Manna Matters

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Manna Matters is a publication of Manna Gum. Manna Gum is an independent non-profit organisation which seeks to help Christians reclaim and practise biblical teaching on material life, and promote understanding of the ways our economic lives impact upon ourselves, others, and the earth.

This paper claims to be 100% post-consumer waste (but we have our doubts, see p. 13)

News From Long Gully

As I write, the rain is pouring down outside and the frogs in the dam-now-wetland are singing a happy song. It is a miserable August day if you are not a frog, and I am wondering what the Dja Dja Wurrung did on days like this, and how did they keep a fire going during extended wet spells? (Did they?) Up until now, August has been unseasonably warm, causing our crop of broccoli to head all at the same time, so we are finding ways to eat broccoli with almost every meal.

Winter is the time for webinars, and we are more than half way through our six part series on Christianity vs. Capitalism. I have enjoyed taking a deeper dive than I normally get the opportunity for, and yet every session I have been conscious of how much more there is to say. These webinars have all been recorded and can be found on Manna Gum's YouTube channel (find it through the 'Resources: Video and audio' section of the website).

Seeking a better economy: the perfect is the enemy of the good

I have been reflecting a lot lately on the deep, unconscious assumptions that seem to underpin much thinking on 'ethical' action and transitioning towards a better economy. There is a fascinating contradiction in the fact that as our culture descends deeper into relativism, lacking any common moral grounding, the more the dominant understanding of 'ethics' becomes puritanical. We see this in the many versions of 'cancel culture' that abound today, such as when one author cannot even bare to share the same publisher as another author whose views cause them offence, or fans of a TV series who cannot tolerate a cast member who has the wrong views on the Israel-Palestine conflict. As we lose our grasp on what ethics are and what they are rooted in, we seem to want the ethical ideas we do hold to be as untainted as possible. Thus, to be 'ethical' is to remove any stain and cast out any sinner. Any blemish puts the whole in jeopardy.

Within the realm of ethical consumption, such a conception of ethics can only lead to despair and paralysis.

Accepting compromises with our human reality is central theme of Katherine Shields' article (p. 18) and is an undercurrent in all our articles this edition. Katherine gives us an honest account of the wrestle between her 'eco warrior' tendencies and her very real need for the companionship and warmth of another of God's creatures. In Heather Roberts' article (p. 9) we are confronted by just how tentacular are global supply chains, and how many of those tentacles employ some form of coercive labour. Caught between a health need to be eating fish and the extreme brokenness of global fisheries (in multiple ways), there are simply no perfect options. Of course, there will inevitably be those who want a harder line: Katherine should just have done without a cat and Heather without fish, and they both should just suck it up. These are First World problems, after all. And, of course, there is a very strong and satisfying logic to such a position. The problem is: where do you draw the line? You either follow that logic all the way back to becoming a hermit in the wilderness, thereby withdrawing from the world and its problems for the sake of personal purity, or you accept the need to draw a line somewhere—to live with a compromise, allowing you to live and fight another day. Heather's work with Just Kai provides

(Continued on back page)

The Politics of Property

A Christian Ethic of Property (Part 3)

by Jonathan Cornford

> The great and chief end therefore, of men's uniting into Commonwealths, and putting themselves under Government, is the Preservation of their Property.
>
> **John Locke**
> ***Second Treatise of Civil Government*, 1690**

> Property is theft!
>
> **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**
> ***What Is Property?*, 1840**

It is no secret that Australia's housing system is fundamentally broken. Rental affordability is the worst it has ever been. According to Anglicare's most recent survey, just 0.2% of rental properties were affordable for someone on disability support pension, while nationwide there were just three (yes, three!) rentals that were affordable for someone on Jobseeker. Meanwhile, the number of Australians who own investment properties has almost doubled in the last decade, up to 2.2 million. One in three houses is purchased by an investor. These two facts are closely related. The gap between those who own property and those who do not is becoming stark.

The housing crisis is not some mysterious social affliction. Its drivers are well known, and we have watched the crisis steadily build over a quarter of a century. And yet no Australian government has showed any real will to take the necessary action. While politicians talk vaguely and mysteriously about 'housing affordability' they are loathe to do anything about the central fact of the housing crisis: property prices.

If there is a sacred cow at the heart of Australian politics, it is the maxim that property prices must rise. Every Australian Government, if they want to stay in government, must demonstrate their obedience this doctrine.

The politics of property in Australia has its roots centuries back in post-Reformation England. In this article we shall trace the origin of modern secular ideas of property and consider some of the primary Christian challenges to these ideas. I hope to show that, unbeknownst to many Christians, Christianity has within itself significant intellectual resources to furnish a coherent and powerful critique of the established order, as well as to imagine alternatives to it.

Parliament and property

In October 1647, there was a remarkable moment during the bitter and bloody English Civil War, in which the leading protagonist of the 'Parliamentary' cause (against King Charles I)—what was called 'The New Model Army'—sat down at St. Mary's Church in Putney, on the south side of the Thames, to have a political debate within itself. The radicals within the army, known as 'the Levellers,' were advocating that the new political regime should look something like our modern understanding of democracy. Speaking for the Levellers, Thomas Rainsborough declared,

> ...for really I thinke that the poorest hee that is in England hath a life to live as the greatest hee; and therefore truly, Sir, I thinke itt's cleare, that every man that is to live under a Governement ought first by his owne consent to putt himself under that Governement; and I do think that the poorest man in England is not at all bound in a strict sense to that Government that he hath not had a voice to put Himself under.

By the early nineteenth century ... a man might be imprisoned for murder while a child was sentenced to death for pickpocketing a kerchief from a gentleman's trousers.

Above: Henry Ireton c. 1650.

Previous page: The Battle of Marston Moor, *1644 (English Civil War) by John Barker (19th century).*

The leadership of the army, headed by Oliver Cromwell and Henry Ireton, were deeply alarmed at these sentiments. Ireton asserted himself to restore some common sense into the debate:

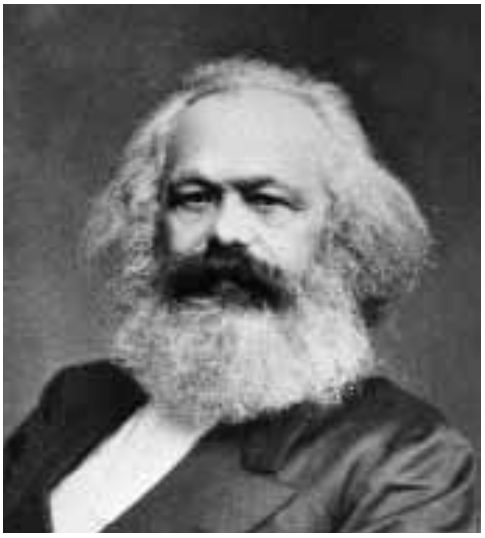
> no man hath a right to an interest or share in the disposing of the affairs of the kingdom... that hath not a permanent fixed interest in this kingdom.

