Manna Matters

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News From Long Gully

Our family is entering a new phase of life as Kim and I recently found ourselves empty-nesting for a couple of months: our younger daughter, Mhairi, has been travelling in North Queensland and Indonesia while our older daughter, Amy, has been working on a cattle property in the arid rangelands of Western Australia.

Amy is studying wildlife and conservation biology and has been volunteering for the Australian Dingo Foundation. She has become passionate on the issue of dingo conservation, which has led her to work on a regenerative cattle station (Wooleen Station - featured on an *Australian Story* on the ABC) that has become known for its re-wilding of dingoes as a key part of its restoring vegetation. The dingoes play a key ecological role by controlling the grazing pressure of herbivores (see my article on eating kangaroo, p.3).

We expect all members of the household to have returned later in the year, but it is a taste of things to come. It is prompting Kim and me to begin to think about what the new season means for how we structure our time and energy.

Jacob and his wife Andi are back from Mongolia and have moved into the Grace Tree Community in Coburg, Melbourne. As it happens, Simon and Julie Moyle from Grace Tree recently came and shared with the Seeds Community here in Long Gully for our retreat day, and it got us thinking: what has happened to the idea of intentional mission communities/churches that seek to give discipline and structure to a whole-of-life Christian ethic? Twenty-five years ago, there were quite a number of such communities just in Victoria, and a network that meshed them all together. Now there are few left. How are the next generation out there in the church world thinking about discipleship, mission, and community these days? If you have thoughts on these matters, I would be keen to hear from you.

Following this thought, in May I ran a four-part webinar series on re-visioning the church in Australia. These were recorded and can be accessed through the 'Video and audio' section of the Manna Gum website (under the 'Resources' menu). The webinars discussed some of the challenges facing churches in post-Christian Australia and some of the deep questions about structure and form that this is prompting, as well as how these relate to our understanding of the gospel. Underpinning all of these things are questions of economic structure.

The core idea of the webinar series is this: before churches can answer any of these questions well, they need to reclaim an understanding of the church as a new social reality in which the relations between people are placed on a fundamentally different basis from those we found in mainstream society. As a new social reality, it must also be an alternative economic community: one that thinks about money, work, and property in wholly new ways.

Manna Gum has no firm answers to any of these issues, but we have many questions to ask and a few ideas to share. This webinar series was an opening shot in what will be an ongoing exploration over the coming years.

Check out the promo on the back page for our *A Different Way* week in November. It is starting to fill up, so if you want to come, don't leave off registering too long...

Jonathan Cornford

All written and artisitic contributions to *Manna Matters* are graciously provided for free.

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A western grey kangaroo photographed in Cheynes, WA. Photo: Kenton Reeder @kreeder_photography

Why You Should Eat Kangaroo

Jonathan Cornford

It is a bitterly cold June night. I am sheltering, hunched over a beer, in a pub in Castlemaine, the wind and rain lashing the windows. With me are two companions, also sheltering, but from a different kind of storm. We talk in low tones, cautiously, feeling our way forward, wary of a hostile environment.

One of my companions is a bush revegetation manager and the other is a kangaroo shooter. We are discussing the roo meat industry in the heartland of opposition to it. Mount Alexander Shire (centred on Castlemaine) had recently voted to lobby the State Government to ban commercial kangaroo harvesting. Proponents of the ban warned of '65 000 bullets raining down' – a 'war zone', bringing carnage to a native species.

We sip our beers and shake our heads at the absurdity of the situation. Across the continent, kangaroos represent a top-tier ecological problem stopping the regeneration of bushland, soils, hydrology, and habitat for many of our critically endangered small mammals, not to mention undermining the sustainability and efficiency of our food system. This is widely known, though little talked about. There is a way of addressing this massive ecological problem that is a win-win-win-win+ situation—for native habitat, for animal welfare, for sustainable food systems, and for human health—with very little downside, and yet it is being strenuously opposed… by the green side of politics. What is the solution?

We should be eating kangaroo.

In this article I will argue that you should be eating kangaroo meat, even if you are vegan. Do not adjust your screen. In fact, the only group I will exempt from this claim are those with a theological-cosmological objection to eating the life-force of another sentient being – i.e. strict Buddhists (I don't believe Christianity supports such a position). Even then, I would still urge you to at least reconsider in this specific case.

Win 1: Ecological restoration

Although kangaroos are a native species, they now pose a massive ecological problem. While many natives have fared terribly since colonisation—Australia has the highest mammal extinction rate on the planet—kangaroos are one of the winner species of colonisation, along with noisy miners and bell miners. Kangaroos have high fertility and reproductive success, and they increase rates of reproduction in response to good seasons. Cleared landscapes, improved pastures, and regular watering points have essentially created a perpetual good season. As a wide-ranging herbivore, kangaroos have evolved with high predation rates by top end predators such as dingoes and harvesting by First Nations people. Colonisation has removed both of those controls on kangaroo numbers.

