

MANNA matters

Newsletter of MANNA GUM.

enough?

This edition:

BIBLE & ECONOMY

Daily Bread:

The economy of enough in the Bible

Jonathan Cornford (p.2)

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

The Economics of Remote Aboriginal Communities (5): The need for flexibility

Tim Trudgen (p.5)

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

What is it about air travel?

Thea Ormerod & Miriam Pepper (p.7)

EVERYDAY PEOPLE

An adventure in going car-free

Cathy Cook (p.9)

News from Manna Gum

A busy year is drawing to a close and we are approaching that time of year in the Christian calendar when we are called to reflect on the meaning of Christianity's scandalous claim that God became one of us. The great challenge for us is whether we can find enough stillness, in what really has become a silly season, to let this awesome truth touch us.

We have just completed our annual *A Different Way* week, exploring Christ's call to a new way of living. The week follows a rhythm of prayer and singing, exploring the Bible, thinking about the world, and getting our hands dirty in something active and productive. It is a great privilege to share this week with a group of people all thinking seriously about their faith and their lives.

In October we were privileged to take part again in TEAR's bi-annual Victoria gathering, focussed on the theme of 'Choosing Life'. We ran three sessions, each in some way about money: a history of global capitalism; an exploration of Mammon in the gospels; and discussion of household finances and budgeting from a discipleship perspective.

In the last couple of months Manna Gum has been able to
(cont. back page)



DAILY BREAD

The economy of enough in the Bible

by Jonathan Cornford

This article first appeared in TARGET Magazine, June 2012.

How much money do you need to be happy? The answer is: about 20% more than you currently earn. At least, that is what people *think* will make them happy. Research in the US has shown that people think that with an extra 20% in their pockets they could finally be content. The strange thing is, it doesn't matter how much money you are earning now – whether \$40,000 or \$200,000 – the answer is pretty much the same: 20% more, please. In Australia, surveys in 2002 found that 62% of people feel that they do not have enough money for 'everything they really need'. Really? Not enough for what we need? How much is enough?

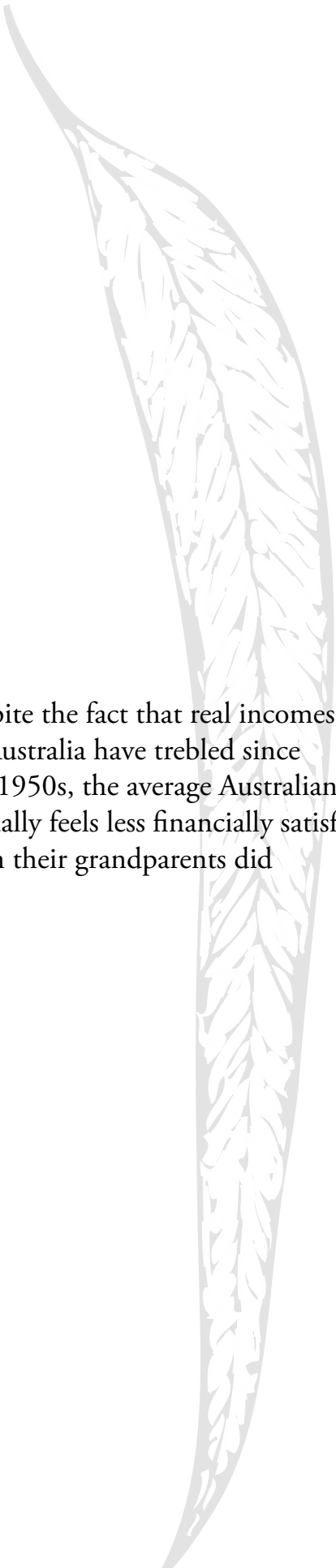
It is hard to think of a more pressing question for humanity than this. The issues of climate change, resource depletion, species extinction, poverty in the 'two-thirds world', and social disintegration in the affluent world, all hinge on this question.

Like some mythic Greek tragedy, our insatiable desire for more is driving us to devour ourselves. According to the World Wildlife Fund's *Living Planet Report*, our consumption of the earth's resources began to exceed the planet's biocapacity – that is the planet's ability to renew its resources each year – somewhere in the mid-1970s. Since then, the world population has increased by about 3 billion people, and at the same time, the *rate of consumption* – that is, the amount of the earth's resources that each person uses – has also increased dramatically, nowhere more so than in the West. If everyone in the world lived like the average Australian does now, we would need between four to six planets to support us. Something has to give.

The problem is, it does not look like we are the ones who are going to give. There is now a growing mountain of research – such as cited above – that shows just how intractable is our inability to be satisfied with what we have. So despite the fact that real incomes in Australia have trebled since the 1950s, the average Australian actually feels less financially satisfied than their grandparents did. Moreover, despite being wealthier than ever before and having more access to the earth's resources than was ever before imagined, there has been no appreciable gain in happiness in Australia since the end of the second world war. This trend is mirrored with eerie exactness across the developed world, irrespective of culture. Whatever our problem is, it is clear that it is rooted deep in the human condition.

