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Newsletter of MANNA GUM.

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## News from Long Gully

I am very happy to announce that Matt and Ashley Anslow (with a little help from their friends) will be hosting a Home Economy weekend in NSW in October, on their farm at the back of the Blue Mountains (see above). It is a stunning location and they have an enormous amount to offer.

Back in Bendigo, the mid-winter crops of garlic, onion, broccoli, cauliflower and beetroot are well on their way, along with a full flush of weeds. It is a season for waiting, maintaining and wood-chopping!

The first half of 2018 was both an encouraging and difficult time. Encouraging, because we had a good response to our annual financial appeal, which, for the time being at least, allows Manna Gum to still pay me a wage. We continue to be humbled, blessed and challenged by the support for Manna Gum's work; it has given us a concrete insight into the way that the people of God are part of the answer to our prayer, 'Give us this day our daily bread'.

But it was also a difficult start to the year, as I had a bad

*(News cont. on back page)*



# Christian Witness in the Midst of Capitalism

## Christianity versus Capitalism (Part 5)

by Jonathan Cornford

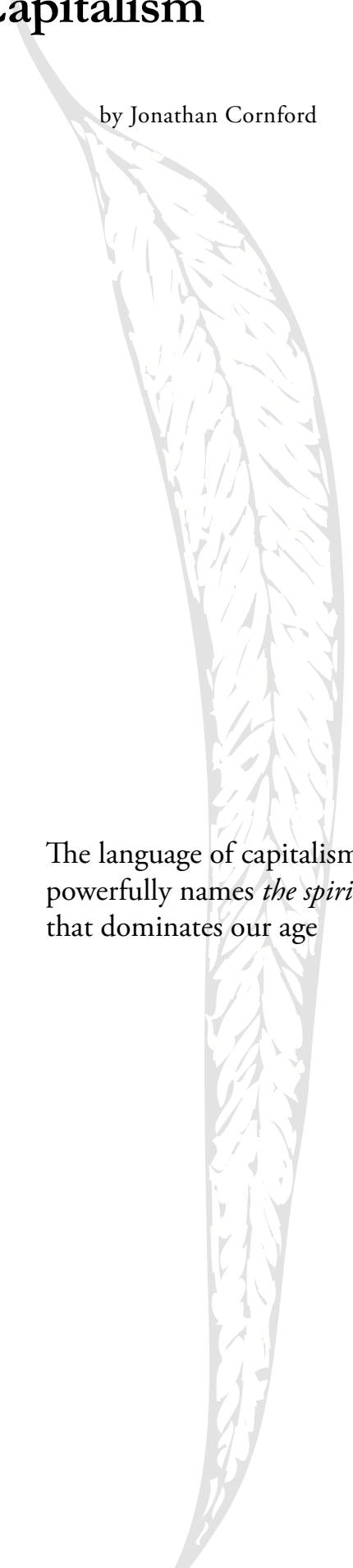
Two young fish were swimming along together when they passed an older and wiser one of their number. 'How's the water today, fellas?', he cheerily greeted them. Further on, one of the younger fish looked to the other with a puzzled expression: 'What's water?'.

This is the final instalment in a series of articles in which I have been slowly building a case about the relationship between Christianity and capitalism. 'Capitalism' is a word that gets bandied about a lot, but is rarely defined, and it has strong polemical overtones that tend towards ideological polarisation either for or against it. Often it can be an unhelpful word, obscuring more than it clarifies. Why bother with it at all?

Over the course of this series, I have been arguing that capitalism *can be* a useful word, so long as we are clear about what we mean by it. Following a long tradition of historians, political economists and sociologists, I have been arguing that the term 'capitalism' captures a complex, but momentous, shift in human socio-political systems that began to unfold in Europe 500 years ago and, through Europe's expansion, spread to encompass the globe.

To be precise, what was born in Europe at the close of the Mediaeval period was a *capitalist world-system*: a huge, complex, integrated and interdependent global system, over which no one has control, that is driven by the imperative of endless accumulation and does so through the relentless commodification of life. In this sense, the descriptive label of 'capitalism' helps us recognise the significance of where we stand in the grand scheme of human history and helps us name the powerful, but hidden, forces that shape how we are formed as human beings. Capitalism is the water we have all been swimming in.

