy, ethical consumption, promoting fair trade in the community and connecting faith and environment. The amount of questions and discussion that this stimulated over the weekend is an illustration that these are ideas whose time is becoming ripe. Jonathan finished the month giving a lecture on mission in the Book of Revelation at Whitley College. Hopefully didn't scare the pants off them. No more engagements until 2010. Phew!

### Gellibrand Climate Change Petition

Manna Gum has been coordinating an initiative in our local electorate (Gellibrand, in inner-western Melbourne) to get churches of all denominations to sign a petition expressing concern about the need for the Australian Government to have a stronger position on climate change. The petition will be delivered to Nicola Roxon, our Federal MP, in early November. Cathy Cook (for Manna Gum) and Greg Gow (for Footscray Church of Christ) have done the bulk of the work around this and they have done a great job in furthering an ecumenical spirit.

### Other stuff

- In late August Jonathan attended a roundtable in Canberra, to discuss the delivery of Australian aid through international financial institutions (such as the World Bank). This is part of an ongoing Manna Gum project that is trying to assess how much aid we give through these institutions and how that affects the poor.
- In October we had our first Annual General Meeting, attended by our Management Committee and a number of other friends. We appreciated the supportive discussion that took place, especially around issues such as manageable workloads and financial viability.



Kim conducting an ethical shopping tour in Adelaide.



## Become an advocate for Manna Gum

Manna Gum seeks to live within the economy of God – frugally, ethically and through the generous sharing of abundance within the community of faith. As a new organisation, Manna Gum is in an establishing phase. Our long-term viability is dependent upon building our monthly supporter base to about double what it is now. If you find some resonance in the work of Manna Gum, we would like you to consider doing one or more of three things:

- (i) Pass on *Manna Matters* to others who you think might be interested and get them to sign-up to our mailing list.
- (ii) Talk to us about coming to speak to a group you are involved in.
- (iii) If you are able, consider becoming a supporter yourself (see below).



‘Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.’  
(Matthew 19:14)

*Children play in the Mekong River in amongst fish traps while their fathers and grandfathers cast nets. As they play each day, they learn about fish, the river and the art of fishing. To some, they are simply ‘poor’, but to any who care to observe, there is something here worth fighting for. (see p.4) Photo by Glenn Daniels.*

MANNA GUM seeks to live within the economy of God – frugally, ethically and through the generous sharing of abundance within the community of faith. If our work resonates with you, please consider becoming a financial supporter.

- I would like to make a donation to MANNA GUM.
- I would like to become a regular financial supporter of MANNA GUM

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**CONTRIBUTIONS**     per month     once off donation

Amount:  \$20     \$30     \$50     \$100     Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT)\***     **Cheque/Money Order**  
 BSB: 633 000    A/c No. 134 179 514    (payable to *Manna Gum Initiatives Inc.*)  
 A/c Name: *Manna Gum Initiatives Inc.*

\* We can send you information on how to set up an EFT.

## Support the work of MANNA GUM



### About Manna Gum

Manna Gum is an independent non-profit organisation that seeks to:

*1. Provide resources for Christian groups to understand and practise the social, economic and political implications of the Gospel of Christ; and*

*2. Stimulate critical thinking on issues of aid and development, poverty and wealth, and to undertake research and advocacy on matters concerning Australian aid and development involvement overseas.*

Please contact us if you would like more information about our work or to find how we could support you and your group/organisation to explore some of these issues.

Post to **MANNA GUM, 14 Essex Street, Footscray VIC 3011**, call (03) 9689 0202 or email us at [manna-gum@optusnet.com.au](mailto:manna-gum@optusnet.com.au)