



# MANNA matters

Newsletter of MANNA GUM.

## This edition:

### FAITH AND ECONOMY

The Moral Ecology of Judgement (Pt.3)

*Jonathan Cornford (p.2)*

### FAITH AND ECONOMY

Beauty and the Beast: Violence and Economics in the Book of Revelation (Pt.1)

*Matthew Anslow (p.7)*

### EVERYDAY PEOPLE

Conservation and Hope: A Rocha Australia Serving the Lord in Creation Care

*Stuart Blanch (p.11)*

### FAITH AND ECONOMY

More Than Martyrs: The First Christians and Their Money

*Edwina Murphy (p.14)*



A Rocha Australia, doing tree planting with students from Capernwray, Southern Highlands, NSW.

## News from Long Gully

The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. In the previous edition, I announced that Matt Anslow had come on board as *Manna Matters* editor for one day a week. Unfortunately, Matt's other part-time work was made redundant and he has had to accept a full-time role somewhere else. So this will be Matt's last edition editing *Manna Matters* (for the time being, at least!). He will still be contributing some more articles and joining in with the *Manna Cast* (see back page) for a while. I will be sorry to lose Matt—he was a rare catch in terms of skills, ideas, and insight.

Manna Gum's new podcast, the *MannaCast* (one of Matt's initiatives), is now up and running. You can access it through the Manna Gum website or the web address on the back page. This is a fairly new medium for both of us, so your feedback is very welcome (as well as any five-star reviews you'd like to leave us on iTunes)!

In November, the Manna Gum Reference Group and other members met for our AGM. For those who don't know, Manna Gum is an incorporated association. Now that Matt is finishing up, I am once again "the employee" of Manna Gum, however, it is also dependent on the unpaid contribution of a number of other people. In particular, Kim takes care of administration, Colin Taylor proof-reads written material, David Cook assists with IT stuff and numbers of other of our Long Gully community help with mailouts. Finally, there is the Reference Group, made up of Peter Chapman, Kim Cornford, Greg Hewson, Lauren Ash, Anthea Taylor and Simon Holt. Its role is to keep Manna Gum accountable to its purposes, to help discern the direction of the ministry, to provide pastoral oversight and to act as a sounding board.

The bulk of my time at the moment is spent in research and writing. After a difficult mid-year period with different members of the family quite unwell, things have settled down to some normality (whatever that is at the moment).

*(News cont. on back page)*

# The Moral Ecology of Judgement

## Part 3

by Jonathan Cornford

At some point when I was thinking about how I would write this article, I listened to a song by the Canadian folk band, The Great Big Sea:

I want to be / Consequence free  
I want to be / Where nothing needs to matter  
I want to be / Consequence free  
Just sing / Na na na na na na na

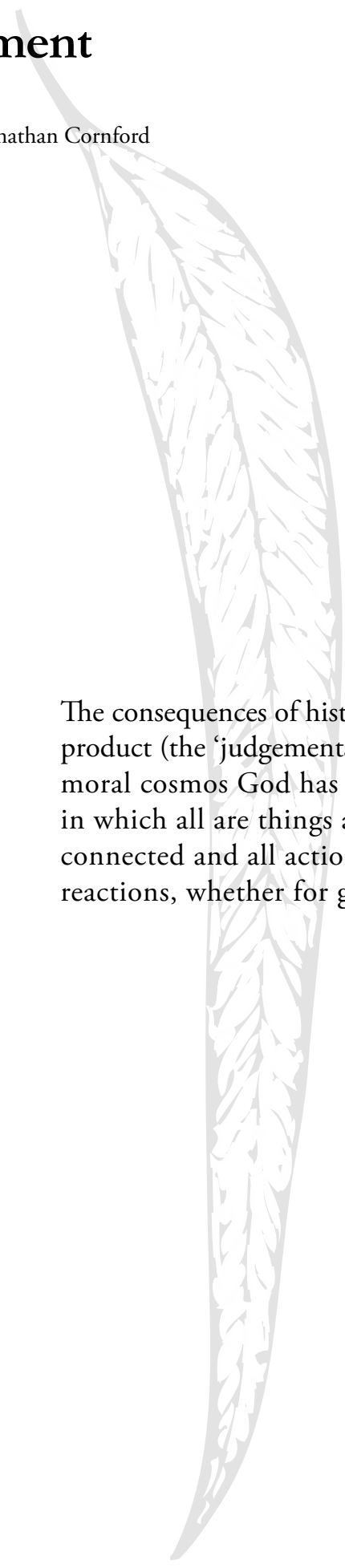
While I can't but help love this upbeat song, I realised that it is expressing a profoundly misguided sentiment. The singer is wishing to be able to party hard without suffering any adverse effects of such actions. Of course, he is wishing for such a thing precisely because his life experience tells him it is not possible. It seems a life-affirming sentiment, but in reality, it is a denial of our created existence in an interconnected world where all of our actions have consequences, whether for good or ill. When Jesus offered life in abundance, he did not have *escape* from this world in mind, but something much better.

In the previous article, I attempted to unpack the ideas that lie *behind* the Old Testament language of judgement. I argued that although the ancients used the idea of divine punishment to explain judgement, what they were really describing was the operation of cause and effect in the moral universe that God has created. If there is 'punishment' in judgement (and I do not think such language is helpful to us), it is the punishment that we bring upon ourselves. What we call 'judgement' is that moment of disclosure when what has always been true, but has generally been ignored, suddenly becomes plainly apparent. We are in such a moment now with climate change.

In this article, it remains to see how judgement plays out in the New Testament. I will suggest that the central idea remains fundamentally the same, but with the coming of Jesus there is a surprising new twist. Finally, I will try to hint at how the biblical idea of judgement plays out *within* human history and in our own time. If judgement is the disclosure of reality, then we should be able to see it happening. It seems laughable to attempt such a thing so briefly, but as Chesterton helpfully advised, 'if a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly.'

## Judgement in the New Testament

On a superficial reading, the gospels can seem a bit confusing on the matter of judgement. In various places we are told not to judge, to judge for ourselves, to judge with right judgement, that Jesus does not judge and that Jesus is our judge! Clearly there is a lot to unravel here and to do so well would require paying attention to all



The consequences of history are the product (the 'judgements') of the moral cosmos God has created, in which all are things are interconnected and all actions produce reactions, whether for good or ill.

the different contexts in which the concept of judgement appears. We do not have space for that here, but let me at least suggest some baseline concepts that will help us understand it better.

First, we need to address the underlying discomfort that we, postmodern individualistic readers, bring to the subject. Jesus speaks about judgement often and much of it is pretty uncomfortable. The language is strong and the imagery dire and it seems to confirm our worst fears about a vindictive and arbitrary God. I suspect this is largely for two reasons:

- i) In the back of our mind, we are applying these statements about judgement to our own little world of petty transgressions: we have treated someone badly, we are self-indulgent, we made a mistake of judgement (!) about a particular situation. That is, our consciences are troubled by our own judgement of ourselves.
- ii) In spite of a sometimes negative assessment of ourselves, when we feel we are being judged by another (including God), we can't shake the feeling that it is being judged against an arbitrary standard. It doesn't feel 'fair'.

