Jesus calls for revolution!

A powerful Roman empire squeezes maximum profit from the common Jewish people with oppressive rule. Collaborating with the Romans, Jerusalem priests live lavish lifestyles funded by Temple taxes collected from struggling Jewish peasants. Other religious leaders foist stifling regulations on the people.

Incensed at the injustice, local leaders one after another raise up violent revolutionary followers only to be viciously snuffed out by the well-oiled Roman machine. Common people hunger for freedom from crushing Roman yoke and stifling religious burden. They yearn for a messiah to come with sword in hand to drive their oppressors out and establish their own nation of prosperity, and peace.

Jesus announces his revolution. “The time has come, and God’s kingdom is near. Change the way you think and act, and believe the Good News.” (Mark 1:15, GW)

Through his lived-out teaching, Jesus calls and empowers his followers to a new politics, lifestyle, attitude, and religious expression. His strategy to vanquish evil and establish lasting harmonious order is nonviolent, reconciling, agapic love.

Jesus tells those of us who accept his revolution that we are salt and light. Through the empowerment of The Holy Spirit, we begin here and now living out God’s revolutionary way of peace, reconciliation, and justice to humanity and all creation.

“Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10)

Let’s be revolutionaries, the Jesus way!

Mountaintop Removal continues to scourge areas of Appalachia. Yet many environmental activists seemingly have abandoned the effort to abolish this egregious practice. Fighting fracking and pipelines are the new fights against extreme energy, necessary battles to win in this critical time period of climate instability due to greenhouse gasses. Christians For The Mountains is deeply involved in these actions, but we are not going to abandon our advocacy against mountaintop removal, either. Therefore we feature Coal River Mountain Watch, an organization headquartered in the heart of mountains currently being blasted to smitherens for coal. We encourage you to support Coal River Mountain Watch’s advocacy efforts.

Is the earth doomed? Nuclear War (fast death) or an inhospitable earth climate (slow death) can seem inevitable. Dale Aukerman’s “Reckoning with Apocalypse” takes hope in God’s desire for humanity to turn away from destructive pathways. Included are articles showing some ways we humans can walk on right paths.

The Mountain Vision is a free publication made possible by contributions and prayers. Thank you!
Lessons From Barmen  
by Allen Johnson, Editor

Adolph Hitler's Nazi regime had wrested control of the nation's Protestant churches by the time 139 ordained ministers, church members, and university professors representing several denominations met in the town of Barmen, Germany at the end of May, 1934.

A year before, Hitler had appointed Ludwig Muller to establish a Reich Church comprised of established congregations. It quickly gained controlling ecclesiastical power with vast popular support. The Reich Church cooperated with the Nazis in outlawing criticism and dissent. Germans were still reeling from their humiliating and costly defeat in World War I and were suffering through severe economic depression. Most Germans equated national patriotism with Christian truth, and eagerly lapped up the ideology of a racially pure nation guided by who they believed was God's chosen leader, Adolph Hitler.

Those Christians meeting in Barmen vigorously dissented from the established Reich Church. National idolatry and all sorts of racist and violent evils were infecting and bedeviling the vast majority of churches and their people. The Gospel was warping into a satanic evil. The integrity of German churches was at stake.

The Theological Declaration of Barmen of “The Confessing Church” was drafted by theologian Karl Barth and unanimously approved. Many of the signers were later imprisoned, forced into exile, or executed. Among the signers were Martin Niemoeller and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

The Barmen Declaration is a Status Confessionis [Latin for "a state of confessing"] for a dire situation endangering the very legitimacy of The Church.

The Barmen Declaration had an opening statement of purpose followed by six statements each of which was preceded by scripture and comprised of a positive confession and a repudiation of false doctrine. Although not directly denouncing Nazism, perceptive readers understood the inferences. For example, here is the first article.

1. “I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one comes to the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6.)

   “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. . . . I am the door; if anyone enters by me, he will be saved.” (John 10:1, 9.)

Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.

We reject the false doctrine,
as though the church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation.

Why Barmen Matters Today

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot. (Jesus, in Matthew 5:13, NRSV)

Jesus calls and empowers his followers (churches) to lead in reconciliation, peace, healing, and harmony. Salt preserves and flavors. But if a church loses that focus and betrays its Gospel mission, then it is discarded as an object of contempt and scorn.

It is no exaggeration to say that outsiders rightly scorn and condemn subsets of Christians and their churches for proactive warmongering, racialism, inhospitality, greed, licentiousness, selfishness, callous exploitation of the environment, and so on.

Has The Church come to the point where a status confessionis is needed today? For example, in 1982 the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) declared apartheid as a status confessionis and expelled the South Africa-based Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) for its racism. This strong measure led the DRC to repentance and reinstatement to the WARC.

Scientists conclude the world's changing climate is fast-moving toward global disaster. A nuclear weaponized war could blink out life on this planet any moment. Ethnic and racial tensions are seething. Poverty, injustice, and war bring misery. Fascist ideologies such as alt-right are ascendant. Will the Christian Church sacrifically step up to boldly take on these problems? Or will churches ignore these issues, or even worse, fuel them?

The Church always faces two threats. One is persecution by those who would stamp out its message. The other threat is seduction by those who would capture, twist, and exploit its message. Let's heed the lessons from Barmen!
We Really Do Need Your Support—Here’s Why

We invite you to please send a generous contribution to Christians For The Mountains (CFTM) as we stand with people and communities devastated by extreme energy extraction such as mountaintop removal and fracking.

Rebuilding Appalachia requires concerted focus, creativity, selfless leaders, and lots of time—above all, God’s grace and empowerment. Malaise is so often spiritual at root. Exploiters and oppressors are spiritually impoverished, but so are, in another way, those who are exploited and oppressed. This is an opportunity for Christians to open hearts and minds and hands to God’s saving way.

Christians For The Mountains is a leading voice dedicated to addressing spiritual issues that underlie environmental abuses while drawing upon God’s leading to bring hope and restoration. CFTM works alongside numerous religious and secular organizations and persons regionally and nationally. We maintain our Christian identity while bridging with the scientific, political, and organizational strengths of secular groups.

As a CFTM member, your prayers, counsel, and financial support enable CFTM to publish twice-yearly issues of The Mountain Vision, maintain three websites and two Facebook pages, contribute financially to disasters, be on leadership teams that plan and hold conferences, and push for just, enforced regulations and policy in state and national government. Scholars, researchers, and media frequently request interviews and tours. CFTM continues to support health research in mountaintop removal communities CFTM is a sponsor of the Larry Gibson Biography project.

All this on our donor-supported 2017 budget of $15,000!!!

Our nation is going through challenging political times. Our most important gift to movements yearning for a more just, harmonious world is Christian Hope. We welcome you to join us in confidently stepping out to each new day with the heart-knowledge that God is with us.

Please be generous with a tax-deductible donation to help CFTM reach others like you, who understands our God-given directive to “act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God."

THANK YOU!!!
Three Deadly Sins and Seven Godly Virtues

For many centuries the Church has recognized key traits that underlie human behavior. Dante’s great work, the "Divine Comedy," accorded these sins and virtues in an ascending order of magnitude as listed in the chart below. Mindfully cultivating these seven virtues is key to overcoming the seven deadly sins, such as, practicing purposeful prayer, being ever mindful of God’s presence and will, avoiding situations where one’s weakness is susceptible to temptation, and associating with people who are positive examples and receiving their guidance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SINS</th>
<th>VIRTUES</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lust (excessive sexual appetites)</td>
<td>Chastity (purity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gluttony (over-indulgence)</td>
<td>Temperance (self-restraint)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greed (avarice)</td>
<td>Charity (giving)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sloth (laziness/idleness)</td>
<td>Diligence (zeal/integrity/Labor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrath (anger)</td>
<td>Forgiveness (composure)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Envy (jealousy)</td>
<td>Kindness (admiration)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pride (vanity)</td>
<td>Humility (humbleness)</td>
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Spiritual Sloth in Contrast with Spiritual Diligence

Sloth, or Acedia, is one of the deadly sins. These two terms have somewhat different inflections and have been difficult to fully get a handle on. For now, I will discuss Sloth in terms of spiritual laziness, apathy, torpor, and Diligence in terms of spiritual striving toward godly character and behavior.

Sloth is careless about the Gospel. Such Sloth is spiritually lazy and does not strive for growth and maturity. Sloth does not “hunger and thirst” for God’s reign of justice, righteousness, love, truth, and salvation. Rather, Sloth accepts the culture’s status quo and an easy “just get by” attitude. Some church congregations become spiritually slothful, satisfied with “ear-ticking” religion to soothe their lazy apathy.

Sloths are guilty of apathy, torpor, and Diligence in terms of spiritual striving toward godly character and behavior.

Spiritual Diligence, in sharp contrast, fervently and consistently hungers and thirsts for God’s righteousness (Matthew 5:6). Diligence risks all for God, even to making itself vulnerable and at odds with its surrounding society. Diligence strives to cultivate spiritual virtues, and by word and example inspire and help others toward the way and mind of Christ. Diligence perseveres toward God-mindedness, and God-mindedness results in good things for humanity and creation.

