



# MANNA matters

Newsletter of MANNA GUM.



## News from Long Gully

I am happy to announce, beginning next year, a rural internship, supported by Manna Gum, that provides a great opportunity for a couple of people (or couples) to explore living on the land as a Christian vocation (see back page). The internship – *A Year of Plenty* – is being offered by two families who live just outside of Bendigo: Ali and Di Turnbull and Bron and Brian Hosking. Each family is connected with the Seeds Community/ St Matthew's Church and the Cornerstone Community/ Old Church on the Hill respectively and between them have significant experience at low-impact living and high-volume organic food growing. If this is something you have wondered about and you are looking for a low-risk way to dip your toe in the water, this might be of interest to you. See the Manna Gum website for more details.

Speaking of ventures in living on the land, in October Matt and Ashley Anslow ran a home economy weekend on their beautiful property behind the Blue Mountains. The weekend was attended by around 20 people and it sounds like a great time was had by all. If you have been thinking about running an event connecting faith with responsible and sustainable living, and would like some ideas or help, please contact us.

My back has improved from the first half of the year and I have been able to work more-or-less effectively, but it continues to provide challenges. The flexibility of my work for Manna Gum, the support of my local community and access to a First World health system have been enormous blessings. For so many families around the world an episode like this can be the beginning of a catastrophic poverty spiral.

Jonathan Cornford

### **This edition:**

#### **BIBLE & ECONOMY**

An old 'new economy' movement

*Jonathan Cornford (p.2)*

#### **ALTERNATIVE ECONOMICS**

The new economy movement in Australia

*Lauren A. (p.4)*

#### **EVERYDAY PEOPLE**

The Farm Next Door

*Stu Berryman (p.5)*

#### **BIBLE & ECONOMY**

Turning towards the poor

*Dave Fagg (p.9)*

# An old ‘new economy’ movement

## The idea of Israel as an alternative economic community

by Jonathan Cornford

Last month I spent a weekend attending the annual conference of the New Economy Network Australia (NENA) in Melbourne (see Lauren’s story on the next page). The New Economy movement gathers together a diverse group of people motivated by the common conviction that ‘business as usual’ is fundamentally flawed, as evidenced by the global ecological crisis and economic inequality. The conference showcased a wide range of creative thinking in the areas of food systems, cooperatives, housing policy and ‘the sharing economy’. Noticeably absent, however, was much of a Christian presence. The few Christians present at a conference like this generally stay quiet about it, and there is not much of a sense that Christianity has anything relevant to contribute to the challenges of building a new economy.

This is a tragedy, because the central ideas of the New Economy movement – the promotion of a form of economic life that supports both human and non-human flourishing – are ideas that are *inherent* to the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Indeed, we might say that Old Testament vision of Israel represents the first new economy movement.

In the August 2017 edition of *Manna Matters*, I discussed the foundational story of how the Hebrew people were sustained in the wilderness by manna from heaven. There we are given a picture of a confused and disoriented people who have been liberated from a bondage in Egypt that is at once spiritual and economic, but who cannot imagine a new way of being. Their rehabilitation requires them to unlearn all they have learned about work, production and accumulation in Egypt and to spend forty years living by the strange manna economy. This teaches them many lessons, but most fundamentally that ‘man does not live by bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord’ (Deut 8:3; Matt 4:4) – the economy should never become a god.

All this is a precursor to a much bigger idea: the idea that these people are intended for a ‘promised land’, a land flowing with milk and honey in which they will live in harmony with God, each other and with the land itself. And as the Israelites are led through the wilderness they are given rules for this promised land: *the Torah* – the law or instructions – which is found in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy (actually the first five books of the Bible are collectively referred to as the Torah).

For many modern Christians, there is a tendency to see ‘the law’ in a condescending or even contemptuous

light, largely based on a misreading of the attitude of the Apostle Paul. It is viewed as a burdensome set of irrelevant religious instructions from which we have thankfully been liberated.