In most parts of Australia today, kangaroo numbers are so high that they exert a massive grazing pressure that the fragile Australian landscape cannot bear. The scale of the problem is hard for urban people to imagine, so let me give you a concrete example. On one fragile rangeland ecology in WA (Wooleen Station), it has been estimated that the natural carrying capacity of that area would be approximately 20 000 kangaroos. With the introduction of permanent watering points (for cattle), kangaroo numbers boomed and were calculated in 1990 to be around 4 million, *twenty times* what the land can bear.

This kind of grazing pressure provides one of the primary obstacles to desperately-needed ecological restoration. In the months preceding writing this article I asked a number of conservation land managers what level of challenge kangaroos presented to their work: all placed them near the top, along with the worst invasive species in their area. One told me of kangaroos destroying 80% of a biodiversity planting in Victoria; another told me of kangaroos denuding a desert habitat in SA that is home to important species such as the desert mouse and fat-tailed false antechinus.

Tragically, kangaroos now represent a contributing pressure to our appalling native mammal extinction crisis. Localised studies by ecologists everywhere confirm this, but somehow it has not reached our national consciousness, and instead, talk of controlling kangaroos provokes the kind of shrill opposition mentioned above. Why? Simple: misguided sentiment. Kangaroos are known worldwide, and are rightly loved and admired. But hardly any Australians have heard of a fat-tailed false antechinus.

Whether or not we eat kangaroo, most regions of Australia desperately need kangaroo numbers to be culled way beyond what is currently happening. The ‘65 000 bullets raining down’ feared by the Castlemaine animal rights activist refers to a Victorian Government culling target for the Central region. An ecologist explained to me that this represents one kangaroo culled per 28.7 hectares – not even a fraction of what is needed. And if we need to cull them anyway, we should be eating them, otherwise we are wasting a massive food source.

Ultimately, however, no human culling can ever be enough. What is also desperately needed is to *stop culling* Australia’s apex predator—the dingo—and let them do their thing. But that is a subject for another article.

Win 2: Climate change

By eating a lot more kangaroo we support efforts at ecological and biodiversity restoration, which also helps restore landscape hydrology. As well as benefitting healthy ecosystems, this massively increases the landscape's ability to store carbon, whether in trees or grasslands. As well as banning any new fossil fuel projects, increasing carbon stored in our landscapes is *the big shift* Australia needs to make in order to support both climate change mitigation (reducing atmospheric carbon) and adaptation (coping with the climate change that will happen).

Eating kangaroo contributes no extra carbon to the atmosphere (beyond the transport needed for any food) and kangaroo production and consumption tends to be more localised than many other foods on our supermarket shelves. Most importantly, eating kangaroo provides a perfect carbon-positive substitute for that notoriously carbon-negative meat: beef. (See cooking tips below.) (To be clear, I do think that beef can make a legitimate and carbon-positive contribution to our food system, but this requires a transition to regenerative methods that are still the exception to the rule.)

Win 3: Food system sustainability

Following on from the last thought, by culling and eating much more kangaroo, we provide a triple-whammy benefit to the sustainability of our food system.

Not only is kangaroo grazing pressure a problem for ecological restoration, it is a massive problem for farmers and graziers. Indeed, on many sheep and cattle properties in Australia, kangaroos are grazing more than half the feed. This is a primary reason many graziers give for never resting their paddocks: if they do, whatever grows will just be eaten by kangaroos. This leads to the cycle of denuded paddocks, loss of soil hydrology, and erosion that has been so disastrous in Australia.

Similarly, kangaroos can have a big impact on cropping, both through grazing and trample damage. This reduces the amount of food produced by each hectare of land. By reducing the damage of kangaroos, we both increase the productivity of existing farmland, *and* we assist the uptake of regenerative farming methods, which is what is badly needed for the sustainability of our food system.

Tragically, kangaroos now represent a contributing pressure to our appalling native mammal extinction crisis.

Thirdly, by culling and eating much more kangaroo we can make a substantial increase in the amount of protein supplied to the human food system by the Australian landscape—*with no extra ecological cost*—and hopefully reduce the demand on other forms of protein, which do come at an ecological cost. If you are vegetarian or vegan and begin incorporating kangaroo protein into your diet, then you reduce the number of acres required to support your individual consumption and all the associated ecological costs that come with cropping.

'65,000 bullets raining down – that's a war zone'

Jade Jungwirth

Mount Alexander Shire councillors have voted to advocate to the state government for the banning of commercial kangaroo harvesting in the shire.

Cr Stephen Gardner brought the motion forward stating that kangaroos held a special place in the heart of the Maldon community.

"Think about that iconic scenery with kangaroos going down the main street. They are doing that in Maldon," Cr Gardner said.

"We even had a winter festival recently that was about celebrating the kangaroos.

"The number earmarked for this area is 65,000 kangaroos. That's a lot of kangaroos, that's a lot of bullets.

"65,000 bullets raining down, that's a war zone. Do we want that in our area?

"It's not for me to determine the best way to resolve this, that's the government's job, but there must be another way."

During public time, Brian, a farmer from Ravenswood South, spoke in support of the commercial harvesting of kangaroos.