This takes on even more significance when we begin to think theologically. A central claim of the New Testament, especially in the writings of Paul, is that Christ has exposed and triumphed over the enigmatic 'principalities and powers' that dominate and shape human existence. He reminds us that 'our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms' (Eph 6:12). In this sense, the language of capitalism powerfully names *the spirit* that dominates our age. It is something like the 'power of the air' to which Paul refers in Ephesians (2:2): it



The language of capitalism powerfully names *the spirit* that dominates our age



is the matrix of beliefs, ideologies, assumptions, habits and institutions that forms the overall atmosphere *we breathe* without even knowing it.

It is in this sense that I argued in the previous article (May 2018) that capitalism is inimical to Christian faith. It is not just that capitalism is unchristian, but that it is specifically anti-Christian: a counter-religion with which the church can find no compromise. Therefore, if we are seeking to follow the Way of Christ, then we must reject capitalism *as a way of being*.

But what could that possibly mean? If the capitalist world-system is the only show in town, how do we reject it? This is the critical question to which we must now turn, for which the previous five articles have merely been groundwork. But to do so, we need to first address some lingering confusions.

### Rejecting capitalism: what I *do not* mean

Firstly, by identifying ‘capitalism’ as an economic system whose essential spirit we must reject, I *am not* saying that pre-capitalist systems represented some moral golden age from which we have fallen. Mediaeval Europe, the Roman Empire or Athenian democracy all enshrined socio-political structures that are ultimately challenged by the world-inverting gospel of Christ. In saying that Christians must reject the spirit of capitalism, I am not arguing that it represents a special case, but am rather aligning with the *generic attitude* of the New Testament in relation to the fallen ‘powers’ of ‘this present age’. Capitalism, along with feudalism and communism (and most other ‘isms’), is just one more way by which the great lord it over the small. The Way of Christ provides a challenge to them all.

Secondly, we should not confuse capitalism, as many have done, with commerce, markets and basic economic liberties. The claim that only capitalism allows these forms of economic life to exist is one of the great fallacies through which it has won ongoing support. Clearly, commerce, markets and profit are central to the current capitalist order, but they have all also existed for thousands of years before a capitalist world-system came into being and have flourished in many other sorts of social systems. To be clear, in saying that capitalism is inimical to the gospel, I *am not* saying that commerce is inimical to the gospel. Human civilisation is dependent on commerce, and, to this day, it is possible to undertake commerce within the current world-system without conforming to a capitalist logic. (The story of Kokonut Pacific on p.7 is an excellent example of a non-capitalist approach to commerce.)

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markets and basic economic liberties.**

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Similarly, in saying that we exist in a capitalist world-system, we should not imagine that *everything* is determined by it or that it accounts for all behaviour. On the contrary, the only reason things hold together at all is that there yet remain many areas of life not determined by a capitalist logic. And, as in all periods of history, there are always counter-movements to the dominant system, offering resistance and alternative options, however small or marginal. Capitalism does not name the entirety of our existence – far from it – but rather names a force that *affects us all* in more ways than we know.

Finally, the imperative of rejecting capitalism does not stem from a theological concern to be ‘pure’ from the taint of the world. Such a thing does not exist within any social system. The call of Christ is to live within the world as salt, light and leaven, not to be cut off as a pure and morally self-congratulating sect. The key question centres on *worth*: where do we find worth in life? To what things is it worthwhile to give our lives? Where we give worth is, literally, what we worship.

### Replace or reform?

What might the call to follow Christ involve in relation to capitalism? Once you have taken the step to recognising that there is something profoundly problematic about capitalism, it is not surprising the most common assumption is that the Christian calling must therefore be to either reform capitalism or to replace it with a better system.

RH Tawney, the great English economic and Christian thinker from the early 20th century, dedicated his life to replacing the capitalist order with a more human system – he called it ‘socialism’, but he meant something quite different to what most people assume that word means today. Others have taken the more pragmatic decision to try to make the best of a bad lot and, accepting that all social systems are imperfect, have given their efforts to trying to ameliorate the capitalist system as best they could.

Each of these represent legitimate ways of trying to express God’s love and care for the world. However, neither can be considered the *primary* calling of Christians in the face of global capitalism. Moreover, each of them presents some particular difficulties for us in the current historical moment. Firstly, and most obviously, trying to concretely envisage an alternative economic order or to reform the failings of the present order requires a high level of specialist knowledge: either people who are trained in economics, political economy or some associated



The story of Kokonut Pacific (p.7) and Green Collect (May 2018) are fine examples of non-capitalist commerce.

disciplines. Ideally, if this is really to form part of their *Christian witness* in the world, it also requires them to have a highly developed theological framework in which to fit their specialist knowledge. All of this is great to aspire to, but realistically, will only ever be relevant for a tiny percentage of Christians. It represents a very particular calling and could never be considered a primary Christian vocation.