Perhaps a better way of understanding the Torah is as a *vision*, painted in elaborate detail, of a whole new way of living. The components of this vision cover the whole realm of issues we face in life, including religion, family, society, politics and, yes, of course, economics. Indeed, the Torah has quite a lot to say in the economic sphere, including property rights and land rights, debt and credit, agriculture and land use, workers’ rights, charity, care for the poor, inequality and even treatment of animals.

The beauty of this vision is that it is given in detail; however, it also means that much of its meaning and intention can be obscure to us, who are separated by a vast chasm of history and geography from the circumstances of the ancient Middle-Eastern farmers and livestock herders to whom the Torah was given. There is much value to be gained by unpacking the particular historical meaning and significance of the diverse elements of the Torah, but for now let me unpack some central principles.

Firstly, the Torah is given specifically in relation to occupation of ‘the promised land’, a place characterised by the economics of abundance, flowing with milk and honey. Indeed, observance of the Torah is the fundamental *condition* upon which the land is promised and it is only by following its provisions that the land will be bountiful. That is, the extent to which the community is economically blessed by God through creation (the land) depends directly on the form of economic organisation that they follow.

Secondly, the key descriptor that is used for this community living by the Torah is that it would be a holy people – ‘*You shall be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy*’ (Lev 19:2). Holiness is one of those big religious words that makes people’s eyes glaze over – it is often associated with distance and other-worldliness. However, the best way to reclaim the true meaning of the word is through its root in the English language – *wholeness*. Holiness is therefore the healthy (another related word) integration of mind, body and spirit, of conviction and action, and of self and other. Far from distant and otherworldly, holiness means being *present* and *earthy* and that is what the Torah is calling Israel to be: a community that models the integration of life, faith and action.

Thirdly, and related to the previous point, it should be obvious that a community living in this way will



necessarily be counter-cultural to the world around it. A repeated refrain throughout the Torah is that this community is to live in an entirely new way: *'You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you.'* (Lev 18:3) The point is not that Israel become a private fan club for Yahweh (as it tended to think of itself), but that it was called to be a blessing and a light to the nations (Genesis 18:18, Isaiah 51:4). Israel was surrounded by exploitative imperial and monarchical economies characterised by great wealth for the few and oppressive conditions for the many (sound familiar?). If Israel was to point the world to the God of love, then it needed to embody a 'new economy'.

Fourthly, and flowing directly from the previous point, the distinctive economic life of this community is directly dependent on its *rejection of false gods*. The Torah is quite clear, as are the prophets, that the form of economic life of a community is directly related to the God (or gods) it worships, and vice versa. Moses and the prophets understood winning over the people to Yahweh necessarily meant winning them over to an alternative economic ethic; without it, they would inevitably end up chasing after *baals* who promised them all they could desire.

So what are the hallmarks of this economic community and how is it a witness to the character of God? Behind all the details about how people harvest their fields or lend money are some consistent fundamental intentions:

- All economic life is to be governed by the observance of limits: limits to work, to wealth accumulation, to debt, to use of the land, to the use of animals.
- There shall be abundantly enough for all
- There shall be no poor among you
- The vulnerable are protected.
- Obscene inequality will be impossible.
- The land (even the wild animals) shall be respected and cared for.

The Torah makes clear that not only is Israel to be a distinctive religious community, it is to be a distinctive economic community – a 'new economy'. It demonstrates that central to God's way of working in the world – 'reconciling the world to himself' (2 Cor 5:19) – is to form together communities of people whose whole lives, including their economic arrangements, are a living witness to the life that is found in the living God. It is one of the big ideas of the Bible – a central thread that runs continuous through the Old Testament and into the New Testament. For the calling to be an alternative economic community does not end with Israel, but rather takes on an even fuller meaning in that community we call the Body of Christ. But that is a story for another day...

## Imagining a new economy

by Lauren A.

In October, over 200 delegates gathered in Melbourne for the third annual New Economy Conference. Focused on a range of issues and themes relevant to creating a fairer and ecologically sustainable economy and society, the conference brought together a wide variety of people, organisations and communities across Australia who are working to strengthen the commons, grow better food systems, develop sustainable business models and cooperative enterprises, experiment with innovative governance, property and legal models, explore economic theory and learn from indigenous political economic systems.

