Jesus loves the little children
All the children of the world
Red and yellow, black and white
They are precious in His sight
Jesus loves the little children of the world

The lyrics above have been listed as a hymn, a prayer, and a nursery rhyme. It is one of the first songs small children often learn in church, perhaps second only to Jesus Loves Me.

The words are truth. Jesus invites us to come to Him “like little children” and says “whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:4-6)

Children come to Jesus readily. Children are not racist unless adults corrupt them. Grown-ups too often lose the innocent faith and trusting nature that children possess.

Since Jesus lovingly treasures children, we adults likewise must love them. Each and every child needs to be cherished, protected, and nurtured into responsible maturity. For what sort of adults these children grow up to be will cumulatively greatly influence the future quality of life on Earth.

May God bless every one of you with faith, hope, and love this Christmas!

THIS ISSUE

Several essays share personal insights about the children they are parenting or grandparenting. A common partner is the natural world of God’s creation. God endows children with an eagerness to wonder, explore, and learn. When we adults facilitate this process, we also learn from wide-eyed children.

What does The Bible teach about human responsibility to God’s creation? Does Genesis teach domination and exploitation for our self-aggrandizement, or do we nurture reation as a reverence to God? Rabbi Ellen Bernstein offers solid teaching.

Rev. Owen Owens shares his eye-and-heart opening experience as he first tours the devastated lands of his passed friend, Larry Gibson. Even though national press seems to have forgotten, Mountaintop Removal continues to ravage the health of people and destroy mountains. Our Larry Gibson Biography Project will keep this issue forefront until the odious form of coal mining ceases. We offer a tribute to Chuck Nelson, friend to many as a stalwart advocate against this practice.

Young people, globally, are addressing looming climate change. We highlight Christian young people and their organizations. They need our support.

Sprinkled throughout this issue are reviews of notable books and films. Winter is a good time to snuggle up with a challenging book to refuel our own activism.

Sociologists say we are living in the information age. Yet that is but one subset of the technological era that can be blessing or curse. What is our response?

Boone County, WV is among the poorest and beleagured areas in the nation. Not to give up, local leaders are developing successful helping programs.

Visit us on the Web at www.christiansforthemountains.org Our Facebook community welcomes you!
“I see a Peckwooder!” I exclaimed excitedly to my wife, Debbie. The season’s first swirling snow was splotch-dappling the ground. A few days earlier, Debbie had hung the bird feeder and the suet feeder. And there she was, our first Peckwooder for this winter.

So, what thou asketh, is a Peckwooder? Most birdwatchers would have identified our feathered friend as a Hairy Woodpecker. For us, our peculiar multi-decades old nomenclature derives from what one of our young sons named that bird. As he was learning identification vocabulary, woodpecker and peckwooder garbled. The same thing garbling happened when a grasshopper became a hopgrassier. “Cute and descriptive,” we thought. Saying these terms ourselves reminds us fondly of seeing the wonder of nature through the eyes of a child.

Rachel Carson is famous for her classic book, Silent Spring, that exposed the devastation of uncontrolled pesticides. Growing up on a family farm near Pittsburgh, Carson relished exploring the outdoors. In 1955 she began an essay describing her outdoor nature walks with her grandnephew, Roger Christie, that would become another of her books, The Sense of Wonder: A Celebration of Nature for Parents and Children.

Roger and Rachel together explored the rocky coast of Maine through dense forests and open fields, observing wildlife, strange plants, moonlight, and storm clouds and listening to the living music of insects in the underbrush. Teaching Roger about the natural wonders around them, Carson began to see anew herself. She wanted to relate that same magical feeling to others who might hope to introduce a child to the beauty of nature. “If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder,” writes Carson, “he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in.”

One of the delights of caring adults, be it parents, grandparents, uncles or aunts, or family friends, is to explore nature with a child. This might be a trip to a zoo or aquarium, looking through a microscope at protozoa, fishing in a creek for chubs, or naming the animal figures as clouds float by.

I recall with fond joy being with our sons on canoe-camping adventures on rivers such as the Potomac, James, and Greenbrier. Shared embedded memories are of cracking campfires, meteor-streaked starlit nights, strange night sounds of owls and “what is that?” The bite of cold air while snuggling into a warming sleeping bag.

I was fourteen when I really fell heads-over-heels in love on a full-moon summer night. Not romantic love with a woman, that would come later. Rather, a friend of my dad, Frank Burton, had invited our family to go on a canoe-camping trip on the Wisconsin River near Madison. Burton taught my older brother, Jerry, and me how to fish. We explored the adjacent wooded hills and pattered about in the river. We brought nature treasures to Burton, who would delightedly teach us about each treasure.