Ultimately, we are worried that our lives will be weighed in the balance by an arbitrary and vindictive God who doesn't share our sense of compassion, fairness or proportion. Our worry betrays a lack of confidence in who God is and what Jesus is about.

I don't want to suggest that what I have just called 'petty transgressions' are not actually important to the texture of our day-to-day lives (they are very important), but if this is the only canvas we bring to the texts on judgement, we are missing the big picture. What if, instead of our own petty lives, we bring to mind the big stuff that makes up human history: war, slavery, genocide, radical poverty alongside radical wealth, dying oceans, disappearing forests, species extinction? These are not matters of petty existential angst, but matters that cry out for justice! Notice how the following teaching of Jesus takes on quite a different tone when we begin to apply it to the climate emergency:

You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time? And why do you not *judge for yourselves* what is right? Thus, when you go with your accuser before a magistrate, on the way make an effort to settle the case, or you may be dragged before the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer throw you in prison. I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny. (Luke 12:56–59)

In the midst of a multi-dimensional ecological crisis, might we not say that that the Earth stands as our accuser and that if we do not come to some acceptable terms with



'Woe Unto You, Scribes and Pharisees' by James Tissot (1886).

the Earth, we will surely pay a very high cost? Surely this is the very position we find ourselves in and it is the secular scientific establishment who are warning us of impending judgement. The Bible's language is strong precisely because, as we are finding out with climate change, the stakes of human action and consequence are so very high.

Which brings us to the meaning of the word 'judgement'. In the New Testament, the Greek word that is translated as 'judgement' is *krisis*, from which we get our word 'crisis'. The correlate of this word in Hebrew is *mishpat*, which is most often translated in our Old Testaments as 'justice'. Whereas we tend to think about judgement as unfairly writing someone off—'Don't judge me!'—*mishpat* and *krisis* are much more serious concepts: they refer to an intervention by a ruler or court to restore right where wrong has been done. Judgement is the tipping point of crisis, when justice is demanded.

So how do we relate this *krisis* to Jesus? As I have mentioned, Jesus speaks about judgement a lot. In the synoptics, this mostly relates to the concept of a 'Day of Judgement', which I shall come to in a moment; but in the Gospel of John, judgement is discussed repeatedly in relation to the person of Jesus himself. We see this most famously in chapter 3, which, in this case, is most consistently rendered in the New American Standard Version:

For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the judgement, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light. (John 3:16–19)

A major theme of this gospel, explored in John's difficult style of holding paradox in tension, is the way in which Jesus refuses to judge *and yet* brings the moment of judgement with him. At one level, Jesus comes 'full of grace and truth', calling all to repent and opening the path

to salvation. At another level, the very coming of the light of love into the world presents us irrevocably with a choice and in our choice lies our judgement. As John's gospel rises to a climax, when it is clear that this embodiment of love will be murdered, Jesus declares: 'Now is the judgment of this world' (12:31). When truth and love are rejected, horrible consequences must follow. But notice the final twist: the suffering of humanity's calamitous choice falls on God's self. *The cross is God suffering the consequences of humanity's judgement, which is the full disclosure of our predicament: when we were visited by Love, we killed it.* As the great mystic, Julian of Norwich, once proclaimed: 'The worst has already happened and has been repaired'.

The rest of the New Testament bears witness to this dual story of grace and judgement. The way is opened for all to enter salvation, irrespective of past history, but notice how it must be accomplished: by each *participating in* the crucifixion by which God bears the judgement of the world, and

so *participating in* the healing that follows. 'For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.' (Rom 6:5) Judgement is not in tension with the economy of grace but an integral part of it.

But the grace of resurrection life is not that of entering a new creation in which there are no consequences for actions. It is not what Bonhoeffer called 'cheap grace', but rather a restoration to the moral ecology of love. 'Do not be deceived. God is not mocked. You reap whatever you sow.' Interesting that the Apostle Paul states this in Galatians, a letter all about freedom from the Law. Paul staked his whole apostleship on a revolutionary claim about the profound human freedom being discovered 'in Christ': 'It is for freedom Christ that has set us free' (Gal 5:1). Yet Paul never imagined that freedom meant that ethics and morality become a kind of playdough in the hands of humans: able to be re-shaped endlessly according to new desires and inclinations. Rather, Paul is emphatic that humans exist within a pre-ordered moral universe. When he talks of the restoration of freedom, he does not mean what we moderns tend to mean by 'freedom': the removal of all constraints and obligations upon individual will. Paul's idea of freedom is almost the opposite: we are being restored to a 'new creation', the restoration of a fractured cosmos back into the healing communion of love for which it was intended. That is, we are being restored into *connection* and *relationship*.

What of that vital teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, 'Judge not, that you may not be judged'? It is not really that complicated: Jesus is teaching that we must never presume to weigh the soul of another human being, because the *full* disclosure of reality is open only to God. Just as God holds the offer of grace open to the utmost, so must we. However, we are never absolved of the responsibility of making moral judgements,

---

For so many of the world's downtrodden and oppressed, the vision of a day when right will be done, creation restored and all that is wrong removed has long provided a vision of hope to hold on to.

---

however provisional they must be, about the times and circumstances we find ourselves in: 'Judge for yourselves what is right' (Lk 12:57); 'Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgement' (Jn 7:24).

And what of that final 'Day of Judgement' – a day of crisis and of justice – that Jesus referred to so often? There is no doubt that he invokes this image as a strong warning: the stakes of our life choices are high; there is a road that brings life and a road that wastes life (which is the meaning of the image of *Gehenna*). It is perhaps a measure of both the material comfort of our lives and the insecurity of our minds that we find this such an unnerving concept;

yet for the Hebrew people, as for so many of the world's downtrodden and oppressed, the vision of a day when right will be done, creation restored and all that is wrong removed has long provided a vision of hope to hold on to. We fear being weighed by a demanding and arbitrary God, when we should look forward to a day

when all our faltering efforts towards love and justice are brought to a completion by the God of love and grace and the world is healed. Of course, such a day is shrouded in mystery and beyond our comprehension: we can only speak of it with our own inadequate words and images. Yet the message is clear: if we are joining ourselves to the life and love of Jesus, then we have nothing to fear from such a day.