Secondly, we occupy a very different moment in history from people like RH Tawney. Tawney was able to successfully communicate a profoundly *Christian* vision of economic life that was widely influential in British society and government. Tawney's voice was accompanied by those of influential church leaders (his best friend was the Archbishop of Canterbury!) who commanded significant moral authority in the political life of the nation. For a small window of time at the end of the Second World War, it did indeed look as if the capitalist order was being transformed into something else. Although Tawney was under no illusions that Britain in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century could any longer be meaningfully described as a 'Christian society', he was nevertheless still able to appeal to a broadly shared moral sense of what the common good looked like.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the Western world, there is no such broad moral agreement about what the common good looks like. Rather, our society is characterised by deep moral and philosophical fissures and, in Australia, a Christian moral vision is perhaps the least popular of all. Indeed, the church itself is so fractured that we cannot really talk meaningfully any more of 'a Christian moral vision' and hope that people might understand what we mean by it.

We need to face up to the fact that the tides of history have well and truly turned and the Christian church in Australia is a marginal grouping that has little moral authority and even less political influence. It would now be meaningless for the church, speaking as the church, to throw its public voice, as it did in Tawney's day, behind concrete schemes for economic restructuring.

Of course, this does not prevent those few Christians who have the specialist knowledge from performing their roles in government, civil society or academia as best they can to work for a better system. But as I have said, this is not relevant to most of us and, moreover, even for these few there are some real problems. If these secular vocations are to be seriously thought of as expressions of *Christian witness* (as they should), then those undertaking them must be deeply rooted in a Christ-centred way of *seeing the world* – the profound transformation of mind of which Paul talked and by which we see through the prevailing wisdoms of the day (Rom 12:2). And here we have real problems as Christian faith in the West has, for a long time, taken the form of a fairly thin veneer that supplements the largely non-negotiable material culture of affluent consumer individualism. As I argued in the previous article (May 2018), we generally underestimate the extent to which capitalism works on us as a *school of desire* that profoundly shapes our very idea of what a 'good life' consists of.

The result is that politically engaged Christians with specialist knowledge, whether on the left or right, tend to slip into the most attractive intellectual framework that the world offers them and end up having little to contribute in the political arena that genuinely stems from the insights of a 'kingdom-way-of-being', rather than from the most current intellectual fashion.



Similarly, there is nothing preventing ordinary Australian Christians from exercising their political citizenship to join with others, as best they can, to work for a better economic system. Indeed, I would argue that, as long as we continue to hold democratic rights to participate in the political life of our nation, then we are morally obligated to do so. Once again, however, the problem is how we conceive of what a better system looks like. How do we judge what set of options to support? What are the moral and philosophical criteria by which we make such judgements?

Let me be clear: *I am not* saying that Christians cannot play a constructive role in exercising their political citizenship or working at the coalface of systemic reform. Of course they can. What I am saying is that, to the extent we have all been shaped within the same school of desire, the moral imagination with which we are able to conceive of a more life-giving economic order, is likely to be severely constrained. Before we can think well about Christian witness in these arenas there is some prior business to which we all need to attend: we need to get our own house in order first. We need an alternative school of desire.

### Christian witness in the midst of capitalism

Since the very first edition of *Manna Matters* 10 years ago, I have been arguing that the primary means by which we are called to communicate God's good news to world is through the vehicle of our lives – our *whole* lives. The consistent call on the people of God throughout the Old Testament and the New, is to be a people who embody a new way of being human, one in which we are being called into communion with the God of love, and through him, with all of humanity and creation. This necessarily means that the people of God, whether Israel in the Old Testament or the Body of Christ in the New, have always been called to be an alternative economic community whose day-to-day mode of living rejects the idolatries of power, money, class, race, sect or nation, but instead testifies to the character of the God who is revealed in Christ.

The call to live non-conformist economic lives is not so that God's people can be self-righteously separate and pure; rather, it is because the dominant modes of economic being have always been destructive to the communion of love between God, people and creation. The call to let Christ transform our economic lives thus has multiple dimensions, all inextricably interwoven.

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Repentance, salvation, ethics and evangelism – so often seen as separate compartments of faith – are really just words that describe different aspects of the same big

picture. In essence, then, Christian witness in the midst of capitalism is no different to the call of the people of God in the presence of Babylon or the Roman Empire. It is first and foremost a call to reject the idolatries of the age and to *embody in our lives* the love of God for the world.

