



# Manna Matters

QUARTERLY OF MANNA GUM

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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.



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# NEWS FROM LONG GULLY

This edition of *Manna Matters* is a little bit different. Traditionally, at the beginning of the year we send out a report of Manna Gum's work for the previous year, and an annual appeal, but not an edition of *Manna Matters* per se. However, last May we relaunched Manna Gum with a new logo, new website and new-look for *Manna Matters*, so our summer mailout is also due for a refresh. This new version will be a hybrid, combining some tidbits of articles, but also incorporating our annual report and appeal: a *Manna Matters*-lite for the summer season. After all, who wants to work too much when there is cricket and tennis to watch, swimming beckoning, and lots of yard work to be done?

Some time in the coming months we will have a federal election and, as I write, Donald Trump has just taken office, sending *The Guardian* into a hysterical tailspin. Serendipitously, Jacob Garrett and I have just finished recording the last podcast in a four-part *MannaCast* series on Christianity and politics. I can tell you now that it won't answer all your questions about how we confront these challenging times, but hopefully it will provide something of a map to help us constructively engage the troubled sphere of politics. The central theme of the series is that politics, properly understood, is the practice of negotiating a common life, and something for which we all hold responsibilities, especially those seeking to bear the message of Christ into the world.

For those able to get there, I will be speaking on 'Money & Stuff in the Upside Down Kingdom' at the Surrender Conference in Melbourne, 21-22 March. See [www.surrender.org.au](http://www.surrender.org.au).

**Jonathan Cornford**

## Coming up in 2025

### WEBINAR SERIES

#### **Kingdom Communities** (*June*)

We will be re-visioning what it means to do church in 21st century Australia, paying particular attention to the implications of the gospel for the economic structure and practices of faith communities.

### LEARNING EVENT

#### **A Different Way Exposure Week** (*Bendigo, November*)

Come and spend a week exploring Christian alternatives in areas of money, employment, consumption, sustainability, family, community, care for creation, and serving the poor.

***Stay tuned for further details.***

*Cover image: Illustration showing a rioting mob of Luddites, by Phiz (Hablot Knight Browne), 1813. See p. 10 for more.*