By 'permanent fixed interest,' Ireton meant landowners. Ireton was expressing the widely held assumption that the purpose of parliamentary government was to represent property owners. The mass of tenants and wage earners in the land simply had no right to have a say in the affairs of government. This view was most famously encapsulated by John Locke's political philosophy at the end of the seventeenth century when he stated that the ultimate purpose of government was the preservation of property. And when such thinkers talked of preserving 'property,' what they really meant was preserving a social order in which the masses of the populace were socially and politically subservient to an economic elite.

These are the ideas upon which the Westminster system of government that we have in Australia were founded. Such a conception of property developed in an England that considered itself to be unequivocally a "Christian" society, and yet it bears little resemblance to the ideas about property found in the Bible or taught by the church for the first 1500 years of its existence, as discussed in the first two articles in this series. How did this come about?

The tyranny of property

The long term impact of the Protestant Reformation and (even more so) the religious wars of the seventeenth century, was that they shattered the moral and institutional authority of the church to speak into matters of economic life. In its place there arose a widespread spiritual individualism that privatised faith and tended to be blind to the social implications of Christianity. However, initially, the Protestant Reformation did little to unsettle the teaching of the Mediaeval Church on property. Martin Luther was an economic conservative who tended to oppose any form of economic innovation. John Calvin was more flexible in his thinking, but


Radicalism in an age of big beards (from left to right): Frederick Engels, Karl Marx, and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon.

his economic instincts were towards collectivism and against individualism (for more, check out MannaCast ep. 19).

Ironically, the seeds of changing ideas about property were sown before the Reformation and within the Roman Catholic Church itself. The Franciscans were a mendicant order who were known for their radical rejection of property, but in their efforts to critique property (and defend their own position) they began to revert to the old Roman idea of property as a right of sheer power (*dominium*). To be clear, they were rejecting such a position, but their unequivocal rejection of property led them to talk about it in far less constructive terms than had their contemporary, Thomas Aquinas (see previous edition).

A couple of hundred years later, the Franciscan conception of property was picked up by thinkers seeking to grapple with the challenges of the new commercial world of the sixteenth century, leading them to describe property in terms of individual rights that form the basis of market interactions. This combined with the new spiritual individualism of the post-Reformation age to completely erase earlier ideas about the social function of property. By the beginning of the eighteenth century property was conceived as an absolute right possessed by an individual, and held against the rest of the world.

Eighteenth century England was marked by an increasing concentration and hardening of property rights in the hands of 'the landed interest.' There is little appreciation today of the extent to which the English aristocracy of this period exercised an almost complete tyranny over local government and justice, to an extent that exceeded that of feudal times. With a growing divide between the propertied and unpropertied, and increasing desperation amongst landless labourers, 'the landed interest' used its domination of Parliament to develop criminal law in England around a vigorous defence of property rights. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the number of 'offences against property' that attracted the death penalty grew to over two hundred. By the early nineteenth century this reached the absurd position that a man might be *imprisoned* for murder while a child was *sentenced to death* for pickpocketing a kerchief from a gentleman's trousers.

The radical reaction

It is not surprising then that, in the nineteenth century, when people began to imagine a serious challenge to the established social order, they focussed their attention on the power of property. Responding not just to the tyranny of the rural aristocracy, but also the depredations of the Industrial Revolution and a new breed of property owners, social dissent was beginning to gather together under the vague catchcry of 'socialism.'

In 1848, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels published *The Communist Manifesto* just as a wave or revolutions and revolts was beginning to spread across Europe. Announcing that 'A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism', they went on to explain: 'the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property.' Anticipating the disbelief at such a statement, they further explain:

> Do you mean the property of petty artisan and of the small peasant, a form of property that

> preceded the bourgeois form? There is no need to abolish that; the development of industry has to a great extent already destroyed it, and is still destroying it daily.

A few years before Marx and Engels published *The Communist Manifesto*, Pierre Proudhon, known as 'the Father of Anarchism,' proclaimed 'Property is theft!' and 'Property is impossible'. People still argue about what Proudhon actually meant in his enigmatic writings, however there is little doubt that the combined effect of the writings of the likes of Proudhon, Marx, and Engels, was to lead many to assume that the goal of 'socialism' must be to get rid of property rights. Indeed, that is still the dominant understanding of 'socialism' today.

Distributism and the Catholic Third Way

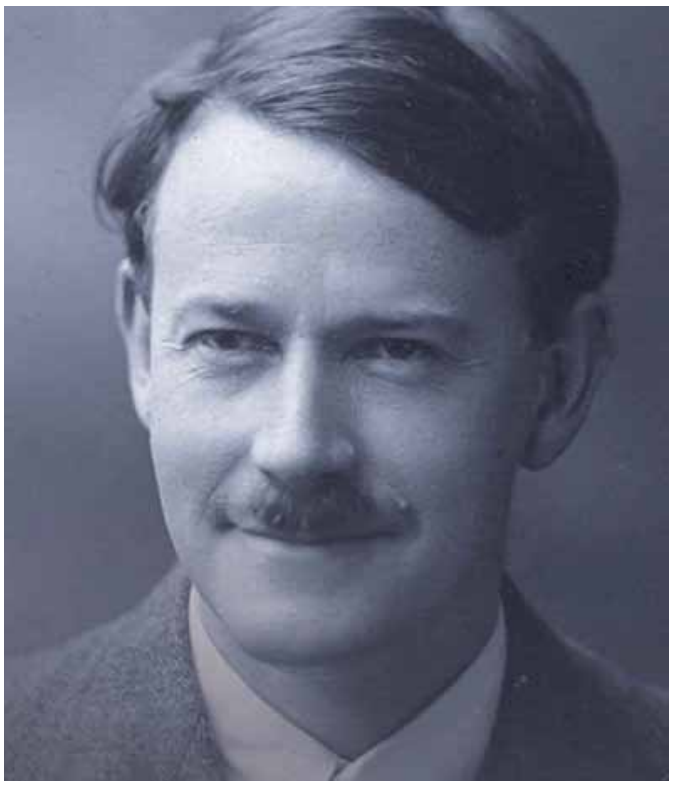
In 1891 Pope Leo XIII published his own manifesto in response to the revolutionary pressures that were building in Europe. *Rerum Novarum* ('Of Revolutionary Change') was the papal encyclical that launched the modern era of Catholic Social Teaching, and it sought to chart a way between the twin evils of revolutionary communism and unrestrained capitalism. Pope Leo's vision of the social order re-articulated Thomas Aquinas' understanding of the social function and responsibilities of property for a modern industrialised economy. *Rerum Novarum* foresaw the grave injustices that would be committed under Soviet and Maoist communism, and argued that maintaining rights of private ownership were indeed critical to welfare and dignity of working people. However, it also demanded that for this to be the case, there must be distributive justice within the structure of the economic system.