The call to a new way of being human applies to our individual economic lives, but also to the shape and form of our faith communities. The key link that joins these two things together, and the unit that forms the basis of participation in the broader economy and ecology, are our *households*. Therefore, the primary place for us to think through how we resist the spirit of capitalism and embody a better mode of being, is through the shape of our household economies.

What does that look like? That has been the subject of the last 10 years of *Manna Matters* articles, so I will only give the briefest sketch here, but I encourage readers to use the Manna Gum website to fill out this picture ([www.mannagum.org.au](http://www.mannagum.org.au)). Here are the main challenges:

1. The conscious practice of economic discipleship in relation to money; in particular, through the practices of renunciation, generosity and gratitude. (See May 2016)
2. Making a positive choice to live at a lower material standard of living than the current social norm. This



is a choice *against* the idol of 'More' and a choice *for* people and the planet. (see April 2013)

3. Re-thinking the shared work and vocation of a household (both paid and unpaid) to prioritise care and nurture and serving the world, as opposed to securing affluence. (See April 2013)
4. Learning how to practise responsible consumption so that spending as consumers is directed as much as possible to support modes of commerce that care for people and the earth. (August 2013)
5. Beginning, in small ways initially, to rediscover ways of rebuilding shared economic relationships between households and especially within faith communities. (See Advent 2015, August 2013)

In conclusion, the foundation of Christian witness in the midst of capitalism must be to first reject its inner logic – its *spirit* – and for that to be real it must find expression in our material lives. What is really at stake is the question of where we find worth. Or to put it theologically, who, or what, do we really worship? Once we are clearer about this ourselves, then we will have a firmer basis from which to be active political citizens or to pursue specialist vocations in re-imagining economic structures. The question of what represents 'the good' in economic life will not be abstract or theoretical; it will have been *experienced* through enfolded daily acts of love practised in households and communities of faith. That is, there will be tangible human experience of 'good news' – in all its social, economic, ecological and spiritual dimensions – that can be drawn on and pointed to. In all times and all places, the heart of Christian

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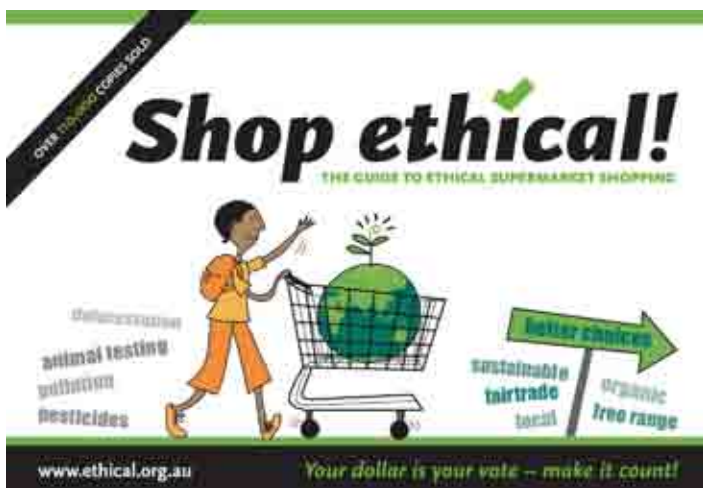
witness is always to show in which direction lies the Way of Life, in the midst of a world that is continually drawn to choose the wide road that leads to death.

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So what will be the future of the capitalist world-order? Will it continue to dominate all nations unchallenged? Will it collapse amid the whirl of social, economic, ecological and geo-political storms that are gathering in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Will enough of us reach a point of collective clarity that will allow us to choose a saner path and bring the human economy to heel within viable and healthy limits? Who can say? History can help us make some guesses about the future, but its strongest lesson is that the future is entirely unpredictable. Neither does Biblical faith offer any clear clues or guides about the trajectory of human history: the twin possibilities of human repentance and flowering, and of catastrophic civilisational collapse are both accommodated within a Biblical worldview. Whatever our place within the great drama of human history, whether in times fair or foul,

the affirmation of the gospel is the same: the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has never overcome it – *God is with us*; and, someday, somehow, the God who is in Christ will restore all things and make all things right. Though it is a mystery to us, it is this vision of healing and

restoration that we are called to *live into* here and now. 'Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain' (1 Cor 15:58).



Left: The motto of *The Guide to Ethical Supermarket Shopping* is "Your Dollar is Your Vote" (August 2013). Right: The cooperative work of the Western Organic Collective (August 2013). The practices of responsible consumption and economic cooperation are both ways of inhabiting our consumer culture in a non-capitalist mode.