Held over three days, 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> October, the conference was facilitated by the New Economy Network Australia (NENA), a network of individuals and organisations building a movement of people advocating for, creating and benefiting from a 'new', transformed economic system based on the objectives of ecological health and social justice. This year's conference focused on the theme of 'strengthening the new economy for the common good', recognising that the commons – the wealth, land and resources we inherit, steward and create together – is at the heart of the transition to the new economy.

I was inspired by how the conference worked to embody what the new economy is about in its processes, balancing goals of professionalism, accessibility, authenticity and inclusivity. I was also inspired by the breadth of issues discussed – the event did a good job of highlighting key issues and their interconnections across the economy. The conference attempted to balance the small and local scale with the big and international scale issues and methods of social change. It attempted to balance ideas, research and academic theorising with grassroots and systemic action as well as establishing the 'movement' itself.

For the first time, there was a significant session on 'faith and the new economy' that included a presentation by Jonathan. The session was received well by folks from religious backgrounds and those from none. Participants could see the importance of faith communities being engaged in the new economy space and the connection between the Christian faith tradition and role in similar social change movements.

The conference also highlighted some important practical projects already happening in the new economy – including conversations with owner/workers of cooperatives like Redgum Cleaning Cooperative, and with the Australian



Earth Laws Alliance, with its important 'GreenPrints' project working to create Earth-centred governance models for bioregional ecological health in Australia.

At the heart of my inspiration from the conference, though, is that the new economy movement is *for* something, rather than just against things. It sets a vision for an alternative economic model (or models) that can operate together for good. Despite debates on frameworks, the consistent themes, values and goals are evident.

A key aspect of this vision is the idea of 'just transitions' – ensuring a just transition for people and the planet now and into the future, while ensuring the burden of change that benefits everyone is not placed disproportionately on a few, who are often already vulnerable, and that those affected are partners in the solutions to the transition. This is a challenge for the church – 'green' churches in the inner-city calling to close power plants while churches within the same denominations in rural areas are made up of congregations that rely on those industries. How does the church advocate for justice for all? What do we stand for, while standing with our people? How do we act and advocate in a way that shows love for our global neighbours *and* our local neighbours?

Of course, the conference also had deficiencies. As we know, social change movements require continuous improvement – even a changing goal or end point. There were gaps in the 'aspects' of the new economy addressed and missing voices in the discussion. Ongoing challenges include the role of women at the front, the range of class and race backgrounds present, the high-level, academic preference of conversation, the dominance of those of 'privilege' in the space and the largely missing voices of the poor and marginalised, those most 'at risk' in the current economy. In this context, the new economy movement is challenged with embodying the just transitions idea and speaking strongly on important issues, while partnering with those whose livelihoods are caught up in the status quo and who may be further marginalised by the outcomes of what we are advocating for.

A point of both inspiration and challenge that came out at the conference was the diversity of views about what the 'new economy' means, what it looks like and how we get there. This diversity is a good thing – a realm of visions that can add rigour to the discussions and enable people to act and live out aspects of the new economy in the ways they feel called and motivated. But it also makes consistent advocacy difficult and communication among the group more challenging; language, ideas and goals require 'translation' from different contexts and spheres. It also means a coherent, clear alternative is still in progress – with some debate between which alternative economic framework is best (steady state economics, 'degrowth', ecological, soli-

arity, circular, sustainable etc.). This highlighted for me the importance of effective 'translation' of our own and others' language in order to recognise common themes and values and articulate a common vision.

My understanding of what the new economy means comes from my faith tradition, that being inherently connected with my understanding of biblical economics and Christian economic models. Jonathan's talk on the alternative economic models of the Old Testament, alongside Mary Graham's talk on relationality as a key idea in indigenous economics that resonates with biblical teachings on community, fellowship and relationship with God, neighbour and earth, reaffirmed this for me. My picture of a new economy is fundamentally an economy of enough, enough for all, that satisfies human needs to allow for human flourishing and the continued flourishing and renewal of creation as God hopes it to be; a regenerative and distributive economy that facilitates enough for all through empathy, connection and relationality with those around us, made in God's image.