# OUR WORK FOR 2024

by Jonathan Cornford

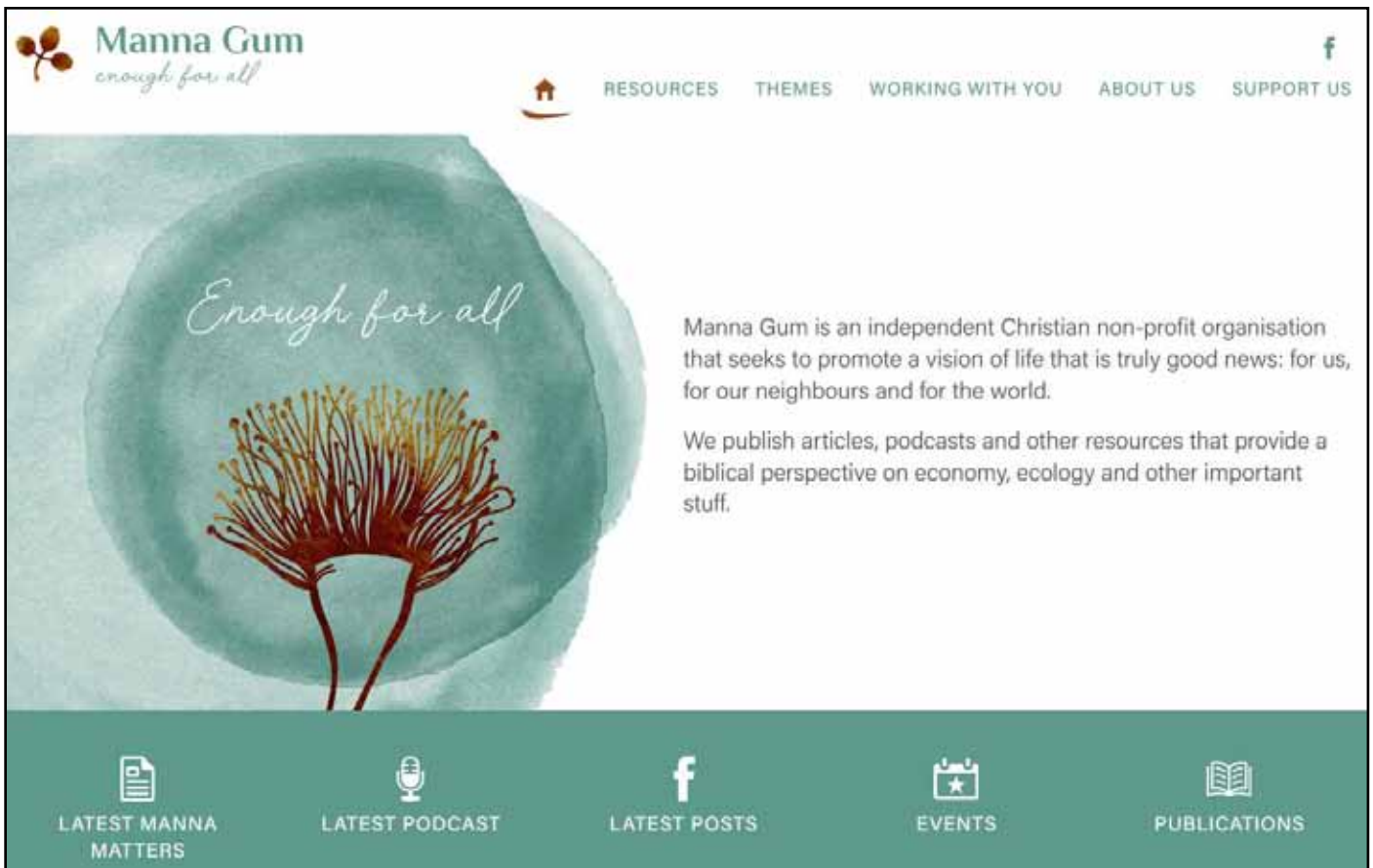
2024 was a big year for Manna Gum. After fifteen years of operation, it was time for a refresh.

In May, we ‘re-launched’ Manna Gum with a new website, new logo and new-look *Manna Matters*. We marked the occasion by a re-launch event at Ridley College in Melbourne (see photos above), which provided an opportune moment to restate what the ministry of Manna Gum is all about, and where we see ourselves going over the next fifteen year period.

The renovation of Manna Gum’s visual identity comes at a time when we feel like we are entering a new phase of ministry. Manna Gum’s core purpose is to renew our perception of the ways in which spiritual life and material life are fused together, both in scripture and in day-to-day life; and secondly, to renew our understanding of the ways in which the

human economy, and human life more fully, is embedded within the greater economy of God’s creation, both in scripture and in the practical realities of life. Over the last fifteen years this work has given a central place to the everyday economics of our households: a foundational place for Christians to begin to reclaim the economic implications of the gospel.

This will remain important in Manna Gum’s work, however, over the coming years we hope to give more attention to two themes in particular: (i) the economics of the church; and (ii) Christian political witness. The first of these themes (the economics of the church) is really the inevitable extension of household economics to our local faith communities. The church is itself a household, and Christian economic ethics are intrinsically communal. For too long,



the structure and management of churches has looked to the world of business for ‘best practice’; it is time to re-found our understanding of what church is all about, and what this means for the economics of Christian communities.

The second theme (Christian political witness) concerns the ways in which the gospel can speak into the great challenges of our century: ecological crisis, affluenza, social inequality, technologism, and the weakening of democracy. In my view, Christian political witness should also be an extension of our household and ecclesial economic practice, however, the ways in which we make the translation from the sphere of discipleship and faith to the secular public sphere is by no means straightforward, and requires careful thought.

Manna Gum will continue to cover a wide range of issues relating to economy, ecology, and faith, however these two themes will become a sustained focus of the coming years.