# The Story of Kokonut Pacific

## An example of non-capitalist commerce

by Dan M. Etherington

Sri Lanka has been called the land of ‘serendipity’ – meaning a surprising, delightful, unexpected discovery. So it was with me in 1976 when I first visited that country. My visit to the Coconut Research Institute turned out to be the start of an adventure.

I was amazed by the palm itself: that it should produce regular bunches of large fruit all year round and that the fruit itself could be divided into a wide range of products. The husk could be made into coir fibre products; the shell into tools, ornaments, charcoal and activated carbon. Then there was the nutritious juice (water) followed by the flesh which had delicious milk, cream, oil and – potentially – desiccated coconut. No wonder the palm is referred to as ‘The Tree of Life’.

Ten years later, in April 1986, Cyclone Namu tore through the Solomon Islands causing enormous devastation. That same month, the world price of copra dropped to less than half its ‘normal’ price. Deaths in the country from malaria had increased rapidly. Population growth was much faster than the increase in national educational and medical services. I remember thinking that the country was ‘paralytic’ and recalled the story of the crippled man brought to Jesus on a stretcher by four friends. Their way into the house was blocked by a crowd, but with a good dose of lateral thinking, they made a hole in the roof and lowered their friend through it to Jesus (Mark 2:1-5). I prayed then that maybe I could help this nation – possibly through the ‘Tree of Life’, with its wide range of potential products.

In 1991, I attended a conference where a British scientist presented a paper on low-pressure extraction of coconut oil. It described a simple traditional technique for producing coconut oil first observed in Tuvalu. It took me a while to grasp the importance of this work, but in 1992 I was challenged by a village soap maker in Mozambique to come up with a method whereby he could make his own coconut oil on the farm rather than selling his copra to a large factory and buying the oil back. It was a few months later that I experimented with a simple caulking gun: I modified the sealant tube by drilling micro-holes and making sure the piston could move both ways. I mixed some desiccated coconut with a little hot water and stuffed this into the tube and started pressing. Eureka! Oil just poured out onto the floor!

This was the birth of what became the *Direct Micro Expelling (DME)* process:

- **Direct** – quick – pure oil within one hour of opening a coconut.
- **Micro** – small scale (family farm size).
- **Expelling** – extraction of *extra virgin coconut oil (EVCO)*.

When is enough, enough?

‘He who is content has enough.’

*Chinese proverb*

With active support from the CSIRO, we built some genuine presses and started field trials in PNG, Solomon Islands and then Fiji. We showed that it was indeed possible to produce a pure raw, virgin coconut oil of superb quality in a village or farm setting using what was effectively indigenous Pacific island know-how. We registered Kokonut Pacific as a company in November 1994 in order to have a vehicle to produce the equipment.

The Company's vision was, and is, encapsulated in the motto 'Empowering and Bringing Hope.' In partnership with local communities, we aimed to improve their lives by building sustainable value chains and revitalising the smallholder coconut industry with appropriate technology. I was fortunate in that I had a full-time research position at the ANU, but that did not provide funds for a commercial operation. Without knowing quite what we were getting into, my wife and I, our eldest son and two good friends in Brisbane provided very modest, totally unsecured, loans to the Company. Our five shareholders were passionate about justice (for people and the planet) and wanted to invest with purpose. I retired from the university in 1997 to follow the dream. In effect, we became a pioneer 'social enterprise' before the term came into common use.

Kokonut Pacific was formed as a for-profit company



rather than a charity because we believed that it had to be profitable in order to be sustainable. Profits were made, but retained as we grew. We still have the five original shareholders, but later (2013) added an extra shareholder in the form of a charitable trust, the Niulife Foundation (NLF). KP had two parallel strands to work on: first, the supply side, the DME process and the production system; and, secondly, the demand side – the market for the oil produced.

Making Virgin Coconut Oil (VCO) at a village/farm level was a totally radical, if not ridiculous, proposition. There was no market for it. Initially we thought that the oil would be used mainly as a diesel-fuel substitute in remote locations. Copra was the only commercial coconut product produced at a village level. This debased raw material was exported for the oil and meal to be extracted in large factories overseas. The farmers never saw the oil or the meal. But the DME units in Fiji and Samoa produced far more VCO than the domestic market could absorb. In order to sustain this new value chain, we had to find export markets for the VCO now arriving from Samoa in 200 litre drums.