Reverence to God Through Mindful Gratitude

At the beginning of a meal, many Christians offer a prayer of thankfulness and ask for God’s blessing upon the food and fellowship. Often rightly called “offering grace,” this practice is an example of God-mindfulness. However, it can become routine and sterile unless one presses toward God.

For example, the food before us at a meal is a culmination of many services. The foodstuff itself, working through the web of life, stems from sun energy, soil, air, ecosystem synergy, and the life-force giving Breath of God. People tilled ground, planted seed, nurtured crops, harvested, marketed, perhaps processed, transported. Someone at a home or restaurant prepared and served the meal, typically on utensils manufactured through another chain of processes, and if heated then another set of processes. Some of these steps, sadly, might have contributed to pollution, unjust labor, and exploitive trade. Important to remember with gratitude is God’s gift of bodily nutrient digestion that builds and sustains life.

American’s on average throw away uneaten 25% of the groceries they bring home. God-mindfulness is to not be careless about even the simple gift of food. God-mindfulness leads to recycling materials, conserving energy such as turning out unnecessary lights, and donating unused items—not so much just to save money but more so to reverence The Giver of gifts of even small things.

God-mindfulness honors God’s giftedness of life, including God’s parameters for sexual expression, support for the poor, weak, and vulnerable, and appreciation for past generations along with covenant promise for those to come in the future.

Brother Lawrence was an uneducated monk who did menial kitchen and cobbler chores in a monastery in 17th Century France. His classic Christian work, Practice of the Presence of God, compiled by Father Joseph de Beaufort, details how to gain constant and comforting connection to God. Brother Lawrence rejoiced in everyday tasks and treated others kindly, striving to be always mindful of God in all that he did. He said,

“That we need only to recognize GOD intimately present with us, to address ourselves to Him every moment, that we may beg His assistance for knowing His will in things doubtful, and for rightly performing those which we plainly see He requires of us, offering them to Him before we do them, and giving Him thanks when we have done.”

Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone. See that no one pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to each other and to all people. Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5: 14-16

1 The Man Who Talks with Flowers, by Glenn Clarke (Macalester, St. Paul, Mn.) 1939, p. 21
The Bible directly states, one by one, the character of each king. Most of them did “evil in the sight of The Lord.” Some started out well and then slipped into evildoing. The relatively few who did “right in the sight of The Lord” still had some flaws in character or governance that the Bible unflinchingly details.

Some of the worst kings from God’s standpoint may have been successful government leaders building the national economy, securing their territory, or appeasing the population. The neighboring idolatrous fertility religions tempted the Israelite people with security, economic prosperity, and sensual pleasure and therefore were allowed or actively encouraged by most of the kings. Oppression of the poor and arrogant pride were other traits of evil regimes.

While The Bible focuses mostly on the politics of the Israelite people, politics of other nations also get their due. For example, chapters 25-32 in the book of Ezekiel are prophecies against several named nations. In rare cases, The Bible extolls the leader of an outside nation, an example being Cyrus, King of Persia, who permitted exiled Judeans to return to their homeland.

The Israelite people when first coming out of Egypt were a federation of tribes led by judges. After a time, people began to clamor for a king to rule over them like that of other neighboring nations. In the book of 1 Samuel, chapter 8, we read that God was displeased with their request for kings, yet granted it with a warning that kings exploit their subjects. Saul was chosen to be the first king over Israel.

Let us discern and apply lessons from these “Bible Presidents” to our contemporary situation!
Public Prayer to Move Hearts in Appalachia by Fr. John S. Rausch

Over the years, I have explained the church’s social teachings by economic and social concepts with limited success. I discussed human dignity, the common good, option for the poor, rights of workers and care of creation either in harmony, or in contrast, with free market principles. I have found the way to the heart seldom seems paved with facts and figures.

Pope Francis in his encyclical, Laudato Si, writes that the market promotes extreme consumerism (L.S. #203), and the emptier a heart is, the more a person needs things to consume (L.S. #204). “Obsession with a consumerist lifestyle...can only lead to violence and mutual destruction” (L.S. #204), he concludes.

Consequently, to root out violence and replace it with nonviolence towards our brothers and sisters and all creation begins with transforming the heart. “It is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come” (Mk. 7:21.) The question remains: how can we encourage this change of heart?

Public prayer conducted outside amidst the beauty of the Appalachian countryside tries to raise awareness of these structural and spiritual ills, and spread some salve to dress these wounds. It attempts to change hearts.

As I assess my various experiences, I group public prayer into three categories: petition prayer, listening prayer and meditative prayer. Depending on the subject matter, the circumstances, and the participants, certain forms of public prayer lend themselves to express the full range of human emotions from lament to righteous anger to hope.

All forms, however, are deepened through the use of symbols. Amidst God’s garden symbols abound. Frequently, Appalachian public prayer might incorporate wild flowers, seeds, coal, water, top soil or garden tools to poetically convey the message of the prayer event. Participants experience the support of communal prayer at the prayer site, then carry the symbol in their hearts as they return home.

Petition Prayer

Petition prayer seeks something from God. On a mountain denuded by mountaintop removal (MTR)—an aggressive method of strip mining that blows the tops off mountains by sometimes 500 feet—community people gathered for prayer to heal the mountain. We chose December 10, International Human Rights Day, to emphasize that everyone has a human right to a healthy environment. To conclude the prayer I gave everyone a handful of wildflower seeds, then instructed them: “Let’s take back the mountain for God and our community!” Sixty people fanned out covering that moonscape intentionally planting a seed here and another there, but one senior, a lifelong resident of the area, chose a spot visible from her house below and was overheard saying, “I’m sowing my community back!” Symbols, like wildflower seeds, speak poetically when words seem inadequate.

Listening Prayer

Over the past twenty years I have driven hundreds of people through Appalachia in vans and cars to see the land and meet the people. I call each excursion “A Pilgrimage to the Holy Land of Appalachia,” because a pilgrimage is a journey with a spiritual significance, and because land reflects the holiness of God, the Giver. We listen to the stories of the people and see the tortured land polluted by careless mining. We ask why the destruction, why the inadequate safety net, why the oppressive structures remain in place.

Every day the group’s theological reflection integrates the experiences with each participant’s faith life. Imagine the reflections about a free health clinic, dilapidated housing, narrow winding mountain roads, an abandoned strip mine site, a miner with black lung, an abused spouse, unemployed women learning the computer, and discussions about drug problems, schools and poverty.

Listening and respecting a person’s story allows the person to feel validated. Ministry becomes a two-way street—we pilgrims listen and are inspired, and our host shares her struggles and no longer feels alone. Stories become the symbols in listening prayer.

Meditative Prayer

Meditative prayer allows people to connect the sufferings of others with the sufferings of Jesus. We used the Via Crucis as a prayer to scan the issues of suffering in Appalachia. Reflecting the original 14 Stations, our rewritten meditations alluded to death of miners, pollution of streams, alcohol addition, and numerous other scourges. While a seven foot cross led the procession to each station, the 75 participants followed holding small white crosses depicting some social sin, like “Black Lung,” or “Land Destroyed.” Many took their hand-held crosses home where they became a sacramental symbol of the prayer experience.

Conclusion

Ritual prayer speaks to the heart neutralizing violence. It combines elements of a demonstration, a celebration and reverent prayer that intend to convert some and deepen the commitment of others. Through symbols and gestures the poetry of the event plants the seed of nonviolence and opens participants to the inbreaking of God’s Reign. In Appalachia, the laments and righteous anger over suffering and structures of sin always give way to hope, because God has bathed the area in beauty and remains the ultimate giver, and owner, of the land.

Fr. John Rausch has served Appalachian communities as a Glenmary priest for almost 40 years. Rausch was 2007 Pax Christi “Teacher of Peace,” has 'led numerous tours on mountaintop removal, and is a Steering Committee member with Christians For The Mountains.
"And it came to pass, that as [Jesus] was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1)

The Bible leaves no doubt at all about the sanctity of the act of worldmaking, or of the world that was made, or of creaturely or bodily life in this world. We are holy creatures living among other holy creatures in a world that is holy.

Some people know this, and some do not. Nobody, of course, knows it all the time. But what keeps it from being far better known than it is? Why is it apparently unknown to millions of professed students of the Bible? How can modern Christianity have so solemnly folded its hands while so much of the work of God was and is being destroyed?

Wendell Berry
The Art Of The Commonplace

"Above earth's lamentations,” our Christian faith rests on the Resurrection of Jesus, and the promise of our resurrection, so we cannot keep from singing our Alleluia song. We sing not out of naiveté or denial of personal, national and global calamities, but out of faith in the enduring love of God confirmed in the life, suffering, death and Resurrection of Jesus.

The resurrection hope finds living expression in men and women when they protest against death and the slaves of death. But it lives from something different – from the superabundance of God's future.

Its freedom lives in resistance against all the outward and inward denials of life.

But it does not live from this protest. It lives from joy in the coming victory of life.