On the last night, everyone went to their tents to sleep except Jerry and me. We went to the downstream edge of the sandbar we had camped on, baited up our fishing rod, and waited for a bite that never came. Not that it mattered. For hours we watched the full moon rise and then begin to settle. The August air was balmy, the sand under our supine bodies was soft. Insects hummed. Strange sounds came from the wooded shore.

That night I fell in love with God’s creation. After that, I could not be satiated enough with nature. I devoured field guides, learned the Latin names of species, set up an aquarium of small native fish, snails, insect nymphs, built a boat to fish in a local lake, memorized Latin names of species, and peered often into a microscope. Whenever I could, I was in the woods, a swamp, or a lake. My chosen major in college, to no surprise, was biology specializing in ecology. Decades later, in midlife, I launched into a graduate degree in theology through an internship with the nascent Evangelical Environmental Network.

Larry Gibson’s motto emblazoned on his bright-colored T-shirts, “We are the Keeper of the Mountains. Love Them or Leave Them, Just Don’t Destroy Them.” To intimately love nature is to respect, cherish, protect, and spend time with nature. Just as we would act toward people we love. Importantly, to love God is to love what and who God loves. Adults have the high privilege to inculcate this love into children.

Some adults are fearful to bring children into the world. Climate disaster, nuclear war, and a myriad of social dysfunctions loom portentous and bleak. Yet whatever troubles the future might bring, it will be important, indeed essential, that there be courageous, altruistic, creative, hope-filled and faith-filled adults to address such challenges with loving service. At the core of the Christian Gospel is Hope, Faith, and Love. (1 Corinthians 13:13) Our calling as Christians is to live out this truth. And that can include raising children into that truth. As adults, we can encourage, strengthen, and support those who have primary responsibility raising children. Older adults can encourage young adults to mature in their God-given abilities that they may serve well their families and communities.

“Let the children come to me! Don’t try to stop them. People who are like these little children belong to the kingdom of God. I promise you that you cannot get into God’s kingdom, unless you accept it the way a child does.” Then Jesus took the children in his arms and blessed them by placing his hands on them.” (Jesus, quoted in Mark 10:13-16, NLT)
Snapshot of CFTM Happenings

We invite you to send a prayerful 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.

1. Your contribution will go toward completing, publishing, and distributing Larry Gibson's biography.

2. Your contribution and your prayer will continue to strengthen CFTM involvement in leadership activities and responsibilities such as:

Allegheny Blue-Ridge Alliance (ABRA) CFTM’s volunteer Coordinator continues as Chair of the Board of Directors. The ABRA coalition of 50 member organizations in Virginia and West Virginia led the successful defeat of the $8 billion Atlantic Coast Pipeline that would have locked in fossil fuel gas for decades and caused environmental damage during construction to pristine steep slopes. ABRA’s Conservation Hub uses data-focused tools to promote responsible resource management. https://www.abralliance.org

CFTM’s Coordinator is also a board member of the recently-formed Mother Jones Community Foundation, a non-profit organization (501-c-3) dedicated to improving the quality of life in some of the most exploited communities in Appalachia. See projects in Boone County, WV (see our page 19). Website is https://motherjoneswv.org

CFTM is active with the National Religious Coalition on Creation Care that is an interfaith 501(3)(c) non-profit organization with active engagement concerning our world’s most pressing environmental issues. www.nrccc.org

CFTM leads tours of mountaintop removal. (see pages 8,9 for an impactful tour this past June). In 2018, Orthodox theologian John Chryssavgis toured mountaintop removal. He said, “That trip changed my worldview!” Chryssavgis then spoke directly to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomeos, spiritual leader of 300 million Orthodox Christians. And now, Bartholomew is publicly denouncing mountaintop removal as ecocide. (see page 20)

CFTM has active contributing presence with Eight Rivers Council, WV Public Lands, WV Climate Alliance, World Stewardship Institute, Christians Caring for Creation, Highlanders for Responsible Development, OVEC, Highlands Conservancy, WV Rivers Coalition, ACHE, and more.

We Welcome Your Support!

Larry’s Friends’ Reunion on Kayford, 2022.

“We need to get together!”

Those words summarize what many tell Marybeth in interviews on Larry Gibson’s biography.

A planning committee is being formed to hold a celebratory tribute to honor people who helped Larry fight mountaintop removal and who themselves continue good work. To remember those stalwarts who have passed on. To inspire youth.

Please contact Allen if you would like to help on the committee and if you want to be sure you are invited. allen@christiansforthemountains.org

Likely a Saturday in spring or summer, date yet to be determined. Food, music, fun, and lots of storytelling. And a commitment to carry on the spirit of Larry’s legacy.

Progress Update on the Bio

The Larry Gibson Biography Project is to fulfill the vision of this great man to inspire future generations to courageous effective advocacy for the lands and people of their own communities and indeed for the world.

First, CFTM is deeply grateful for those of you who are supporting this enlightening story of a remarkable man who inspired a movement that has been life-changing to thousands.