## Judgement in history

'Do not be deceived. God is not mocked. You reap whatever you sow.' This is the moral ecology of an interconnected creation and the truth of it can be seen again and again throughout human history. After the Second World War, historian Herbert Butterfield wrote an important little book that is hardly remembered today, entitled *Christianity and History*. Butterfield was asking what the study of history, a secular academic discipline, might contribute to religious faith. His first two conclusions were: (i) the study of history confirms what the Bible says about human nature – 'All men are sinners'; and (ii) the moral judgement of human nature is something that plays out *within* history. That is, so many of the catastrophes that play out in history are the product of civilisational moral failings. The catastrophe of the First World War was a product of European competitive nationalism in which nations 'gambled very highly on what was an over-optimistic view of the character of man'. No one thought that what *did* happen, *possibly could* happen. The Second World War was, in large part, a product of a 'peace' imposed by the victors of the first war, who sought vengeance and denied their own culpability. The Great Depression in between these two events was a product of an over-optimistic view of the competence and propriety of capitalists.

One of the things Butterfield so usefully clarified is that this sort of judgement in history was a judgement upon *systems* and not upon persons. Stalin, possibly one of the most despicable human beings in history, died while still on top, at a ripe age, and probably of natural causes. But when, a generation later, the judgement came on the system he had erected, it came with a swiftness that shocked the world and which few people had seen coming. With hindsight, historians agree that the flaws of the Soviet system – its callousness, its hypocrisy, its punishment of truth, its outraging of human dignity and freedom (to name but a few) – simply could not be sustained over time.

Where the Old Testament view of causality would have attributed the collapse of the Soviet Union to the intervention of God, we can see that human actions bring such consequences upon themselves. As I argued in the previous article, we do not need to see a stark contradiction between these two: the consequences of history are the product (the ‘judgements’) of the moral cosmos God has created, in which all are things are interconnected and all actions produce reactions, whether for good or ill.

This draws our attention to another feature of such judgements within history. Because it is *systems* and not people that are judged, the judgements of history fall, like rain, on both innocent and guilty alike. Very often it is the *innocent* who suffer the worst from such catastrophes of history and this is yet another reason why the warnings of the Bible about judgement are so strident. When human hubris and blindness run amok at a civilisational scale, there is no limiting the liability. And this ‘judgement’ in itself reveals another deep truth about God’s moral order: we are all in this together.

## Judgement now

As I have been arguing throughout these articles, we can see all of this playing out with great clarity in the case of climate change. At the root, it is the result of humans imagining that we exist outside of the created order and can bend it, like plastic, to our own will and imagining that the moral order is simply something that we construct – it is not *real*. We are learning to our own hurt that neither of these are true and it is the innocent – Pacific islanders, Bangladeshi farmers, Sudanese herdsman, not to mention the non-human species of the planet – who are suffering first and most. Reflecting upon the fact that human nature remains unchanged, yet human power has increased exponentially, Butterfield mused:

I am not sure that it would not be typical of human history if – assuming that the world was bound some day to cease to be a possible habitation for living creatures – men should by their own contrivance hasten that end and anticipate the operation of nature or of time, because it is so much in the character of Divine judgement in history that men are made to execute it upon themselves.

The Old Testament lament of sackcloth and ashes is an appropriate first response to such threat of judgement. We cannot move forward in hope if we do not own how we got here. But while the grief of lament can never really leave us, we cannot stay in that place. The witness of the Bible is that even in our darkest hour, there is a light from heaven that can break in, if indeed that is what we seek.

But what of the global pandemic we are currently experiencing? Can we see the sorts of lessons we see in climate change playing out here too? This is admittedly a more complicated case than climate change and we need to be more tentative in coming to conclusions. Certainly, we must reject the tendency of some Christians today (and throughout history) to blame such events on the moral failings of the *other*, usually their current political enemies, and who seem to exhibit a certain gleeful *shadenfreude* at the spectacle of suffering.

Also, we should not imagine that every bad thing that happens is a consequence of human action. The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami was a catastrophe of unimaginable proportions to which we can attribute no human responsibility. Again, we must reject the temptation to say, as some Christians did, mysteriously shrugging their shoulders, ‘If it happened, God must have willed it’. God never wills such things. All that such events tell us is that it is not only humanity that is broken, but creation herself: they are another sign that things are not as God wills them. Bad things happen and humans touched by God’s love seek to heal them. (That said, there was a great deal to be learnt from *the human response* to the disaster, where we witnessed what Naomi Klein called ‘disaster capitalism’.)

Pandemics are caused by a complicated mix of ‘natural’ occurrence and human action. Most pandemics in history have involved animal diseases crossing over into the human population. This sort of disease crossover is just something that can happen in nature, but it happens more often when humans confine animals in unhealthy ways, or when we impinge too much on animal habitat. Both are now happening on a scale never before known. But disease crossover does not equal pandemic; the experience of *pandemic* is, almost by definition, the product of advanced human civilisation in which there is transcontinental



Aftermath of the 2004 tsunami, Meulaboh, Sumatra. We must avoid the temptation of saying that God wills such things.

mobility and exchange. The very complexity and high level of exchange and interconnection of our present globalised economy makes us more vulnerable to pandemic than ever before.

But is there a moral judgement to be drawn from this? Once again, we need to be more tentative. To conclude that exchange and movement of peoples between the different regions of the world is a bad thing would seem to be the wrong conclusion to draw. But perhaps we could say with more confidence that the forms and *extent* of present-day global exchange are problematic and there are other reasons that confirm this: the impact of transport emissions on climate change, the erosion of local production and the proliferation of 'modern slavery' are just a few more examples. We can also say with some confidence that our continued impingement on habitat and unnatural confining of animals will increase the frequency of disease crossover and thus the likelihood of pandemic. Perhaps the other significant area where the experience of the pandemic has shed a moral light is on the health of our political and economic systems, but this is a complex subject and we cannot open it up here. When we are finally able to look back on this experience, there will be many judgements that have to be made about our response if we are to learn our lessons and avoid such a catastrophic event again. As Herbert Butterfield observed, hindsight is itself a gift of *human judgement*.

## A final word

I have been arguing throughout this series that being able to see, and come to terms with, what the Bible means by 'judgement' is a necessary part of being able to see, and being able to communicate, what good news looks like for us here and now. At the heart of being able to comprehend judgement is being able to comprehend the moral ecology of the created order: all things are connected and all actions have consequences. We reap what we sow: 'If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all' (Gal 6:8).

In closing this series on judgement, it is appropriate that I say something of what it means for the Christian church.



*'Because it is systems and not people that are judged, the judgements of history fall, like rain, on both innocent and guilty alike.'*

'For the time has come for judgement to begin with the household of God', the Apostle Peter advises his flock (1 Pet 4:17). Christians have often made the mistake of assuming that judgement is something the church gets to say about the world; but as the old saying goes, whoever points the finger has three fingers pointing back at them.

From what I have been saying it should be clear that the church is not immune to the moral ecology of action and consequence. We live in a period when, across the Western world, but especially in countries like Australia, there is a markedly negative attitude to the religion that shaped our culture. We miss the point if we complain that Christianity is the victim of misrepresentation and one-sided stereotyping. In the longer arc of history, this ill-feeling towards Christianity should be understood as the inevitable letting loose of centuries of stored-up resentment at the hypocrisy of a church wedded to its social prestige and often involved in oppressive and abusive power, all the while proclaiming itself as representing the gospel of Jesus. In many ways, I think it is true to say that *the church is under judgement*.