In England, *Rerum Novarum* inspired a Catholic intellectual efflorescence that made a bold contribution to the national political conversation, spearheaded by such literary giants as G.K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc. Belloc and Chesterton distilled the new Catholic Social Teaching into a social vision based upon a renewed conception of property in English society, which they labelled 'distributism.' At the heart of distributism was the idea that property rights, as such, were not the problem, but rather the concentration of property in the hands of few. They envisaged that a more socially just England required a much broader distribution of property across the population. Chesterton mischievously put it this way:

> *A pickpocket is obviously a champion of private enterprise. But it would perhaps be an exaggeration to say that a pickpocket is a champion of private property. The point about Capitalism and Commercialism, as conducted of late, is that they have really preached the extension of business rather than the preservation of belongings; and have at best tried to disguise the pickpocket with some of the virtues of the pirate. The point about Communism is that it only reforms the pickpocket by forbidding pockets.*
>
> *Thus the Socialist says that property is already concentrated into Trusts and Stores: the only hope is to concentrate it further in the State. I say the only hope is to unconcentrate it; that is, to repent and return; the only step forward is the step backward.*

Distributism sought the re-instatement of the small proprietor, in agriculture and in industry, as the dominant economic institution of England. Unfortunately, for all their rhetorical flare, the distributists had no program to develop distributism in detail or to advance their scheme in action and politics. Chesterton almost boasted of his 'ghastly ignorance' of the economic facts.

From beards to moustaches!
Right: R.H. Tawney.
Opposite page: G.K. Chesterton.



R.H. Tawney's Christian socialism

The vision of distributism found a much more sophisticated articulation in the work of economic historian, R.H. Tawney. Tawney was a deeply committed Anglican who described himself as a 'socialist,' and indeed was perhaps the leading British socialist thinker of the twentieth century. However, Tawney's version of socialism was nothing like Marxist communism, but rather much closer to the Catholic social vision. Tawney agreed with Patristic and Mediaeval thought that considered property, like the state, to be an 'accommodation to sin': a necessary and providential way of structuring community that takes account of fallen human nature while safeguarding dignity and freedom. Tawney was critical of a conventional type of socialism that demonised all forms of private property. In contrast, he argued for strengthened rights in property, but re-founded an alternative moral basis to that of 'individual right.'

The question is not to defend or attack property rights in abstract, but rather to ask what kinds of property best serve the broadest social good within a given sector or industry.

Like the distributists, Tawney wanted to see property ownership much more widely distributed within English society, however, he had a much more sophisticated understanding of property and a much more intricate understanding of the functioning of industrial Britain. Tawney understood that what is commonly referred to as "the right to property" is not one thing founded on some eternal law, but rather a whole mix of rights that change over time to reflect the dominant social-political consensus. Different forms of property rights serve different purposes and have different social consequences. The question is not to defend or attack property rights in abstract, but rather to ask what kinds of property best serve the broadest social good within a given sector or industry.

Within industrial Britain in the period between the World Wars, Tawney identified nine types of property and placed them on a spectrum from the forms of property that serve the greatest social function (such as personal possessions, land, and tools) to forms of property that serve the least beneficial social function ('improperty,' such as mineral royalties and company shares). (Interestingly, he placed patent rights—intellectual property—reasonably high on his list. I suspect he might have a different view of the social function of intellectual property today.)

Tawney's 1922 manifesto, *The Acquisitive Society*, offered a detailed vision of industrial Britain with

recalibrated structures of ownership, in ways that would promote greater equality and dignity, while safeguarding economic and political freedoms. It advocated for a mosaic of ownership structures with small proprietors dominating in some sectors, larger private companies (but never too large) in other sectors, public utilities and state-owned enterprises in other sectors, and forms of cooperative and mutual ownership (including mixes of managers, workers, and customers) in others. Unlike some socialists, Tawney envisaged a more limited place for 'nationalisation' of industry. He was under no illusions that state-run corporations were magically fairer or more efficient; nevertheless, the market structure of some key industries suggested that state-ownership was the only viable way to pursue better social outcomes.

Conclusion

In Australia today we live on the other side of a privatisation binge that sought to purge state ownership from most sectors of the economy. Now we have immense challenges decarbonising our energy supply and transmission systems, improving public transport, or providing affordable housing, all because these key sectors of social infrastructure lie in private hands. The current 'cost of living crisis' has brought back into the limelight the role of the supermarket duopoly of Coles and Woolies (currently the subject of parliamentary inquiry) in squeezing both producers and customers to extract record profits.

Currently, no political party in Australia offers a coherent vision of social, economic, and ecological renewal. If we are to develop such a thing, it must include a renewed moral vision of the place of property rights in underpinning the common good. I believe that Tawney's question is the right question for us to be asking again: what structures of ownership serve the most beneficial social purpose within any given sector? This requires rejecting simplistic slogans and ideologies, whether for state ownership or the inviolability of 'private' rights, and thinking hard about where we are now and where we want to go.

Where will such a moral vision come from? Like Tawney, I believe that the Christian scriptures and tradition offer a treasure of resources for the renewal of such a vision. However, if there is to be anything like a renewed Christian political vision of property, then it must first be founded on a renewed Christian ethic and personal practice of property. That will be subject of the next and final article of this series.

Slavery in our Food

The journey towards Just Kai

by Heather Roberts

Back in 2006 I'd been largely bedbound with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME) for about three years. I spent a lot of time listening to the radio. One day, I was horrified to learn in a BBC World Service documentary about kids being trafficked from neighbouring countries to work on cocoa farms in Côte d'Ivoire, and being beaten with bicycle chains if they didn't work hard enough. I started to look into this further, and learned that around 20% of the total cocoa-growing workforce was children, most starting work somewhere between the ages of eight and twelve. Some of them had been trafficked there, but the vast majority were working for their own parents who needed them to work so the family could stay afloat.

I felt these kids in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire were my neighbours—people who I was connected to as they grew my treats. My husband and I quickly changed to buying Fairtrade cocoa and chocolate and, over time, I came to maintain a list of cocoa products available in Aotearoa where the cocoa farms were being audited for child labour.

And then in 2016 my mum saw news reports of forced labour in the tuna industry: men being tricked into working without pay on fishing boats, often not seeing land for months or years so having no options for escape. She asked me, 'What should we do?'

From anguish to action

I sat on it for a whole year. My specialist had recommended I eat oily fish every week for my CFS; and I knew there weren't any Fairtrade fish brands. It just seemed too hard.

But then, I thought, I should at least try! So I wrote to the two brands whose fish I was buying (Sealord and Brunswick) and asked them: what do you know about forced labour in your supply chains?