Our primary researcher and author, Marybeth Lorbiecki, has conducted interviews averaging two hours with about one hundred persons. Her initial book will be a monumental work that will detail the man, the movement, and project a future trajectory. Anticipated draft will be completed in January 2022.

From this book will come a shorter popular-read book, and another illustrated book for children. Your support can make these works inspire people in the future as Larry did.

Invitation to Join Together With Us

Name ____________________________

Address ____________________________

City ____________________________ State _______ Zip _______

Phone ____________________________ Email ____________________________

Organization/School(s) ____________________________

We welcome any other information you would like to share
(such as your faith; experience; skills; special interests; etc...use separate sheet)

Mail to: Christians For The Mountains 12664 Frost Road, Dunmore, WV 24934

[Note: This form is not necessary. We welcome pertinent info. Online donation is also available.

CFTM has 501(c)3 nonprofit tax exempt status through a partnership with World Stewardship Institute. P.O. Box 7348, (3840 Finley Ave., Bldg. 33, Ste. 202) Santa Rosa, California 95407. Contact is Fred Krueger. Telephone 707-573-3161.

Mountain Mourning Collection DVD

Write us or Circle “Yes” here for a copy.

Online Donations are welcome!
https://christiansforthemountains.org/donate

Your donations are tax deductible.
Thank you for your prayer support.
A Letter To My Grandsons in 2050

with love, from Janet Keating

30 October 2021

2 Corinthians 4:18 As we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient; but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Dear Thomas and Jude,

I am writing this letter to you which will be placed in a Climate Capsule that the WV League of Women Voters will have archived at Marshall University and opened in 2050. I am also submitting this to the Mountain Vision, a publication of Christians for the Mountains, as a part of my vision and hope for your future.

Today, my precious grandsons, you both are lively, young boys, thankfully unburdened by the big challenges we are currently facing in this nation and our world due to climate change. You are loved unconditionally, sheltered in a beautiful home, and cared for by so many adults in your life—your parents, grandparents, other relatives, teachers, physicians, and many others, who provide for your needs. My heart is glad that your world is still sweet and innocent. One day you will know and understand how fortunate your lives are compared to millions of children worldwide.

I will not sink into despairing for what is but rather want to speak to you about a different world that can be made manifest in your lifetime and maybe in mine before I transition—one that you can have a hand in shaping. I will begin by sharing a personal experience about 3 decades ago while camping along the South Branch of the Potomac River, while backpacking with a friend.

Admittedly, the hike was strenuous for my small frame, carrying my share of everything we needed for the weekend. After pitching the tent and having just finished a simple meal prepared on a camp stove, in this place with a resplendent view, in one of the most remote and biologically diverse locations in West Virginia, I remember asking my companion, “What more does anyone really need than this?”

Granted, these camping and hiking conditions were ideal, but what that realization clarified for me as I basked in the stunning scenery, is that many of life’s greatest joys and pleasures spring freely out of the beauty of nature. For that brief moment in time, my heart overflowed with joy, yet my material possessions were minimal—just sufficient water, food, companionship, and shelter for the weekend.

Of course, life is way more than a weekend backpacking in wild areas. I’ve experienced my own set of personal challenges, but along the way, I’ve learned a few things that might prepare you for the kind of future you could be facing.

Just like the realization I had on the backpacking adventure, my vision for your lives would begin with your embracing simplicity. I believe, that through your hard work and ingenuity and surrounding yourself with a community of like-minded people, your essential needs can be met. Within your world I imagine everyone’s basic needs of nutritious food, clean, safe water, and warm, affordable housing is standard, available, and accessible to everyone. Homelessness is a relic. I’m not talking McMansions here, but instead sturdy, functional dwellings built out of the flood plains to withstand high winds.

I hope you know that you are a part of God’s creation and connected to the well-being of every living thing. Because both of your parents spent many hours exploring the natural world as children and learned to love and appreciate nature, hopefully you enjoy the benefits of being in forests and other wild places and then will practice good stewardship of the air, land, and water. I pray that you value the intangible and the unquantifiable—beauty within nature.

Your parents have already provided you with a good beginning by buying farmland surrounded by hardwood forests where water and wildlife are plentiful. Nowadays, people are supporting small farmers and locally grown food. By the time you are young men, perhaps one of you will transform the farm into a thriving local co-op, using the latest, most earth-friendly types of agriculture to date. I recently read that pursuing farming is not just “back to the land,” but instead “bringing the land back.” In my lifetime, so much of our land has been degraded and abandoned. Putting your energy into restoring the land would be a worthwhile pursuit and a reciprocal relationship.