If we are to be people who hope to be bearers of the good news of Jesus in the world, then we need to come to terms with this judgement on the church. It demands a proper moment of lament, of sackcloth and ashes, and perhaps, in the interim at least, it demands a penance of silence. Perhaps the words of the church cannot be heard constructively again in the wider world until the church first learns to shut up for a season. But the ultimate response judgement calls forth is repentance: a new clarity of sight about where we went wrong and the ability to take a turning at the crossroads, to choose the road less travelled. Judgement is the moment of crisis, the opportunity to discover the 'life that really is life' (1 Tim 6:19).

# Beauty and the Beast

## Violence & Economics in the Book of Revelation

### Part 1: The Beast

by Matthew Anslow

I think it is safe to say that the Book of Revelation is a divisive text. The reasons for this are no doubt numerous, though the book's complex and intriguing character probably plays a large part. Such characteristics are probably also to blame for two of the main attitudes to the book I have experienced, namely, avoidance and obsession.

Over the next few articles focused on this enigmatic text, my aim is twofold. First, I hope to provide a helpful model for navigating the Book of Revelation. This doesn't mean I will address every burning question or cause for controversy—the book is far too grand and intricate for that. As I lay out my basic approach to the book, however, I hope others will find some encouragement in learning to read it as Christian Scripture.

Second, and more specific to the work of Manna Gum, I hope to illuminate the Book of Revelation's powerful critique of violent economic systems and its alternative vision for Christian witness and human life.

### How do we read Revelation?

Interpreting texts is tricky business, particularly one as strange as Revelation. But there's no reason why we should treat Revelation as fundamentally different to, say, the Gospel of Luke or Ephesians. Each book is a coherent whole, seeking to convey a message, and we should be wary of approaching each with our conclusions already decided. Furthermore, in each case we consider the literary context (what kind of text is this and what is it saying?) and the historical context (from what historical situation does this text arise?). Not that these contexts exhaust the meaning of the text, but they do provide a good starting point.

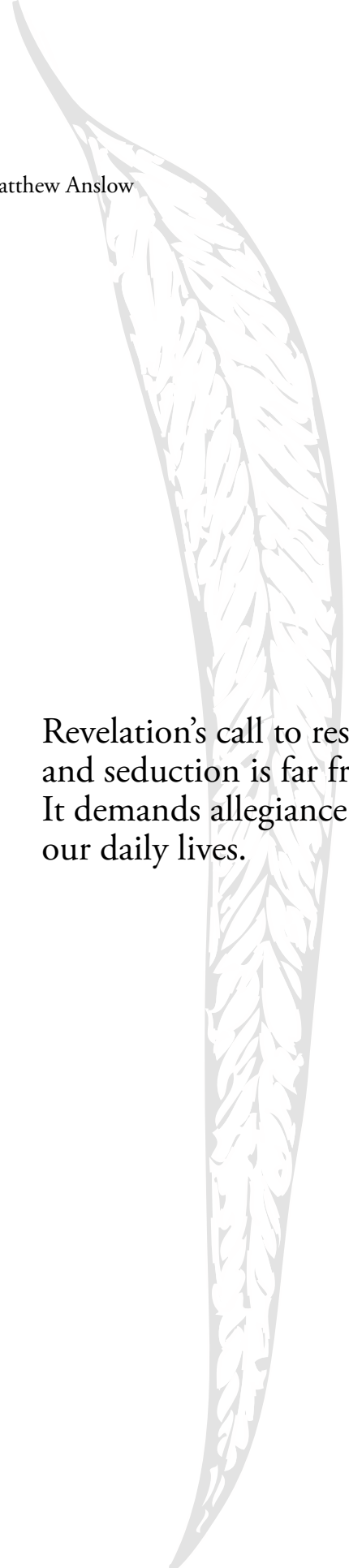
#### *Literary Context*

Perhaps part of what makes the Book of Revelation so complex is the fact that it contains at least three genres: epistle (letter), prophetic text and apocalyptic text.

Epistles and prophetic texts are somewhat familiar to us, in part because they are common elsewhere in Scripture. Again, this suggests to us that we shouldn't take a radically different approach to reading Revelation compared with other texts.

Where Revelation is most strange to us is in its so-called 'apocalyptic' aspects. While there are apocalyptic elements elsewhere in Scripture, Revelation is by far the most comprehensively apocalyptic text.

So, what is an apocalyptic text? Defining apocalyptic has been a hot topic in biblical studies for decades, but generally speaking apocalyptic texts are thought to be those that tell a story about a person's visionary experience. In this story, the



Revelation's call to resist violence and seduction is far from abstract. It demands allegiance to Christ in our daily lives.



*John's vision of heaven, by Matthias Gerung (1530).*

world is imagined symbolically. The reason for the symbols is that it forces the audience to look at the world in a different way. This is why the texts are called ‘apocalyptic’—the Greek word *apokalyptō* means ‘to lift the veil’ or ‘to reveal’, and apocalyptic texts seek to reveal a divine truth to the audience.

Despite the thinking of certain preachers, apocalyptic texts were not about the future, but were written to explain the difficult circumstances in which the people addressed found themselves in their own time. The only reason these texts ever look to the future is *to help explain the present* and to offer hope. The audience of an apocalyptic text is typically a marginalised or oppressed group in the midst of a traumatic experience. Apocalyptic texts are intended to help them view the world through a different lens so that they can endure their suffering.

So why, then, does apocalyptic literature use such strange symbols? Such a question is likely a product of our own distance from the original audience, both in terms of time and culture. In truth, the language used in these texts was fairly comprehensible to the original audience.

Simply put, Revelation is a text that utilises well-known genres and symbols in order to reveal to its audience God’s perspective on their current situation of suffering and marginalisation. But if the audience was being oppressed, who was the oppressor?

### *Historical Context*

The answer to this question is fairly straightforward: the dominant power in the Mediterranean world at the time of Revelation was the Roman Empire. The entire New Testament originates in a social, political, economic and religious context overshadowed and dominated by Rome, whose empire spread from present-day Britain, France and Spain across to Turkey and Syria and down to North Africa,

ruling over approximately 60–65 million people of a diversity of ethnicities and cultures.

Revelation was probably written in the late first century CE under the reign of the Emperor Domitian. In the political system of Rome there were vast disparities of wealth and power. Life was miserable for a great many people not fortunate enough to be in the top 2–3% who made up the elite. This elite class owned the majority of the land and consumed some 65% of its production. They exploited cheap labour with slaves and tenant farmers and imposed tributes, taxes, and rents.

Rome was able to preserve this situation through its military domination. The so-called *Pax Romana* (Roman Peace) of the period was the result of military coercion and the constant threat of military action. The cost of maintaining the 25 legions (6000 troops each) of the Roman military machine was paid by the taxes mentioned above.

