

Living ethically and sustainably can begin at home

Coming Home: Discipleship, Ecology and Everyday Economics by Jonathan Cornford (Morning Star Publishing, 2019)

reviewed by Deborah Guess

FOR A small book (150 or so pages) *Coming Home* succeeds in a rather ambitious goal. It draws together a number of topics that are each in themselves quite complex: ecology, economics, faith, ethics and daily household living. In essence, it poses a fundamental challenge to rethink the way we run our daily households in response to significant environmental and ethical questions.

In the introductory chapter, Victorian author Jonathan Cornford says that the book is in part grounded in his own family's way of living, which developed as a response to the current ecological and economic context, but is also informed by the family's overseas experience in Laos and Cambodia. There are seven main chapters (Hospitality; Work and Leisure; Consumption; Sustainability; Giving; Savings and Investment; and Debt) each of which follows the same four-section formula: a discussion of the problem, a section on what the Bible says, suggestions of how we might respond, and examples of what practical action

people have taken. There is also a brief concluding chapter and two short appendices.

The book has many strengths:

It makes clear and strong connections between economy and ecology, and between Christian faith and how we actually run our homes and households. And it provides real, achievable and highly

and personal ways of responding.

Jonathan Cornford is good at discussing ecological and economic issues succinctly, providing the reader with enough summary information without getting bogged down in technical detail or extensive references. Although the book focuses rather more on economic than ecological questions,

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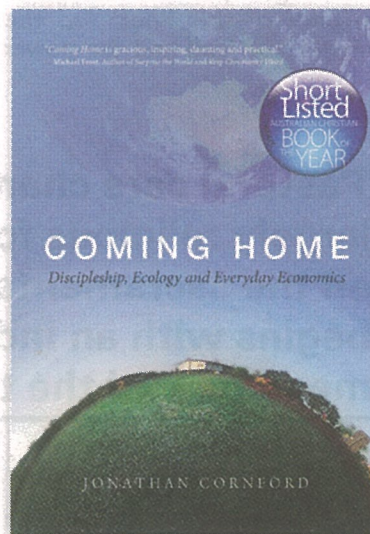
practical suggestions for daily living. The suggestions in chapters 2, 3 and 4 for addressing ecological issues of the day and the ones in the later chapters focussing more strongly on economics and the ethical use of money are all effective, sensible and practical. Although Cornford acknowledges the scale and complexity of ecological and economic questions, his hands-on suggestions offer readers powerful

nevertheless ecological questions are covered adequately and can easily be researched further by the reader.

A few topics could have been included in the book:

First, although Cornford is good at identifying ecologically affirming scriptural texts, he does not discuss either the significance (positive and negative) of the Bible's frequent silence about the natural

world, or the thorny question of scriptural texts that biblical scholar Norman Habel names "grey" (by which Habel means texts which are ecologically problematic, as opposed to "green" ones).



Second, in what is otherwise quite a full account of ecological questions, the issue of population (apart from one passing reference on p.64) is not dealt with, and so the opportunity is missed to suggest that the choice of family size might be an ethical consideration.

Third, given Jonathan Cornford's academic background in political economy it is perhaps surprising that suggestions for action are

exclusively oriented to practical actions at the household or small community level, with no discussion of how Christians seeking to act sustainably and ethically might participate at the wider social and political level such as lobbying, engaging in activism, or voting.

Setting those gaps aside, this is an important and timely book given the present context. It is simply and clearly written, well structured, easy to read and down-to-earth. Readers should not be put off by the rather cheesy "Martian anthropologist" trope in the introduction – it's not typical of the book as a whole.

Coming Home makes a valuable theological connection between our spiritual and material lives and is highly recommended for individual Christians who would like to make real, positive and effective changes in their daily living as a way of responding to the present crises in environment and economy. Similarly, the book would be very suitable for congregations or small groups interested in discussing these issues and supporting each other in new ways of ethical living.

Deborah Guess is a Research Associate at Pilgrim Theological College and a Member of the Centre for Religion and Social Policy (RASPP), University of Divinity.