One thing for certain, is that uncertainty will be a part of your life, whether it be in relationships, livelihoods, or the weather—and maybe especially the weather. My vision for your future is that you both learn to be flexible, adaptable, and community-minded. Those traits can serve you well in times of distress and difficulty. We humans are social creatures, and truly need the support of others with talents of their own which can enhance your life. Creating lasting and meaningful relationships will serve you throughout your life in the toughest of times. I know this. I’m living (thankfully, living is the operative word), through a pandemic. I thank God for the wonderful family and friends who continue to provide love and support.

Get comfortable with uncertainty, dear ones. So much that happens in our lives is out of our control. A song by a favorite singer-songwriter, Carrie Newcomer, says, though, you can “control what’s within 6 feet or more.” You can control your approach to life, you can make good choices, and you can dream.

I hope the world you live in is kinder, more inclusive and that your generation focuses more on common goals and the common good, rather than differences. At our core we all want to be seen, heard, and valued rather than relegated to the margins. Hopefully, in your world, the economy will value everyone’s gifts and labor. We certainly have learned in these pandemic times that our society functions best when everyone’s contribution is acknowledged and adequately compensated.

If by chance you are reading this letter at night, I hope your home will be powered by one of the eternal energy sources—the sun, wind, or tides. In your adulthood, my vision includes leaders and decision-makers across the globe being in total agreement that caring for our air, land, and water is no longer a political football, but a labor of love.

And finally, a time will come when you feel sadness or despair. Here’s my advice. Stand up. Go outside. Take a walk. Listen to the birds and the wind. Seek and find beauty. Thank God for the miracle of your life, then extend yourself. Do something that benefits another. Join with others to do good. Know that taking action not only creates hope for change, but also is truly an antidote to despair.

Forever love, your Gogo.
Raising My Boys for Christ and His Creation

by Robert Russo

All this is fully integrated and immersed in teaching about and nurturing steady awareness of God’s presence and reign, understanding that all this is Gods and we are stewards of His creation. Just tonight my oldest asked my to sing, “My Father’s World” to him for bedtime. We try to work in books like the beautifully painted book to “All Things Bright and Beautiful,” and “The Jesus Story Book Bible.” We often discuss how God made all this wonderful creation and encourage them to give thanks and act respectfully towards it all, showing respect to the creation and the Creator.

And that since Jesus is the redeemer of all things including all creation and we are followers of him as God’s redeemed children, we participate with Jesus in helping redeem some of the fallen aspects of the creation, such as cleaning up pollution, stopping exploitation, and even rescuing an area from invasive species so it can thrive and flourish in a healthy and beautiful way.

All in real life

Writing this has helped remind me of the sweet blessings we live in. It may even seem idyllic, but it all happens within the regular world of school work, siblings fighting, the allure of wanting to watch TV for hours, consumerism and the desire to have all the toys, and the tantrums too. We talk about money and help them earn money and practice budgeting and choosing how to spend or save and continue working towards something more important that they want. It is a struggle. Sometimes mommy and daddy just want to watch TV all day at the same time too. We try to find the balance instead of being too extreme, but when we pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and talk about the different rocks in a different cluster of mountains, or see a different forest type because we climbed a couple hundred feet in elevation and see the wonder and joy on their faces and on ours, it is worth it.

Momma and Daddy here are growing and learning with our kids too. We teach and we learn together. We pray that we raise good stewards of God’s garden well not just as environmentalists, or conservationists, or naturalists but also as worshippers of The Lord Most High, who created all this and then came down to save us, redeem us and call us to worship Him and walk with Him, listening for His voice in the cool of the day, and in every moment.

Robert Russo and wife Jessi are raising their three sons in rural Weaverville, North Carolina (near Asheville).

Earlier called by the nickname “Sage,” Robert was on staff of CFTM for several years in field organizing and pastoral care. Robert is an ordained minister who serves on the staff of a local church, while also holding a job in human services and self-employed carpentry work. He is now on the Steering Committee of CFTM.
The Bible Does Not Validate Endless Exploitation and Domination of the Environment

By Rabbi Ellen Bernstein

Reprinted courtesy of Tikkun (September 27, 2021)

Reprinted by permission from Tikkun: the Jewish and Interfaith Voice of those seeking a world of love, justice, and environmental sanity. https://www.tikkun.org

This article is adapted from the intro to Rabbi Ellen Bernstein's essay. The full essay is at https://www.tikkun.org/the-bible-does-not-validate-the-environment/

Rabbi Ellen Bernstein is an eco-theologian and author of numerous books on the intersection of Judaism, Bible, and Ecology including most recently The Promise of the Land: A Passover Haggadah. She founded the first national Jewish environmental organization Shomrei Adamah, Keepers of the Earth in 1988. To learn more about her, please visit www.ellenbernstein.org.

Genesis 1:26 And God said, "Let us make the human creature in our image, after our likeness. They shall have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.

Genesis 1:27 And God created the human in God’s image, in the image of God, God created him; male and female God created them them.

Genesis 1:28 God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.”