Ruling over this system was the emperor, who was called ‘Father of the Fatherland’ (*pater patriae*) and also ‘lord’ (*kurios*) and ‘saviour’ (*sōtēr*). People were required to have ‘faith’ (*pistis*) in him, which meant loyalty or faithfulness. In fact, when a new emperor was crowned, the announcement message was called the ‘gospel’ (*euangelion*).

While this is no doubt a vast simplification, it gives us a snapshot of what life may have been like for the audience of Revelation. The problem that they would have faced was not that they believed in a strange religion—Rome was generally tolerant of different religions. Rather, the problem for early Christians would have been that they denied the sovereignty of Rome and the emperor, instead claiming they belonged to a different kingdom, ruled by a different Lord, Saviour and Father in whom they put their faith by means of a different gospel.

In other words, the early Christians experienced periods of persecution because they were a political threat to Roman power and authority. If,

as I suggested before, apocalyptic texts were written for oppressed communities, it makes sense that the Book of Revelation would have appeared for a certain community of early Christians. A question that would have been supremely relevant for them would have been, *how should followers of Jesus, who was crucified by the empire but raised by God, negotiate Rome’s empire in their daily lives?*

How, then, does the Book of Revelation answer this question? This will be the question over the next few instalments of this series in which I’ll turn our attention to some specific texts. As an introduction to Revelation’s message of discipleship, we’ll turn to one of the book’s most well-known characters.

### **The Beast (Revelation 13:1–10)**

Revelation’s beast is hardly original. It is borrowed from Daniel 7:1–8 which describes four beasts, with the fourth being the most horrifying. These beasts are metaphors describing successive empires with whom Israel was

---

**Revelation ... utilises well-known genres and symbols in order to reveal to its audience God’s perspective on their current situation.**

---



confronted, as explained in Daniel 7:15–28. Daniel doesn't identify the beasts and scholars disagree about which empires each represents. One strong possibility is that the beasts symbolise the Babylonian empire, the Median empire, the Persian empire and Alexander's Greek empire respectively.

The specifics are not terribly important for our present purposes. What is important is that, in Daniel, the focus shifts from the beasts to the 'Ancient of Days', who kills the fourth beast and takes the authority of the other three away. In the place of the beasts, authority is given to one like a son of man, whose kingdom will never be destroyed.

By the time Revelation was written, the fourth beast in Daniel was interpreted by some to represent the Roman Empire (e.g., 4 Ezra 12:11–30). But Revelation understands Rome differently. It is not merely the fourth beast, but in fact a composite of the four beasts in Daniel's vision. Daniel's beasts look like so:

- Beast 1: Lion with eagle's wings
- Beast 2: Bear
- Beast 3: Leopard with four bird's wings
- Beast 4: Iron teeth and ten horns

The Beast from the sea in Revelation 13, on the other hand, has, 'Ten horns ... And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his

throne and great authority.' This beast is a compilation of all of Daniel's beasts.

In other words, Revelation shares Daniel's use of beasts to describe empires, but Revelation's Beast is more fearsome, more terrifying. This makes sense of Rome's power, even in comparison to previous empires.

This Beast emerges from the sea, the traditional place of chaos and death. It has a mortal head wound that has been healed (13:3), recalling the Emperor Nero's suicide and the 'Nero Redivivus' legend in which it was said he would return. The Beast's number, 666 (13:18), is a construction of Nero's name by way of the common Jewish practice of the time of assigning numeric values to letters.

Nero had been a particularly brutal emperor, persecuting Christians after having used them as a scapegoat for Rome's burning in 64 CE. After Nero's death, the empire had almost collapsed, with four emperors taking the throne within the space of one year. It was the dynasty of the Flavian emperors, including Domitian, which brought the empire back from the brink. In other words, the empire had almost died, but alas came back to life.

It is no wonder, then, that the people are said to worship the Beast: 'Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?' (13:14). This is not unlike Exodus' claim about Yahweh, 'Who is like you, O LORD?' (Exod 15:11). The Beast seems invincible, even godlike.



La Bête de la Mer (*The Beast from the Sea*), part of medieval Tapisserie de l'Apocalypse (*Tapestry of the Apocalypse*).

But Revelation wants to make the point that the Beast is only a shadow of reality, a kind of parody. It has been resurrected, but it is a sub-par version of the resurrection of the Lamb in Revelation 5. The Beast is a parody of the God of Israel ('Who is like you?'). And though the Beast utters blasphemies about God (recall Nero's opposition to Christianity), he will only be allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months (13:5). Why forty-two? In Hebrew symbolism, seven is the number of completeness, while six is just short of that, the number of incompleteness.  $7 \times 6 = 42$ . 'Let anyone who has an ear listen.'

Those who worship this Beast will not have their names written in the book of life (13:8). That is, they do not experience the life given by the Lamb of God, but only the deceit of the Beast.

Then, in Revelation 13:11, there appears a second Beast out of the earth who works to legitimate the first Beast. This second Beast speaks like a dragon, a reference to Revelation 12 where the dragon is Satan. In other words, the Beast is the product of the great source of evil himself. This is Revelation's damning verdict on the Roman Empire.

Revelation insists that those who seek to be faithful to God must not enter into the worship of the Beast; they must not accept Rome's version of imperial reality. This is difficult, since those who worship the Beast are given a mark that allows them to buy and sell (13:16–17). The 'Mark of the Beast' has been a source of much speculation in certain contemporary circles, but in Revelation the meaning is rather simple: to refuse to acquiesce to the demands of the Empire could have meant social and economic exclusion — how can one buy and sell in their communities if they have been excluded for not worshipping the Beast?

## So What?

So, what does all this strange symbolism mean for the way Christians ought to live? Revelation's description of Rome as a Beast is the heavenly perspective on what is apparently invisible to many humans: Rome is a monstrous, murderous, maniacal entity. The Beast seems especially to symbolise the coercive power and violence of imperial military might.

Revelation seeks to uncover this violence, to unveil the fact that the so-called *Pax Romana* (Roman Peace) was a sham for it is a peace brought about only through beastly, even inhuman, coercion and violence.

In the midst of all this, Revelation makes the following appeal: 'Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints' (13:10b). The book is not merely describing Rome's military power as a beast because it would make a good read. It is describing a terrible reality in its world that must be opposed. Revelation's is a call to embody an alternative and a challenge to Rome's way of doing things.

Being such an alternative does not mean starting a rebellion against Rome; Revelation never counsels such counter-violence. But nor is the Christian alternative a form of passivism whereby Christians merely try to accommodate the way things are. Revelation counsels a third way of nonviolent

embodiment of the kingdom of God (we'll have more to say about this in future parts of this series).

This alternative begins not with a particular set of actions, but with seeing things differently — having one's imagination transformed. As I've said, Revelation seeks to uncover reality from a heavenly perspective, to reveal how things really are. This might make us think the book is trying to get its readers to embrace some kind of heavenly escapism. This is not at all the case. The Book of Revelation reveals the very earthy reality of the daily violence and seductions of a particularly brutal political system, one that crucified Jesus. But it also asserts that Jesus was raised — the empire failed to kill him. Rome is not inexorable or inevitable, and, in fact, its days are numbered.