## New website

Manna Gum’s ministry exists to communicate a message, and the website plays a critical role in that ministry. It is not merely a tool for promotion, it is first and foremost a repository of Manna Gum’s resources—articles, podcasts, webinars, books, and more—most of which are free. The website is the lynchpin connecting people with those resources.

Developing Manna Gum’s new website was (for us!) a large investment of time and money. We were incredibly blessed by the generous response to our appeals for extra support, as well as a grant from Gospel Resources Trust (see financial report on p.6 for details), all of which meant we did not have to cut corners in the quality of what we were attempting to do. The end result is a far more attractive, functional and easy-to-use website. Also, the back end is far more pleasant for Jacob and me to operate than the migraine-inducing system of the old site.

The benefits of the improved website were immediate, with increased engagement with our resources, increased sign-ups to the mailing list, and fewer migraines for us. So a very big thank you to all those who supported this endeavour.

## What's new about mannagum.org.au?

- MannaCast episodes: all our episodes can be perused and accessed from the website.
- Easy-to-navigate menu bar.
- Clean layout for long-form reading.
- Easy sign-up to the mailing list, whether for email or hard-copy or both.
- Follow a series of articles more easily.
- Search by topic: perhaps my favourite bit, you can now easily search by a range of topic listings. It also shows the range that Manna Gum material covers.
- Recent Facebook posts: Manna Gum's Facebook posts add a different flavour to our articles or podcasts, often engaging with topical issues or suggesting further resources.



Search all articles by topic.

## MannaCast

The podcast has certainly been a valuable and fun addition to Manna Gum's resources. It allows us to extend our range of subjects and seems to be effective at reaching people beyond our mailing list. If you listen to the podcast, please give us a rating and/or review as it helps people discover it more easily.

## Podcasts in 2024

1. Christians Rule! (Reflecting on Constantine 1)
2. A New Kind of Christian? (Reflecting on Constantine 2)
3. In the Shadow of Christendom (Reflecting on Constantine 3)
4. What is Manna Gum?
5. Slavery in our Food with Heather Roberts
6. The Industrial Revolution (1)
7. The Industrial Revolution (2)
8. The Politics of God (Christianity and Politics 1)
9. The Gospel VS the Christian West? (Christianity and Politics 2)
10. The Australian Project (Christianity and Politics 3)
11. Christian Political Witness (Christianity and Politics 4)

## Webinar series: Christianity VS Capitalism

Between July and September we ran a six-part webinar series on Christianity vs. Capitalism. Not for the faint-hearted, this was a deep dive into a historical, analytical, and theological description of capitalism, and the challenges it poses for Christian witness. The webinars were recorded and can be found on Manna Gum's YouTube channel, which you can access through the website. If you are not into all the conceptual stuff, skip to part six of the series, which gives the practical pointy end of it all.



## Speaking & teaching

A highlight for me this year was spending a day teaching for the Masters of Transformational Development at Eastern College, covering topics from a biblical approach to economics; colonisation and the loss of a biblical perspective; and economic development, poverty and human flourishing. I really enjoy the opportunity to go deep on subjects like this with a small group of engaged students. Another highlight for the year was being interviewed again on Meredith Lake's *Soul Search* program on ABC Radio National. Opportunities like this are enormously valuable for introducing Manna Gum to a new audience.

- 'Jesus and Money' seminar, Merri Creek Anglican (Feb)
- Masters of Transformational Development (Eastern College) (Apr)

- *Soul Search* Interview, 'Rethinking Prosperity' (May)
- *Reading the Bible in Australia* book launch (May)
- 'Food and Social Justice' lecture, Uniting Church JIM convention (Oct)

## Other writing

I am working on two books which I hope will come to fruition in 2025. The first is publishing my thesis as an academic monograph, and the second is a more popular book in the style of *Coming Home*, but opening up a broader understanding of economic life.