The more I develop my own understanding of what the 'new economy' means, the more I see what the church has to offer to the discussion, processes and practice of reimagining our economy. Our tradition – built on prophetic imagination and the idea of shalom and the restoration and renewal of all creation and broken relationships – sets an outstanding foundation from which to reimagine our societies and economies for the common good. Faith voices are just beginning to be heard in the conversation. I look forward to a future conference where people from different faith backgrounds, connected by the principle of 'do unto others as you would have them do to you' and the sacredness of the environment, present together on the principles of political economy underpinning their faiths and develop strategies for working towards the new economy together, alongside those of no faith background. As this year's faith session pointed to, faith communities *are* involved in the new economy work (regardless of whether we call it that), leading significant social justice movements throughout history, and the 'new economy' movement presents another opportunity to collaborate with other faith institutions to address current injustices.

With this opportunity, my ongoing questions for the church and us as Christians are:

- Where is the church in the new economy movement?
- What is the place of alternative economics in the thinking and practice of Christian communities?
- How can the church work collaboratively with those of other or no faith backgrounds in the new economy movement?

# The Farm Next Door

by Stu Berryman

*'a farmer went out to sow some seed...'*

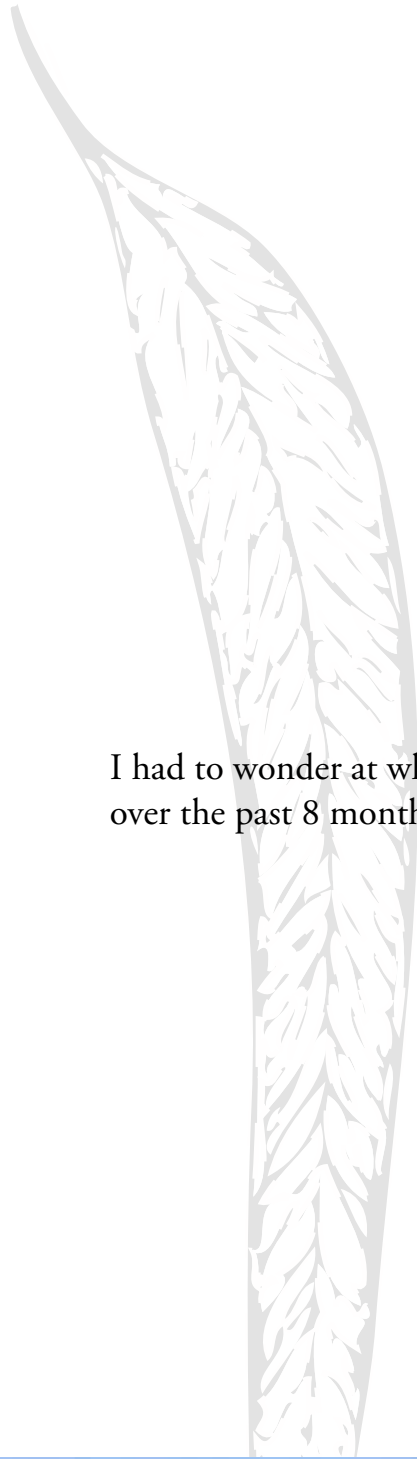
It was a warm and sunny day in early October. Nearby, a group was busily working away dressing and preparing pizza bases while others engaged in the sweaty task of navigating the rocket oven. To my right, people meander through the vegetable beds, inspecting the produce and chatting amongst themselves. On the adjacent front lawn, a stage had been erected and a sound system brought in. Live artists are strumming away while others sit back on hay bales soaking up the sun after an overcast winter, enjoying the music. Children of all ages run about between the bales and garden plots, occasionally disappearing behind the houses before bursting unpredictably back into the front. It's 'the farm next door barn dance', though it has become something more akin to a small community festival.

Throughout the day, over 80 people attended the dance. People from all over Geelong had come to Norlane to attend and others came in off the street, curious as to what the commotion was all about and pleasantly surprised at what they found. It was incredible to watch strangers from all walks of life coming together over humble food, drinks and music – in Norlane, Geelong's most disadvantaged suburb, of all places. Despite my natural pessimism, I had to wonder at what has unfolded over the past eight months.