Jurgen Moltmann
Bread And Wine

We Christians must be people of hope, singing our Alleluia song, even as we are keenly aware of sin, evil and suffering in the world. St. Augustine reminds us, “We are Easter people and 'Alleluia' is our song. Let us sing 'Alleluia' here and now in this life, even though we are oppressed by various worries, so that we may sing it one day in the world to come, when we are set free from all anxiety.”

Sr. Marie Lucey, Director, Franciscan Action Network

"Help, Thanks, Wow”
Anne Lamott
Three Essential Prayers

"And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words.”
Romans 8:26 NLT

Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer
(Luke 5:16)

"Ask, and you will receive. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Whoever seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door is opened. Who among you will give your children a stone when they ask for bread? Or give them a snake when they ask for fish? If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him. Therefore, you should treat people in the same way that you want people to treat you; this is the Law and the Prophets.”
Teaching of Jesus (Matthew 7:7-12)
Coal River Mountain Watch: Standing Strong For Land and People

Coal River Mountain Watch (CRMW) is a grassroots organization begun in 1998 in response to the fear and frustration of people living near or downstream from huge mountaintop removal sites. CRMW began as a small group of volunteers working to organize the residents of southern West Virginia to fight for social, economic, and environmental justice.

CRMW has a distinguishing characteristic of having its office in the heart of the most intensive Mountaintop Removal (MTR) operations in the nation. CRMW’s outspoken public stand against MTR takes resolute conviction, sturdy courage, and diligent organizing in the face of coal industry-fomented opposition.

Once based in Whitesville (Boone County, WV), CRMW has in recent years been in their Judy Bonds Center quarters further upstream along Big Coal River in Naoma (Raleigh County), WV.

Heading west from Beckley, WV, a twisty drive along Rt. 3 brings a traveler through a region that through many generations has mined and exported massive quantities of coal. The area is rich in coal mine history. Backbreaking labor, deadly rockfalls and explosions, low pay, and brutal coal camp policies pushed desperate miners into union organizing that incurred violent repercussions from coal companies and their allied government authorities. Unions won out, and for several decades mining communities thrived even through boom and bust cycles.

As once-rich coal seams played out, the major coal interests devised several tactics to keep their profits rolling, including: (1) Mechanization of mining through technology and machinery displaced vast numbers of miners while increasing coal output. (2) Corporations found ways to break the power of labor unions; (3) Thin but valuable coal seams can be extracted with little labor by blasting mountains apart and dumping the excess rubble downhill (Mountaintop Removal).

Once-thriving communities along the Coal River Valley are struggling to maintain a semblance of community life. This holds true throughout much of southern West Virginia and adjacent areas in Kentucky and Virginia. Many talented young people have moved outside the have moved away. Drug abuse is rampant. Poverty rates are high. Community mental and physical health is low relative to most of the U.S.

Coal River Mountain Watch aims to stop abusive mining practices and nurture developments for a clean, vibrant, healthy, future in its surrounding communities.

CRMW says about itself, “We are a small non-profit working in communities impacted by the irresponsible practices of the coal industry in southern West Virginia. We combine our local knowledge with technical expertise to fight for local interests threatened by the coal industry. We pressure regulatory agencies to do their jobs to protect the health of our communities and create policy change through educating the public and our local and national representatives. We educate and mobilize citizens to organize and stand together for environmental justice.”

“We envision stronger and more self-sufficient communities that are in control of their natural resources. The coal industry has extracted wealth from southern West Virginia for decades, leaving behind polluted water and destroying a unique culture and way of life. The state government and regulatory agencies have allowed irresponsible mining practices to continue despite local opposition and increasingly obvious impacts to public health and natural resources.”

“We understand that powerful industry interests corrupt regulatory agencies and democracy beyond southern West Virginia. We stand in solidarity with other communities that are fighting for local self-determination in the face of industry pressure all over the world.”

Marsh Fork Elementary School Campaign

The perseverance of Coal River Mountain Watch in collaboration with other supportive organizations and persons finally led to the construction and opening of a new Marsh Fork Elementary School several miles away from the dangerously-situated former school (see top left picture and caption.)

The original Marsh Fork Elementary School was located in the Coal River Valley of West Virginia 225 feet from a coal processing plant operated by Goals Coal, a Massey Energy subsidiary. This plant treated dusty powdered coal with chemical surfactants. School children were frequently ill with respiratory illness symptoms. Compounding the danger, a seeping massive multi-billion gallon toxic waste storage facility (sludge dam) loomed overhead just 400 yards from the school, the school. Another Massey subsidiary, Independence Coal, operated an 1800-acre surface mining operation above and around the school and dam utilizing heavy explosives.

To protect the children, a new school relocated away from the imminent danger was critical. Government balked, as acknowledging the danger for the school children would be tantamount to acknowledging similar coal-related dangers elsewhere.

Ed Wiley became distraught when he found out his granddaughter Kayla was getting sick attending the school. Also, Wiley had worked for the coal industry and knew how the slurry dam was slapped together with debris and tree roots. The seeping dam could kill 1000 people if it washed out like the Buffalo Creek disaster of 1972.

Campaigns were launched that petitioned local and state government to build a new school. When those efforts failed, people took to direct action. On May 31, 2005, committed citizens took a letter to the coal company headquarters and were arrested for trespassing. (see picture and caption on top-left) Direct action continued, incurring a peaceable attempt to speak to Governor Joe Manchin at his office that also led to arrests.

Wiley launched the Pennies of Promise campaign that asked school children throughout the country to send some spare change to Governor Manchin to pay for a new school. Wiley walked for 40 days from Charleston, WV to Washington, DC, to draw attention to the campaign.

Kayla and Ed delivering sacks of donated pennies

The relocated new Marsh Fork Elementary School opened for students in January 2013.

CRMW Article Continued on Page 9
The Tadpole Project

The Tadpole Project works to protect and restore the Marsh Fork of the Big Coal River. The 28-mile Marsh Fork tributary of the Big Coal River flows in the valley between Coal River Mountain and Cherry Pond Mountain in western Raleigh County. The Marsh Fork, and the numerous creeks running into it, suffer from years of neglect and build-up of garbage and scrap metal.

The Tadpole Project goal is to foster community pride by getting community members involved in the restoration of our river and bringing awareness to the natural beauty of our area. We organize clean-up days along the river and its creeks and local cemeteries, go door-to-door talking to people who live along the river, and engage local youth and visiting student groups to help with the clean up.

Coal River Environmental Education for Kids (CREEK)

CREEK provides wholesome and fun activities, mostly outdoors, to teach local kids self-sufficiency skills while instilling an appreciation for a clean environment on which our communities depend.

Activities have included stream and hollow cleanups with the Tadpole Project, hikes, scavenger hunts, leaf identification, and picnics. The kids have even gotten some experience flying the Appalachian Mountaintop Patrol drone. Current activities include vegetable gardening in the CRMW community garden, mushroom gardening, and bee-keeping.

Citizen Enforcement

CRMW provides resources to the community and empowers citizens to to fight back effectively against irresponsible coal industry practices and to pressure regulatory agencies to do their job. This includes:

Training citizens to monitor coal activities, document and report violations, and follow through. For example, some activities at the Edwight MTR site were halted for months when a local resident videotaped blasting violations and showed his footage to federal regulators. State DEP inspectors had refused to take action, but one visit by federal personnel resulted in four violations and changes to the company’s blasting operations.

Closely monitoring mining activities at the Edwight MTR site and others that are chronic violators endangering the community. CRMW succeeded in having a show cause order temporarily suspend operations at the Edwight site for multiple violations that we discovered. With local residents, CRMW monitors the sites from the air via flights from Southwings and from the ground via hiking with cameras and GPS. CRMW overlays aerial images and ground navigation with permit maps to identify areas mined out of bounds.

Opposing new permits in the area as they are proposed. We work with community members to scrutinize permits, call for public hearings and site visits, and appeal permits through regulatory and legal means.

Stopping new and existing operations on Coal River Mountain

Working with partner organizations to sue the coal industry and other agencies for flagrant violations of laws designed to protect communities, public health and the environment.

Publicizing court dates, outcomes, and penalties for individuals arrested for polluting the Coal River. For example, because of citizen complaints, two executives of Mountaineer Grading were arrested for criminal violations of water pollution standards. We hope to demonstrate that citizens’ vigilance and persistence can and will bring polluters to justice.

Hosting Tours and Work Groups

CRMW hosts numerous guests and reporters for tours of mountaintop removal, slurry impoundments, and advocacy projects. In addition, CRMW facilitates student alternative spring break projects, justice advocacy groups, and teaching experiences.

For example, in March 2017, CRMW hosted students from the University of Miami, University of Connecticut, and Hamilton College during their spring breaks. The students learned about mountaintop removal, the history of coal in the area, environmental activism, and helped out with the Tadpole Project cleanup.