It is at this point that the Biblical story breaks in on the epic human tragedy. Into a world in which people are enslaved to the great idol of more, the Bible recounts the story of how God, 'like the dawn breaking from on high', intervenes to offer a new possibility: the possibility of salvation in this world and the next. And at the centre of the Bible's salvation hope for humanity is the simple idea of enough.

We cannot properly engage what the Bible has to say about 'enough' until we first come to grips with what it says about its opposite – greed. It is common knowledge that the Bible has strong, and often disturbing, things to say about greed: 'Where your treasure is, there



despite the fact that real incomes in Australia have trebled since the 1950s, the average Australian actually feels less financially satisfied than their grandparents did

your heart will be also'; 'No one can serve two masters ... You cannot serve God and wealth'. From the books of the Law, to the proverbs and psalms, the prophets, the gospels, the letters of Paul to the Revelation of John, there is a consistent understanding that greed is a primal destructive force at the heart of humanity. Nevertheless, on the whole, the church in recent centuries has done a pretty good job of trivialising this major current of the Biblical message. Mostly, we do this by categorising greed as an extremity of the human condition, something that applies to the Gina Rhineharts and Rupert Murdochs of the world, but not to us. No one thinks of themselves as greedy.

However, the Bible has a far more democratic view – it sees greed not merely as obscene excess, but as a subtle and widespread force that rears its head in all sorts of different ways. In a little considered passage in Luke's gospel, Jesus is approached by a man with an appeal that, by our standards, would be viewed as an appeal for justice: "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." (Lk 12:13). Surely the one who has come to proclaim God's jubilee (Lk 4:19) will bring a fair resolution? However, Jesus pointedly refuses to enter into the dispute, and his response is telling: "Be on your guard against *all kinds* of greed" (Lk 12:15). Greed comes in many guises: what we would call our 'rights', Jesus here defines as greed. Jesus recognises that there can be no real shalom while people are intent on claiming what they consider to be 'rightfully theirs', and sees real

The Bible sees greed not merely as obscene excess, but as a subtle and widespread force that rears its head in all sorts of different ways.

restoration as only possible when people can give up the claim to *their rights*, with its emphasis on a right as something that is individually possessed, for a bigger view of *what is right*, which includes a concern for the good of the other. When framed in this light, we can see more clearly that greed is a force that acts on all of us.

It is to humans in this condition that the Bible presents its first great archetypal salvation story – the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt. Here we find that Hebrews had been enslaved to Pharaoh's greed, building his great store cities to amass his wealth, and building a civilisation that represented at once a monument to human progress and to human oppression. However, once the

Israelites are taken through the Red Sea and beyond Pharaoh's power, we discover that their enslavement had not been just political and economic, but a spiritual enslavement as well. For once they are confronted with the perceived scarcity of the wilderness, *they cannot imagine any other possibility* than returning to the secure slavery of Egypt: 'there we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread' (Ex 16:3).

But God offers a new possibility that takes the form of a new economy. In the place of the fleshpots of Egypt they are offered bread from heaven, a food that is abundant and graced to them without productive effort – a perfect metaphor for the biosphere that sustains us. However, the manna economy





comes with clear rules that define it as the very opposite of the Egyptian system. The first is that people are only to 'gather enough for that day' (Ex 16:4). The manna system worked to ensure that none had too little, but also to ensure that *none had too much!* (Ex 16:17-18)

For the average Australian in the 21st century this is a revolutionary idea. Our culture has virtually no concept of too much, or if it does it does, it is set at such a high bar as to have no practical use. Could it be possible that we have too much? Could it be possible that the unprecedented levels of family breakdown, addiction, depression and loneliness have something to do with how much we have? Could it be possible that the decline of the church and the widespread crisis of faith could be related to our material lives?

The fundamental concern of the manna economy is holiness, or to put it another way, *fullness of health*. God's purposes in calling this marginal people was to form a community whose life reflected the life and wholeness of God, and provided a model for humanity of right relationship – 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy' (Lev 19:2). Deuteronomy 8 makes clear that the Israelites had to spend forty years in the wilderness living by this system of 'enough' and unlearning the system of Egypt, before they could enter into the Promised Land, the land flowing with milk and honey, the land of good health. The proclivity towards too much is a poison to human community and even to the land itself, and it could have no place in the Promised Land. The beautiful and intricate instructions of the Torah found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy – covering subjects of debt remission, land restoration, collateral, gleaning, land use, reaping and sowing, treatment of animals and much more – go on to paint a vision of a community whose everyday practice is structured to ensure that none have too little and none have too much.

The idea of learning to live in the contentment, the gratitude and the wholeness of enough echoes in different ways through the rest of the Bible, in too many ways to recount here. However, its most important expression is perhaps the most overlooked.