In the meantime, the Christian community is called to endure and resist Rome's violence and seductions by embodying the example of Jesus, the slain and risen Lamb. This took numerous practical forms [see Edwina's piece in this edition, for example], all of which derived from a transformed way of seeing the world whereby God, and not Caesar, is in charge. God will eventually judge the world, setting things right; this makes possible a radically countercultural way of living now, in the present.

Our own political system is by no means as openly vicious as Rome. Still, the global systems in which we live brutalise workers, even whole populations, as well as the natural world in order that we in privileged nations might maintain our opulent lifestyles. Revelation's call to resist violence and seduction is far from abstract. It demands allegiance to Christ in our daily lives. We'll talk more about what such allegiance might look like in our next instalment where we'll focus on the 'Great Prostitute' in Revelation 17 and its damning critique of imperial economics.

*Dr Matthew Anslow is the editor of Manna Matters. He's married to Ashlee and together, with their three young children, they live at Milk and Honey Farm, two hours west of Sydney.*



*A coin minted during the first century with the image of Nero.*



# Conservation and Hope

## A Rocha Australia: Serving the Lord in Creation Care

by Stuart Blanch

A year on from the bushfires, burnt koalas, drought, and dead wildlife – and in the midst of Covid and its economic pain – I have been wrestling with hard questions about what I truly believe about God and how I live in Christ in hope and joy amongst the crises facing our climate and biodiversity.

*What does the Bible have to teach through these? About God. About people. About His church. About me.*

*How do I maintain hope in God's promises amid my anguish and anger?*

*How is God building His kingdom and reconciling His creation through Christ in all this?*

While these have been shocking, they are not unexpected in Scripture and science.

I grew up in a farming family during the 1970s and '80s, living near the beach on the NSW North Coast. The coastal creek near my parents' house is called Swimming Creek. I love that creek. I fished, swam, snorkelled, canoed, explored and played endless games there, and in the bush and beach. I always thought it would be just the same as when I was young; clear water, mullet schooling, cormorants diving, eels patrolling, wallabies watching, forest shrouding, cockatoos wheeling, cicadas crescendoing.

By the 1990s, though, overflowing sewage pipes and sediment erosion from the growing town polluted the creek. Algae replaced beautiful aquatic plants, the water turned muddy, the sound of mullet jumping no longer kept me awake. At one point, the pollution was so bad the Council set up a 'No Swimming' sign. Next to Swimming Creek!

Then, from 2000, the rising sea and storms started eroding the sand dunes that line the creek and protect houses on the street where my parents still live. Rows of old banksia trees that I have known and loved for 50 years fell into the Pacific Ocean. The foredune is gone, the rainforest on the dunes behind is more exposed. Looking ahead, if the world heats by another 1 or 2 degrees Celsius, these too will be lost, plus the houses behind.

I grieve over this loss. As a conservation scientist and environmental advocate, these concern me greatly. As a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth, I see this degradation as an outcome of rejection of God or a lack of spiritual transformation amongst God's people, leading to greed, selfishness and apathy.

I don't recall hearing sermons, or being part of Bible studies, during the first three decades of my life regarding God's love for His creation, nor our role in using it wisely



*Banksia trees killed by rising seas, Nambucca Heads, NSW.*

and caring for it. The environment and my faith were on parallel tracks, rarely intersecting, and occasionally colliding.

I would listen to speakers from Christian missionary organisations talk about roles they supported in gospel ministry. 'Do you have roles for ecologists or conservationists?', I'd ask. 'No' was the answer, occasionally with a furrowed brow. If mission agencies supported nurses to heal sick people, agricultural extension officers to help poor farmers grow food and teachers to educate illiterate kids, then why not — so my thinking would go — also support ecologists and conservationists to educate farmers and kids about how to understand and care for the wildlife and ecosystems that provided the healthy food, clean water and natural medicines that these same people relied upon?

For many years I felt I wore three hats that didn't often sit well together: a disciple of Jesus, an ecologist and an environmental campaigner. I felt on the outer, often questioning whether it was right to love both the Lord and study and conserve wildlife.

Concern for the environment was often seen amongst believers as not particularly relevant, or a distraction, to faith. Scientists and conservationists thought Christian belief quaint, odd or to blame for deforestation and species extinction.

I sought out role models, people who took seriously God's Word and caring for His world. They were scarce, and there were few books on the topic to help me juggle my hats.

That changed in 1998 as I read the notices section of the newsletter of the Sydney church where my wife, Lianne, and I worshipped. Between notices for upcoming

evangelistic events was a two-line advert by a mission agency for an ecologist to study freshwater insects. In Lebanon. *What?! I read it twice. What was this 'A Rocha'? And why did a Christian organisation want to research and restore degraded wetlands in a country until recently convulsed by civil war and religious conflict?*

That's where my journey with A Rocha began.

Soon I was reading the book *Under the Bright Wings* by A Rocha co-founders Peter and Miranda Harris about how these two British missionaries had set up a field studies centre in Portugal. It was a long way from Peter's role as a priest in the Church of England. They had done it to help people learn more about who God is through studying wildlife, experience life with Christians living in a cross-cultural community and read the Bible with a greater awareness of God's love for His creation and Christ's work of reconciling all things within it. As missionaries, they were supported by a mainstream missionary agency, working to show love for people and wildlife by doing research and conservation around an estuary.

Creation care, they called it. I no longer had to wear three hats, but just one.

Bible passages familiar and obscure took on deeper meaning. I increasingly saw nature conservation through a theological lens, which was part-affirming and part-convicting as the Spirit helped me understand both the joy of serving God through creation care and the personal cost this requires as a disciple in how I live. God's command was to 'take care' of the garden of Eden, which I see as God's direction to care for ecosystems and farm sustainably (Genesis 2:15).

King David observed 'the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it' (Psalm 24:1), meaning we are stewards, not owners. What does that mean to me today? I am a citizen of a wealthy, high-carbon nation that is disproportionately contributing to heating God's Earth. How must I change how I live and speak out in response to God's commands that 'You shall not murder' and 'You

shall not steal' (Exodus 20:13, 15) when extreme weather events amplified by climate change are killing millions and robbing billions of a safe climate?

I re-read Old Testament prophets who called on God's people to show justice and mercy to the poor, widows and orphans (Zechariah 7:10, Isaiah 1:17, Jeremiah 22:3). And I read anew Jesus' teaching to 'love your neighbour as yourself' (Mark 12:31). It struck me that choices I made regarding my food, car, house and job could indirectly impact people through global supply chains, global financial systems and the global climate. For good or ill, how I lived impacted them, wherever they lived. This made me both uncomfortable and joyful. I could obey God's commands to care for and love the weak and marginalised — albeit in very small ways and indirectly — in how I lived.