"I'm quite concerned as a farmer that (banning kangaroo harvesting) might deliver unintended consequences," he said.

"Kangaroos in large numbers cause a number of issues for council, for farmers, and for the community at large.

"They are involved in a number of traffic accidents causing fatalities, injuries and damage to property.

"I live on Fogartys Gap Road and there has been one death and innumerable car accidents in relation to kangaroos.

"They cause damage to pastures, to crops and to fences, compete for grazing and when numbers are out of control, and have a negative impact on native vegetation and habitat.

"While natives themselves, when the populations become too large, they often have an untoward effect."

Brian described the nature of professional kangaroo harvesting as highly regulated and said he found professional shooters to be very sensitive to human safety and animal welfare.

"As a practising farmer, I can tell you if kangaroo numbers grow any further it will severely impact the ability of farmers' ability to manage their property and to continue to run profitable businesses," he said.

Councillors Maltby, Cordy and McClure voted against the motion with Cr Tony Cordy stating that there were 900,000 eastern grey kangaroos in the central region and that they were not an endangered species.

Continued page 4.

Above: Castlemaine news article reporting the Mount Alexander Shire Council's move to ban commercial kangaroo harvesting.

Left: Kangaroo numbers on the Maquarie Marshes (Image credit: The Land*).*

Win 4: Animal welfare

The primary objection to culling and eating kangaroo comes from animal rights activists. Animal welfare remains a huge problem in our modern industrialised food system, from the close penning of animals and inappropriate feed to the transport of live animals to the slaughter process at abattoirs. It is animal rights campaigners who have provided the vital service of bringing these issues before the public.

Unfortunately, on the subject of kangaroos they have gone badly astray. This is largely due to a failure to think about animals in the context of natural systems, and perhaps also an element of culture wars blinkering. (And probably also because they're cute.)

Picture this: a mob of roos is eating native grasses from a paddock/grassland in the Campaspe downs. To one side, the hilly paddock curves down to the valley of the Campaspe River; on the other side, a golden dawn emerges over a hilltop wooded with grey box and ironbark. A large male roo casually straightens from grazing, takes in the beauty of the vista (does he admire it?), absently scratches his belly, then...

Then nothing. Most of the mob hardly notice one of their number flop to the ground, and make nothing of a muffled pop sound in the distance.

This is kangaroo harvesting. For an animal that has evolved to be preyed upon—one that ecologically *requires* predation—it is hard to imagine a better way to go. No terrifying chase by a pack of dingoes, followed by a horrific mauling, no painful spear that takes minutes (and perhaps more spears) to have its effect. None of the terror experienced by chickens, sheep, pigs, and cattle being transported to an abattoir where they can *smell the blood* of their companions.

I think one of the prejudices against kangaroo culling is that it involves guns, which means 'shooters'. Since the Howard Government gun buy-back after the Port Arthur massacre, Australians have rightly been proud of our gun control. Unfortunately, however, a culture wars casualty of this effort has been the easy caricaturing of all gun users as untrustworthy rednecks. This fails to understand the important role that qualified shooters play in regional Australia.

Dingoes are the apex predator for roos and come in a wide variety of appearances. Most people would call this one a 'wild dog' but recent research has shown that nearly all 'wild dogs' are actually pure dingoes.

Kangaroo culling/harvesting is necessary for the very sake of kangaroo welfare.

In Victoria, kangaroo culling and harvesting is tightly controlled through the Game Management Authority. Accredited harvesters must demonstrate repeated proficiency of a headshot at 100m, first on a target range, and then supervised in the field. (They must also pass food safety requirements.) These are not simply 'shooters'; they are marksmen. To make a good income they must be as clean, precise, and efficient as possible. Their own interests align completely with animal welfare concerns.

Moreover, kangaroo culling/harvesting is necessary for the very sake of kangaroo welfare. The tragedy of exploding kangaroo numbers is that once conditions change from wet years to dry (as they are now), with no predators at hand, kangaroos begin to starve *en masse*. This is a terrible sight. The conservation manager from the SA property mentioned above told me that

after this last dry year, they have had to shut the property to the public because of the terrible scenes of kangaroo starvation.

I see this when I go walking in the bushland near our house, as well as a terrible condition called 'phalaris staggers'. This results when the kangaroos are forced by hunger to eat a certain invasive grass species (Phalaris) that contains toxic alkaloids, bringing on a kind of Parkinson's Disease for roos. They get muscle tremors, stagger erratically, struggle to swallow, and eventually die a very slow unpleasant death. Kangaroos need us to control their numbers for their own sake.

Win 5: Bush food #1!

Since colonisation, Australians have failed spectacularly to adapt our diets and our food systems to the ecological conditions of this continent. With the marginal exception of macadamia nuts, there is no native food that makes a significant contribution to our food system. There are ongoing efforts to try and commercialise grain harvesting from kangaroo grass and some wattle seeds, but these are still a long way off.