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray (Matt 6:9-13, Lk 11:2-4) he placed the idea of enough at the centre of this prayer. The importance of the Lord's Prayer has been vastly under-recognised, for it is not intended as merely some liturgical form of words, relegated to be droned out in Christian gatherings; rather, it is a model of *the things we should pray about*, the very substance of our dialogue with God. So we should take special notice that immediately after Jesus instructs us to pray that 'Your kingdom come, your will

be done on earth as it is in heaven', he then instructs us to pray 'Give us this day our daily bread'.

The implications of this are huge. At its most basic level it tells us that our economic affairs are rightly a subject of importance to God, and that they are directly related to the subject of God's kingdom and his will. More than that, with this one line Jesus invokes the manna economy, with all its meaning, and places it at the heart of our conversation with

God. It confirms that the existence of too little should rightly be the subject of our pleas to God – no Christian needed to be told that – however, it also makes equally clear that the subject of too much is on the table in our relationship with God. At the heart of our life with God we are called to orient ourselves to His economy of enough – to all the grace, gratitude, and wholeness

that it embodies – and to pray for it and work for it in the world.

God's economy begins with simple gratitude and contentment with what we have, such as that expressed by the Apostle Paul:

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. (Phil 4:11-12)

It is precisely this contentment and gratitude that is missing in our culture.

So how much is enough? I would not presume to try to answer this question for anyone, however, when addressing an Australian audience I think can safely say that we could probably all do with a bit less. More than that, I am convinced that renewal of the church in Australia is dependent on Christians rejecting the idol of more and *actively choosing less*. On this choice hinges no less than our own health and wellness, our ability to comprehend the gospel of Christ, the deepening of Christian community life, the integrity of our calls for justice and care for creation, and the basis of our evangelical witness in the world. Of course, making such a choice would be entirely counter-cultural, would be seen as unnatural in the broader culture, and viewed as something like taking up a cross ... which is a clue that it might just be the way of Jesus.

My hope is that this generation of Christians will be the one to finally make a break with the economy of too much and to begin to explore the practical ways and habits of living with less. I do not believe that it is a work that can be accomplished in a generation, and our children will have to take it up and improve on our shortcomings, but we must begin it now. As Paul writes: 'See, now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation!' (2 Cor 6:2).

**At the heart of our life with God
we are called to orient ourselves to
His economy of enough – to all the
grace, gratitude, and wholeness that
it embodies – and to pray for it and
work for it in the world.**

The Economics of Remote Aboriginal Communities

Part 5 - The need for flexibility

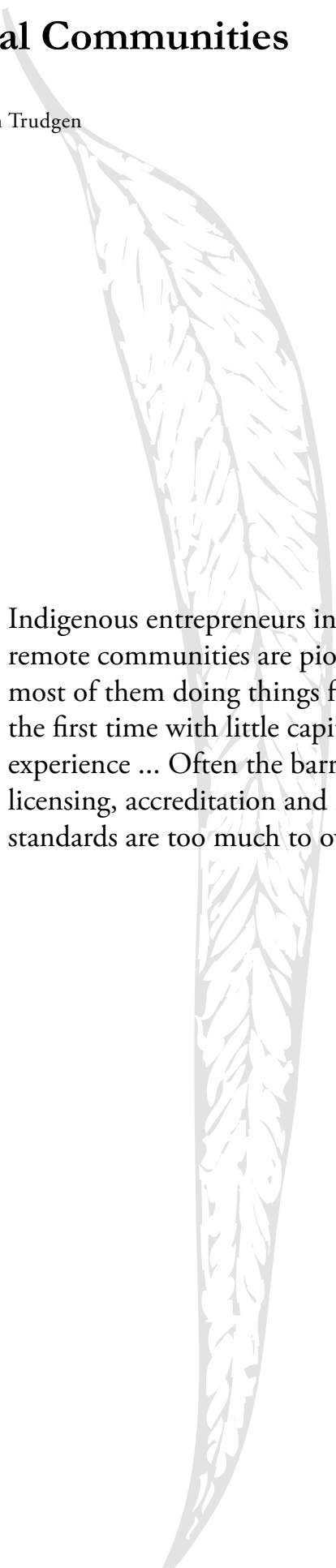
by Tim Trudgen

In my previous article (*Manna Matters April 2013*), I argued that indigenous communities need locally-based production, which is the basis of any real economy, and that this needs to be driven by local ownership of local products. However, when it comes to encouraging local economic participation and appropriate economic development, things get most difficult when it comes to regulations. All other issues I have discussed so far can be put into place at the project and program level. But the inflexibility of the regulatory environment requires an adjustment in the bureaucratic ideology that drives modern government, and it also requires changes in legislation. The flexibility I am talking about is a willingness to *deregulate*, to allow for local circumstances and the needs of pioneers. The legislation of modern Australia is designed for a city environment – but when applied to remote and low-income areas, it is a great barrier to overcome for people attempting to start production-based industries and enterprises in general. Indigenous entrepreneurs in remote communities are pioneers, most of them doing things for the first time with little capital or experience and often poor supporting infrastructure. Often the barriers of licensing, accreditation and industry standards are too much to overcome, despite their motivation and the long-term potential of the business plan.