It began in February 2018; a small group of us at Norlane Community Initiatives (formerly associated with Urban Seed) had been gathering to imagine how we could further develop our connection between ourselves and our neighbourhoods through urban gardening. Given constraints on the group's time and energy, our dreams had dwindled to a small network of sharing vegetables between our local community houses. Then we got a call from Lachie.

Lachie was a Geelong local having grown up in Newtown, an affluent suburb in Geelong. Having graduated with a Bachelor of Environment from Melbourne University in 2016 and not

I had to wonder at what has unfolded over the past 8 months.







sure what to do next, he made the decision to go on a trip to France. The plan involved four months working on organic food farms in the country. While there, he was struck by the contrast of lived values between the communities he worked in and his own home town. By the time he arrived back in Australia, he had a plan to develop an urban farm in Geelong's North which sought to provide a hub for community involvement in the sustainable production and distribution of fresh produce.

The day after we first spoke to Lachie he was at the church, at 7am, for our weekly men's breakfast. Having the support of a like-minded group he moved fast. Within a few weeks he had performed soil testing on a property across the road from Labuan Square (a struggling shopping strip in Norlane) and promptly moved in. The property was a typical two-bedroom house in Norlane surrounded by an arid community of struggling homes and kikuyu grass.

We all got to work brainstorming with Lachie what the project might actually look like, and by April, the farm held its first major working bee. Over 40 volunteers attended from both Norlane and the Greater Geelong region. On that day, the front yard was transformed from a kikuyu wasteland into a dozen raised garden beds which have since been planted out with all manner of vegetables. Regular working bees have been held each Tuesday afternoon, garnering anywhere between 5-25 people with a core membership of around 14 plus children.

Early on, pigs and painting were a real drawcard for children, drawing in the involvement of young families. The pigs were brought in as a response to our first major project, the removal of kikuyu grass from the backyard. Two pigs, 18 chooks and a small army of volunteers worked over five months to remove the grass from the backyard. In small plots, the pigs, then chooks, were rotated over the ground removing the kikuyu before volunteers followed behind, providing the necessary detail clean.

---

The property was a typical two bedroom house in Norlane surrounded by an arid community of struggling homes and kikuyu grass.

---

Meanwhile, Joel, another member of the team, moved in and the project gained traction. Private individuals and organisations from all over Geelong began donating tools and building materials. Lachie's van got a good workout visiting many a backyard in the region. Together, we invested in a community mulcher and a local gardener began dropping off trailer-loads of mulching material for compost each week. A food scrap box was advertised in the front of the yard and for a while the quality of goods

made the enterprise feel a lot more like a 'dumpster dive home delivery service' rather than waste for a compost pile.

With community help all round, a greenhouse was built off the back of the house, a pergola off the front. Two 6500L water tanks were installed on the side of the house and, through some grant funding, irrigation pipes for the row crops. Composting bays run down one side of the property while a permanent chook run has been constructed on the other. Community workshops have been hosted at the farm, teaching skills in jam making, bread making, tool maintenance and 'how to build a rocket oven', which has led to many a tasty meal pumping out pizzas and pork chops. A rotary hoe was brought in and the beds were formed. As of November over half of the 16 rows have been planted out in sequence with tomatoes, zucchini, corn, carrots, beetroot,







spring onions, beans and salad greens.

A key strength of the project has been the development of relationships near and far. The front yard utilised at the barn dance was the offering of Jazz, a next door neighbour. Steve, a Norlane resident, has been involved in the farm from the beginning: 'the farm has been great for my kids, to be learning about how to grow fresh produce in their own back yard... working with pigs, chooks and humans is a good thing. The farm has brought a new energy... it's been turning the stigma of Norlane on its head'. Josh, a young entrepreneur and artist in Geelong, has been similarly involved since the conception of the farm, at one point organising an artistic fundraiser at his 'Analog café'. Josh sees the farm as 'a space that we've been given to do good to those around us.' Amrit, the son of a farmer Lachie worked for in France, arrived a few months ago and has been sleeping on the couch ever since. He's been getting involved in every aspect of the farm's operations: 'The farm is a good way of bringing people together, it is a good thing to work with the earth, work with the land... its relaxing and good for the brain!'