1. *Christian Witness in the Midst of Capitalism: An Australian Conversation with R.H. Tawney, John Howard Yoder and Oliver O'Donovan.*
2. *Turning the Tables: Following Jesus in a world of money, markets, commerce and capitalism.*

## Show me the money

As an experiment in faith, Manna Gum continues to surprise us by continuing to work. After a big financial shortfall in 2023, it was great to break even in 2024. A huge thank you to our supporters and to Gospel Resources Trust for help getting us over the line with the new website. The cost of producing our materials, printed and online, has risen substantially in the last couple of years, increasing the challenge of covering our annual expenses. Please give your consideration to the enclosed appeal.

<b>INCOME</b>	<b>\$</b>
Supporters	42,926
Donations	30,571
Gospel Resources Trust grant (web development)	8,000
Other revenue	1,139
Book sales	1,111
Interest	1
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>83,748</b>
ASSETS (Books held)	780
LIABILITIES	0
ASSOCIATION'S EQUITY	0

<b>EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$</b>
Wages	53,591
Web development	10,793
Superannuation & Workcover	6,594
Printing, stationery & postage	3,746
Computer software & equipment	1,355
Book publishing	1,110
Web services	1,073
Conferences & webinars	714
Travel	698
Hospitality	588
Phone & electricity	336
Bank fees	336
Events	113
Meetings & resources	79
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>81,124</b>
Net Profit	2,624

# VOTE 1 MANNA GUM

2025 is an election year. This is the year when it will be revealed that Manna Gum has infiltrated its operatives into all the major political parties. When the election result is in you will see a host of the elected parliamentarians cast off their guise as inane twits and declare for Organised Manna Gum (OMG). While everyone else is still in shock at this coup-by-democracy, OMG will move rapidly to form government and begin solving everything.

Here is what some of the first actions of an OMG Government will be:

## Ecological crisis

- End fossil fuel subsidies. In 2023–24, Australian governments provided \$14.5 billion in subsidies to coal mines, oil and gas operations, and major fossil fuel users.
- Ban any new fossil fuel projects or upgrades, including those in the pipeline.
- Institute a carbon tax.
- Provide generous tax breaks, grants, and technical assistance to farmers seeking to transition to regenerative agriculture.
- Call together a National Cabinet with the states to rebuild the national recycling and circular economy sector.

## Housing

- Scrap the capital gains tax discount on housing, which makes housing so attractive to investors, who consistently out-bid home buyers.
- Call together a National Cabinet with the states to address housing issues, moving to scrap all stamp duties and move to a uniform, property value tax that incentivises matching house size to occupancy needs and penalises land speculation and land banking.



## Taxation

- Restore top income tax brackets to 2005 levels and reduce levels for the lowest two tax brackets.
- Remove all superannuation tax concessions. Last financial year, superannuation tax concessions (which go almost exclusively to high income earners) cost the government over \$51 billion, almost as much as the age pension costs.
- Institute a progressive inheritance tax for all estates valued at \$10m and over. Inheritance is the primary mechanism of rising inequality.
- Institute a financial activity tax—a tax on the sum of profits and executive remuneration packages—for large financial institutions.
- Increase the Petroleum Resources Rent Tax (PRRT) and close loopholes. Currently the government collects more money from students, nurses, and teachers than from the PRRT.
- Impose and increase royalties on all gas extracted in Australia. Currently more than half of Australia's gas exports pay zero royalties.

*If you are interested to know more about the thinking behind any of these policies, drop us an email: [jonathan@manna gum.org.au](mailto:jonathan@manna gum.org.au) (or, if after the election, contact the Office of the Prime Minister).*

# BATHED IN LADYBUGS

THE WORK AND REST OF CUDGEE CREEK PRODUCE

by Elvira Hewson

Cudgee Creek Produce is our (very) small business/side hustle, developed as part of our work to care for our land in south west Victoria. Cudgee Creek Produce began in 2010 with the idea of creating and selling a few market crops in order to help us invest back into our productive garden. Over that time, we have grown food for our home and family and, through Cudgee Creek Produce, sold garlic, fruit, and flowers through markets, a few local stores, website sales of dahlia tubers, and currently through our seasonal Friday Flowers deliveries. What follows are a few reflections on this business and the way our understanding of God and economy opens up a different way of evaluating investment in this kind of work.