As a college student in the early 1970s, in one of the first environmental studies programs (UC Berkeley, CNR) in the U.S., I was taught that the “Judeo-Christian” tradition was, in part, responsible for our present-day environmental crisis. We had been required to read Lynn White’s influential essay, “The environment crisis. We had been required to read White’s interpretation of the biblical creation stories to concede the use of force, the nature and degree of the force is determined by the context. If you ask a farmer, he/they convey the use of force, the nature and degree of the force is determined by the context. If you ask a farmer, they will tell you that they master the earth to grow crops by subduing weeds, cultivating the soil, laying down mulch, creating terraces, growing stands of trees, and planting cover crops. They are adding value to the soil.

The understanding of dominion as domination (as critics suggest) assumes that we humans stand over and above the whole creation, entirely separate from her. And yet we could not be more intimately related. The very goodness—the ultimate goodness—proclaimed on the sixth day, after the entire creation has been completed, alludes to all the creatures together—the web of life—and not just compartmentalized humanity as many moderns surmise. Since we are all born of the One, we are kin to the earth and its creatures. This understanding moved the Jewish philosopher and rabbi A.J. Heschel to speak of the earth as our sister.

A midrash on this text imagines a sense of trust and intimacy between animals and humankind. The text generously, mastering the earth means utilizing skilful means to tend and sustain it, so that it can continue to yield its fruits forever. While, KDVS which is generally translated as subdue or master. If you view the text generously, mastering the earth means utilizing skilful means to tend and sustain it, so that it can continue to yield its fruits forever. While, KDVS does convey the use of force, the nature and degree of the force is determined by the context. If you ask a farmer, they will tell you that they master the earth to grow crops by subduing weeds, cultivating the soil, laying down mulch, creating terraces, growing stands of trees, and planting cover crops. They are adding value to the soil.

No creature is entirely independent; no creature is an island. Everything exists bound up with everything else. Being alive means being in ceaseless relationship with others: other people, creatures, the earth, the air. Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote poignantly of the intimacy between humankind and the creatures. He understood dominion as a loving presence: “The ground and the animals over which I have dominion constitute the world in which I live—without which I cease to be.” Created last, the human creature is vulnerable and depends on all the other creatures in order to survive. Bonhoeffer continues, “In my whole being, in my creaturiness, I belong wholly to this world: it bears me, it nurtures me, it holds me. It is my world, my earth, over which I rule.” Bonhoeffer uses the word “my”—not in terms of possession—but in terms of relationship. He is reflecting the sentiment of the Bible where there is no concept for human ownership. Rather, dominion implies a deep connection, a communion with nature.

Further excepts] Bonhoeffer recognized the conditionality of dominion. He stressed that we bear the likeness of God, but only when we act on behalf of “our brothers and sisters,” the earth and its creatures. Dominion implies service to all the creatures of the Creator. Bonhoeffer laments that if we do not regard the earth and its creatures as my kin or my relations, if we abuse our dominion and seize it for ourselves, then dominion becomes domination and we are no longer worthy of the role we have been assigned. We lose our kinship with God and we lose our kinship with earth. There can be no dominion without serving the whole, the One.

To conflate dominion with domination, as exploiters of the text have done and continue to do, is reductive and harmful. It narrows the scope of the meaning of the word. Dominion from the Latin domus is related to domicile, dame, madam, all words related to the household. The earth is God’s household and the job of the head of the household is to serve the household. Dominion means perpetuating the good of all the creatures and preserving the wholeness of the creation. Anything else is not dominion.

While the term RDH has garnered the most attention, the other problematic word in Gen 1:28 is KVSH, which is generally translated as subdue or master. If you view the text generously, mastering the earth means utilizing skilful means to tend and sustain it, so that it can continue to yield its fruits forever. While, KDVS does convey the use of force, the nature and degree of the force is determined by the context. If you ask a farmer, they will tell you that they master the earth to grow crops by subduing weeds, cultivating the soil, laying down mulch, creating terraces, growing stands of trees, and planting cover crops. They are adding value to the soil.

Tikkun uplifts Jewish, interfaith, and secular prophetic voices of hope that promotes a caring society that protects the life support system of the planet and celebrates the Earth and the universe with awe and radical amazement.

https://www.tikkun.org
You grew up during the 50s like me, your childhood was vastly different to our children’s and grandchildren’s. We largely played outdoors, whether in the yard, around the block, in the woods behind the house, or in the countryside. Our imaginations and senses were stimulated by the sights and the sounds of nature—a Robin’s evensong, a lightening bug rising from the grass. A tree became a castle tower; a boulder became a fort. In winter, we built igloos from wet snow and in summer decorated mudpies with dandelions. March winds were for flying kites and the first snow sent us to the nearest hill to go sledding. Vivid is my childhood in summertime, running inside the house to quickly don a bathing suit and then running back outside to soak myself in the pouring rain. If it rained hard, I ran to the corner of Monroe Avenue to splash around in knee deep water where water pooled in the storm drain. Those were such sweet and simpler times when we all had a greater connection to the earth, to nature.