For Lachie, the farm is about a combination of environmental and social justice. He sees the farm as 'an opportunity for localising food production, reducing our reliance on destructive methods of food production and reducing food miles. Equally important is creating connections with and between people 'developing a sense of community, purpose and belonging'. While he





believes many people share a conceptual understanding of environmental issues, they don't always know what to do about it. This is particularly true, he believes in a suburb such as Norlane where people might not have the means to simply buy their way into environmentalism. As I push Lachie to talk about his role in facilitating the project he redirects me to the number of individuals and groups that have contributed their time, money, skills and experience. Individuals and groups have jumped at the opportunity to help out and he considers his primary function as simply facilitating those relationships.

At the time of writing, the farm is preparing for its first sale of produce in the next few weeks. Plans for the future include strengthening the partnership with community members, aquaponics and hiring a shopfront.

My experience of the Farm Next Door has kept me hopeful about the significant ways in which a Christian community, working closely with others who do not share the faith, can impact a community. The Norlane Community had a good idea, experience in working in the community and some resources, but little time or energy to spare. Lachie, a young man with passion and a big heart, but not an adherent of the faith, brought what we lacked. Our mutual willingness to work together, and with others in the community, has turned the seed of an idea into something that bears real fruit.





# Turning towards the poor

by Dave Fagg

In a contemporary echo of Christian saints and thinkers through the ages, Shane Claiborne reminds us that: ‘The great tragedy in the church is not that rich Christians do not care about the poor but that rich Christians do not know the poor.’ So much of our view of ‘the poor’ in Australia is shaped by our superior economic position and the voyeurism of the mass media, epitomised in television shows like ‘Struggle Street’. This series of articles argues that the church, as the community of discipleship, needs to relinquish gazing at the poor from a distance and instead become *involved*, with all the risk and uncertainty and difficulty that such involvement entails. In doing so, the church fulfils her vocation as a true companion of the poor.

In the first article (Oct 2016), I argued that we must view the poor through the lens of the image of God, possessing equal dignity, despite experiencing the distortions of that image common to all. In the second article (May 2018), I provided an insight into the practical experience of poverty in Australia, an insight that attempted to avoid sacrificing the essential dignity of the people whose stories I told.

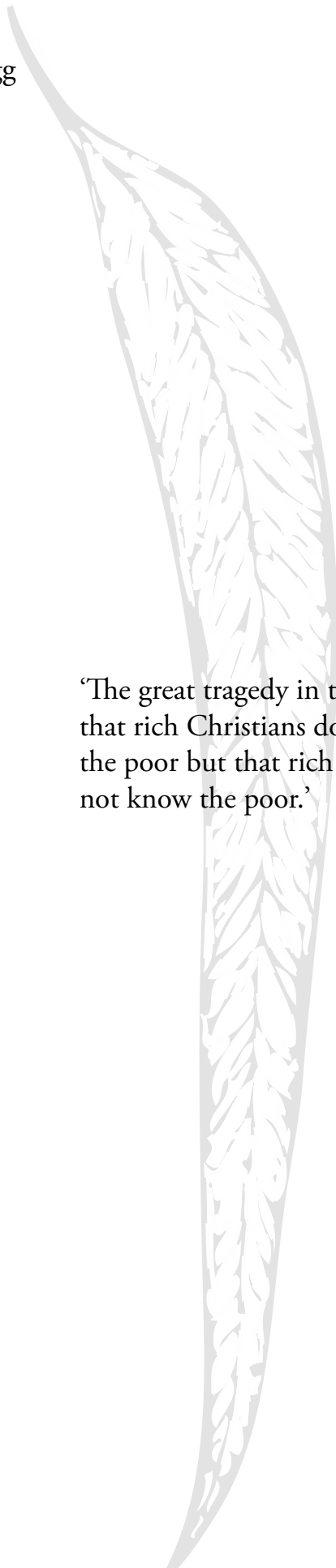
In this third article, we move from the questions of sight, to questions of response. In the Bible, the ideal disciples are those who are healed of blindness and immediately follow on the way of Jesus. Think of Bartimaeus (Mark 10) and the man born blind (John 9): they demonstrate that discipleship is not only a matter of seeing clearly, but of following Jesus. How does that apply to the matter at hand? Having seen the poor through Jesus’ eyes, and gaining insight into their experience, we need to respond. The first step in any biblical discipleship is repentance.