It is often wrongly suggested that indigenous people do not have enterprising mindsets, unlike poor people in overseas countries who thrive on any little help given to them. In developing countries, it is often said that, “you can give people a small loan and they create for themselves a thriving small business, but Aboriginal people have all these resources at their fingertips but are just not interested in the hard work.”

Such sentiments miss several major differences between the circumstances of the poor in the developing world and the circumstances of remote communities in Australia. An entrepreneur in the developing world is often only limited by their access to credit, but crucially they are often not limited by legal and bureaucratic frameworks. In many developing countries, people in rural areas can start a small business: tailoring, a food stall or selling chicken eggs, without having to think about bookkeeping, income tax, town plans or health laws. In many places they can even build stalls on the side of the road with little or no negotiation with local authorities. Where they do have legal requirements, these are well understood and highly simplified. In many parts of India, for example, taxation comes in the form of fixed levies at various roadside collection points.

The story in Arnhem Land is entirely different. A Yolngu person who starts a small business, after the first year of business, risks becoming a criminal if they do not have accurate records of their income. All income, including cash sales at a market stall, must be declared on their tax return, or to Centrelink if they are receiving social security benefits. That seems fair enough, but it is so poorly understood and bookkeeping is such a foreign activity to many that it is a significant disincentive. While a business remains little more than a supplement to other income, this is not a big problem – unless Centrelink finds out and demands repayment. In such cases, people can see their total income halved overnight.



Indigenous entrepreneurs in remote communities are pioneers, most of them doing things for the first time with little capital or experience ... Often the barriers of licensing, accreditation and industry standards are too much to overcome

The real complexities start when businesses get to a size where they are the main income for more than one employee. At this point businesses become identifiable entities to the Australian Taxation Office and other regulatory bodies. Then there are many laws and regulations to consider. The killers for many include: superannuation, GST, PAYG withholding, health and safety regulations, company income tax, regulations against loaning to family and various forms of licensing. Primary production based enterprises find it even more difficult, even small-scale fishing and native wildlife use requires licenses and are highly regulated. Agricultural food production is hampered by over-the-top health regulations on the delivery chain of the end product. While welfare dependency certainly undermines people's motivation for economic participation, those that do attempt to create business often find themselves worn down by the maze of regulations and laws they have to navigate. Those entrepreneurs in PNG, India, Indonesia or developing countries in many ways have it easy compared to a remote indigenous Australian, being able to rely simply on the sweat of their brow to succeed.

There is a real need for regulatory flexibility that can account for the circumstances of remote business people. As an example, the sale of food products does have a range of health risks. When someone wants to sell food, they have to meet pre-defined requirements that are designed for mass production and the sterile world of our cities. It's not sterile here in remote communities – you can't avoid dust and dirt to the same degree as in cities. People eat it when they go hunting and it gets on everything because the roads are not sealed. People can't afford the stainless steel bench tops required in enclosed preparation areas. A standard of hygiene is needed, but why must it be the same standard as the cities when it doesn't work in this context?

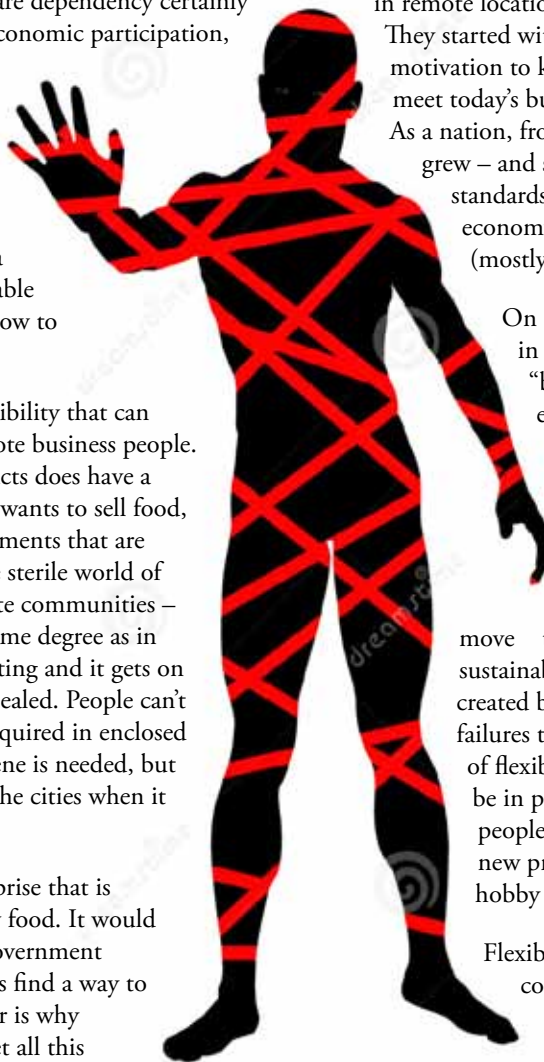
We are currently supporting an enterprise that is trying to reuse treated sewage to grow food. It would be nice if someone from one of the government departments came and said, "OK, let's find a way to make this work." However, all we hear is why it is too hard and that we have to meet all this red tape and overcautious standards. We cannot meet the standards because the infrastructure is just not there. Yet in developing countries, treated sewage of the same low standard as ours is being used safely to grow good food. We have independent professional advice about safe standards in our context, but the bureaucratic systems are not interested in the possibilities, only the regulations. Effluent reuse was successfully occurring in the 1990s in several communities, producing massive crops of bananas without ill effects on the