Meanwhile, we have in front of us one of the most important bush foods of the First Peoples of this continent, one that is easily adaptable to modern diets and available in quantities to make a significant contribution to our food system, all with ecological benefit! It is a low-hanging fruit, if ever there was one, and yet it is being held back by some mis-placed culture war politics. How much better if a healthy market for kangaroo meat could be turned to remunerate the culturally significant activity of kangaroo hunting for many traditional owners? Wake up Australia.

Win 6: Human health

Here I will be lazy and simply quote from the Sustainable Table website:

> Kangaroo is a lean meat with less than 2% fat, making it a healthier red meat option. It is also high in protein, essential B vitamins, minerals such as zinc, iron and omega 3 fats and omega 6 fatty acids. Compared to beef, kangaroo contains double the amount of iron and triple that of chicken and pork. Eating wild meats such as kangaroo is also better for your health as you can be sure there are no added growth hormones, antibiotics or chemicals.

And it is cheaper than beef!

You should be eating kangaroo.

If you eat meat, you should be eating kangaroo. In many cases, you can simply swap it in for beef. We don't really eat steak in our house, but any dish that involves beef mince or beef stir fry we do with kangaroo. Guests never know the difference unless we tell them. This is by far the most sustainable form of meat you will ever find.

If you are vegetarian or vegan, you should still eat kangaroo. Since they must be culled anyway, not eating does not prevent an animal from dying. Eating, on the other hand, prevents a massive waste of food and provides a cascade of other ecological and food system benefits, as argued above. Perhaps it also helps us take small step in reducing the disconnection of the urban consumer from natural landscape upon which we depend. Rarely are there such win-wins in a food system.

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Tips for eating kangaroo

Substitute kangaroo mince for anything that uses beef mince (eg. bolognaise, lasagna, shepherds pie). No tips needed!

Stir fry and steak: slice thin and cook fast and hot. Don't overcook. Use the same marinades as with beef.

Curries and roast: cook low and slow. In a curry, best to add some fat early to prevent it drying out (vege oil, cream, or yoghurt) as roo meat is so lean. (I haven't yet done a kangaroo roast, but I have been assured it can be good.)

The Social Harvest

Timely Lessons from 1960s Rural Tasmania

by Wendy Soares

In 2018 I read that a plastic shopping bag had been sighted by an underwater research vessel in the Mariana Trench. I cried. I was particularly grieved to realise that we, as God's people, have been complicit in the erosion of the health of our earthly home. Caring for the earth, learning to live within its God-given rhythms, and making it even more productive was our original job description. Facing the alarming reality that we have corporately trashed our planet to its deepest recesses, I found myself teetering towards despair. I needed to find a way forward.

I considered the environmental impact of my own lifestyle and (default) choices and focused on simpler, more sustainable practices. I took heed of Philippians 4 and sought out what was good, noble, and praiseworthy. I caught an episode of *Landline* on regenerative 'carbon' farming and felt a glimmer of hope. I tuned into *Gardening Australia*, which now includes welcome doses of wisdom from permaculture systems thinking. I was nourished by stories of everyday people caring for their human and non-human communities, inspiring and empowering a new generation to connect, go outside, get dirt under their nails, and share the awe and excitement of being part of the living world.

It also felt familiar.

I found comfort in recognising the grounding impact of being raised 'on the land' in north-west Tasmania in the 60s.

Right: 'The Big Pine Tree', possibly planted in the 1850s, in an orchard which used to belong to the author's grandparents.

Left: Squibbs apple packing shed in Spreyton, 1964. Apples were a key export from the area through much of the 20th century. Photo: Tasmania Archive Heritage Office.

I grew up with the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of orchardists, farmers, and tradespeople in a small rural district. Our lives overlapped through work, play, church, school, special occasions, and daily interactions. Tasmania had 'boomed' on apples and hydro-powered industry. Dad's father brought his family out from Northern Ireland in 1951 to work on dam construction. Mum's family, descended from convicts and settlers, were orchardists. They also ran a transport business taking apples to port. I remember the orchard, the bush, my grandparents, cousins, uncles, and aunts living within half a kilometre and seeing recognisable faces wherever I went. Even on a trip to 'town' (Devonport) we would always bump into someone we knew. We went there to buy new shoes or to see 'the pictures'. Soft serve Dairy Queen ice-cream in a cone from the milk bar near the post office was a much-loved treat (and I'm sure it was better than Macca's!).

The adults of my childhood world were 'practical' people. They were skilled. They could maintain and repair trucks, tractors, fences, ditches, taps, roofs, clothing, and toys.

As a child, I experienced the particular security of being known not so much for who I was but for whose I was. Family reputation mattered. People knew my family's story and I had my place within the broader history of that place. What I wasn't told was that 'our' history had swept away the heritage of my peers. Arrogance and ignorance had silenced the violent stories of European settlement. Having been taught 'Tasmanian Aboriginals are extinct' I could not see what could not be. The realisation that many of my 'olive-skinned' schoolmates were (obviously!) descendants of First Nations people came shamefully late. They were included as part of 'us' but we had pushed them from their place and denied them their rightful identity. Thankfully, if belatedly, change has come: Hannah on *Gardening Australia* now respectfully reports from 'nipaluna/Hobart'.