The success of Cudgee Creek Produce is on many levels very questionable. It has earned us an important but marginal income:

we both have main work roles and are involved in the lives of our family and community.

These roles are significant in themselves and we sometimes

question whether we're stretching ourselves too thin. It's been hard to step up and invest required capital and risk for the business to grow quickly but economically. After eight years of growing garlic and establishing a niche market of local buyers, our garlic crop succumbed to rust during an inordinately moist Spring two years ago.

Now we are taking an enforced rest from growing garlic until the rust stops showing in other plants.

However, being involved with this work provides us with so many more benefits than those determined by 'the market', and a fuller understanding of home economics and faith brings these to light. Connecting with people in our local area through offering something that

we've produced, and that is beautiful, has been a source of hope, encouragement, and conviviality. Sometimes we hear stories about people buying flowers for friends, family, or neighbours going through hard times, or as a symbol of beauty for the kitchen of a household busy with work and caring.

The act of working outside helps us slow down and notice so many things: the smell of soil, birdsong, the intricacy of biodiversity, the aliveness of a garden in the full photosynthetic flight of Spring, the coolness of the earth on the morning of a hot day, the sound of black cockatoos passing through or standing sentinel in our banksias. In response to an outbreak of aphids last Autumn, an army of lady bugs descended and particularly liked tucking themselves into the folds of our sunflowers

and dahlia petals. I have vivid memories of being bathed in lady bugs on Thursday evenings while bunching flowers for our Friday delivery run.

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**Cudgee Creek Produce is,  
for us, an act of hope.**

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Year on year, despite the challenges, we are growing in our mastery of gardening. My husband Greg has fine-tuned our compost making. I know more about growing and sequencing vegetables and flowers to produce sellable products week on week during the growing season. We generally grow enough tomatoes to be bottled for cooking right through the winter months, and we store berries, nuts and preserved fruit for eating year round.

I'm convinced that doing small things with lots of love matters. Cudgee Creek Produce is, for us, an act of hope in growing something that might someday support more of our income and maybe even provide some meaningful opportunities for others for employment, rest,





and learning. However, it is also an act of faith as we participate in caring for our garden as an expression of our love for God, and that even if this is as big as our little business gets, that is alright too.

Climate change and the already evident changes in weather and seasons has become an issue by which we've increasingly felt both burdened and galvanised. Being connected to a parcel of land and actively loving and caring for it helps to ground our fearfulness, holds our lament, and continues to help us stay alert to the possibilities of restoration and change. We're thinking about how to regenerate the soil and landscape by growing local trees and shrubs to support biodiversity; practising regenerative agriculture principles; and growing produce to reduce our environmental footprint. We delight in watching wallabies and koalas pass through our wildlife corridors to the creek. Holding the burdens of our hearts and minds in this place means we are looking at a global issue in the context of living things and a particular place.

The former pastor of our small congregation in Warrnambool, Alison Sampson, contributed

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**Sometimes, the rest and aliveness of our place catch me by surprise; a sense of God hovering and sitting nearby.**

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significantly to our theological understanding of rest, connection to the landscape, and responsiveness to God being active in our lives and communities. In one of her recent blog posts online, Alison writes about Abraham and 'the teacher trees' (Gen 12:6): a story about Abraham resting and seeing something of Yahweh in the trees. Sometimes, the rest and aliveness of our place catch me by surprise; a sense of God hovering and sitting nearby while I catch a moment of rest in the shade of a manna gum or apricot tree.

The work of Cudgee Creek Produce makes demands of us, but also enlivens us.

*Elvira lives with her family in Cudgee on Kirrae Whurrong country.*



# REBELS AGAINST THE FUTURE

RESISTING THE 'SEDUCTIVE CATASTROPHE' OF INDUSTRIAL CULTURE

by Jacob Garrett

If the Luddites are thought of at all, they are generally remembered as a rebellious group of English workers who hated machines for rather impenetrable or even mystical reasons. Consequently, our modern (pejorative) term 'Luddite' brands someone as an opponent of any new technology simply because it is new. On this view, Luddites—then and now—are stubbornly and hopelessly backward, dragging their heels for no good reason.