At first, markets for this rare, beautiful and healthy oil were very hard to find. Then, almost miraculously, some 'radical' nutritional scientists were taken seriously. Early studies on coconut oil were re-examined. Books and articles extolling the dietary benefits of coconut oil were widely published. Over the next two decades VCO has become something of a superfood featured in many magazines and recipe books. When we approached the largest vegetable-oil marketer in Melbourne 2003 with our oil we were told very firmly that there was no such thing as virgin coconut oil. However, as a charitable gesture, the manager bought two drums. Ten years later, they were our largest bulk customer buying six tons quarterly! The demand for VCO 'took off!' So far, so good.

*Left: The Direct Micro Expelling technique provides a cheap and easy-to-use means of village-based production of high-value coconut oil. Below: a four-man team at the drying tables. Photos by Sean Davey.*





The challenge for us was to increase the supply of VCO from remote villages to affluent countries. But where? My original prayer was for the Solomons. If the Solomons was ‘paralytic’ in 1986, by 2002 it was ‘quadriplegic’. Ethnic conflict resulted in the RAMSI initiative in July 2003 to restore law and order. Colin Dyer, a missionary who was rebuilding burnt-out schools and clinics in rural locations where others ‘feared to tread’, invited Kokonut Pacific to consider a joint venture. Who would be rash enough to invest in the rural areas of a ‘failed state’? Another step of faith was required – encouraged by the poor widow’s experience in 2 Kings 4: 1-7.

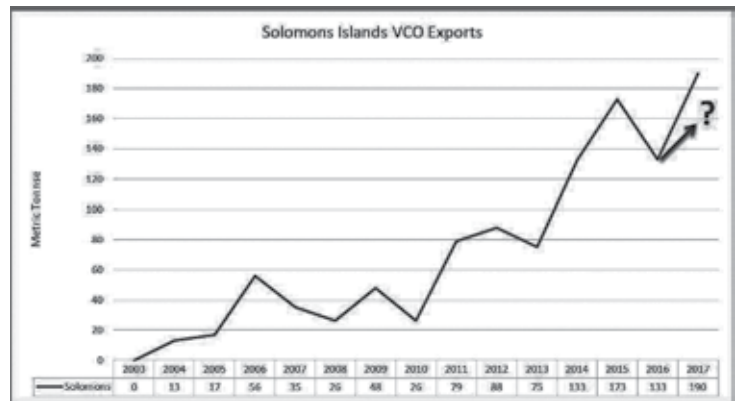
By June 2004, we had set up a joint venture company, Kokonut Pacific Solomon Islands (KPSI). Colin Dyer provided the local contacts and administration for scattered village communities that were taught how to produce DME VCO. Kokonut Pacific (Australia) (KP) provided the equipment, training, technical, logistic and marketing support.

DME VCO is ideal to produce at a farm level. Not only does the producer have pure oil, but the residue is edible for human consumption and – together with the coconut water – makes an excellent stock feed. VCO has a long shelf life – measured in years rather than weeks or months.

We knew that any farm or village-based DME unit operating as a small business entity would perform best if it were a module within a system that provided the economies of scale necessary to enter the international market. The system could have three tiers of actual production units, regional service centres, and then a headquarters’ operation.

The economics of a system will vary depending on the density of coconut plantings, yields of fully mature nuts, farm size, ease of road and/or marine access, size of local markets, distance from export markets and, critically, on the desire of rural entrepreneurs and local communities to engage in this new coconut processing enterprise. Export markets require an assurance of quality. A reputation of having a remote pristine environment is not enough. Annual inspection of farms and VCO producers by an internationally accepted organic certifier became a necessary and expensive requirement which KP funded for 10 years.

The logistics of getting the oil from an isolated village to the export port for consolidation with oil from numerous other producers were, and are, challenging. Key components of the links in the chain include establishing and maintaining good relationships with farmers and producers, technology development and transfer, training, extension, business principles and handling money, communications and logistic support. It was to



help facilitate this complex task, we set up the *Niulife Foundation* (NLF) in 2013 so KP could use its profits more effectively to assist poorer tropical communities to get better value for their coconuts.

One of NLF’s first projects was to help establish the Coconut Technology Centre (CTC) in Honiara. The CTC was registered as a legal charitable entity in September 2014 and an Australian volunteer (Frank Sanders) was engaged to build the basic facility and begin operations. The centre was formally launched by the Minister of Agriculture in June 2015 and is now managed by a Solomon Islander.

### Supply side VCO production is increasing

Our vision was affirmed in 2006 when KPSI won first prize in an international competition mounted by the Asia Pacific Forum for Environment and Development (APFED). Ten years later, KPSI scooped the ‘Prime Minister’s Award’ as *Business of the Year*. Two other awards – *Exporter of the Year* and *Business Contribution to the Community Award* – were also received.