## Repentance

Repentance means that we turn from all that distances us from God and those God loves. We turn towards God, and to those God loves, and in doing so are transformed entirely. Repentance means that we turn to God and towards those who, the bible tells us, are close to God’s heart: the sick, lonely, destitute, unemployed, despised, the persecuted, oppressed, and the hopeless.

But we don’t repent in a vacuum. Often it can feel like just ‘trying harder’ to be a moral and decent person. When we see repentance like this, discipleship becomes a short-lived moral legalism. Rather, Christian repentance occurs in an atmosphere created by three crucial elements:

- i. **The love of God:** when God’s love becomes real for us, we find ourselves motivated by the Spirit to turn away from things that grieve God, and towards those things that God



‘The great tragedy in the church is not that rich Christians do not care about the poor but that rich Christians do not know the poor.’



loves. Rather than bowing to an abstract rule, we obey a personal and loving God.

- ii. **The better way:** we are always turning towards something more beautiful, truthful and just, not simply away from something sinful. The way of Jesus and his reign is the better way, now and in its full consummation.
- iii. **The Christian community:** we are repenting in a community where *everyone* is repenting and where support, affirmation and accountability can be found. Of course, the church fails often, but without this community, repentance can become a source of resentment and bitterness.

### Repenting from economic security

We must first repent from economic security and turn to generosity. Our world is full of messages about economic security. You won't have enough retirement savings. You'll never own a home. Wages haven't grown. School fees are set to rise. You, or your children, must have this experience to be healthy and well. These messages are designed to instil anxiety and for each anxiety, there is a corresponding 'solution' that you can buy. When we succumb to this anxiety about economic security, our capability for generosity is stunted.

Ageing with dignity, homes, fair wages, education and caring for family are all worthy concerns. But worrying about these things beyond their importance means we become grasping and focused on ensuring our security through accumulation. In the process, we become insulated to the needs of others. We say, 'we'll care for others once we are financially stable', or 'we need enough for ourselves before we can be generous'. But the point of the anxiety-inducing messages is to keep us in a *permanent* state of deprivation; hence we feel like we never have enough security to look to others. The pursuit of wealth, as scripture and Christian tradition would have it, is indeed a snare.

Especially insidious is the way that the pursuit of economic security turns us away from the losers in this race. They become strangers to our way of life and, because their lives are not relevant to our anxieties about security, they become gradually more invisible. We fail to see them.

---

Since poverty is a problem of relationships and community, a professionalised approach to poverty is not enough. We need to get involved in some personal way.

Turning from economic security to generosity is essential, but it is misguided to reduce generosity to the giving of money. Christ-like generosity is much deeper than this. Can you remember a time Jesus gave away money or goods? I can think

only of the feeding stories (Matthew 14 and 15). Jesus focused on giving his time, presence and attention. This sets the pattern for us: giving of material goods is good, but the giving of our own selves is the far better way.

### Repenting from reputation and respectability

Third, we must repent from reputation and respectability and turn to solidarity.

Despite wanting to serve those on the margins, our desire to be respectable and reputable often means we keep the poor at a distance. In general, many Australian churchgoers (and still more outside the church) hold the view that Christians should be 'better' people than those outside it. They should be respectable, virtuous and reputable, and seen to be so. This pre-occupation with social respectability hangs over from a time when the church was an establishment institution that commanded

### Repenting from outsourcing our calling

Second, we must repent from outsourcing our Christian calling and turn to personal involvement.