Both wrote back promptly with excellent and detailed responses! Praise God! It turned out I 'just happened' to have written to two of the best companies there are. I've always loved research so, encouraged by their responses, I started making lists of common fish brands on online shopping websites and, sector by sector, asked them about their supply chains. I learned to ask about fishing vessels and processing factories, and was stunned at the lengths of some supply-chains (especially petfood!). I combed through certification documents and was amazed to learn that Sealord had chosen a tuna supplier specifically because they were carrying out audits on fishing vessels thousands of kilometres out at sea. I learned that slavery is rife in the fishing industry. More than 128 000 people are believed to be enslaved on fishing vessels at any one time. Others are forced to work in fish processing factories, where you will also find many children: their small fingers are handy for packing sardines into tins or peeling prawns.

Some people get caught up in this by people taking advantage of their hopes for a better life. I think often of a Cambodian subsistence rice farmer named Lang Long. He was struggling to feed all his siblings, so leapt at the chance to take up a better-paying job in the construction industry in Thailand. But when he got there he was forced onto a fishing boat where he worked for three years, sold from one boat to another, chained at the neck whenever other boats were near, until the Catholic charity Stella Maris finally bought him and helped him rehabilitate. Others, like a Thai man named Asorasak Thamma, were simply taken opportunistically. He went to a brothel looking for a girl, was given a spiked drink, and woke up to find the room he was in was swaying: he'd been carried onto a boat and was already beyond sight of land. In his case he was able to escape after a few months, but he ended up far from home and it was several years before his family even knew he was alive.

Over time some of the stories I was reading gave me literal nightmares (and these days I really limit my exposure to them), but I also found the research so encouraging: a decent number of brands were going to considerable lengths to eliminate slavery from their supply chains.

My husband, Martin, and I started to pray about how we could share what I'd learned more widely, and in 2018 we launched Just Kai with a stand at The Justice Conference. We hadn't expected I'd be working on that stand due to my substantial health issues, but I woke on the morning of the conference feeling my body had really changed. I went in as well, and spent 8am to 8pm talking to people about slavery in food, then went in to church the following day (still in a wheelchair) to thank God for my healing.

Since then Just Kai has grown to an organisation with around ten volunteers and, whilst it turns out my healing was only partial, I have remained considerably stronger and work on the project about six hours a week.

More than 128 000 people are believed to be enslaved on fishing vessels at any one time. Others are forced to work in fish processing factories, where you will also find many children.

Slavery in food supply chains today

Modern slavery is a huge problem in our world today, affecting around 50 million people at any one time—41 000 of them in Australia. These people are sometimes physically prevented from leaving their jobs; other times they have their passports confiscated or they are kept trapped by threats of physical violence. They're not always sold (although that is common) and are sometimes even paid some wages: the defining factors are that they are working against their will and cannot leave.

We most commonly hear about the 6.3 million people who are enslaved in the sex trade, but another 8 million people are enslaved producing physical goods for sale. They're mining the minerals that go into our electronics, catching the fish we eat, and working in factories making our clothes. It can be shocking to think that the people who make our stuff are doing it against their will, but it also gives us an opportunity. If we choose to buy slave-free goods, those slave-free businesses can expand, plus

the market for slave-produced goods will wither. In addition, poverty is one of the major drivers of slavery: choosing to buy goods where the workers are reasonably paid leads to less slavery, and less child labour as well.

Alongside those people, around 152 million children are in child labour, mostly working in agriculture. These are not simply kids with after school jobs: they do work that interferes with either their education or their physical or emotional development. The children who work on tea plantations in Kenya or hazelnut orchards in Türkiye (Turkey) are working instead of going to school; the kids who grow cocoa in West Africa often also have spinal damage caused by carrying loads too heavy for their young bodies.

In Australia, the goods most likely to have slavery in their supply chains are (in order) electronics, garments, solar panels, textiles, and fish. Cocoa is also at high risk of being produced with child labour; tea, coffee, nuts, tomatoes and palm oil also have high rates of either forced labour, child labour, or both.

KnowTheChain.org is already doing excellent work on slavery in electronics; Baptist World Aid's Ethical Fashion Guide tackles the garment sector. Just Kai addresses slavery in the supply chains of food. We:

- raise awareness of the issues;
- identify and promote brands already checking for forced labour and child labour in their supply chains;
- lobby certifications to raise their human welfare standards;
- lobby and advise a handful of food companies;
- lobby the New Zealand government to implement modern slavery legislation (something Australia already has).

Our main work is producing resources that go onto our website (justkai.org.nz) and onto Instagram and Facebook (@justkainz). I also speak at churches and community organisations as I'm able, and we've had a stand at a number of ethical and sustainable festivals. We've produced buying guides for a number of food sectors, and produce seasonal guides each Christmas and Easter. Our most recent work has been producing a 'morning tea guide' (covering tea, coffee, sugar, hot chocolate, cordial, and biscuits) that we're hoping will be used by churches.

One thing I'm particularly keen to communicate is just how bad things are in the fishing industry. The Australian domestic fishing industry has very low rates of slavery, but even domestic fish can have an international supply chain. Most Australian-farmed prawns, for example, are sent overseas for peeling, where they're often processed in poorly regulated 'peeling sheds' in which both forced and child labour are common. Fish farmed in Australia is also generally fed on feed that includes fish meal and oil made from low-value wild-caught fish—another risk-point for forced labour.

And, when it comes to imported fish, much of the fish that goes into petfood is low-value imports—and you'd be surprised how much 'beef-flavoured' pet food has fish on the ingredients list! Slavery is also common in the supply chains of fish caught in distant-water fisheries, notably tuna and squid. To save fuel, companies often park fishing vessels in these fishing grounds for up to four years at a stretch, sending another vessel out to them from time to time to drop off supplies and bring back the fish—a situation that lends itself to forced labour as fishers have no options to leave.

What can we do?

Modern slavery is a huge issue which can only be solved by tackling it from many angles. Fundamentally, it's an issue of the human heart, and won't be solved without God transforming the people who are benefitting by exploiting others. I think often of Micah 6:9-16. It comes straight after the famous verse:

> He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?

In the following verses the prophet Micah lays into the people because they are using unjust weights and measures at the market: effectively telling people something costs one price, but charging another to their own benefit.

The modern slavery we're seeing today feels a lot like that: people like Lang Long, told they'd get a well-paying job to help their families, only to find they're not being paid at all. We're not the ones exploiting those people, but we still benefit from there exploitation by the artificially low prices we pay for many goods. How can we step out of that situation?

Or I think about the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37, in which I feel that Jesus is saying that our neighbour is anyone we come across who needs our help. When we buy cocoa or coffee, our path crosses the kids at the other end of the supply chain, whose futures are being stunted as they work to keep their families afloat. How can we help them?

One thing we all can do is buy slave-free products as we are able. The extent to which we each can do this will vary, but look for Rainforest Alliance or Fairtrade logos when you're buying tea, coffee, and chocolate in particular. You might be surprised how many affordable products you find! Kmart own-brand seasonal chocolate, for example, has been Rainforest Alliance certified for some years now, as are KitKats, Milo, and much of the Woolworths own-brand range! We can also encourage our churches to buy the morning tea brands listed in our guide.