families running these gardens. At one stage they were even endorsed by the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory. But they were shut down by inflexible and unhelpful Balanda (white people), more interested in protecting their legal behinds than helping locals find solutions that might work for everyone. In the end, this is what supporting successful, sustainable development must be about: finding solutions that work in the current local context, not maintaining inflexible mainstream standards.

Historically, standards increase as economies develop. Our Australian "white" pioneers started with land and bush in remote locations with few regulatory requirements. They started with small incomes and only their motivation to keep them going. They did not have to meet today's building accreditations or health standards. As a nation, from 1800 onwards the Balanda mainstream grew – and so did the red tape, to give us the standards we have today. In today's mainstream the economy, infrastructure, and skill base makes it (mostly) reasonable that we meet these standards.

On the other hand, indigenous people in remote communities are our "black" pioneers, economically and educationally. Our "black" pioneers have economies that are isolated, maintained by a discouraging welfare system and desperate for locally derived products and production. Like our colonial pioneers, it leaves them with little other than their internal motivation to move them forward. They are working to build sustainable economies against a tide of resistance created by legalistic inflexibility and mainstream failures to cooperate or communicate. The degree of flexibility to support new local products must be in proportion to the pioneering context the people are working in. Without this flexibility new products are stifled, because the leap from hobby to profitable business is too big to make.

Flexibility in regulations for remote indigenous communities can help everyone, but most importantly it would help local indigenous entrepreneurs become successful. They are our "black" pioneers and it needs to be recognised that much of their struggle to get by can be eased by bureaucratic systems that appreciate the unique local circumstances. Broad-brushing may work for cities, but it is inappropriate and unrealistic for the context of remote indigenous communities. Legislation, policy and enforcement need to be flexible to unleash the pioneering spirit that is so often squashed by attitudes that value red tape over reality.



Tim Trudgen is the Managing Director of Why Warriors Pty Ltd. He has worked closely with indigenous people from North-East Arnhem Land (Yolju), Northern Territory, Australia, since 2001. Today he works as a cross-cultural educator and as an Enterprise Facilitator to help Yolju develop their economic and social endeavours.

What is it about air travel?

by Thea Ormerod and Miriam Pepper,

Despite the growing social movement towards living more sustainably, there is one matter that few dare to address. It's the one topic that will have the most ardent environmentalist shifting about in their seats. Any challenge to this highly prized lifestyle option will rapidly kill a conversation around the dinner table. We're talking about air travel.

Naturally, most of us get excited thinking about it. We enjoy telling our friends about our next trip. We seek opportunities to travel even when it's not a "necessity". International aviation is a fast-growing industry, despite peak oil and climate change.

What is it about air travel? George Monbiot in *Heat* refers to "love miles". By this he means that many individuals meet friends or partners overseas, which lead to relationships between people from different parts of the world. Also there is the migration of individuals and whole families – in a search for a better life, or to escape persecution and danger. After that, there's the pull to visit the relatives, friends or homelands again, and vice versa. Thus, air travel begets air travel.

Academics today believe they would be consigning themselves to professional invisibility if they didn't attend conferences and the like. And who could begrudge a friend the personal enrichment of experiencing unfamiliar parts of the world, other cultures and historic places? Ironically, some of this travel is to visit beautiful wilderness areas.

Global annual aviation growth is currently estimated to be 4% to 5%. Improvements in energy efficiency have not kept pace with this growth, resulting in a net increase in global emissions.

Flying is now so culturally accepted, it's become sacrilegious to question it. The globalization of businesses continues apace and virtually all areas of human endeavor are increasingly staging international tournaments, festivals and the like. We now have the dubious benefit of the World Paper Planes Championships! Even environmentalists repeatedly set mining against tourism without acknowledging the climate impacts of the tourist industry.

Religious institutions are as much a part of this trend as anyone else. World Youth Day has a very substantial carbon footprint, but this is rarely questioned. International relationships are fostered to maintain overseas aid and development work, and inspirational speakers are hosted from across the globe.

Conveniently overlooked is the fact that air travel brings with it a heavy carbon footprint. Estimates vary regarding aviation's proportion of global emissions, from 2% to 6% or more, depending on who's counting. Confounding the calculations is the fact that burning fuel at high altitude has nearly three times the climate impact of burning the same fuel at ground level. Complexity is added because of the creation of nitrous oxides that are 310 times more powerful than carbon dioxide, and the effects from condensation trails (contrails), which are difficult to quantify.