The adults of my childhood world were 'practical' people. They were skilled. They could maintain and repair trucks, tractors, fences, ditches, taps,

roofs, clothing, and toys. My mother sewed, knitted, and mended and passed these skills on to me. She could spin a fleece, smock and embroider a baby's dress, and make food 'go further'. My Dad was a mechanic and a decent 'bush' carpenter. Someone on our road would have the gear and the know-how to make, build, restore, or repurpose whatever was required for everyday life and work. It seemed that, together, the inhabitants of Spreyton could tackle almost anything, with a minimum of fuss. I suppose they had to. But I had the sense that people enjoyed working side-by-side. Dad says 'smoko', with a thermos of tea and a sandwich from home, was the best part of the working day. As well as providing rest, it was a chance to catch up, review progress on the job at hand, and share a laugh. I recall the hum of conversation between pickers in the orchard, and snatches of songs. (I know some seriously old 'popular' tunes.) Whistling was still a widely-practised art and I became quite proficient, although my mother (my tutor) suggested I 'keep it for the paddock', as it was considered 'unladylike'!

Real flourishing is mutual and relational.

Resilience or convenience?

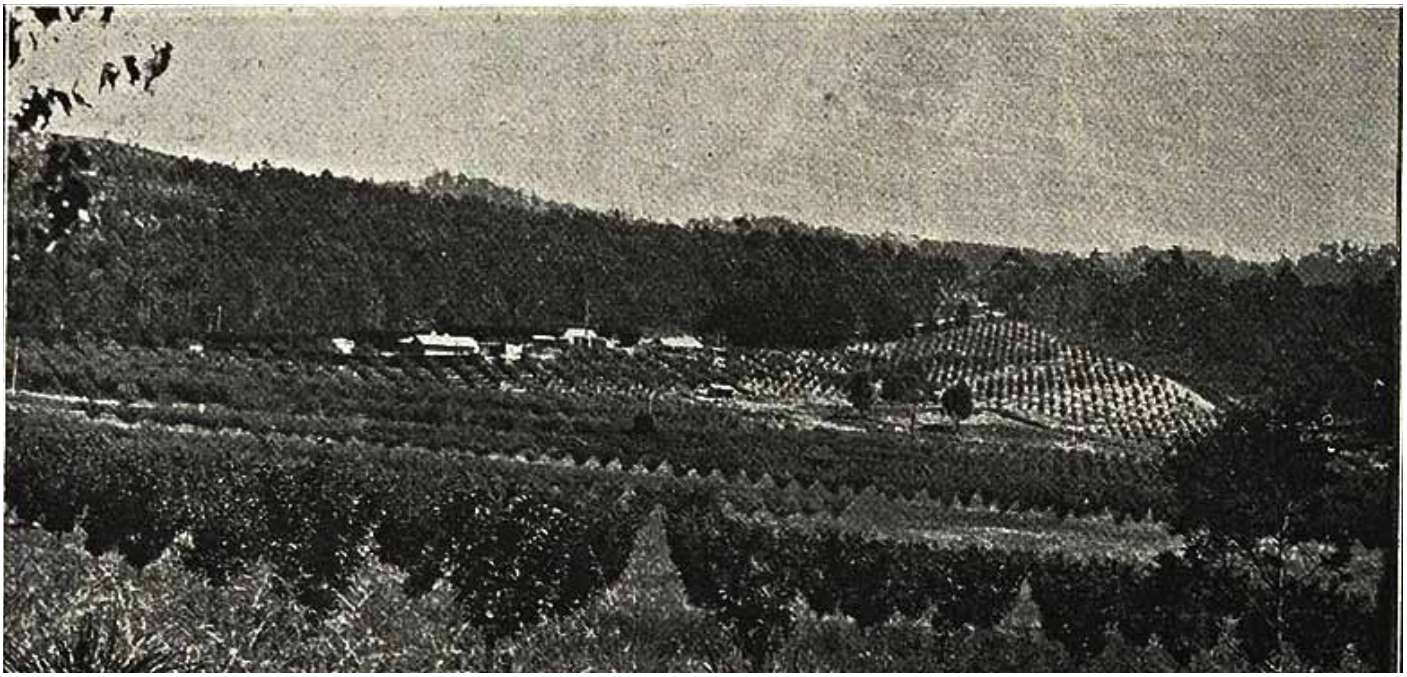
Our relatively self-sufficient community could have been described as 'resilient', but it was not a term I heard used. It was just the way they were. The times had required it. Perhaps it grew from their values and expectations of life and, as the podcast term 'Reskillience' suggests, our 'emotional' resilience may depend on knowing we have the necessary skills to meet life's challenges. Resilience is embodied and is strengthened through cooperation.