The thirty-year-old classic, *Rebels Against the Future* by Kirkpatrick Sale, sets out to challenge this perception and vindicate the Luddites by telling their story through their own eyes. More than that, Sale argues the Luddite experience contains valuable lessons for us as we come to terms with a new industrial age defined by revolutions in computing, AI, robotics, biotech, etc. Will we learn the lessons of the first industrial revolution or relive its tragedies a second time?

Above all, Sale believes the Luddites stand as a warning: 'whatever its presumed benefits, of speed or ease or power or wealth, industrial technology comes at a price, and in the contemporary world that price is ever rising and ever threatening.'

The book begins with some initial scene setting, including a chapter naming and explaining what the author sees as the defining features of the First Industrial Revolution. He doesn't mince words: it was a multi-generational disaster for traditional lifeways due to its assault on the culture and economic independence of local communities, all driven by a fundamentally new culture which sought to entirely subordinate

nature and overturn her ancient limits in the service of profit and (capital P) Progress.

Since we are the inheritors of this new industrial culture, Sale knows we are inclined to be charitable in its defence: 'you can't make an omelette without breaking a few eggs', and all that. Perhaps textile workers in the midlands of Britain in the early-mid 1800s were regrettably caught up in the gears of history, but you can't (mustn't?) halt Progress.

Yet it is hard to maintain this kind of dismissive apologetic after reading Sale's narrative. And that's intentional. He brings the reader face-

to-face with the profound injustice and destitution experienced by workers and their families due to the rapid and unilateral imposition of novel technologies by a few wealthy factory owners, forcing all manufacturers to yield in turn to new market

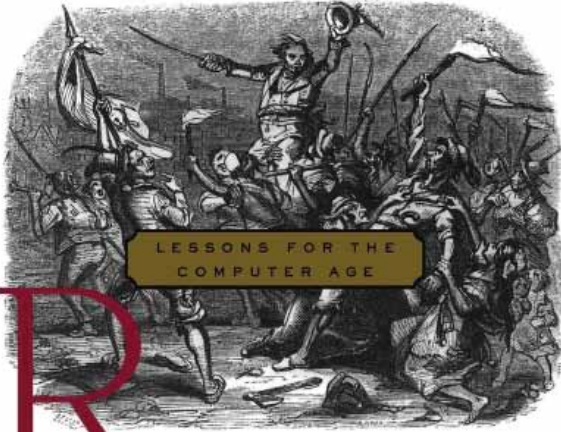
realities. He relates how this left the average cotton or wool worker with only two options: submit to drudge-work at pittance wages, or attempt 'collective bargaining by riot'. The events of the resulting violent Luddite protests over fifteen months between 1811 and 1813 are passionately and evocatively told, and it is easy to get swept up in the drama of secret night raids on factories, government spies, letters of defiance signed in blood, and brutal military crackdown. In this telling, the Luddite resistance becomes far less about machinery per se than the moral and social outrage felt by common people at what the new machines represented: 'a new economic order being thrust upon the workers and their communities unbidden.'

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**For those with ears to hear, this book remains a stirring call to seriously consider whether 'technology is in the saddle and rides humankind'.**

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THE LUDDITES AND THEIR WAR  
ON THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION



**R**EBELS  
AGAINST  
THE FUTURE  
KIRKPATRICK SALE  
WITH A NEW PREFACE BY THE AUTHOR

And this is the heart of the matter, then as now. As a Luddite letter of March 1812 has it, their 'Army of Redressers' sought neither the elimination of all machinery nor a halt to innovation, but rather 'to put down all Machinery hurtful to Commonality'. These workers were adamant that, despite much high-flown economic theorising to the contrary by their betters, these particular machines were 'hurtful' as they did not serve the interests of the majority. In 19<sup>th</sup> century terms, the Luddites were forcing 'the machinery question.' Who gets to decide how new technology is used? What are the criteria? How should we judge the outcomes and effects? Who bears the costs?