Fast forward to the present. From our various conversations, I know that Richard Louv, acclaimed writer and founder of the Children and Nature Network (https://www.childrenandnature.org/) had a similar upbringing. Odds are that his childhood experiences inspired his later desire to research, explore, and then write about a major, disturbing shift in childrearing that has occurred in our lifetimes.

When I first met, Richard, in 2001, he was working on what is a seminal, highly researched book—Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder—regarding the significant role nature plays not only in child development, but also in overall physical, mental, and emotional well-being for both children and adults. His book became a major wake-up call to the nation. After it was published in 2005, the phrase—nature-deficit disorder, which he coined—appeared often in the media to describe the loss nature connection for children. His book highlights several reasons our culture has moved toward child-rearing with greater regimentation, supervision, and more restrictions—and vastly less free play outside.

Chief among the causes is the allure of computer games (and now smart phones and iPads), i.e. screen time. Children nowadays are more likely to encounter a virtual squirrel on their iPad than a living, breathing, walnut carrying one on the tree in their own backyard! Additionally, with the rise of suburban living, Louv points out that the majority of homeowners’ associations prohibit kids from building tree houses or forts on their over-manicured homesteads. Significantly, because we find ourselves bombarded by the media with grisly stories of child abduction or “stranger danger,” parents are fearful of letting their kids explore the neighborhood let alone play in the woods behind their homes. Even over-development of land needs to be considered as a contributing factor.

Nowadays, instead of a spontaneous neighborhood game of softball at the vacant corner lot a few blocks from home, parents have opted for enrolling their children in a plethora of organized activities, indoors and out. While this physical activity has a beneficial effect, it is no substitute for a walk in the woods.

Engaging with nature has shown to provide the following benefits:

- Supports creativity and problem-solving.
- Enhances cognitive abilities.
- Improves academic performance.
- Reduces Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) symptoms.
- Increases physical activity.
- Improves nutrition.
- Improves eyesight.
- Improves social relations.
- Improves self-discipline.
- Reduces stress.

“From: https://naturalexploring.org/01-benefits-of-engaging-children-with-nature/"

In a new edition of his book, Louv presents some practical and easy solutions to reestablishing children’s bonds with nature which also “reflects the enormous changes that have taken place since the book was originally published.” As stated at http://richardlouv.com/books/last-child

It includes:

- 100 actions you can take to create change in your community, school, and family.
- 35 discussion points to inspire people of all ages to talk about the importance of nature in their lives.
- A new progress report by the author about the growing Leave No Child Inside movement.

New and updated research confirming that direct exposure to nature is essential for the physical and emotional health of children and adults.

I can make a pretty good case for how being allowed so much freedom outdoors created my personal love and respect for life on earth. Experiences in nature provided me with a fascination and appreciation of other lifeforms, a sense of awe about its delicacy and intricacies, a realization of how the fate of all life on earth and humans is deeply intertwined, and perhaps, most importantly, my deep desire to help protect, restore and preserve the earth, which eventually led me to a career path with the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (Ovvec.org)

Whether you are a parent or grandparent, a physician or other care-giver, an educator, a conservationist, or a psychologist, Last Child In the Woods provides activities and actions for reconnecting children and people of all ages with nature. While we all have felt loss and despair as the Covid pandemic continues, spending more time in nature, alone or with children and others, will not only be a spiritual balm for you, but also can enhance the life of a child and help restore a personal sense of hope and rejuvenation.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Romans 15:13

Janet Keating continues to playfully romp about the meadows and woods of the family farm.

She is retired Director of OVEC and is a co-founder of CFTM.
In the winter of 2011 or 2012 my friend David Dunbar, head of the biology department of Cabrini College, called me. “Owen,” he said, “Larry Gibson is going to speak to our students and faculty. Come over and hear what he has to say.” So I did. The room was full. Larry Gibson entered wearing a neon green T-shirt. I remembered meeting him at a Washington, DC meeting of the National Religious Coalition for Creation Care and listened. When Larry left Ohio and returned to West Virginia in the 1990s, he saw a new method of coal mining literally blasting mountains apart to extract coal, shoving the rubble into adjacent valleys. Companies were mechanizing, providing fewer and fewer jobs, and the huge draglines, dynamite, and bulldozers left devastation behind them. Communities were not safe to live in. Many suffered from cancer and lung disease, as silicon dust and toxic residues of the dynamite used to blow up the mountains poisoned air and water. Ecosystems were being irrevocably degraded.