Flying is now so culturally accepted,
it's become sacrilegious to question it.



George Marshall, author of *Carbon Detox*, has calculated that a holiday to Australia for a family of four living in the UK has the same climate impact as heating their average size house for a decade.

Unfortunately, the “carbon offsets” that people buy in good faith go only part of the way to offsetting the real effects of flying. Offset companies routinely underestimate flight emissions and over-estimate the amount of carbon that offset projects save. Perhaps what is most effective about such offsets is the way that they assuage our own consciences.

At the same time, they conflate non-fossilized and fossilized carbon. For example, the amount of carbon that a tree supposedly soaks up over decades is conflated with the amount of carbon released by burning ages-old fossil fuel in a single flight. Similarly, carbon emissions saved by reducing meat consumption is conflated with a certain number of cars taken off the road. Thus, the complexity of the ecological and social issues of everyday lifestyles is reduced to a matter of disembodied greenhouse gases.

The reluctance to curtail flying habits derives in part from the belief that our small actions are not going to make a scrap of difference to the planet anyway. Some people who believe in sustainable living argue that the key to reducing emissions is structural change, not individual sacrifice. This position is seductive, but it evades the obvious gap between the talk and the walk.

Ghandi’s “Be the change you wish to see in the world” comes to mind. Actually, it seems these weren’t his words exactly, but we know that he believed personal and social transformation go hand in hand. The image of the great Mahatma, one so vigorous in his engagement with

structures that perpetuated injustice, walking barefoot in his dhoti is one that remains potent for our time.

The simple truth is that, to live authentically, those of us concerned about the future of this planet need to review this area of our lives – not only in terms of so-called “luxuries” that we might allow ourselves, but also in terms of the travel that we feel is so essential in our personal and professional lives. If we don’t, how can we call upon others or society as a whole to change their ways? It is this very tendency to hold that others must make the necessary changes that has delayed progress at international climate negotiations. Because air travel seems so sensitive,

Because air travel seems so sensitive, intractable, and hard to give up, is precisely why we should consider it and discuss it more.

intractable, and hard to give up, is precisely why we should consider it and discuss it more.

Consider the possibilities. What would be so bad about holidays closer to home, to other parts of our own country, with all

its legendary beauty and diversity? What could we gain from travelling more slowly through the environment, appreciating its subtleties and changes, rather than transporting ourselves at speed from one context to another? Instead of international meetings, consider webinars, videoconferencing, group Skype meetings and bi-annual gatherings rather than annual ones.

As aviation fuel becomes less available, these options will be forced on us at any rate. Perhaps by travelling less we would not achieve what we currently do, but we could achieve other outcomes, equally valuable and less environmentally damaging.

If humanity is serious about the mitigation of carbon emissions, we are going to have to do something about this idolatry of air travel. The alternative is to allow the expansion of aviation to add to an already quite unbearable burden for our grandchildren, for the world’s poor and for all of life on this fragile planet.

Thea Ormerod is the President of the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC), a multi-faith member-based organisation. Miriam Pepper is also a member of ARRC and a founding member of Uniting Earthweb, a Uniting Church ecology network.

An adventure in going car-free

By Cathy Cook

I'm sitting at a suburban train station watching the Melbourne rain drizzle down, contemplating the 45-minute journey home from my midwife appointment that will involve a train trip, a bus connection and then a walk, all with a feisty two-year-old. I'm eight months pregnant, so I'll make this trip at least another three times before baby arrives.

At times like this I find myself thinking 'a car would be nice right about now ...' So why don't we have a car? Everyone else does, so why should we be any different?

It's been three years since we went car free, and I'm still getting used to the surprised looks we often get when people realise we don't have a vehicle. Not so long ago I would have responded the same way.

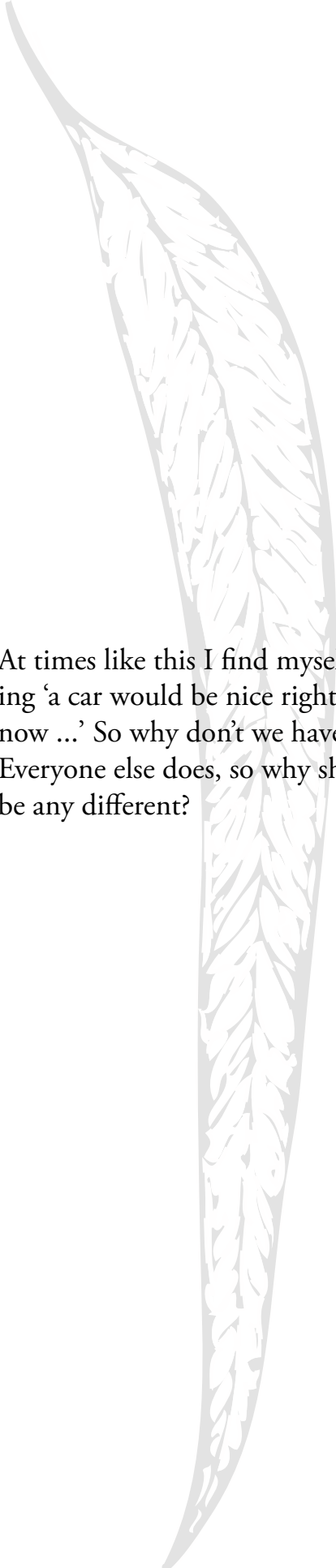
I grew up in the outer-eastern suburbs of Melbourne immersed in the beauty of God's creation. The lush green of Mount Dandenong was at our back door and the Yarra Valley just down the road. My small Christian school offered strong Biblical teaching on justice, but for the most part my understanding of poverty and environmental issues was academic.