These are questions we continue to face today as we contemplate everything from the use climate engineering technologies to rapid developments in AI which herald new possibilities for the automation of human labour. The enduring relevance of these same questions three decades later means *Rebels Against the Future* has aged remarkably well.

That said, while the history portion makes a compelling case for the 'cataclysmic' view of the Industrial Revolution—in many ways a tragedy as much for the life and community of the average worker as for the English countryside—Sale's critical analysis nevertheless comes across a little too self-satisfied at times. He is certainly unlikely to convince anyone not already sympathetic to his outlook. However, for those with ears to hear, this book remains a stirring call to seriously consider whether 'technology is in the saddle and rides humankind'.

And this leads to the question of technological determinism: the Luddites, after all, lost. They rebelled against the future and the future swallowed them. Is it even *conceivable* that they might have won? What would 'winning' have meant? As Sale notes, industrialism has succeeded more-or-less everywhere, no matter the culture or political arrangement. Moreover, he argues that in every case it has shown itself 'disregardful of the collective human fate and of the earth from which it extracts all its wealth'. Is this merely because of consistently selfish or foolish application of industrial technology, or does it come with its own built-in Faustian character? The author has no doubt it's the latter.

So, if industrial technology is irredeemable, then ongoing resistance is the answer. The final chapter accordingly offers eight 'lessons from the Luddites' on what this might mean. (You can hear in detail what Jonathan and I make of these lessons on ep. 29 of the MannaCast). In a sentence, I was left wanting more here. I am probably more willing than most to entertain the idea that 'industrialism' and 'industrial culture' as described are worth resisting in many respects, but a look at both the past and the present suggests this is devilishly difficult. Moreover, while Sale dismisses monotheistic religions as part of the problem, I'm particularly curious to know what a Christian theological critique and practice of resistance might look like.

All in all, *Rebels* is a provocative and educational read. It's at its best when it is dismantling Luddite caricatures and questioning our deep assumptions about technology. I only wish this book was as good at answering its questions as it is at asking them.

# READING & LISTENING

Here are some of the things stimulating thinking below the hood of Manna Gum, going into 2025.

## Jon's top picks

- 'The Road to the Great War', six-part podcast series, *The Rest is History*, eps.469-474.  
— this deep dive might change your perception of the hinge moment of the 20th century.
- 'Golidlocks Universe - The Surprising Science Pointing to God', podcast, *The Surprising Rebirth of Belief*, ep.19.  
— atheism, faith and astrophysics!
- *The Victorian Bush: Its 'orginal and natural' condition*, book by Ron Hateley.
- *As Gods Among Men: A History of the Rich in the West*, book by Guido Alfani.  
— for the nerdy. A unique lens on economic history.
- 'Decolonising Fire Science', YouTube video, Lecture by Dr. Philip Zylstra to the Royal Society of Victoria.  
— I learnt a lot from this video. We still have a long way to go in stewarding the Australian landscape.

## Jacob's goodies

### From YouTube:

- Climate Town - deadpan comedy meets environmental commentary.
- Future Proof - deep dives on the realities of consumerism in an accessible style.
- Not Just Bikes - urban planning from a different perspective (feat. a lotta bikes).
- Slowjourning - six-part film reimagining adventure travel in an age of eco-crisis. By yours truly!

### Writers/thinkers:

- Paul Kingsnorth & Martin Shaw - what happens when an eco-pessimist writer and a mythologist embrace Christianity? Find out at:  
*The Abbey of Misrule* (on substack)  
*The House of Beasts and Vines* (on substack)
- Malcolm Guite - poet, priest, and academic labouring at the intersection of faith and art. He has a charming YouTube channel too!

## SUPPORT OUR WORK

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 our website**  
(Go to the 'Support Us' tab)

 **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.*)

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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!*