SUPPORT CRMW

Coal River Mountain Watch
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Telephone: (304) 854-2182
Website: www.crmw.net
https://www.facebook.com/crmwstopmtr/

Vernon Haltom, CRMW Co-Director

Peggy Bone, CREEK, Tadpole
Debbie Jarrell, CRMW Co-Director

Maria Gunnoe, Community Outreach

Junior Walk, Community Outreach
The white puff to the right of the arrow is an explosive detonation on a mountaintop removal site above the McDowell Hollow in the Coal River Mountain community on April 25, 2017.

The US military recently used a MOAB “mother of all bombs” in Afghanistan, with a yield rated at 22,000 pounds of TNT. This amount is considered a “small blast” by the WVDEP, and is detonated above the communities on Coal River Mountain at least six times per week, with the resulting carcinogenic dust wafting into homes and drifting for miles.

The latest USGS explosives yearbook lists West Virginia as using 222,000 metric tons of explosives in 2014. After converting to pounds and multiplying by 0.8 (ammonium nitrate + diesel has 80% of the explosive force of TNT), that works out to 1,252,308 pounds per day, six days per week. That’s the equivalent of more than 55 MOABs per day for West Virginia (it’s 45 for KY). In other terms, it’s more than 1,200 Tomahawk missiles per day. Or, for the old-school folks, the explosive equivalent of 13 of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima per year: one per month plus a bonus.

In other terms, it’s more than 1,200 Tomahawk missiles per day. Or, for the old-school folks, the explosive equivalent of 13 of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima per year: one per month plus a bonus. [and what about the explosives in Kentucky and southwest Virginia on mountaintop removal?]

**The Sordid Coal Legacy of W.Va. Governor Jim Justice**

Jim Justice became Governor of West Virginia in 2017.

This is his first elected office. Justice built his billionaire financial empire on large scale agriculture and then on coal businesses he initially inherited from his father. Justice also gained a reputation for rescuing the famed but then floundering Greenbrier Hotel. Justice is West Virginia’s only billionaire. Justice is active in his community, including coaching girls and boys varsity basketball teams for Greenbrier East High School. He donates generously to charities. Justice is a large, imposing man at 6 feet, 7 inches.

However, Jim Justice has a notorious reputation for his mining practices. Since he went into the coal business in 1993, Justice has incurred many millions in fines for a multitude of labor, safety, and environmental violations. In late January 2017, the Mine Safety and Health Administration stated that Justice still owed $4.6 million in unpaid fines. Research showed that Justice’s 50 businesses are also in long-term arrears in payment of taxes to federal, state, and county governments. Meanwhile, the WV state budget is facing deep deficits or cuts. The family of Jim Justice is suing personal assets of two top officials at the Kentucky DNR for trying to stop them from mining or extending permits. That extension is obtained. Marfork [subsidiary of Alpha] failed to begin mining or apply for an extension within three years, but the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) retroactively granted them an extension for none of the legal reasons to do so. The Charleston Office of Surface Mining (OSM) agreed with CRMW that the DEP’s actions were “arbitrary, capricious, and an abuse of discretion.” DEP appealed the decision, and the OSM under-secretary overruled the Charleston Field Office, determining that the word “shall” in the law does not carry a mandatory obligation. CRMW has sued the OSM in federal court. As Halton says, “How has the word ‘shall’ come to mean ‘may’?”

**Mountaintop Removal On Coal River Mountain**

Rising high above Clear Fork on the north and Marsh Fork on the south, Coal River Mountain had been the highest relatively unspoiled mountain range in southern West Virginia. A proposed wind farm could give the region a long-term economic boost. However, Republic Energy, a subsidiary of Alpha Natural Resources (formerly Massey) is decapitating the range at a “fast and furious” pace according to Vernon Halton of Coal River Mountain Watch (CRMW).

“6550 acres are being impacted by mountaintop removal here,” says Halton, “including sludge impoundments. But that is over 10 square miles!”

Halton ticks off some active mountaintop removal operation. “MiddleRidge (802 acres), Collins Fork (264 acres),” and approved permits “Long Ridge #1 (853 acres) and Eagle #2 (2040 acres), and Bee Tree (853 acres) which is currently idled.”

“How has the word ‘shall’ come to mean ‘may’?”

The 2,000-acre Eagle 2 permit should be null and void according to federal law, which requires mining to commence within three years of the permit being granted unless an extension is obtained. Marfork [subsidiary of Alpha] failed to begin mining or apply for an extension within three years, but the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) retroactively granted them an extension for none of the legal reasons to do so. The Charleston Office of Surface Mining (OSM) agreed with CRMW that the DEP’s actions were “arbitrary, capricious, and an abuse of discretion.” DEP appealed the decision, and the OSM under-secretary overruled the Charleston Field Office, determining that the word “shall” in the law does not carry a mandatory obligation. CRMW has sued the OSM in federal court. As Halton says, “How has the word ‘shall’ come to mean ‘may’?”

**The ACHE ACT Is Reintroced in Congress in 2017**

The Appalachian Community Health Emergency (ACHE) Act, H.R. 786, was introduced in the 115th Congress by Rep. John Yarmuth (D-KY-3) on February 1, 2017. ACHE Coalition leaders Bo Webb and Bob Kincaid were present for the reintroduction of this worthy and needful bill to protect the lives of people threatened by Mountaintop Removal pollution.

Passage of this bill would place a moratorium on any new mountaintop removal permits or extensions; would have pollution monitoring and reporting; would be paid for by a fee on the coal industry; and the National Institute of Health would conduct a health study of affected communities.

At present the bill has 26 cosponsors. It has been referred to the subcommittee on Health and the subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources. For the past several years since its first introduction, the ACHE Act has been stalled in committee. Public pressure is needed to bring this important bill to passage. The ACHE Coalition (including Christians For The Mountains as a founding member) will keep pressing ACHE Act passage as long as mountains are being decapitated at a “fast and furious” pace.

At root this is a moral test of our nation’s commitment to the health of citizens as a higher priority than the profits of the coal industry. Numerous health research shows the devastating affect of mountaintop removal pollution on nearby residents. Please exert your influence.

**NOTE:** A National Academy of Sciences review of health research data and community listening sessions is now underway. A moratorium on mountaintop removal is still needed. The Precautionary Principle holds that when significant evidence points to the cause of a harm, that factor should be stopped until thorough research and analysis substantiates or refutes that initial evidence. Instead, the ‘coal cart is leaving without the safety horse.’
Mountaintop Removal Public Health Hearings

The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) is holding public hearings concerning the many peer-reviewed scientific studies and testimony that mountaintop removal is correlated to serious community health impairment. Advocacy organizations, including Christians For The Mountains, relentlessly pressured state and federal officials to acknowledge these studies. The highly publicized People’s Foot rally in Charleston in March 2015 got the pushed the West Virginia governor and head of the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (WDEP) to acknowledge the studies. At a meeting soon after with the WV Bureau of Public Health, director Dr. Rahul Gupta promised to seek federal help with the WV Bureau of Public Health, Virginia Department of Environmental Protection and Enforcement (OSMRE) to enlist the help of the National Academy of Sciences.

One of these meetings was held May 23, 2017 near Logan, West Virginia. Three panels representing state agencies, the coal industry, and environmental groups Coal River Mountain Watch (CRMW), Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (OVEC), and WV Highlands Conservancy testified to the NAS committee. The evening session was a town hall forum. During the town hall forum, one coal supporter said to the scientists, “If coal is making people sick, why am I not sick? Coal is a natural mineral that comes out of the ground--how can it be bad for our health?” Environmental groups countered with actual facts, including photos of mountaintop removal dust clouds coming down into communities.

The WVDEP air quality spokesman stated that WVDEP monitors air quality in accordance with their EPA-approved program. He mentioned 22 air quality monitors throughout the state, but, when pressed, admitted that the only one close to surface mining was in Beckley but was removed in 2015. WVDEP mentioned the thousands of water samples taken beneath mine sites, but failed to mention that the federal EPA had to step in and issue record fines against Massey Energy and Alpha Natural Resources for thousands of violations that the WVDEP missed. They also omitted the fact that two independent lab employees went to jail for falsifying water tests. When asked what is actually tested for in water, they finally admitted that they don’t test well water unless it’s requested, and that they don't test for lead, arsenic, cadmium, or other contaminants commonly associated with coal mining. They said there is no compilation of well water test data. They said they knew of no compilation of citizen complaints, how many complaints there are in a year, what citizens complain about, or what the outcomes are. However, Coal River Mountain Watch received such a list from WVDEP a few months ago.

The WV Coal Association blamed all the bad health in communities near mountaintop removal on personal lifestyle choices such as smoking and obesity. He also said that coal trucks always leave the site clean and within weight limits, with the occasional exception. But anyone who travels the roads knows that a clean, legal truck is the exception.

During the environmental group panel presentations, CRMW executive director Vernon Haltom rebutted several of the WVDEP and coal association’s statements. He then used a slide show to illustrate the blasting dust clouds that people breathe, photos of friends we’ve lost, and quotes from folks presently suffering from related illnesses. He pointed out that coal companies in WV use the explosive equivalent of 55 MOAB “mother of all bombs” to blast our mountains (45 in Kentucky), that the explosive equivalent of one MOAB is considered a “small blast” by the WVDEP, and that some communities endure the equivalent of at least one MOAB above their homes six days a week. He told the committee about the peer-reviewed studies showing that the dust (mostly silica) comes from the MTR sites, that it is in people’s neighborhoods, and that it causes health impacts such as cancerous changes in human lung cells.

Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition’s (OVEC) executive director Natalie Thompson spoke about the many diseases associated with MTR, including depression and anxiety, with a long list of people who’ve suffered. WV Highlands Conservancy’s Cindy Rank said that this study should have been conducted years ago, and that MTR’s impacts on fish and other living things should have raised a red flag that something seriously wrong could be affecting people.

One resident said that the WVDEP dismisses her complaints about the 300 dusty coal trucks past her house everyday as frivolous. Another noted that many community members with whom she’s spoken are opposed to the MTR above their homes, disrupting their lives with blasting, noise, and dust, but won’t speak out for fear of retaliation. Others speaking against mountaintop removal included friends from Kanawha Forest Coalition, Appalachian Voices, Keeper of the Mountains Foundation, and more. In addition to fear of retaliation, a recurring theme was the sense that no agency cared or would do anything to make anything better.

WV Delegate Rupie Phillips and announced candidate for the U.S. Congress, said that if elected he would ensure that the NAS committee to review health impacts of surface mining would not exist anymore. Rupie said he supported legislation to outlaw “false complaints.” He said the committee needs to look elsewhere for cancer. Rupie claimed that his grandfather was a miner and smoker who died at 94 of old age and not cancer. He told the committee, “We will fight you, and we will fight these tree-hugging groups.”

Comment to the NAS:
Most content in this report is from Coal River Mountain Watch (www.crmw.net)
Picture by Wendy Johnson

Remembering Judy Bond (1952-2011)
A Mother Of The Mountains And Its Inhabitants

Judy Bonds was a stalwart leader in the fight against mountaintop removal. She lived in Marfork Hollow in the Coal River valley, as her ancestors had lived for seven generations (many of them underground coal miners). The heavy foot of Massey Energy Coal Company blasted her surrounding mountains, bled out its waters and suffocated its trees. Judy helped organize and then led Coal River Mountain Watch against mountaintop removal. Like other outspoken anti-MTR activists in the coalfields, Judy Bonds received innumerable threats, taunts, personal assaults, and faced bullying coal trucks. Judy’s fiery spirit refused to flinch, recognizing that to give in to the coal terrorists was to capitulate to their nefarious strategy. Truth would prevail with courage and perseverance. Like the biblical Deborah, Judy’s dauntless courage led the charges. Deborah, a mother of Israel; Judy, a mother of the mountains and its inhabitants, a keeper of the covenant, a lover of God and God’s people (Judges 5).

Friends will always treasure the memories of Judy’s twinkling eyes, sparkling grin, enthusiastic hugs, and encouraging words. To be with Judy is to feel valued. Judy Bonds was other-centered, non-ego-centric, honest, and generous of heart.

Judy’s earthly, robust faith placed her feet on the ground, her sleeves rolled up, her hands working the ground for God’s truth and justice. Let us carry Judy’s mantle onward.
Four majestic oak trees frame the front yard of my Ohio home. The largest—nearly five feet across—is subject to endless speculation. Locals have dropped by to admire and give their best reckoning of its age. They all agree that the massive tree predates my house, and the log cabin before it.

It is easy to see why trees held a special place in the mythological stories of antiquity. Trees are larger than us. Like the mountains and hills, they endure the passing of time. Yet for all their grandeur, we have power over them, to cut them down and shape them to our purposes. (In antiquity, this was mostly only true of trees. In our modern technological age, it is also true of hills and mountains as well.) Left unchecked, our ability to shape our natural world can give way to the singular perception that the natural world exists solely as a utility of our convenience and consumption.

In Greek Mythology, the god Zeus withholds the knowledge of fire from humans in order to keep them weak and subservient to nature. His plans are thwarted when the hero Prometheus steals fire from Mount Olympus and teaches humans the secret of civilization. Thus armed, humans become masters over the natural world and their destiny. The natural world becomes the raw building blocks from which to forge their growing self-reliance.

With the rise of our modern age, self-reliance over nature has become the dominant worldview. C.S Lewis, in his Abolition of Man, notes that this shift towards technology has reshaped the way we perceive the natural world:

“There is something which unites magic and applied science (technology) while separating them from the “wisdom” of earlier ages. For the wise men of old, the cardinal problem of human life was how to conform the soul to objective reality, and the solution was wisdom, self-discipline, and virtue. For the modern, the cardinal problem is how to conform reality to the wishes of man, and the solution is a technique.” C.S. Lewis

The major difference, according to Lewis, between ancient and modern society is who is conforming to whom. In ancient times, roads and trade routes followed the natural terrain and curvature of the landscape. With the advance of technology, we now see nature as an obstacle to be overcome and shaped to our liking. We build tunnels, bridges, and canals to bypass geographical inconveniences. We harness the power of the wind, water and waves. We engineer molecules to work for us in the form of biological weapons, genetically modified food and nuclear energy. This shift is more than just how we interact with the natural world. It has reshaped our entire perception of the natural world into an object to be manipulated, dominated and reduced to the utilitarian sum of its parts.

Is this what God intends? Has God designed the natural world to be molded to humans’ will and whim, or is it the other way around? The author of Genesis writes: The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (Ge 2:15.) “He brought (animals) to the man to see what he would name them. (v. 19.) Unlike Zeus, who withheld fire from humans, here God places humans in the role as care-taker and name-giver of all creation. With this elevated role comes its own particular set of rules.

“Out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” Genesis 2:9

Notice the order. First, trees were pleasant to the eyes -beautiful. Second, they were good for food. God also creates a tree of knowledge -that also has fruit- but which God commands the humans not to eat of it (v. 17). The plan has been set. Then temptation arrives.

“The woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise.” Genesis 3:6

Notice the subtle reversing of the order. Eve prioritizes food first, beauty second. God had given them every tree in the garden for food, save one. They were instructed not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That tree, apparently, was to be appreciated only for its beauty, not for its utilitarian use. When Eve reverses God’s perfect order, and eats from the tree reserved solely for beauty, sin and chaos enter the world. The same is true for us when we prioritize consumption over adoration.

Human beings consume. That is what we do. Turning back the technological clock to some prehistoric state of existence does not change the biological fact that we are omnivores who get our energy primarily from the eating of plants and animals. Plants and animals are also consumers. What sets humans apart from plants and animals is our ability to adore.

“What sets humans apart from plants and animals is our ability to adore.”

The point is: God did create fruit-bearing trees—and by extension natural world—for our consumptive enjoyment. But this consumption must always take a back seat to our adoration of the Creator and an appreciation of His gift of creation. To reverse the order is to wildly miss God’s original design. Adoration must always precede consumption. Any beast can devour food, but only we humans can appreciate beauty. Never-ending consumption without adoration leads to greed, overconsumption and the eventual destruction of our planet. When God’s order is restored, the results are much different. Adoration first, with consumption second, leads to gratitude, sustainable consumption, and concern for the thriving of all of life.

Jesse Johnson wrote this out of his experience living near Canfield, Ohio, where he pastored Midway Mennonite Church.

Jesse, his wife Joan, and 15 year-old daughter Genesis recently moved to Memphis, Tennessee. Jesse serves on the congregational care staff of Christ United Methodist Church.
The Wilderness as a Revelation of God  by Dean Ohlman

Sometimes “seeing the forest” does require us to focus on the wonders of the individual tree -- plus all the other wonders that abound in the wild places. As another has expressed it, “Nature is an icon of the face of God.

If we are truly attentive, our vision in the wilderness can perhaps approximate some of Adam's vision in the Garden: He saw its beauty before he recognized its utility (Genesis 2:9). In his letter to the Roman church, the apostle Paul said that since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). Without excuse for what? For not believing, understanding, and acknowledging the existence of a divine Creator.

I’ve often considered that Scripture to be a sort of apologetic for the existence of God--in a general sense. Over the years, however, as I have studied and become more intimate with the natural world as well as with the Bible, I’ve gotten much more out of Paul’s statement by asking myself and people I have interacted with in wild places just exactly what is it that one can “clearly” see about God's eternal power and divine nature in what He has created.

When Paul speaks of God’s "eternal power," I understand him to be saying that in the natural world we will not be able to determine the limits of either time or space. It is clear from even the latest of scientific studies that mankind has indeed not been able to delineate the extent of either time or space.

What does Paul mean by “divine nature” (or "Godhead" in some older translations)? I have come to understand “divine” to mean “that which is superhuman, God-like, supremely good, magnificent, and/or compels a person to worship”).

So what is it within the natural world that would show us God’s eternal power and His divine nature?