Fish is harder, as there aren't any consumer-facing certifications to look for, but Brunswick sardines, Huon fresh and frozen salmon, Sealord frozen fish and both John West and Woolworths tinned salmon are all slave-free. If you're buying processed wild-caught Australian prawns, ask the brand if they have their prawns processed by Thai Union: they don't use peeling sheds. Fish oil supplements are another risky area, but Blackmores has gone to significant lengths to reduce slavery in their supply chains, as have Purina, which owns a number of petfood brands.

Some people will feel God is calling them to do more. If this is you, some things you could consider might be:

- lobby the government to strengthen the modern slavery legislation you have. Thus far it has identified very few cases of modern slavery in company supply chains, and there is a lot of concern the commissioners' powers are too weak;
- if your favourite brand of coffee or chocolate isn't independently certified slave-free, ask them to switch to certified suppliers. And if your favourite is certified, write to them and thank them for taking that step;
- talk to other people about these issues. I find awareness of these things is often low, but when people learn about them they're really interested. My dentist was recently really interested to hear about all the work Nutella is doing to remove child labour from their hazelnut supply chain!

If you'd like help with getting started on any of those things I'd be happy to chat: my email is heather@justkai.org.nz. (See also MannaCast ep. 27). Together we can make a big impact on the lives of people who are currently trapped in terrible situations.

Heather Roberts is the founder of Just Kai. When she's not writing and speaking about modern slavery in food, she loves riding her bike and swimming in the sea in Aotearoa, where she lives with her husband, Martin, and their friend, Sarah.

Papering Over the Cracks

The Unrealised Promises of Recycling

by Tom Allen

Many of our present ecological crises can be traced to our apparent unwillingness to adopt an economic system which acknowledges a need to live within limits. Despite much rhetoric to the contrary, this need not be so: no market exists without the conscious intention of humans to regard something as valuable and worth exchanging, meaning markets can change if we change the way we value things. A circular economy means a system of resource management where 'waste' is re-imagined as a valuable resource and 'untapped' old-growth forests, coal, and rare-earth mineral deposits need not be exploited because we have created a sufficiency from what we already have.

This article tracks the travails of the Australian paper industry in some depth. While this may seem a niche topic, it actually serves as an emblematic case study on the challenges of implementing a circular economy and ultimately forging a new economic system that serves not only *some* people but all people, all beings, and the complex web of interconnected planetary systems within which human society is fearfully and wonderfully entangled.

Collapse of the domestic paper industry

In January 2023, the Maryvale paper mill made headlines as it announced the end of Reflex copy paper production. The Latrobe Valley mill, owned since 2009 by Japanese paper giant Nippon Paper and operating under its Australian subsidiary Opal, would now focus exclusively on the recycling and production of cardboard products. The Maryvale Mill was the last producer of white graphic paper

in Australia. Opal pinned the decision to close this part of the plant entirely on the 'unplanned end of VicForests' wood supply', referring to the Victorian government's decision to bring forward the moratorium on old-growth logging from 2030 to 2022. The government's decision was made as VicForests was found guilty of breaching the law on several occasions, including spying on anti-logging activists. In more recent news, VicForests was shut down completely on 30 June 2024 following record losses of $54.2 million and $60.1 million in the last two financial years respectively, despite a $149 million state government bailout.

The concurrence of VicForests' cessation of native forest logging and Maryvale's closure of its copy paper mill demonstrates how much the two were propping each other up. There were few other takers for VicForests' poor-quality timber, and few forestry companies could supply Maryvale so cheaply. It wasn't very long ago that things looked quite different, however. In 2015, Australian Paper (owned by Nippon at the time, but yet to be rebranded as Opal) announced a $90 million de-inking facility that would produce post-consumer recycled printing paper, envelopes, and other stationery. It is not clear what has happened to that plant.

Consumption of copy paper in Australia is reported to have declined by 4-5% every year for the last decade, and the Maryvale Mill faces the same economic headwinds as any manufacturer in Australia. Most copy paper now sold in Australia is made in Indonesia.

Even in the domestic recycling industry, it is estimated around a third of paper and plastic in a kerbside recycling bin is sent overseas for processing. While there are at least two mills in Australia (both owned by Opal) that produce cardboard products from recycled paper and cardboard, there are none producing copy paper.

Flaws in the regulatory framework

In answer to all of this, it would be common sense to investigate recycled paper alternatives (assuming everything possible has been done to reduce consumption in the first place). After all, recycled paper seems to be readily available at most major outlets, so what's the big deal? The issue is that recycled paper isn't always what it seems, and the issues encountered in sourcing genuine post-consumer recycled paper relate to some larger problems in our economy at large.

As part of its opposition to VicForests, The Wilderness Society ran an Ethical Paper campaign that called on consumers and businesses to boycott the Reflex brand of paper produced at the Maryvale Mill. Despite achieving its objectives, the Ethical Paper website (https://ethicalpaper.com.au) is still live and we took a look at the paper alternatives they recommended as 'ethical.' All of them were labelled as 100% recycled, but with a bit of digging this came to look like a fairly spurious claim in every case.

Left: Native forest logging, Victoria.

Previous page: Maryvale workers with the last ream of copy paper produced by the mill (Jan 2023).

While some products recommended by the Ethical Paper campaign have been discontinued, there were a fair few still available. All of them, despite differences in appearance, were effectively made and sold by the same company: WINC, a large stationery supplier that sources its 'recycled' paper from a mill in Indonesia. Several were essentially the same product, repackaged to help large businesses and government agencies meet their 'social procurement' targets. Social procurement is a movement whereby procurement teams are encouraged to buy supplies from social enterprises or Indigenous-owned enterprises. Several Indigenous-owned stationery companies have sprung up to serve this market, however they have all done so in partnership with WINC, through its Australian partner, Paper Force.

That Indonesian mill, and Paper Force, is owned and run by Asian Pulp and Paper (APP), a sprawling Chinese/Indonesian conglomerate with mills and forests all over Asia. Its paper is certified by the Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC). The PEFC's is one of two logos you'll commonly see on wood-derived products, the other being the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC). Both of these organisations began in the 1990s as attempts to arrest the decimation of forests worldwide, with FSC cutting its teeth in the management of huge corporate forestry in the tropics, and PEFC geared more towards the fragmented landscape and logistical chains of European forestry. Nowadays they essentially compete for 'market share' in the regulatory space, trying to prove their credentials as tough regulators on the consumer side of the business—i.e. trying to be the 'most trusted' certification stamp—and trying to spruik their streamlined processes and low cost of certification on the business-to-business side of things.