During my teen years my interest in environmental and justice issues grew. I started a Social Justice and Environment Network at my church, and I studied International Relations at university. But still these issues remained mostly theoretical. And, of course, once I had the funds, I enjoyed the liberation that came with my first car like most people my age.

A few years later I met and married my husband, who also revelled in independent travel – and speed; he had a car *and* a motorbike. Both of us had been learning about God's heart for the poor and marginalised, so, after marrying we embarked on a world trip to deepen our understanding and to be challenged by the real-world experience of those who live in countries defined as 'poor'.

We started with more than six months in countries throughout Asia, India and Africa, much of it spent with aid and development agencies. It was overwhelming to see, touch and smell what had previously been safely confined to the pages of books, the TV and newspapers. However, what struck us most were the numbers of people whose lives were already being impacted by an unpredictable climate. Over and over we heard villagers telling us that the weather had changed. The most frequent story, from Cambodia to India through to Ghana in West Africa, was that the rains didn't come when expected any more, and when they did come, they were either too soon or too late, and increasingly too heavy, causing failed crop after failed crop. People with generations of cultural memory but who had never heard about 'climate change' were describing to us the impact of our excessive Western way of life on their fragile livelihoods.

Despite my years of interest in environmental issues, climate



At times like this I find myself thinking 'a car would be nice right about now ...' So why don't we have a car? Everyone else does, so why should we be any different?



change had only been on the periphery of my thoughts. Now it was front and centre.

My desire for a deeper understanding of how Christian faith connects with creation care had led me to enrol in a Masters in Theological Ethics, with an emphasis on ecology, at Edinburgh University in Scotland, our final destination. Here, under the guidance of my supervisor, eco-theologian Michael Northcott, I started learning the hard facts of climate change.

Human-induced climate change has been caused by a complex range of interconnected factors; fixing the problem will, similarly, need multiple responses. But one thing became rapidly clear – if individuals want to reduce their own carbon footprint, thinking seriously about cars is an important starting point.

In his contribution to the 2009 book *Creation in Crisis: Christian Perspectives on Sustainability*, Northcott highlights that “motor vehicles are the single largest source of luxury so-called greenhouse gas emissions. Luxury emissions are the avoidable emissions of the rich and such emissions are responsible for a dramatic growth in global emissions since 1999.”

Facts such as these were confronting enough – the statistics show that pretty much anyone who lives in a developed country is part of the global ‘rich’. But my studies also reminded me that followers of Christ have a deeper way of understanding our actions and their consequences. Two stand out for me.

The first is the expectation that God’s people will demonstrate their love for Him through love of neighbour. In a globalised world, people such as the villagers we had met on our travels were clearly our neighbours. We cannot avoid the reality that what we do in Australia impacts people geographically near and far.

The second is God’s constant warnings against idolatry. Again, Northcott summarises it well:

God is described in the book of Exodus as a jealous God who is angered by the worship of idols. At the root of this anger is the divine knowledge that when humans devote themselves to things they have made from the divine creation, rather than to the creator, they devote themselves to lies. When they devote themselves to lies they bring destruction and violence into their society and they make sacrifices – even of their own children – to the gods they make.

Idolatry is essentially the worship of created things instead of the creator and, as Northcott highlights elsewhere, repentance can only come with a complete change of heart and mind, when the temples of idols are dethroned and

when people devote themselves to worship of the true God.

But worship involves actions, and actions involve choices – and the choices that we make as individuals, households, communities, and nations reveal what we truly love far more than our words. Ultimately, what we eat and wear, how we shop and travel, all speak volumes about who or what we worship.

It is hard to deny that our culture’s worship of the internal combustion engine is increasingly bringing destruction to people all over the world. This is not to say that everyone who drives a car is worshipping an idol. But I could not escape the reality that faith in God coupled with knowledge demands that each follower of Christ must ask themselves hard questions about their own lives, the difference between needs and wants, and make a frank assessment of what they truly worship accompanied by real actions that demonstrate love of neighbour. I couldn’t sit with this knowledge and do nothing.

Thankfully, God had also started revealing what some of those actions could involve for us.