We all seemed to have 'enough', and people saved for special purchases. They took pride in 'providing for their own' although help was available when needed. Neighbourly habits of non-monetary reciprocity were commonplace and contributed to community resilience, trust, and equity. When our generous Friesian cow was in peak production, her twice-daily yield was more than we could manage. Mum would ask a neighbour (who had four growing children) to share the milking. This arrangement worked seamlessly, requiring only my mother's awareness and her neighbour's reliability and skills. Common-sense cooperation matched abundance with capacity while building social capital. There is a striking quote in a must-hear podcast by Robin Wall Kimmerer ('The Service Berry') attributed to an Indigenous Amazonian who shares a 'kill' with his community. Asked (by a Westerner) why he doesn't dry the meat to keep for his family, he replies, 'I store meat in the belly of my brother'. Real flourishing is mutual and relational.

My parents were 'late adopters' of unfamiliar technology, so I had the privilege of lingering a little longer with the 'tried-and-true' practices and values of an earlier generation who abhorred waste and creatively managed both abundance and lack. No wonder permaculture feels like coming home! More widespread caution concerning the impacts of 'progress' may have avoided some of the worst fall-out of 'Man vs Nature'. Unregulated, extractive industries stained and scarred pristine landscapes and residual DDT from pre-60s orchard spray lingered. I suppose there may have been worse things than flooding native forests to create 'clean' electricity, but human 'dominion' tends to be thoughtless and heavy-handed. However, my generation did benefit from much of the 'new'. Immunised and well-fed (but not overweight) and with growing disposable incomes, we became willing recruits for marketers aiming to train insatiable, wasteful, aspirational consumers who would embrace everything disposable. Everyone loved Tupperware, which was designed to last a lifetime (and beyond!) but single-use plastics saved time at the church kitchen sink.

I was told, 'You can't expect everything in life to be served up on a plate!', but the messaging has been reversed. Despite our generation having easy access to quality produce and time-saving appliances, we're persuaded we have 'better things to do' than prepare meals. We phone-order home delivery of pre-cooked, personalised, highly processed, plastic-packaged food and the indestructible remains now swirl in the deep.

Of course there is a price. Esau traded his inheritance for a quick meal. We seem to be squandering our basic human competency and agency for momentary convenience. After generations of prizing our independence, we're voluntarily de-skilling.



Orchards in the Mersey Valley at Spreyton c. 1930s.

Re-creating communities of enough

Many are pushing back against the mantras of advertising which have brought us to this moment of global crises. If we need 'more time for what's important', we need to be clear about what is important. It delights me to see my tech-savvy adult children and young folk at our church mining the best of the online world for tips on making and mending. They buy second-hand and tap into their local community via Facebook, trading goods and skills. They interlink their human networks, building layers of connection. With no clear solution to what is global, they are starting with local.

Purposeful action has always been a salve for angst in the face of the seemingly insoluble.

Purposeful action has always been a salve for angst in the face of the seemingly insoluble. I manage mine in my home and garden, trying to model responsible earth citizenship to my grandchildren. I repair their clothes, bake sourdough, and direct little eyes to the wonder of God's 'very good' creation which sustains us all. I am drawing on the abundant harvest of experiences from my childhood in the hope of enriching theirs and better equipping them for an uncertain future. I'm not on Facebook, but when my neighbour two doors up brought me honey (because his bees visit my salvias) I gave him a stack of pots I'd grabbed from a nearby skip, so he could divide his turmeric. It's been so good to finally interact a little more after a couple of decades of waving at one another from the car. In town, people come and go, life is lived in transit and it can seem as if reaching out isn't worth the energy. Sometimes we wonder if it's better to keep our distance. People are entitled to their space and relationships always require care. But humans are made to connect. Despite our individualism, I suspect we all know that what's important is experienced together. If we can re-calibrate our idea of 'enough', put aside competition for the greater goal of mutual flourishing, and say 'Hi' to those around us, we will surely find ways to share, build goodwill, and create something like community.

Wendy and Des live on a quarter acre in Brisbane's leafy inner south, next to Des' Mum and ten minutes from their children and grandchildren, shops, and church. Wendy regularly visits her Dad on his property in Tasmania where he's still fixing things with re-purposed bits of 'four b' two'.

Economic Unorthodoxy

Applying Kingdom Values in a Christian Organisation

by Steve Bradbury

> **The fact that we are facing the possibility of 'industrial action' by our senior staff because we are planning to increase their salaries places me as an economist in a state of acute confusion!**

The economist who wrote these words was a Sydney member of the Tearfund Australia board, and the senior staff were the members of Tearfund's leadership team at the time. (For those who haven't heard of it, Tearfund is a Christian charity which partners with local churches to tackle global poverty and injustice through sustainable development and disaster relief.)

The economist's comment was, of course, something of an exaggeration, and said with a smile. It's true that the leadership team was of one mind in resisting the board's intention to increase the salaries of senior staff. It's also true that we communicated our convictions to the board with firmness, some might say passion. But industrial action!? Fortunately, I can't recall any occasion during my 25 years as national director at Tearfund (1984-2009) when even vigorous debate within the board was not conducted with respect and affection. The same can be said of the interactions between board and senior staff. In this we were truly blessed!