However, a significant biosecurity threat has emerged in the Solomons caused by the invasive attack of the Guam sub-species of the Coconut Rhinoceros beetle (CRB-G). Between 2014 and 2018, the stock of coconut palms in Honiara has plummeted by 73%. The threat of CRB to the islands is potentially dire.





## What of the demand side?

VCO production from large-scale desiccated coconut (DCN) factories is now common in Sri Lanka, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. VCO has quickly spread from health food stores to supermarket shelves. Prices have halved! Our overseas bulk oil customers are facing the same challenge from a flood of new cheaper coconut oils entering the market.

KP has responded with a comprehensive rebranding exercise with new labels and updated *Niulife* website. Radically new retail packaging emphasises the uniqueness of KPSI's village-produced oil. Our distribution network tells that 'Trade, Not Aid' brings benefits to over 10,000 people (farmers, oil producers, their families and neighbours, schools, clinics and churches) by the provision of employment and higher incomes. Communities are healthier, better educated, better dressed and enjoy an improved lifestyle with better homes and a hope for the future. The oil producers receive a price for their oil that is stable and above world market prices. Overall, communities make five times more from coconuts turned into VCO than the alternative, copra.

KP's '*Niulife*' brand is trusted as the Australian 'coconut specialists'. In addition to VCO, KP sells the widest range of coconut products which we source from different countries – from the flesh we sell (Creamed CN, CN flour, DCN) and from the nectar (CN sugar, syrup, vinegars and sauces). This diversification strategy spreads our risks and builds the sustainability of the brand around our core VCO product. We also continue to sell our DME equipment around the tropics.

The dilemma for our joint venture is how to remain competitive in a high-cost island situation. (KPSI) has made great strides in value-adding for the domestic and international markets with superior quality soaps and cosmetic products. It is important that DME VCO producers make their operations more efficient and use as much of the coconut resource as possible (composting husks; making coconut shell charcoal and feeding residual meal to livestock). It is important that the quality of the oil is maintained at high international standards.

As a founder of KP and joint founder of KPSI, I believe that in time middle-class urban Asian consumers will absorb more and more of their own country's VCO

production. There is then enormous potential for VCO exports from the South Pacific to increase. The Solomon Islanders have the coconut and human resources to continue to expand their VCO production and exports. We will continue to support this enormously important initiative. The adventure continues!

We have used for-profit structures to ensure sustainability and enter world trade on behalf of remote communities. This continues to pose enormous challenges. The rewards to the company and shareholders are not from financial returns, but the intangible good will expressed in smiling faces.

*For more info see:*

[kokonutpacific.com.au](http://kokonutpacific.com.au)

[www.niulife.com.au](http://www.niulife.com.au)

*Previous page: Niulife coconut sauces. Top left: Niulife soaps. Below: the Asimana DME enterprise in the Solomon Islands employs 30 people, with nearly \$2m a year of revenue flowing into the broader community (photo by Sean Davey). Bottom: Dan and Maureen Etherington, co-founders of Kokonut Pacific.*





# Washed Clean

## The joys and justice of making your own soap

by Delwyn Riordan

It is a Saturday morning, and while children run around ovals all over the state, kick various shapes of ball and generally get very grubby, a group of friends gather outside a kitchen in Footscray. Mixing caustic soda with water causes fumes to fly and we all retreat inside where the work of weighing, measuring and warming begins. As the oils melt and merge, conversation flows. Soap, children, ethical purchasing, school, gardening – the topics are as varied as the interests of those in the room. The one subject it continues to return to is the soap.

The recipe is simple – coconut oil, olive oil, lye (caustic soda mixed with water) and a selection of essential oils. The simplicity belies the science of soap making where all oils are not created equal. We have chosen our oils and ratios carefully to give a soap which will be hard enough to last, but will also lather well. We have also chosen oils which work well together and allow us to avoid palm oil.

Palm oil is one of the most commonly used oils in the cosmetic and food industries and it comes at a huge environmental cost. Most palm oil is produced in Borneo and Sumatra, where rapid clearing of rainforest for palm oil production is destroying the habitat of orangutans at such a rate that it is predicted they will be extinct in 20 years, with Sumatran tigers also placed under extreme pressure. In Indonesia and Malaysia, it is estimated that rainforests are being cleared at the rate of 300 football fields per minute, predominantly for the production of palm oil.