Both certification bodies are built upon sprawling governance structures that incorporate global, regional, and national partner agencies and members, and this is where the whole question of certification runs into a sticky quagmire: the bulk of the funding for both these bodies comes from the forestry companies they aim to regulate. This is an issue replicated across our economy: regulators are dependent on the regulated and are thus vulnerable to capture by the very forces they are attempting to rein in. In the case of paper, the end result is obvious: an opaque landscape of dozens of certification grades and schemes, with very little regulatory oversight. For example, one product, Mandura, is described as 100% recycled. It is one of the Indigenous-owned brands supplied in partnership with WINC. On the product data sheet, however, it states that 'PEFC™ Recycled means at least 70% PEFC™ certified material from recycled sources and wood from controlled sources.' Note the significant *and* in that description, which implies any amount of wood may be allowed to count towards a 70% recycled figure! Furthermore, consider that 'recycled' isn't defined as 'post-consumer' and could simply include paper sweepings from the factory floor, a common practice. One has to wonder whether 'recycled' means anything at that point.

Recycled paper isn't always what it seems, and the issues encountered in sourcing genuine post-consumer recycled paper relate to some larger problems in our economy at large.

Or take another product: Muru 100% recycled. This is another Indigenous-owned brand, produced in partnership with COS, a competitor with WINC, but the paper is sourced through Paper Force from the same Indonesian mill. COS states that its Muru 100% paper is not only PEFC certified as '100% post-consumer waste' but also certified carbon neutral. The PEFC stamp that the product carries, however, only goes so far as to say 'PEFC Certified: This

product is from sustainably managed forests and controlled sources.' It seems like the claim of '100% post-consumer waste' must be taken completely on trust, with no way of verifying it.

It is worth dwelling for a moment on the complex tangle of things going on here. In these cases, social procurement targets—a positive initiative by governments seeking to assist for-purpose enterprises (such as Indigenous enterprises)—is unwittingly contributing to the thick veil of greenwashing that is stopping us from taking the necessary steps towards a genuinely circular economy or genuinely sustainable forestry. It is another variant of corporate capitalism's genius in pitting social interests against ecological interests, the very same conflicts that lay behind the activities of VicForests and the Maryvale Mill.

Progress towards a circular economy?

The term 'circular economy' is rapidly becoming another buzzword to be splattered through marketing material and grant applications with as little thought as 'artificial intelligence' or 'sustainable.' The rise of circular economy as a concept has been encouraged by bodies like the UN and World Economic Forum, and governments at the federal, state, and local levels are all using the notion to frame their ideals for economic transformation over the coming decades. It's a useful concept: it speaks to a need for our society and economy to rethink 'waste' and move away from the extractive processes that are the key driving force behind climate change, mass extinctions, and resource scarcity, and it does this better than vague terms like 'sustainable.'

The issues in domestic paper recycling—and the difficulty of sourcing truly recycled (i.e. post-consumer waste) paper at all, regardless of its origins—show us that we have a long way to go in tackling the perverse incentives that hold us back from implementing an actually circular economy.

Recycled copy paper may perform exactly the same as paper made directly from trees, but it benefits from the additional branding caché of having been recycled. On the flip side, it is more expensive (under current market conditions) to make than virgin paper products. So there are clear incentives to seek the word 'recycled' on your product and have it feature the green tick of a recognised regulatory body, without doing the more commercially challenging work of providing genuinely recycled products. The perverse incentives exist at the other end of the goods lifecycle too: people want to recycle their paper. They want to feel carefree as they pop their discarded waste into a bin, handing responsibility for their consumption over to someone else. So there's an incentive on the part of waste collectors to look like they're doing the right thing and palm off their 'recycled' goods to someone else. And there's an incentive for that someone else to make it look like they're doing the right thing with those goods. And so on down the line.

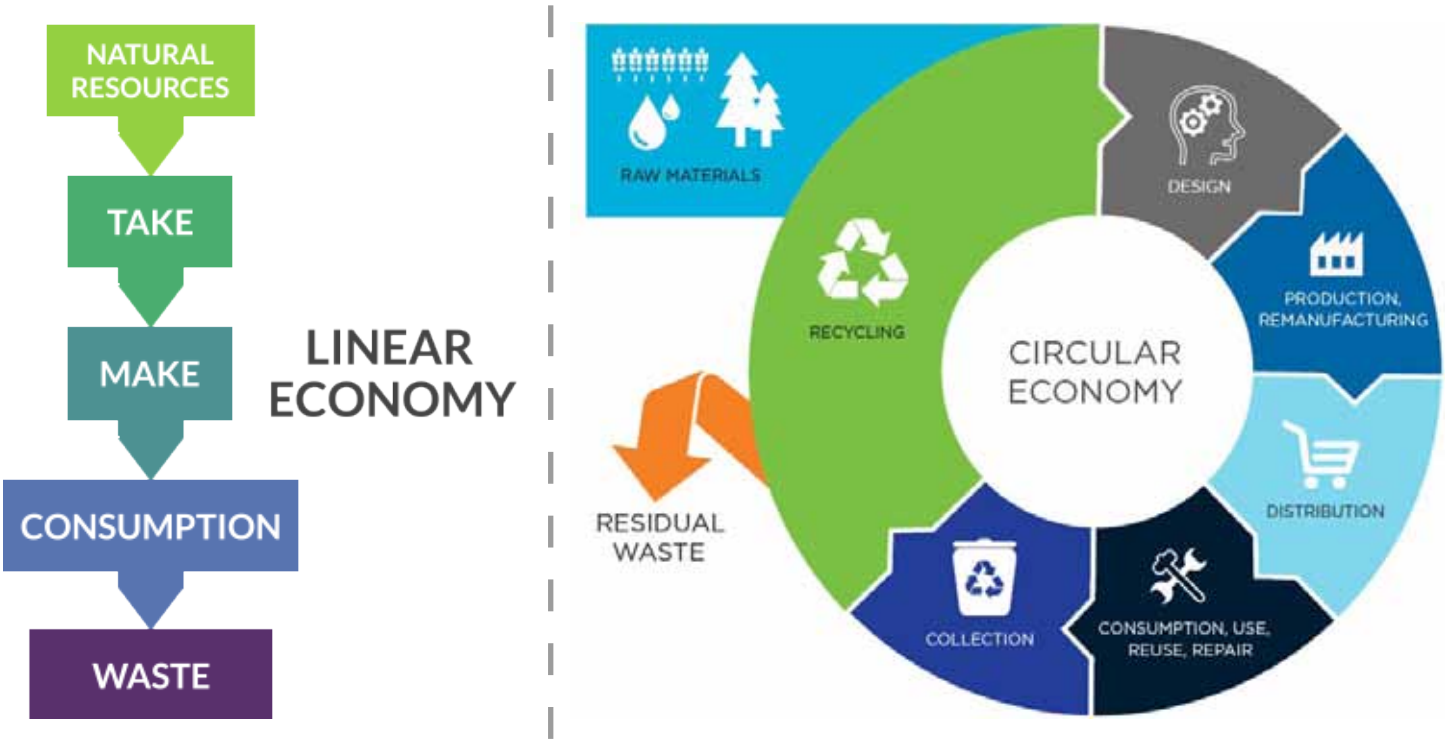
Further, the more it looks and feels like we do have a genuinely circular economy, the more we as individuals can feel careless about our consumption. If a product is branded as 100% post-consumer recycled, you'll obviously feel better about buying it. And if you have a recycling bin to put that product in when you're ready to discard it, you'll feel better about discarding it. In other words, the more we implement a circular economy, the faster we can spin that cycle with no ethical alarm bells ringing.