Among other things, we could observe these:

1. Mysterious light and matter (which still defy human definition and understanding)
2. Seemingly endless time (no clearly apparent beginning or end)
3. Seemingly endless space (eternality seen in the microcosm and macrocosm)
4. Preservation of energy (the inexplicable laws of thermodynamics)
5. Astronomical extravagance and magnitude ("Billions and billions" -Sagan)
6. Wonderful life (inexplicable in its essence and origin—and known on earth alone)
7. Fearsome, but essential, death (which is marvelously linked to life)
8. Profound mystery (beyond human understanding)
9. Abiding orderliness (out of seeming chaos)
10. Mathematical precision (to the point of beauty and elegance)
11. Unfailing regularity (making the creation mostly predictable)
12. Sabbath peace (the balance of rest with activity)
13. Inexplicable Love (warming the human soul)
14. Revitalizing stillness (quieting the human soul)
15. Remarkable harmony (comforting the human soul)
16. Unfathomable complexity (defying human simplification)
17. Awesome power (far exceeding our own)
18. Incredibly informed design (absolutely beyond human duplication)
19. Virtually endless variety (unbelievable biodiversity)
20. Amazing adaptability (micro-evolutionary change)
21. Overwhelming beauty (thrilling the heart and soul)
22. Extravagant fruitfulness (offering people more than enough)
23. Sacrificial nurture (animal parents caring for their young)
24. Limitless sensory stimulation (providing “candy” for the senses)
25. Complex interrelationships (life that is dependent upon community)
26. Abundant joy (“even the worm can feel contentment” –Schiller)
27. Models for human work and leisure (structures fundamental for human creativity)
28. Animal fear of people (grieving the human soul)
29. Creation in agony—groaning (awaiting the end of the curse and the rule of loving children of God)
30. The image of God: mankind (An unbridgeable gap between people and the other created things—people alone having the capacity for creative thinking, abstract reasoning, and symbolic language—and having innate morality and the instinct to worship)
30. The image of God: mankind (An unbridgeable gap between people and the other created things—people alone having the capacity for creative thinking, abstract reasoning, and symbolic language—and having innate morality and the instinct to worship)

So if we are truly observant of the created world around us, these qualities will be displayed before our senses in such abundance and profundity that we will often be compelled to kneel down or even stand up in exuberant praise and worship of our Creator along with every other thing that He has made. The prophet Isaiah, speaking of the coming day when all creation will be restored, describes nature's joy—joy which the children of God will share:

You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands (Isaiah 55:12)

Dean Ohlman grew up in West Michigan as an enthusiastic outdoorsman. After graduating from fundamentalist Bob Jones University, Dean followed a career path including teaching, a Bible college dean of students, professional writer and photojournalist for mission agencies and Christian universities, script writer and TV producer for the RBC Ministries’ Day of Discovery broadcast. As Dean puts it, he feels he “discovered the lost fundamental” of evangelical Christianity: the biblical requirement of creation stewardship. Married to Marge for 50 years, they have three sons and seven grandkids.
The People’s Climate March

Many religious voices were among the tens of thousands joining in The People’s Climate March on Washington, DC on April 29, 2017. The marchers walked from the Capitol to the White House, passing by the Trump International Hotel on the 100th day of President Trump’s term. Hundreds of smaller events were held simultaneously across the country. These marches sent a strong message that strong citizen protest would accompany national policies that regress on addressing climate.

The “Keepers of the Faith” comprised one of the eight blocs in the DC march lineup under the theme, “All faiths respect the earth. Stewardship of our planet is a moral duty.”

Greetings from our friends of Interfaith Moral Action on Climate.

Faith-filled marchers on that hot, sunny day greeted everyone with encouraging words through our common hope that a people’s movement empowered by God will not be in vain.

John Elwood floated his leaky ship through the march with Climate Caretakers.

Grinning on Elwood’s left is Ed Brown who heads up the organization, Care Of Creation.

Climate denial and inaction, of course, is a very serious matter. Sink the “Denial Ship.”

Pope Francis continues to inspire people of all walks who seek climate justice.

In his encyclical, Laudato Si, Francis writes, “Climate change is a global problem with serious implications, environmental, social, economic, political, and for the distribution of goods; it represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day.” (25)

The fossil fuel industry initially intervened in the case as defendants, joining the U.S. government in trying to have the case dismissed. On April 8, 2016, U.S. Magistrate Judge Thomas Coffin recommended the denial of their motions to dismiss, and U.S. District Court Judge Ann Aiken upheld Judge Coffin’s recommendation, with the issuance of an historic November 10, 2016 opinion and order that denied the motions. When the defendants sought an interlocutory appeal of that order, Judge Aiken denied the Trump administration’s motions on June 8, 2017. The following day, the Trump administration filed a petition for “writ of mandamus” to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, seeking, again, to avert a trial. The Ninth Circuit has not requested the parties to submit briefs on the government’s petition, and could deny it without doing so.

On June 28, 2017, Judge Coffin issued an order releasing the fossil fuel industry defendants from the case, and setting a trial date for February 5, 2018 before Judge Aiken at the U.S. District Court of Oregon in Eugene. Youth plaintiffs, now age 9 to 21, and their attorneys are now preparing for trial!

Source: www.ourchildrenstrust.org/us/federal-lawsuit/  Photos: by Allen Johnson
Climate Caretakers Meet In DC

A number of Christians met at the Sojourners headquarters in Washington, DC a few days after the People’s Climate March. Climate Caretakers is a global community of Christians committed to prayer and action on climate change. Primarily comprised of evangelical Christians, the group focused on prayer, personal commitment to conserve, and action on climate in their congregations and in the public square. Emphasis was placed on storytelling, biblical basis, and pastoral nurture to encourage fellow Christians to engage climate. The website is climatetakecare.org

Prayer Vigil At Court House On Toxic Frack Waste

West Virginia citizens of Fayette County and supporters held a candlelight vigil on the Fayette County Courthouse lawn to support community members who have been harmed by toxic contamination.

“It's changed our lives just knowing that our property has become a toxic waste dump,” says Sandra Keeney, a mother living directly beside Wolf Creek, who believes that her water well has been affected by contamination. “My children do not get to enjoy the quiet country life that I wished for them. They do not get to play in the creek or in the sand. My son is hyper-allergic to the outside. My nieces and nephews get chemical burns every time we bathe in the water.”

Allen Johnson, Coordinator of Christians for the Mountains, was a keynote speaker. “The courts may decide to uphold economic special interests over the county’s ordinance. Are corporate interests more valuable than the health of people?” The vigilers shouted “No!”

Headwaters Defense, a grassroots community environmental justice organization, is continuing to call for the immediate shut down and clean-up of toxic waste dumps in Fayette County. The Fayette County Commission has passed a fracking waste ban, which is being challenged by the gas industry.

Public Lab Holds DIY Environmental Tools Workshop

Public Lab is a community that teaches how to make and use inexpensive tools and techniques to change how people see the world in environmental, social, and political terms. A recent workshop at West Virginia University included how to do helium-balloon aerial photography and how to build water conductivity measuring equipment. Appalachian Mountain Patrol, founded by Laura Chipley, along with Coal River Mountain Watch’s Junior Walk, showed how they use drone photography to monitor mountaintop removal. www.publiclab.org

Appalachian Mountain Patrol Produces Local Media

Appalachian Mountain Patrol (AMP) is a multi-media project that incorporates documentary filmmaking, citizen science, video surveillance, and sensor journalism. The AMP project trains, equips, and empowers local residents to tell the story of how mountaintop removal and other extreme energy affects life in Appalachia by combining compelling first-person accounts and scientific data with visceral imagery. AMP will use PR tactics to proliferate a very different message that will reach everyday citizens and lawmakers alike. Both of these goals speak to one ultimate aim: accountability and reform on the part of the energy industry. Participating partners are Christians For The Mountains; RAMPS; Coal River Mountain Watch; Kanawha Forest Coalition.

Fracking and Pipelines Assalt Appalachia

The natural gas boom in the Marcellus Shale region of West Virginia, Ohio and Pennsylvania has resulted in $15 billion in proposed massive interstate pipeline construction projects. The Atlantic Coast Pipeline, Rover Pipeline, Mountain Valley Pipeline and Leach XPress are in construction or far into application process. If approved, completed, and operational, these pipelines would contribute massively to greenhouse gasses, lock in fossil fuel infrastructure for decades, and degrade and pollute the land, water

Christians For The Mountains daily engages in opposition to this developing onslaught against God’s creation, the health and homelands of many people in its swath, and the corporate greed and complicit politics that fuel the assault. Allen Johnson, Coordinator, is a member of the Steering Committee of the Allegheny-Blueridge Alliance (ABRA) consisting of 52 member groups in Virginia and West Virginia opposing the Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP). Johnson is active in the “It’s A Gas” meetings to oppose gas fracking and pipeline development in West Virginia. Johnson also heads up Eight Rivers Council in his own locale setting up informational meetings and inviting and equipping people as they attend government hearings.