With respect to this particular discussion, the leadership team knew that the board's intentions regarding staff remuneration levels were noble and good, and we appreciated their pastoral care. Nevertheless, we opposed them. Shaping our response were two core convictions: the belief that Tearfund's salary structure should be kept as flat as possible, and that Tearfund's organisational commitment to a low-cost administration regime required staff salaries to remain modest but adequate. Our discussion with the board soon demonstrated that we were all of one mind. If my memory serves me correctly, one immediate consequence was a modest raising of Tearfund salaries, with the largest increases going to the lowest paid staff.

A commitment to low-cost administration was made explicit in Tearfund's foundational document, and the reason for it was sound and simple: the desire to maximise the funds available for the programmes of our partners in economically poor countries. Sitting alongside this commitment was another of Tearfund's core objectives: 'to seek to motivate Christian consciences by informing the minds and directing the will as well as and not solely by an appeal for an emotional response.' This was later articulated more clearly in Tearfund's mission statement as a commitment to 'inform, challenge and empower Australian Christians to make biblically-shaped responses to poverty and injustice.' To do this with any kind of integrity it was essential that Tearfund practised what it preached, and this had implications for its remuneration policies and salary structure.

Christ and the Rich Young Ruler *(1889), by Heinrich Hoffman. How might Jesus' teaching on wealth translate to organisations?*

Kingdom economics

I think it would be true to say that most, if not all of us, on the Tearfund board and leadership team at that time had been greatly influenced by a new wave of Christian thinking that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. Led by people such as Donald B. Kraybill, René Padilla, John Stott, Vinay Samuel, and Ron Sider, it challenged affluent Christians to examine their relationship with wealth in the light of global poverty and the needs of the economically poor.

The leadership team knew that the board's intentions regarding staff remuneration levels were noble and good, and we appreciated their pastoral care. Nevertheless, we opposed them.

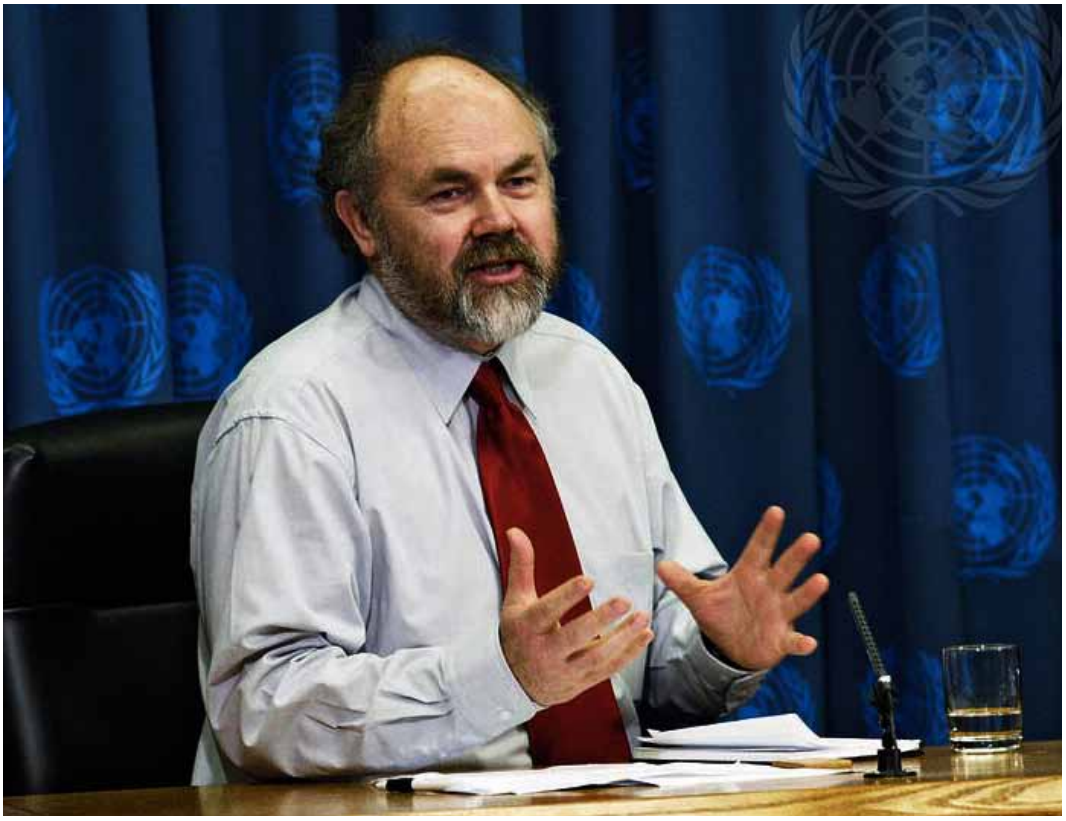
Ronald J. Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (1977) was a prophetically provocative challenge to resist the lures of secular consumerism and acquisition and embrace the biblical call to radical generosity and justice. In his concluding words he wrote:

> All we need to do is truly obey the One we rightly worship. But to obey will mean to follow. And he lives among the poor and oppressed, seeking justice for those in agony. In our time following in his steps will mean simple personal lifestyles. It will mean transformed churches with a corporate lifestyle consistent with worship of the God of the poor. It will mean costly commitment to structural change in secular society.