The issues in domestic paper recycling ... show us that we have a long way to go in tackling the perverse incentives that hold us back from implementing an actually circular economy.

Paper offers yet another intriguing insight in that regard. The wood fibres from which paper is made are of a certain length when a log is pulped. With every run through the recycling mill, those fibres are chopped shorter. Generally, it is estimated that paper can be recycled into paper again only seven or eight times. At each successive step of recycling, the fibres are degraded and require virgin pulp to be mixed in.

Will recyclers sort paper according to its 'generational content' or fibre quality when deciding what product to recycle it into? And what will be done with the piles of dust those fibres have been reduced to when they have been spun through several iterations of paper and cardboard?

The recycling of glass, metal, plastic and all other materials present differing versions of the same problem. Some materials can be recycled a near infinite number of times whereas others can only be used once and have no currently available pathway for recycling. Others technically can be recycled, but the products they are being turned into must be marketed competitively alongside others made



Linear vs. circular economy (credits: CSIRO and Market Vector).

from cheaper virgin materials and prove a tough sell without government intervention to sway the market. This is equally true of things like bollards and park benches made from soft plastics.

What can we do?

It should be evident from the explorations documented above that reducing our consumption should be the first port of call when acting on any matter related to our impact on the world around us. Even if we maximised the proportion of 100% post-consumer recycled materials in everything our society consumes but there was no reduction in the *volume* of consumption, it seems fair to assume that we would still have significant ecological challenges with which to contend. It would be a vastly improved situation compared to today's extractive mayhem, but would it balance out the energy required to power the recycling process? From the logistics of moving so much material to the energy spent processing it, and the inevitable losses along the way, requiring topping up from 'virgin' sources, it seems an open guess.

There is a good reason that paper consumption in Australia has only declined by 4-5% per year over the last decade, and not by a much higher degree: the fact is paper still has its uses. Furthermore, we should not imagine that shifting to electronic documents and cloud computing gets us off the hook environmentally. These come with their own massive energy, materials, and waste footprint, which is perhaps even more out of sight and out of mind.

So, given we must use paper sometimes, it would be a positive step if we could get used to seeing brown or less-white paper as the norm. There can be issues with readability and eyestrain, and it's not obvious if these are easily rectified, but getting used to reading words on flecked brown paper would make much less demand on recyclers. In our research, Ecocern is one Australian manufacturer of truly 100% post-consumer recycled paper, and all their copy paper is brown and contains flecks of colour that cannot be easily removed. In the event that we feel we must or really want to use paper for something, this seems to be as good as it gets, for now.

Tom Allen is a Victorian farmer, creator, and educator who believes in the power of small scale enterprise to create much needed shifts in our ecological awareness. He currently lives in Warrnambool and is working with Worn Gundidj to implement circular economy initiatives in the horticulture sector, and operates a gourmet mushroom farm in Drysdale.

Cat Poo and Fatherly Love

by Katherine Shields

A few years ago I found myself taking on some serious research about poo. Yes, poo. Maybe that's a bit odd, but I was considering getting a pet cat and, as I was planning for them to be an indoor-only cat, I wanted to know if there were any environmentally friendly ways to dispose of kitty litter and cat poo. Given all I'd learned once from a *very thorough* presentation a friend delivered one time during my uni days on the economics and environmental impact of dog poo when it is not picked up by owners, I had to imagine a similar story for cats. One major concern I had was that everything I read basically came to the same conclusion: that cat poo needs to be bagged in plastic and kitty litter should be cleaned at least once a day. I did the maths: 365 plastic bags a year for a pet that might live until 19—that's nearly 7000 plastic bags!

Thinking deeply about how my day-to-day life impacts God's creation is a point of pride for me. I have a background in sustainability and environmental conservation and I've always loved and cared about the environment. When I became a Christian in high school the two went hand in hand (although it took me many years to be able to articulate how). It's out of a love for God and his love for his creation that I try to purchase items locally with as little packaging as I can, purchase second-hand from op shops or clothes swaps, and compost what I'm able. I just recently bought a new phone after more than five years. So why would I throw away that track record for a cat? Well, for starters she's cute and sweet and great company. Even more so though, I came to terms with the wonderful truth that God doesn't love me any more or any less for the number of bags of kitty litter she'll produce.

Well that was simple wasn't it? Not really. Me ten years ago certainly wouldn't have found that an adequate reason! This shift in perspective took time, prayer, conversations and an openness to let God challenge where I find my identity. Do I find it in him and his love and grace or in my being 'good enough'? In part, it's about recognising that we live in a world where perfect answers do not exist, and the best solutions still have shortcomings or unexpected negative outcomes. I don't mean this to sound fatalistic or cynical, but rather, liberating. I believe God sees our hearts and our efforts to care for his creation. The small and big sacrifices. The times when we don't do it well. And in each of those scenarios he still loves us. There is nothing we can do (or not do) that will change that beautiful truth. My identity is not in my eco-warrior status, but firmly rooted in a God who knit me together in my mother's womb and calls me fearfully and wonderfully made, before I ever made a sustainable or environmentally friendly choice.

The truth is that we live in a complex and broken world where silver bullets do not exist.

Fast forward two years and little Sally and I moved from the bustling suburbs of Melbourne to Alice Springs, NT. Again, I found myself facing another ethical dilemma: the availability and accessibility of recycling in this beautiful town. We only have one bin. That's right, one. The main option for recycling is to take tins, bottles, and cans out to the recycling centre every month or so. In the house I'm living at now I'm fortunate enough that my landlord pays for a local company's recycling bin which gets collected when requested for a small fee. But I can't put cardboard in it. My option for that is to take it to school. You can imagine how many random bits of cardboard are in my laundry for a few weeks at a time and then sit in my car for a few weeks and then eventually make it to the staffroom recycling...

Sometimes it just feels too hard. Again, I have wrestled with the truth that God does not love me any less when some of those recyclable items end up in my normal bin and head to landfill. Does it grieve him? Probably. It certainly grieves me and spurs me to more consistent action, however, I don't do these things out of guilt or a desire to be accepted. I've often said that caring for God's creation should be live-giving, just as Jesus said the Sabbath should be. It's not about making more rules and checks and balances that give us a sense of self-justification or further complicating our often busy lives. The truth is that we live in a complex and broken world where silver bullets do not exist. Does that mean we don't try and advocate for environmentally friendly and more broadly ethical decisions and lifestyles? Not at all! But our motivation and our identity that informs it need to be deeply rooted in the love of a father that is unwavering. So Sally and I will continue to enjoy each other's company, my friends will be kept up to date with adorable cat photos, and I will do my best to recycle and compost with the time and energy I have available.