There is so much more to write. The next edition of The Mountain Vision will detail gas fracking and pipeline issues.

www.headwatersdefense.com
The lurking peril of an approaching uninhabitable planet haunts the minds of many activists. Perhaps we know too much? Warming global temperatures could trigger unstoppable feedback loops of permafrost melting and methane hydrate release. Mounting ocean acidification and warming will extinguish coral reefs and diminish keystone shell-forming species from krill to zooplankton. The threat of nuclear weaponry, too, is formidable. Increasing human population may overwhelm the earth’s carrying capacity. A list could go on and on…

Apocalypse, in popular parlance, means vast global destruction, death, or tyranny. Post-apocalyptic literature is the theme of numerous futuristic dystopic novels and films including George Orwell’s famous 1984, Cormac McCarthy’s The Road, Suzanne Collins’ The Hunger Games, and Elizabeth Kolbert’s non-fiction tome, The Sixth Extinction.

The etymology of “apocalypse” is found in the English translation of the title of the last book of The Bible, “Revelation,” translated from the Greek word apokalupsis meaning to uncover or reveal. Vivid imagery in chapter 6 includes the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse who stalk the earth. Interpretations differ on the rider of the White Horse, but typically the Red Horse is War, the Black Horse is Famine, and the Pale Horse is death. Some Bible scholars consider Revelation to interpret the oppressive era when the book was written, while other scholars suggest the book is about the meaning of history and the events that will lead to its culmination.

Humans have faced apocalypse in the past. According to some researchers, massive climate disruptions such as the volcanic Toba super-eruption in Sumatra 70,000 years ago might have reduced total human population to fewer than 100. Massive famines, disease epidemics, oppressions, and genocide have been apocalyptic for certain people groups. The 14th Century bubonic plague pandemic wiped out half of Europe’s population. Native American Indian populations collapsed from European–carried diseases. Africans were kidnapped and enslaved to hard toil. Hitler’s attempt to exterminate Jews was a notorious genocide. Increasingly, it seems, humanity has its hands on the rudder that will steer our future. We understand science, we master technology, we grasp social theory, we have historical perspective, and we can draw upon religious ethics. But do we have the wisdom and collective will to avert disaster and forge a bright, viable future? Ultimately, will we turn away from our destructive human arrogance to choose the cruciform way of living set forth by Jesus? God is merciful and wills life.

Reckoning With Apocalypse: Time To Turn Around
by Dale Aukerman
@Christian Century, December 8, 1999

A hundred years ago many Christians envisioned Christianity winning acceptance among every country and people of the world. As it turned out, this century has seen a drastic erosion of Christianity in the very centers from which it launched its missionary activity—namely, in Europe and North America. That erosion has been hastened by—among other things—two world wars and the unleashing of the atomic bomb.

Since mid-century, some Christians have foreseen not global conversion but global destruction, hastened perhaps by a nuclear catastrophe. Many of the scenarios of the end predict a rescue or rapture of Christians out of suffering, in anticipation of Christ’s millennial reign. Both the expectation of Christian triumph and the expectation of judgment have contained an idolatrous element. Neither has reckoned with the meaning of apocalypse. Some people have dismissed the revealing of God’s word in the apocalypse, preferring instead a future that humans can manage. Others have privatized the apocalypse, dismissing its call for an obedient church that is prepared to suffer with the poor and oppressed and is made up of disciples who hopefully anticipate the fulfillment of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. Still others resign themselves to the fear of computer-generated chaos. Believers may legitimately reckon with “a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire” (Heb. 10:27), the cataclysmic harvest of human evil—individual and corporate. But such a prospect often takes on the false solidity of an inescapable truth and obscures what should be paramount: hope in God, who is incomparably gracious.

In the Exodus narrative, Pharaoh persistently rejected God’s declared message from Moses and Aaron. Similarly, in the times of the prophets the people repeatedly refused to heed God’s call to turn back toward God from imminent catastrophe. Jesus foresaw that the populace in Jerusalem would persist in rejecting God’s call, with awesome judgment as the result. “How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!” (Matt. 23:37). That “and you would not” remains archetypal for all collective rejection of Jesus that leads to doom.

It may be that the current world situation is similar and that God, who sees the hearts of all, knows that in the period ahead humanity will not turn back from folly and world cataclysm. But if God knows that, humans do not—and cannot—know it. Since Christians dare not presume to know the timing of the End, they need also to keep in view that impending judgment can be averted if people turn to God. God can deliver us from any seeming fate, but the urgency of turning around presses upon us all. When Christians think in these terms, the awesomeness of the present is constituted not primarily by threats to a sustainable future, but rather by the word of the eternal, almighty God. The central danger is not perishing in some computer-generated nuclear inferno, nor in clouds of chemical or biological destruction, nor by militia or terrorist attacks. The Y2K problem is not ultimately pivotal. The primary problem lies in our relation—or lack of relation—to God.

“God can deliver us from any seeming fate, but the urgency of turning around presses upon us all... The primary problem lies in our relation—or lack of relation—to God.”

God’s word through the prophets often centered on the verb shuv, to turn— to turn from disobedience and rebellion and return to Yahweh. A turning of one’s...
existence is conversion, actualized in obedience to God's will, and it involves unconditional trust in God and renunciation of all competing sources of help. In the evangelical tradition, such a turning happens when individuals see the magnitude of their sin and recognize their extreme need for repentance and forgiveness. They deplore the enormity of private or underworld sinning—the breakdown of the family, sexual promiscuity, pornography, drug abuse, crime, indiscriminate youth violence. Many churchfolk focus on the pressing need for winning sinful individuals to "a saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ" before the inevitable cataclysm hits us.

Yet many of these people have little sense of the collective sinning done in and by society. Many of them do not understand that the threat of catastrophic judgment is brought on by their nation as nation and by its vested interests: neglect of the least privileged in this country and beyond, economic exploitation, popular media saturated in violence, the support of repressive client regimes, military buildup and the corporatization of the environment. By contrast, many people in "peace and justice" movements often see only the latter types of wrongdoing, not the more private type. Biblically, sin and judgment are both individual and collective. The turning toward God, then, is partially manifested in individual conversion, but also in a collective reorientation. Christians can negate neither the individual nor the collective turning and returning to God.

The alternatives laid out in Deuteronomy 30 summarize God's message proclaimed by all the prophets: "I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. . . . Therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live." Two awesome, contrary possibilities stand before us: Trust in God, cleave to God and be greatly blessed; or defy God and move into catastrophe.

Churchfolk contradict Deuteronomy 30 and the whole message of the Bible when they suppose that an imminent cataclysm is inevitable, and that efforts to address collective evils are a waste of time. This outlook assumes that God is not giving humanity the choice between life and doom. They also contradict Deuteronomy 30 when they dismiss the prospect of God's judgment, presuming to create their own future. Seen biblically, however, God does offer this choice. If there is not the turning back, then the catastrophe will come—maybe sooner, maybe later. But for the moment, God is still giving time, and strives to lead humankind back from total destruction.

This shuv, individual and corporate, is therefore not something simply within human power to decide and effect. Ultimately God alone can rescue human beings, individually and collectively, from "the evil one." Even disciples do not have it within their power to bring about this turnaround.

Some activists tend to see themselves as constrained to become saviors and guarantors of the future through these strategies and efforts. God's word, however, demands a difficult turning to desist from self-help, to leave room for God's sovereign action.

In peace and justice movements, that turning is very much needed. Disciples recognize that within their human capabilities they cannot turn the world around. They cannot overcome. But God in Jesus has overcome and is turning the world around. Jesus, undeserving, took our deserved suffering and stood—and stands—with each and all in undeserved suffering. Jesus gave himself over to the preponderance of oppressive and lethal power (not as a fate but in trust and obedience to God) and overcame it. Disciples on the brink of a new millennium, like their counterparts in the first century, no longer set their hope on human capabilities and political possibilities, but only on God's power to act and save.

What then is the Christian alternative to seeking a part in humanly managing the future? How can disciples work toward a turning, without losing sight of the fact that we can hope only in God? All Christian hope has as its source and grounding the resurrection of Jesus. There the living God overwhelmed death and its power to commandeer societal structures. Because of this hope, grounded in the risen Christ, disciples can stand against all defeated structures.

Giving room to God's acting is far from passive. Disciples seek to embody and proclaim the incursion of God's rule, and therefore resist, rather than stand with, structures set against that rule.

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God's Mercy in the Book of Jonah

Assyrians maintained their empire by terror through grisly public displays such as flaying their enemies' skins, spiking bodies on poles, and piling up lopped heads. Conquered citizens of any age were not spared torture, enslavement, cruel death, and destruction of their homes. Nineveh was the prideful Assyrian capitol.

God called Jonah to preach judgment to Nineveh. No doubt he was terrified to go to the hated arch enemy. Jonah fled in the opposite direction to get away from God. During the "whale incident" Jonah repented, subsequently was given a new chance, and headed off to Nineveh where he preached that "...in 40 days Nineveh will be overthrown."

Surprisingly, the people and the King responded to Jonah's message and began to fast and cover themselves in sackcloth and ashes in contrition.

God relented with mercy and spared Nineveh judgment. Jonah, though, was angry that God spared the hated Assyrian enemy.