The impact and influence of Sider's book was profound. Among some it created a good deal of controversy and even anger, while for many others—myself included—it was an exciting call to action.

Kraybill's T*he Upside-down Kingdom* (1978), aimed primarily at Christians living in high income countries, carefully contrasted the ways and practices of the dominant culture around us with the values of the Kingdom of God, and urged Christians to live in alignment with the former. In a chapter devoted to the upside-down economics of the Kingdom he wrote:

> Most of us today find ourselves in the 'middle' of on-going institutions that are concerned



Left: Steve in 2004 presenting at a press conference on the Micah Challenge.

Right: the autumn 1986 cover of Tearfund' Australia's magazine, Target*. The messaging may be dated but the message remains as relevant as ever.*

with continuity and self-preservation. Stable and predictable financial arrangements are necessary for organisations to continue. Protecting financial self-interest is basic to institutional survival. How then do we relate the economic teachings of Jesus, the 'outsider', to the issues faced by mainstream organisations, corporations, schools and churches? In what ways can the teachings of Jesus be incorporated into the structure of organisations without jeopardising their survival?

It was intellectually stimulating as well as faith-stretching and faith-encouraging to be with a group of people and part of an organisation that was committed to wrestling with such questions.

We had to grapple with these issues ourselves, not just as individuals but also as an organisation.

Challenging convention

A few years prior to the 'threat of industrial action', the board made another 'unusual' decision regarding Tearfund salaries. As a result of significant growth, the time had come to appoint our first Sydney-based staff member – someone to expand our engagement with churches in Sydney and NSW. In my view, we already knew the ideal person as he had been doing such a great job in a voluntary capacity. I also knew that he would not be able to meet his current yet modest financial commitments on a salary like mine. As a result, I proposed to the board that we offer him a job on a salary high enough to meet his family's needs. This would have made him the highest paid member on Tearfund's payroll.

The accepted and largely unchallenged wisdom then, as now, was that the CEO in any organisation—be it a large commercial bank or a small faith-based non-government organisation like Tearfund—should be paid more than any other member of staff. The reason for this seems obvious: the higher responsibility, the higher the pay. But why should I get paid more than anyone else on the staff to do the job to which I felt called and which I loved? My expectation was that my recommendation would generate some significant debate, but it didn't! The board were happy to ignore conventional practice and embrace this modest expression of economic unorthodoxy. (As it turned out, the person in question decided to stick to his teaching job, and he continued as a wonderful volunteer for many more years.)

Heeding the call

In 1980 the World Evangelical Fellowship and the Lausanne Movement convened an international consultation on simple lifestyle. In response to the consultation's papers and deliberations, the 85 participants gathered from 27 nations produced *An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle*. Tearfund published it in full in the Autumn 1986 issue of its quarterly magazine. Jointly edited by Ron Sider and John Stott, this document remains both highly relevant and constructively provocative. Consider the following extract from that document:

> We believe that Jesus still calls some people (perhaps even us) to follow him in a lifestyle of total, voluntary poverty. He calls all his followers to an inner freedom from the seduction of riches (for it is impossible to serve God and money) and to sacrificial generosity ('to be rich in good deeds, to be generous and ready to share' – 1 Timothy 6:18).

Challenges such as this became a consistent theme in Tearfund's communications, education resources, and educational events. But it wasn't simply a matter of encouraging others to give careful consideration to the Bible's radical teaching on money and power, or wealth and poverty. We had to grapple with these issues ourselves, not just as individuals but also as an organisation. The respectful debate stirred by the apparent 'threat of industrial action' in response to the board's desire to increase the salaries of senior staff is but one example of this. Moreover, we were all of one mind, board and leadership team, in believing we achieved the right outcome.

Since his time as national director for Tearfund Australia, Steve has helped design and develop the Master of Transformational Development programme at Eastern College, to which he continues to contribute. He is also a husband to Chris, Dad to Sarah and Tom, and Poppa to Isabella, Asher, Raphael, and Vinnie.

Appendix: a short list of some of the literature from the 70s & early 80s

- Foster, Richard. *The Freedom of Simplicity*, 1981.
- Kraybill, Donald B. *The Upside-down Kingdom*, 1978.
- Padilla, Rene, C. *Mission Between the Times: Essays on the Kingdom*, 1985.
- Schumacher, E. F. *Small is Beautiful: Economics As if People Mattered*, 1973.
- Sider, Ronald J. (Ed). *Living More Simply: Biblical Principles and Practical Models*, 1980.
- Sider, Ronald J. *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study*, 1977.
- Sider, Ronald J. (Ed). *Life-Style in the Eighties: An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Life-style*, 1981.
- Stott, John. *Christian Counter-Culture: The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 1978.
- Taylor, John V. *Enough is Enough*,1975.
- White, John. *The Golden Cow: Materialism in the Twentieth Century Church*, 1979.

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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!*