I pondered why God seemed to know well and delight in flora and fauna across Testaments Old and New: sparrows, ospreys, lions, cedars, sycamore-fig trees, geckos, hyrax, papyrus, ants and jackals. If Jesus said we should 'consider the lilies of the field' (Matthew 6:28), then they must be important to the Lord.

I was confronted by my impacts and hypocrisy, and sometimes fatigued by the moral choices when buying stuff.

It was easier to blame others, but also dishonest. I have played a part in the degradation, from catching too many of the fish in my creek in my youth, to yielding to consumerism, to living a high-carbon life.

I started emailing people involved in A Rocha in different parts of the world, then talking by phone, then Skyping, then occasional visits to their field study centres and forums.

For perhaps the first time in my life, I met a group of committed believers who knew their Bible and wanted to see people saved, who saw ecology and conservation as a very worthwhile career and mission. To them, it was normal Christian discipleship and mission. They saw creation care as a gospel issue, and sought to live out their commitment to 'take care' of the Garden.

I didn't have to defend myself to them. Or weather suspicion—or strong criticism—as being either wishy-washy as a Christian, unscientific as an ecologist or overly passionate as an environmentalist.

I felt like I had found my home.

In 2005, after much prayer and discussion with Lianne, plus a call with Peter Harris, I offered to be the contact in Australia for A Rocha members and to grow our membership. This meant taking over management of the database of Australians who were members or supporters of A Rocha from the highly organised Barbara Mearns of A Rocha International, who was managing this from Scotland. I was daunted! I struggle with organisation and administration. I was not sure whether I would help or hinder. However, I had come to realise I needed to stop thinking about trying to find a way of going overseas



Stuart on a bushwalk in Oxley Wild Rivers National Park, NSW, in April 2019.

to work with A Rocha and commit myself to helping establish an A Rocha presence in my own country. This would one day become A Rocha Australia.

That meant mailing newsletters to members, responding to inquiries, telephone calls to members across the country and trying to meet members and supporters. This was made much harder when I moved with my wife and daughters from Sydney to Darwin for my job. Over the next several years, more believers contacted me asking what A Rocha was all about. I met people and spoke at meetings during work trips back to the south. I encouraged people in my Darwin church to get involved. Interest grew, but it was a hard slog living so far away from most of the members and having little funds for travel and hosting events.

I became discouraged, feeling like I was hampering A Rocha's growth and letting people down who I thought expected me to do more. So, I apologised and stepped back from the coordination role, handing it over to the highly capable Ruth Colman, who faithfully served in the role as more people joined. During those years, Stephen and Pamela Seymour in Toowoomba hosted Skype calls to allow interested people to meet and plan and their church set up a website to help Christians interested in the environment.

In 2012, John and Juanita Anderson took on the volunteer role of leading Tahlee Ministries, a three-hour drive north of Sydney sandwiched between tall forest and a marine park. They soon developed a heart for using the former Bible College as a place for creation care and prayer. John was a former agricultural missionary and Baptist Minister, and Juanita had grown up on the mission field in Bolivia. They were just the right couple to champion an A Rocha project at Tahlee. I'm so grateful to them.

Roger Jaensch took on the role of chairing the project's development, which drew on his love for Jesus, decades of work in bird and wetland conservation in Australia and the Asia-Pacific and experience running a non-government environment organisation.

A Rocha Australia formally began in October 2015 during a conference held at Tahlee that brought together people passionate about creation care from across southeast Australia. With the guidance and encouragement of Chris Naylor from A Rocha International, we laid the foundations for A Rocha Australia that would show God's love for all creation through implementing the 5 Commitments of A Rocha: Christian, Conservation, Community, Cross-cultural and Cooperation.

Roger took on the daunting role of inaugural president for three years and now is the hardworking executive officer. My family had moved to Newcastle and I excitedly joined the board. Thanks to God's grace and the support of an increasing number of members and donors, we have developed diverse partnerships in nature conservation, planted trees, surveyed birds, cleaned up plastic pollution, removed weeds, hosted conferences, developed networks, prayed, encouraged, produced theological resources and spoken at many events.



*A Rocha Australia directors, April 2018.*

Many others have played major roles in thinking, praying, asking, reading and doing creation care that has helped establish and grow A Rocha over these past two decades: Mick Pope, Philip Hughes, Stuart Fleming, Anna Radkovic, Ross Jansen-van Vuuren, Sally Shaw, Paul Dettmann, Jen Schabel, Wendy Hoare, David Williams, Julia Jardine, Greg Stone, Isabel Lyons, and many more.

Many churches were—and remain—disinterested. Some see creation care as of little theological import, and a few are hostile.

But this has changed in recent years, due in part to the very noticeable impacts of climate change and biodiversity decline. A Rocha Australia is more widely known, and, I hope, respected.

And so, I both lament the environmental loss happening, including in 'my' creek and sand dunes where I grew up, but have learnt to give to God my anxiety and anger.

I continue to seek and serve the Lord through creation care, to live in hope of a renewed heaven and earth (2 Peter 3:10–13, Revelation 21:1) and pray that believers will know the joy of a deeper walk with God through being involved in Christ reconciling all creation to himself (Colossians 1:15–20).

*Dr Stuart Blanch is a follower of Jesus of Nazareth, worships at Charlestown Presbyterian near Newcastle, is an ecologist by training and an environmental advocate by passion. He serves as president of A Rocha Australia.*



# More Than Martyrs

## The First Christians and Their Money

by Edwina Murphy

When you think of the early church (if you ever do), perhaps what comes to mind is its martyrs—Nero scapegoating Christians for the burning of Rome, using them as torches to illuminate his lavish party. You might think of Tertullian's assertion, 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church', even if you don't know who said it.

There's little doubt that the refusal of many early Christians to worship the gods of the empire — costing some their lives — contributed to the spread of Christianity. But usually the opportunity to die is not attractive unless you have something worth dying for. Christians were not simply stubborn people with a death wish, as the emperor Marcus Aurelius characterised them, who may as well throw themselves off a cliff and save the courts the trouble of convicting and executing them.

One aspect of Christianity that was attractive was the commitment to care for those in need — and there was plenty of opportunity to do so, as most people lived in, or on the edge of, poverty. In the Roman Empire, giving by the wealthy was largely directed towards gaining status and prestige, giving to get something in return. Even grain distributions by cities in times of crisis were directed towards citizens rather than all those in need. Jewish tradition, on the other hand, always had a concern for the widow, the orphan and the alien. That emphasis continued with Jesus and the early community in Acts took his words seriously. But it didn't end there. Almsgiving, sharing with those in need, was central to what the early church did. We see it in the fullest description of early Christian worship in Justin Martyr's *First Apology*, dated to the mid-second century. He describes the elements we would expect — Scripture reading (the memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets), a sermon, prayers, the Eucharist — and, right in the middle of it all, money and (probably) goods:

The wealthy among us help the needy and we always keep together, and for everything we have we bless the maker of all through his Son, Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Spirit... And those who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit. What is collected is deposited with the president, who helps the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in need, and those who are in bonds and the strangers living among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. (Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 67).