It is hard to deny that our culture’s worship of the internal combustion engine is increasingly bringing destruction to people all over the world.

Being far from home meant travelling extensively via public transport (buses, trains, ferries and more), exposing us to an idea that we had never before considered – that public transport could be a meaningful,

vital, and often achievable way to travel.

At times it was and is challenging: in some places it became an intimate sharing of body odours in hot, cramped conditions, and involved untold hours of delays and stomach-churning amenities.

Yet, we had discovered that there was a beauty in slowing down, experiencing the journey from here to there, having time to read, reflect, rest, or share moments of camaraderie and the crossing of cultural boundaries. We began to experience new opportunities for God to move. We started to recognise the possible personal benefits of not owning a vehicle.

As we experienced the efficiency and creativity of European cities that have such great transport options (the bikes in the Netherlands were a sight to behold!) we decided that an attempt to put faith and values into action for us could be to live without a car. This involved weighing up the pros and cons.

Our initial list looked something like this:

Pros

- We would save money on running costs, which we could use to buy bikes, and hire cars when needed.
- We would have to slow down and think more



Cathy with Aelwyn and Simeon on their Yuba Mondo bike which has room for two child seats and paniers!

seriously about how we use our time.

- We would spend more time in our local community, and be more likely to run into people and build new relationships.
- Walking and using bikes would keep us healthier.
- We would become more connected and sensitive to our local environment.

Cons

- We couldn't just jump into a car for a trip, escape, holiday, to visit family and friends further away. We would miss out on things.
- Hiring a car involves using cash that we might already have spent.
- If you need something from the shops and it's a cold, wet, windy day, you still have to go out on a bike.

Within two days of arriving back in Australia, we discovered we were pregnant with our first child. Now we were going to discover if our nice theories would work out in reality.

And the reality is that sometimes not having a car can be hard, and it's even harder than we expected with children. But hard doesn't mean 'impossible'. For the most part, it's worked out quite well - and we've learnt a lot that we never expected.

It has been a humbling exercise in learning to accept the generosity of others. We have many friends nearby who have cars that are available when needed, and we

frequently get asked to car-sit when people go on holidays. It has deepened our understanding of the family of God and our need for others.

In many ways, going car-free was an experiment. But it's important to make it very clear that this was a choice for *us*, not everyone else, and it's not dogmatic. Where we live allows us to make this choice: we have great access to public transport and we live in walking distance of shops, many friends and our church, and my husband's work is a 30-minute bike ride away. And, importantly, we are open to having a car if our needs and circumstances change.

Choosing to go without a car has been our way of responding to God's challenge to abandon our idols and make choices that demonstrate love for God and neighbour, but we do so knowing that this will look different for everyone depending on their circumstances.

Now the baby I was carrying on that wet day at the train station has arrived, and we're a family of four without a car. Life with two young ones and no vehicle certainly takes more thought and planning, but every time I'm tempted to complain, I think of how our culture's worship of created things is impacting millions of people throughout the world, and decide that the train will do me just fine – for now.



(cont. from front page)

share with churches from a range of denominations, which has been very pleasing. We are hoping to develop this aspect of our ministry. If you would like Manna Gum to come and share with your church in some way, please get in touch.

As mentioned in the previous edition, Manna Gum is relocating its base of operations to Bendigo next year. In

one sense, nothing much will change in Manna Gum's work – we will continue to do the same sort of things – however, inevitably we will need to re-think how we do some things. Our hope is that the move will not only open up opportunities in Bendigo and regional Victoria, but may also open up new opportunities for how we work in Melbourne. We would appreciate your prayers as Manna Gum enters this new season of its ministry.

Step

by Cathy Cook

**Step. Step. Dusty path. Up the well-worn track.
A woman walks it, here she comes. Up and, later, back.
Walking tall she bears her load, the way is far and wide,
Baby bundled tight to her back, children at her side.**

*Determined push, the stroller rolls, on path of concrete ease,
She's dashing to the corner shop for milk and frozen peas.
On the phone - distracted air - her child, she wants to wander,
But cars race by, with speedy zeal, so there's no time to ponder.*

**Step. Step. Dusty path. In the summer glare.
Firewood balanced on her head, with poised and graceful flair.
Walking tall, she thinks ahead of housework that's in wait,
But pauses now to say "hello", to neighbours at the gate.**

*Determined push the stroller rolls, 'Quick, the day is hot!
Let's take the bus, here comes one now, we'll chance the motley lot.'
On the phone, she chats about state politics quite proudly,
Pretending not to hear an old lady muttering loudly.*

**Step. Step. Dusty path. You are our daily friend.
She hopes one day for a change in things, if fortune will send.
Walking tall, she'll carry on, hoping for the best,
She dreams of old age with a grin, of feet propped up in rest.**

*Determined push, the stroller rolls. An eco-lifestyle choice.
She hopes that hers is not another unheard voice.
On the phone she discusses the difficulties they face:
Of how to slow down, and to stop, in this crazy rat-race.*

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.

www.mannagum.org.au