Back in Footscray, I'm enjoying melting coconut oil – our coconut oil has come from small communities in the Pacific (via Kokonut Pacific, see p.7), where local people grow and harvest the coconuts and then extract the rich, high-quality, cold-pressed oil within hours of the nut leaving the tree. This crop neither enslaves the grower, nor destroys important habitat in the developing world. It also smells great as it melts. I picture the small, open shed in Tonga where I watched, eight years ago, as women and men worked together to extract this oil.

The other thing I love about soap making is the pleasure of using something I have made, something that I understand. I think we use things differently when we know them well, when something has been made through our own effort we not only appreciate it, but we cease to take it for granted. Soap is no longer just another item I pick off the supermarket shelf; it is something I think about every so often and work for a few times a year. If

we run out of our own soap I feel that. I would love to extend this thought and care to some of the other things I use regularly; when I think about the things I use in a day, there are many I use quite thoughtlessly – that I couldn't make and don't understand. It seems to me that this disconnection is at the heart of some of the more pressing environmental and social issues of our time.

Now that my children are home and covered in mud, I'm pleased to have my cold-processed vegetable oil soap, free of palm oil and rich in stories to clean their grubby bodies... thank you friends.

*This is an excerpt from a longer article in Manna Matters Nov 2010.*

### HOW TO MAKE SOAP

Here is what you need to make soap and a rough idea of how you do it. However, it is quite an involved process and doing it safely is important. Go to the Manna Gum website for a full set of directions (see *Manna Matters* Nov 2010)

#### INGREDIENTS

- Coconut oil
- Sodium hydroxide (NaOH)
- Water
- Olive oil
- Essential oils (eg. lavender)
- Other special bits (eg. oat-meal)

#### EQUIPMENT

- Rubber gloves
- Safety glasses
- Scales
- Rubber spatula \*
- Large glass bowl
- 2 x large saucepan pots \*
- Wooden spoons \*
- Food thermometer
- Old electric handheld blender \*
- Soap moulds or milk cartons
- Old blanket

\* recommend that these items be dedicated to soap making only.

#### BASIC METHOD

1. Add sodium hydroxide to water to make lye. This is a volatile reaction creating a very high temperature and toxic fumes. It should be done somewhere very safe, and preferably outside.
2. When lye has cooled to 27c (this will take 1-2 hours) it is ready to mix with the oils.
3. Gently warm up the oils to 27c.
4. Slowly add the lye to the oils when both are at 27c and stir briskly (or whiz) until a small amount of soap drizzled across the surface leaves a trace pattern.
5. Add any essential oils and special bits. Mix well.
6. Pour soap into moulds.
7. Cover well with blanket. Leave for 2-3 days.
8. Cut soap into individual pieces (if using cartons or large containers).
9. Leave soap for 6 weeks to complete saponification (i.e. to ensure all of the NaOH has reacted with the oils).



*(cont. from front page)*

recurrence of a back injury which had a severe impact on my ability to work. Many things had to be pushed back or abandoned altogether, which is always a spiritually chastening experience.

In March, Kim was more than able to compensate for my absence at the Surrender Conference and ran a workshop on 'A Christian Practice of Household Economy'. In late April, I was able to get to Melbourne to speak to a class at Eastern College on Biblical economics and then to Canberra to speak at a Fair Trade Conference. Although it was a little challenging with my back, it was nonetheless

an inspiring time to be around a bunch of people who have taken significant risks and steps of faith to expand Fair Trade networks.

More recently (July), Kim coordinated an Arts of Home Economy Weekend for the NEXT course from Whitley, with a lot of input from the St Matthew's Church community here in Long Gully, with workshops including gardening, bottling and preserving, cheese making, bread making, pasta making, smoking and curing, soap making and more ... It was a great time and a good example of the way Manna Gum's work and message is rooted in a community and neighbourhood.

*Jonathan Cornford*

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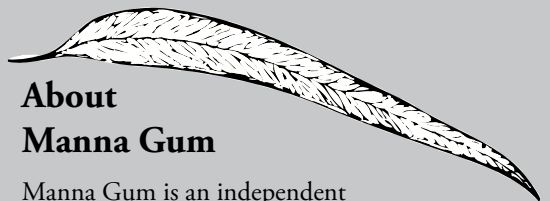
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### About Manna Gum

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

1. *Help Christians reclaim and practise Biblical teaching on material life; and*
2. *Promote understanding of the ways our economic lives impact upon ourselves, others and the earth.*

Manna Gum is motivated by a vision of renewal of the Church in Australia as an alternative community that witnesses to the Kingdom of God.

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

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