So, protecting and providing for the vulnerable was a core component of what Christians did when they came together. A generation later, Tertullian, when discussing the importance of Christian marriage, talks about those things that it would be difficult to do if married to an unbelieving husband. These include visiting the poor in their own meagre homes, encouraging those in prison, washing the saints' feet, providing hospitality to Christian travellers and generally making their resources available to others. In addition, Cyprian, bishop of Carthage in the mid-third century, records raising a large sum of money to redeem those captured by barbarians.

But believers didn't only care for those within their own faith community. John Chrysostom, bishop of Constantinople in the late fourth century and famous for his eloquent preaching, makes an impassioned plea for Christians of his day to imitate the early believers in Acts in their generosity, imagining how it would radically transform the city. Pontius, Cyprian's biographer, records how the bishop encouraged his flock in the midst of a plague to give not only to Christians, but non-Christians as well, imitating their heavenly father in his generosity (Matt 5:45). In *The Rise of Christianity*, the sociologist Rodney Stark credits this sacrificial care as the means by which many non-Christians survived the plague and entered the church.

But, of course, some may need more persuading than others. Cyprian writes his treatise *On Works and Almsgiving* to correct wealthy Christians who are reluctant to give to those who are suffering. He dramatises the virtue and benefits of giving (and the evil and dangers of not doing so) by employing a cast of biblical characters as models. One issue he specifically addresses is giving to the poor in the context of the responsibilities of parenthood. Firstly, he emphasises that Christ must come before family (Matt 10:26), but having established this, goes on to demonstrate that giving to Christ (identified with the poor and captive as in Matt 25:31–46), is actually the best way to care for one's children.

Cyprian's first example is the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17), who was using her last dregs of flour and oil to make a meal before dying with her children. But when Elijah asked her to give him something to eat first, and then feed herself and her children from what was left, she promptly gave it to him. She didn't just give a little out of her wealth, says Cyprian, but gave everything she had, putting mercy before food, and the spiritual life before the physical. As we know, the flour and oil did not run out before the drought broke. This shows that Christ, in his mercy, rewards those who



Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours but theirs.

St. John Chrysostom (347–407 CE)

serve him. According to Cyprian, the mother didn't take away from her children what she gave to Elijah; rather, she bestowed her kindness upon them and they received life rather than death. Furthermore, if the widow did this in her poverty, not yet knowing Christ or being redeemed by his passion, it is clear how sinful are wealthy Christians who do not assist the poor, but put themselves and their children before Christ.

When we are generous, we imitate Christ by looking to the welfare of the other rather than the self. Christian giving may no longer be as surprising as it was in the first centuries, but it is still a powerful way of revealing Christ to the world. Giving to others rather than worrying about our own food or clothing, as Jesus says in his well-known, if not widely obeyed, command in Matt 6:31–33, demonstrates our trust in God. Giving also changes us. It shifts us from a scarcity mindset to one of abundance. It frees us from the bondage of wealth and liberates us to follow Jesus. Instead of being consumed by desire for what others have, we share what we do have with those in need, protecting us from the danger of envy, something the early Christians talked about a lot more than we do. I love what John Chrysostom says on this point:

Now consider this, and be rid of the disease of envy. Even if you are unwilling to set your neighbour free, at least set yourself free from these countless evils. Why do you carry war into your own thoughts? Why fill your soul with trouble? Why work up a storm? Why turn things upside

down? How will you be able, in this state of mind, to ask forgiveness of sins? (John Chrysostom, *Homily 7 on Romans*).

Generosity and reciprocal giving create community and unity rather than the divisiveness of conflict. Of course, showing the kind of love which is, as Chrysostom says, “not speaking empty words to people, but taking care of them, and putting itself forward by works — relieving poverty, helping the sick, rescuing those in danger, standing by those who are in difficulty, weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice,” takes effort. It involves sacrifice. The early Christians were able to persevere in doing so because they had hope for the future and set their heart not on earthly, but on heavenly, rewards. This freed them to behave in counter-cultural ways which did, in fact, change the world.

*Dr Edwina Murphy is Senior Lecturer in Christian Thought and History at Morling College, Sydney.*


[Some of this material first appeared in “Stooping to Conquer: The Gentleness and Generosity of the Early Church.” In *Not in Kansas Anymore: Christian Faith in a Post-Christian World*, edited by Michael Frost, Darrell Jackson and David Starling, 87–98. Sydney: Morling Press; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020.]



*(News cont. from front page)*

There is not a lot more to report. It has been a difficult, topsy-turvy year and for me the importance of the season of Advent has been brought into sharper focus. The more I am conscious of the depth of brokenness in the world (and in me), the more I find myself waiting in hope and expectation of the coming of the One Who Saves, 'like dawn breaking on us from on high' (Lk 1:78). I pray that we all might have a fresh encounter with Christ this Christmas.

**Jonathan Cornford**



**#Change The Heart**  
*Tuning in together*

You are invited by one of our most senior Aboriginal Christian leaders, Aunty Jean Phillips, to gather together to pray in unison to #ChangeTheHeart on the evening before January 26.

Tune in to this unique, national service led by Aboriginal Christian leaders simulcast on television, online and on radio.

**Monday, 25 January 2021 at 7:30 pm AEDT**  
**More info: [commongrace.org.au/tunein](http://commongrace.org.au/tunein)**



**THE MANNA CAST**  
by MANNA GUM


A podcast going deeper into the issues raised in the latest edition of *Manna Matters*


Featuring Jonathan Cornford and Matt Anslow

You can find the MannaCast at [mannagum.podbean.com](http://mannagum.podbean.com), or on your preferred podcast platform.

## Support the work of 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. If our work resonates with you, please consider becoming a monthly financial supporter or making a one-off donation.

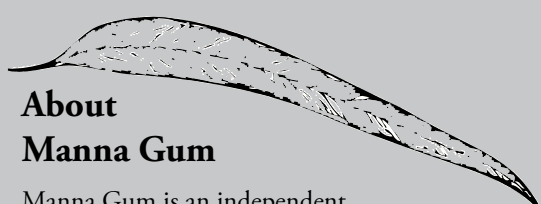
 **Donate via PayPal on the Manna Gum website**  
(Go to the 'Become a Supporter' tab)

 **Arrange an Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT):**  
BSB: 633 000 A/c No. 134 179 514  
A/c Name: *Manna Gum Initiatives Inc.*

 **Send a cheque or money order**  
(payable to *Manna Gum Initiatives Inc.*)

### CONTACT US

POST: 27 Albert Street, Long Gully VIC 3550  
EMAIL: [jonathan@mannagum.org.au](mailto:jonathan@mannagum.org.au)  
PH: (03) 5441 8532



### 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.