“What can I do to save this land I love?” Larry wondered. So he sought to understand what was happening in West Virginia, talking to leaders who had given their lives seeking justice. When the coal company offered him big money if he sold out his family’s ancestral land in Kayford Mountain, Larry refused. “Who am I if I sell my birthright?” Soon silicone dust clouded the sky. Right to the edge of his land came the explosions. Multi-ton boulders blasted into the air by some of the 3,000,000 pounds of explosives used every working day in Appalachia landed on his property. Even graves of his ancestors were blasted away.

With good humor and moving illustrations, Larry told what mountaintop removal was doing to his land. We listened intently. He may only have had a fifth grade education, but this man was truly educated—he knew what he was talking about, and his stories made us laugh. “I just finished speaking at Harvard and Yale,” he reported. “Then I was at Union Theological Seminary in New York, and in the front row was this big, black seminary student. I jumped onto his lap, pointed my finger at his head as though it were a gun, and said, ‘How would you like it if somebody did this to you?’ After he got over being shocked, the big man exploded laughing.”

Immediately I realized I was in the presence of someone who crossed boundaries of race and class to bring people together. By the time he finished his message, I knew coal mining was destroying beautiful mountains and the people who lived there, and that I had to do something to help. As I listened to Larry his words came directly from our Maker and Redeemer: “Change how you live. Stop selling out. Become what you were made to be, a life-giver. I didn’t come here to entertain you,” Larry ended his message, “Decide right now. Give what you can. Come down and help us!”

Following his presentation during the time for conversation, Larry came up to me and said, “Owen, I want you to do my biography.” Surprised, I paused a moment as thoughts raced through my mind: “I’m in my late 70’s. I’ve done a lot of writing and I probably could do Larry’s biography but it would take a lot of research to do it right. I’m not up to it. I feel honored Larry trusts me so much. And I see what I can do.” “Larry,” I replied, “I can’t write your biography but I’ll see that it gets done!”

Months passed but in the back of my mind remained the promise I made to Larry. Then Allen Johnson, who after being challenged by Larry started Christians for the Mountains, wrote:

Larry Gibson, “Keeper of the Mountains,” died Sunday afternoon September 9, 2012, at his home on Kayford Mountain, West Virginia. He was 66. His wife and three adult children survive. Gibson had a fifth grade education, a career as a custodian at an Ohio automobile factory, and retired to the obscure and abandoned place of his birth. Larry stood 5’2”, but he made it his passion to “keep” the mountains. His trademark attire was his blaze yellow sweatshirt and cap, “Keeper of the Mountains,” at a countless protests, rallies, lectures, even coat-and-tie affairs. His pickup truck was festooned with bumper stickers. His outspoken views evoked numerous assaults and acts of vandalism. Undaunted, Larry Gibson always chose the path of integrity over a life of security and ease. His answering machine’s message, “We are the keepers of the mountains. Love them or leave them, just don’t destroy them. If you dare to be one, too, call…”

Allen also wanted Larry’s biography written, and we started working together. After several years of gathering materials and approaching qualified biographers who knew Larry but were unable to take on the demanding task, Allen spent two days with my wife, Irene, and I, at our home in Kendal Crosslands Communities and we worked on a prospectus for the book. We agreed that a writer was needed who knew Larry well, resonated with him, brought out the flavor of his personality, and wrote in a popular style. A well-written book which flowed with a conversational, story-telling style would sell. Since Larry Gibson’s life bridged the divisions separating Americans, his story had to get out to a wide audience, and, therefore, needed a publisher whose editor would polish the book, and who had the connections and commitment to market it effectively. Allen called Marybeth Lorbiecki, biographer, writer, and also an active member of the Religious Coalition for Creation Care, she agreed to write Larry’s biography.

Ever since Larry asked me to write his biography I had been intending to go to southern West Virginia and see Kayford Mountain and the devastated land. At 86 years of age I knew I needed somebody to drive with me, and Wednesday, June 16, 2021 my son, Martin, and I traveled through the beautiful mountains of West Virginia on our way to the state capitol, Charleston, where Allen had arranged for us to stay at the Pope John 23rd Catholic retreat center. Early Thursday morning I got in Allen’s car to drive to Kayford Mountain. Beside the road up the hollow to Larry’s place was a small creek—it was off-color and did not look healthy, and Japanese knotweed covered its banks to where the kudzu cascaded up the trees on the forest edge. The farther up we went, the road got worse. When the blacktop ended, Allen drove slowly to avoid potholes and rocks. Next to the road’s edge was a slope so steep I was amazed that trees could grow on it, but there they were. Finally we reached the top of Kayford Mountain. “There’s Larry’s cabin,” Allen pointed out, “and there are the vacation places of his family.”

The striking beauty of Coal River Mountain loomed across from us, as we walked a path to the end of Larry’s land. A bulldozed wall of rubble blocked the trail. “Can you climb up this?” Allen asked. “Yes, I can if I’m careful,” I replied as we edged ourselves up to the top. We stood up, and as I looked straight down at a 90 degree slope, I realized that where we were standing was part of a mountain ridge that had been entirely blasted away. Far below was the flat, almost barren moonscape of the “reclaimed” land.