Even when our pursuit of economic security does not completely blind us to the poor, we often outsource our care for the poor to professionals. We have believed the lie that poverty is a special illness that requires intervention from specialists and ordinary people need to keep well away. A whole bureaucracy of service provision exists to maintain this fiction. However, since poverty is a problem of relationships and community, a professionalised approach to poverty is not enough. We need to get involved in some personal way. I am not condemning professionalisation outright, but a corrective is needed. Without personal involvement, professionalised service provision simply perpetuates the distance between people that causes poverty.



respect. (If you still think that, reading any Australian newspaper or online comments will set you straight.)

But focusing on respect and reputation has the effect of distancing us from the disreputable and those that no-one respects. Jesus intentionally blurs these boundaries: sinful and holy; clean and unclean; rich and poor; Jew and Gentile. By eating with, touching and forgiving the disreputable and outcast, he places himself with them in solidarity, rather than keeping them at arm's length.

Will that mean some think ill of us because we are friends with the disenfranchised? Yes. Will that mean some people won't come to our church because the disreputable do? Yes. I'm not saying turning people away from church is a positive. But I am saying that solidarity with the 'losers' is the priority; not the comfort and admiration of the cultural mainstream. Jesus was clear that his people are the sick, the broken, those who know their need of forgiveness, the desperate (Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31-32).

---

These three 'repents' can be summed up as turning from a constant search for solutions to poverty that maintain our distance from the poor. This search is a sin and has no sympathy with our identity as the people of God. We must turn away from it.

Jesus offers something better. He gives himself to us through the incarnation, in announcing his reign in word, deed and sign, culminating in the cross and resurrection, and then remains with us through the Holy Spirit which animates his Body, the church. More than a message or strategy or practice, it is a *reality* of loving involvement, in which he invites us to participate with all of our lives. This is discipleship.

Having cleared the ground, our next step is to understand the church in a particular light; as the experience, community and practice of divine friendship, where generosity, involvement and solidarity become real. That will be my next topic ...



*Pizza Night at St Matthew's Church in Long Gully is a time when people of diverse social backgrounds come together.*



An opportunity for enthusiastic people to journey in community on rural properties in the Bendigo area.

### Explore connections between faith and land

- Journey on land within a Christian community -
- Practice shared spiritual disciplines -
- Commit to common work -
- Grow vegetables and care for animals -
- Continue with your work / study life -

For further enquiries, please contact

Ali Turnbull - 0407 502 467 | Brian Hosking - 0400 418 936  
1981turnbull@gmail.com | brian.j.hosking@gmail.com

### Some reflections from participants in the *Arts of Home Economy Weekend, Bendigo (July):*

'The workshops were run by ordinary people who were able to demonstrate that learning good and useful skills isn't that hard'

'I was initially uneasy about being there, and not wanting to be confronted about my lack of sustainability or environmentally-friendly habits. However, there was something about these people that spilled out grace over me. If I was going to change my ways, I didn't have to change everything, at least not all at once.'


'While it isn't ideal, or perfect in any way, it gave me hope for my future lifestyle. I hope to one day live in a community that is supportive and family-like, where I can serve and be served by my neighbours.'

'Manna Gum told a different story that encourages me to keep going in this dark world and often frustrating faith tradition.'

'The things that struck me most about the community we were surrounded by at St Matthew's were that they lived their faith out and that their faith was visible in a practical sense. Lifestyle and faith met.'

## Support the work of MANNA GUM

MANNA GUM seeks to live within the economy of God – frugally, ethically and through the generous sharing of abundance within the community of faith. If our work resonates with you, please consider becoming a monthly financial supporter or making a one-off donation.

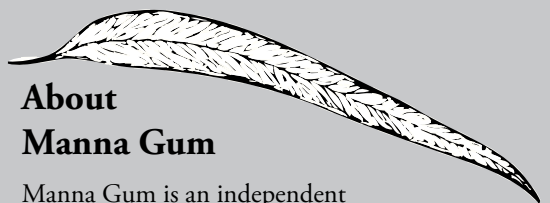
 **Donate via PayPal on the Manna Gum website**  
(Go to the 'Become a Supporter' tab)

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

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

### CONTACT US

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



### About Manna Gum

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

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

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

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