Katherine is a high school geography, science, and agriculture teacher, working in Alice Springs. She has a degree in Marine Conservation and Sustainability and amazingly uses it as she literally works in a desert.

(cont. from p.2)

a great example of accepting what you must today, but not letting that stop you calling for things to be better. Within economic and political life, nearly all change for the better comes incrementally, not all at once.

Tom Allen's article on paper recycling (p. 13) destroys any wishful fantasies about the emerging circular economy. He unveils the many ways in which commercial incentives, regulatory laxity and consumer apathy can undermine the best ideas. Looking at the present state of recycling in Australia, it is tempting to lapse into cynical despair. However, we desperately need to build more truly circular processes into our economy, and the only way we will get there is through a progression of stages in which things are less than satisfactory.

R.H. Tawney, the hero of my article on political visions of property, understood well that we should not let the perfect be the enemy of the good. He gave his life to working for a better and fairer economy for industrial economy. He knew well that his vision of more socially responsible property rights would never be fully attained, however this did not stop him from doing what he could:

> *The important thing, however, is not that it should be completely attained, but that it should be sincerely sought. What matters to the health of society is the objective towards which its face is set.*
>
> **Jonathan Cornford**

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Manna Matters is produced on the lands of the Wurundjeri and Dja Dja Wurrung peoples, both members of the Kulin nation. The 'wurun' of the Wurundjeri refers to Eucalyptus viminalis*, a sacred tree whose leaves are required for a 'welcome to country'. The early Europeans colloquially named this tree the Manna Gum for the sweet white gum (lerp) it sometimes produces, which reminded them of the biblical story of the manna in the wilderness. In doing so, they unknowingly associated a locally sacred tree with one of the foundational lessons in God's economics: collect what you need; none shall have too little; none shall have too much; don't store it up; there is enough for all!*

WORTH THE PAPER IT'S PRINTED ON?

MANNA MATTERS AND THE QUESTION OF HARD COPY

by Jonathan Cornford

> Reducing our overall material consumption and working to build a genuinely circular economy are two of the most urgent political problems we face.

For those reading the paper edition of *Manna Matters*, you are reading this editorial from what, to the best of our knowledge, seems to be the only *actual* 100% post-consumer waste recycled copy paper on the Australian market today. It is made by Ecocern, a small company based in Sydney. And as you can see, it is not white.

Tom Allen's article on the Australian paper industry (p. 13) makes for grim reading. I asked Tom to do some investigating for me after I began to run into trouble sourcing post-consumer waste paper on which to print *Manna Matters*. Earlier this year, I thought I had found a good solution with a product that proudly proclaimed its 100% post-consumer waste credentials; however, it seems my confidence in Australia's 'truth in labelling' laws may have been naively inflated. We still don't know that this product is *not* what it claims to be, however, Tom's research casts a large cloud of doubt over it, showing that it requires trust in the processes of large multinational corporations and Indonesian mills, taking place behind a veil that the consumer cannot penetrate, and our regulators won't. I am afraid my trust does not extend that far.

This poses some uncomfortable challenges for *Manna Matters*. Currently, just under 200 readers get *Manna Matters* as hard copy, and about 700 receive the email version. Why not simply switch to being fully digital?

There are many reasons we have so far resisted this. Firstly, I know that if we went exclusively digital, there are people who would be immediately excluded from reading *Manna Matters*, some due to admirable life commitments, and others who are the forgotten people of Australia's digital divide. We live in a technological culture that blithely leaves such laggards and luddites behind, but that should not be the disposition of Christ's people (BTW, check out episode 28 of the MannaCast where we discuss who the real Luddites actually were.)

Secondly, the substantial research into the differences between reading from screens and reading off paper is unambiguous. Reading from screens results in substantially lower reading comprehension, depth of reflection, and retention. (This is also why we do not include hyperlinks within the electronic versions of articles – they have been shown to substantially scramble reading comprehension.) I think you will agree that *Manna Matters* is generally not light reading material. It asks something of

If we went exclusively digital, there are people who would be immediately excluded from reading *Manna Matters*, some due to admirable life commitments, and others who are the forgotten people of Australia's digital divide. We live in a technological culture that blithely leaves such laggards and luddites behind, but that should not be the disposition of Christ's people.

the reader. That is because we are committed to trying to explore deep and difficult issues with some depth and nuance, something which is becoming increasingly scarce in our culture. Manna Gum exists for this sort of communication, and *Manna Matters* is produced to be *read*—not just perused, but engaged. Moreover, the vast majority of emailed versions get buried in people's bursting inboxes, and, despite many people's best intentions, never get read. I have good evidence that the much smaller number of hardcopy mailouts actually contribute the bulk of engaged *Manna Matters* reading. Moreover, as Tom indicates in his article, it is not like the online and virtual world doesn't come with its own substantial environmental problems.

To be clear, I am not denying that there are certainly those who do read *Manna Matters* in electronic form, and read well. That is why having an electronic version is a great option, and we have invested a large amount of energy to make it as good a product as possible. But there are good reasons for it not being the *only* option.

Finally, a deeper reason for persisting with a paper edition is our commitment to *materiality*. Christians proclaim a creator God who is Spirit, and yet *so loves* the material cosmos that has been created, to the point of *becoming flesh* and suffering the same death that awaits all flesh. The solution to our ecological crisis and hyper-consumerism does not lie in *virtual* existence, let alone a transhuman or trans-planetary future. The solution lies in *redeemed materiality*—learning to love and care for the good creation that sustains us. That is why reducing our overall material consumption *and* working to build a genuinely circular economy (in contrast to what parades under that term today) are two of the most urgent political problems we face.

We want to hear from you

All this editorialising is really just throat clearing for what I really want say: Manna Gum is throwing its procurement policy open for public consultation.

Should we switch to printing *Manna Matters* on this genuine post-consumer waste brown paper, or should we finally acquiesce and go fully digital?

We really want to hear from you, and especially from our hard copy readers: how do you think *you* would go with a *Manna Matters* printed on this sort of brown paper?

As I have said, *Manna Matters* is produced to be read, so there is no point switching to this paper for sound ethical reasons if hardly anyone will actually read it. My initial canvassing so far suggests that people don't mind the look and feel of it, but the real test is whether people will actually read it. Perhaps we just need to try an edition or two and see how it goes? **We want to hear what you think, so if you have a view, please take a moment to send us an email. Or write us a letter!**

A Scaly Mentor*, by Phoebe Garrett. This was published in* Manna Matters *Nov 2022 and has nothing to do with the above article except to demonstrate what artwork looks like on the brown paper.*