This Bible story of Jonah illustrates God's judgment. God will not allow evil to continue indefinitely. Either people will repent and turn away from their sin (God's preference), or evil ways will rebound upon a people to their fall. --Commentary by Allen Johnson

"Ultimately God alone can rescue human beings, individually and collectively, from "the evil one.""
Honoring Ken Hechler (1914-2016) by Allen Johnson

Conversation with Ken Hechler was always a treat. Ever the teacher—one of his vast array of skill sets—Ken would spellbound any listener with first hand knowledge on seemingly any topic or personage of the past 100 years. Ken found great joy in greeting and meeting with people from all walks of life. During his service as West Virginia Secretary of State (1984-2000), Ken often kept a desk in the hallway outside his office so passersby would feel comfortable and invited to talk. As a U.S. Congressman (1959-1977) Ken would often drive to a public space in his district such as a shopping mall, get out a folding table and some chairs, and hang out a sign, "I'm Ken Hechler, Your Congressman. Let's Talk."

Ken was a champion for coal miner health and safety. As a congressman, he spearheaded the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act that passed in 1969. This key legislation upgraded mine safety into federal regulatory oversight, placed limits on mine dust, and instituted black lung benefits.

In the 60's as surface coal mining accelerated, Congressman Hechler pushed hard for environmental protection legislation. Yet Hechler opposed the bill that eventually passed into law, the Surface Mine Control and Reclamation Act in 1977 (SMCRA), believing (correctly) that a loophole would open up on reclamation that would serve to expand surface mining. And indeed it did, as conventional surface mining expanded into blowing up mountains.

Ken became a passionate opponent of mountaintop removal. When Larry Gibson moved from Ohio back to his West Virginia ancestral home, he was angry and dismayed to see his beloved homeland destroyed by this ruthless mining practice. Gibson and Hechler met up, and what a pair they became! Ken's amazing resume included a Ph.D in History; a stint as a Major in the U.S. Army during World War II; author of numerous books including *Bridge At Remagen* that was made into a major Hollywood movie; interrogator of Nazi war criminals; staff assistant to President Truman; U.S. Congressman; West Virginia Secretary of State. Larry's resume was a 5th grade education and a custodian at an automobile manufacturer. Ken Hechler mentored Larry Gibson in effective communication and political advocacy. Larry Gibson inspired Ken Hechler to get out on the street as an activist. For two decades the "odd couple" gave university lectures, spoke at rallies, and marched in demonstrations. Shortly before he died in 2012, Larry Gibson said to me with a puzzled look, "Ken Hechler told me I changed his life." So true, just as Ken Hechler changed Larry Gibson's life. We are all the better for it.

Ken literally "walked the talk" championing justice. He was the only congressman to walk with Martin Luther King in the march from Selma to Montgomery in 1965. More than three decades later Hechler and others did a re-enactment of the Miner's March on Blair Mountain to commemorate the violence-laced labor struggle of the early 1900's and to protest against the recent issuance of a massive mountaintop removal permit on historic Blair Mountain. A group of coal supporters, including local officials, joined together to harrass, throw garbage at, and kick and push Ken Hechler and his fellow protesters. Hechler, always fit from regular walking and swimming exercise, also joined Larry Gibson, Julian Martin, and others in a walk across West Virginia to publicize the onerous practice of mountaintop removal. And Ken walked over 500 miles with 90-year old Doris "Granny D" Haddock in her walk across the nation to push for campaign election finance reform. I remember vividly being in Washington, DC with the diminutive Granny D, the tall lanky Ken Hechler and many others as we walked from the Lincoln Memorial to the steps of the United States Capitol to deliver a strong message that our democracy is not for sale!

For many years Ken lived in Charleston, WV in a humble basement apartment across the street from the Culture Center. A typical day might include research at the library, writing, a swim for exercise, and a drive in his trademark red jeep to Shoney's restaurant for his supper around 5 pm.

Ken was a lifelong bachelor...until age 98 when he married his long-time friend, Carol Kitzmiller. The couple lived in Hampshire County, WV. During the next 4 years I visited the happy and hospitable couple a number of times. And once again I'd be the spellbound, awestruck, yet warmly welcomed audience to the greatest West Virginian ever. (and don't argue with me on that last point!)

"Ken Hechler, one of my life's great privileges has been to have been your friend. I share that sentiment with so many others. Enjoy God's eternal loving embrace."

Excerpt from My Eulogy at Ken Hechler’s Memorial

Ken knew me through Christians For The Mountains. As his days began to close, Ken drew close in trust to Jesus. I would like to close with parts from a Bible scripture. Psalm 72 speaks of an honorable King who is righteous in God's eyes. Or, in modern parlance, a righteous government. As we listen to this Psalm, think of how well Ken Hechler lived this out. And let this be our challenge as citizens and public servants.

I'll read sections of Psalm 72, verses 1-8, from Eugene Petersen's Message and from the New International Version.

*Give the gift of wise rule to the king, O God,*
*the gift of just rule to the crown prince.*
*MAY HE JUDGE YOUR PEOPLE RIGHTLY,*
*BE HONORABLE TO YOUR MECK AND LOWLY.*

Let the mountains give exuberant witness; shape the hills with the contours of right living. Please stand up for the poor, help the children of the needy, come down hard on the cruel tyrants. Because he rescues the poor at the first sign of need, the destitute who have run out of luck. He opens a place in his heart for the down-and-out; he restores the wretched of the earth. He frees them from tyranny and torture—when they bleed, he bleeds; when they die, he dies.

And now this verse 17 in honor of Ken Hechler.

*May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun.*

Ken and Carol Hechler
Thanksgiving, 2014
(Ken at 100 Years old)

Larry Gibson (left) with Ken Hechler and unidentified friend at Rally for Blair Mountain in 2011.

"I'm Ken Hechler, your public servant. How can I be of help to you?"

Ken Hechler at his Charleston apartment with his trademark red jeep.

All photos are by Allen Johnson.
Definition of stewardship: “A trust granted for profitable use” (the Open Bible). Such profit is primarily for the master, but also for the livelihood of the steward/servant. Land is mentioned more frequently than money as the object of stewardship. Unbelievers see earth stewardship primarily as an issue of survival. Believers, on the other hand, must see it first as a responsibility before God. Sadly, it has taken generations of land abuse and environmental threats to survival to begin to awaken Christians to the task we were given in the beginning. For this we must confess to God before a watching world. [Scripture passages chosen describe duties of stewards, servants, and householders as well as those that describe stewardship.]

1. The steward is not the owner of the Master’s property.
Psa. 24:1 The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.
Mat. 25:14 The master delivers his goods to the servants

2. The steward is a humble servant under the Master.
Mat. 10:24-25 Servant is not above his master (John 13:16; 15:20)
Mat. 18:26 Servant falls down before the master
Deu. 8:11-18 Don’t forget God when you become prosperous. Such prosperity does not ultimately come from you (All the stewardship parables of Jesus indicate the need of humility.)

3. The steward has dominion delegated to him by the Master.
Gen. 1:28-30 God gives dominion to man
Gen. 2:15 God tells Adam and Eve to tend and keep the garden

4. The steward is directly answerable to the Master and can expect negative consequences for failure to obey Him.
Gen. 2:16-17 Told not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil
Gen. 3:14-19 All creation cursed because of disobedience
Mat. 25:14-30 Parable of the talents — failure to invest properly
Lk. 12:45-48 Especially bad when we know to do right and don’t do it
Lk. 16:1-2 Steward dismissed for wasting master’s property
Rom. 14:12 We must all give account to God

5. The steward is expected to increase the yield of the Master’s property, which precludes wasting or spoiling it.
Gen. 1:28 Expected to be fruitful and multiply
Mat. 25:14-30 Stewards expected to invest and make profit from master’s goods
Luk. 16:1-2 Steward dismissed for wasting master’s goods

6. The steward seeks to exemplify the Master in dealing with other people under his stewardship.
Mat.10:25 Servant is like his master
Mat. 18:23 Servant should have treated others as the master treated him

7. The steward carries out his duties to the Master faithfully and in a timely manner.
Mat. 24:45-48 Faithful and wise servant gives his charges food in due time
Mat. 25:21, 23 Who is faithful in little will be given much

8. The steward is thankful for and expresses his gratitude to the Master.
Duet. 8:10 Bless the Lord for the gift of good land
Rom. 1:21 Not being thankful is a sign of an apostate society
2 Cor. 9:10-11 Being enriched in everything causes thanksgiving
Phl. 4:6 In everything give thanks
.....and The Book of Psalms

9. The steward is expectant of the Master’s return.
Mat. 24:45-41 The steward must not be unjust because his master delays his return
Luk. 12:35-38 Servant blessed if expectant of master’s return
Upcoming for The Mountain Vision

CFTM is planning its tenth edition for winter, as our schedule permits. Please let us know if your friends would like a sample copy.

We invite you to send your own personal stories of your conversions to “Kingdom of God” life with emphasis on environmental justice.

Mountain Vision is an outreach ministry of Christians For The Mountains. Copies are sent free of charge to advocates for God’s “will to be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt. 6:10).