At my feet were deep tracks—thrill seekers must have ridden four wheelers right down that precipice hundreds of feet to the plain below! Four wheeler tracks also wore across the flattened land, clearly doing no good to the struggling bits of vegetation. The place looked like Montana, not West Virginia, and suddenly in my mind’s eye I saw wood bison and elk grazing, their droppings fertilizing now barren earth (these ungulates once thrived throughout Appalachia before settlers exterminated the herds). I could see 4 wheelers with eco-tourists taking pictures of wood bison, elk, and the wolves that accompanied the herds—maybe restoration of this desecrated land could open new jobs, as it has in Kentucky.1

We walked back to Larry’s grave, on the hill just above his cabin. The gravestone read, “My mother gave me birth, The land gave me life.” Allen and I prayed together, thanking the Lord for Larry and all he gave to bring back life to this land and its people.

It was time for lunch. We sat at one of the picnic tables under the tin roof used many times in Larry’s family celebrations. Vandals had stripped out electrical wire. A few planks had been pulled out of the tables, but it wouldn’t take much work to put things back together. Across from us was the covered bandstand where singers and speakers once stirred the people.

Larry had saved Kayford Mountain from destruction but it seemed lonely. Allen and I walked up the eroded road to the three concrete crosses to which Allen had helped Larry clear the view two weeks before Larry died. Clearly helping hands were needed again not only to keep the view to the crosses clear, but also to close an eroding four wheeler trail somebody had slashed near the existing road. There were no signs of the organization Larry had started to carry on his work. I felt that somebody needed to live here, growing their food, catching water from the sky, building new life together on this solid West Virginia foundaiton and reaching out to the world with Larry’s message that the land gives life.
Friday morning Allen and I met Maria Gunnoe and Chuck Nelson, who were to take us through the largest mountaintop removal mine on the east coast. We climbed in Maria’s pick-up truck, and as she drove, Chuck shared that though he had been a miner, when he saw what was happening to once vital communities, he had to do something to help. Soon we arrived at where we were to register to enter the mine. Maria had called ahead several days before to request a visit to Jarrell Cemetery in the middle of the vast surface mine. The guard was ready, and handed us papers to fill in and sign. After he checked the paperwork, he said, “Now you have to agree not to take pictures until you get to Jarrell Cemetery, but there you can go to the edges and use your cameras.” Then he handed us a mobile phone and speaker so we could keep in touch with the truck that was to escort us through the mine. A dusty pickup appeared and we followed up the unpaved, dusty road. After pulling over to let a coal truck pass, soon we reached an immense plateau. A seam of exposed coal was being mined, but the current operation was small. The huge draglines were gone.

Massey Energy Company, once the sixth largest producer of coal in the United States, employing almost 6 thousand miners and operating 35 underground mines and 12 surface mines, was gone, too. Alpha Natural Resources bought out Massey, after settling Massey’s potential criminal liabilities for flagrant safety violations at a cost of 209 million dollars.¹

The pickup led us across a dusty land. “When dynamite explodes, silicone dust fills the air—when you breathe it you get silicosis,” Maria observed. Though the windows were closed and air-conditioning on, I sensed I was inhaling dust. Imagine what it was like to work here, or live near this mine when it was going full force. “After the coal was dug out, it had to be washed with water and toxic chemicals,” Maria continued.

In one valley bulldozers shoveled rocks, rubble, and logs together to make a dam higher than the Hoover Dam. Behind that dam they pumped water filled with whatever washed off the coal—mercury, sludge, cleaning chemicals. There are at least 20 such ponds I know about, and there are probably more waiting for a big storm to lock in place, dump inches of rain, break the dam, and flood everyone and everything below it. The Mother Jones Foundation is involved with a funding proposal seeking mine remediation funds, first, to set up an early warning system so that when a dam breaks, people can escape the flood, second, to get the huge lakes dewatered safely, and third, to mine rare earth minerals in the sludge deposits without causing more damage.

We came to a one-lane road that wound around steep slopes to the wooded pinnacle of Jarrell Cemetery. “As soon as the mine closes the road goes to the county,” Maria noted. “We sued Massey because they ignored the boundary and mined to the edge of where people are buried. The $60,000 settlement will help pay a little of the cost of maintaining the road.”

We parked where the road ended, got out, and walked to the neatly mowed grass of the cemetery. A grave that stood out for me was that of a World War II veteran. “He died in Italy,” Chuck said. “They brought him up here with a horse drawn wagon and had a full ceremony laying him to rest.” “We won’t go to look over the edge,” Maria said. “I don’t have my snake boots on. This was the only place left where rattlesnakes could live, and there are quite a few in the little bit of forest around us.”

After taking pictures, Maria called the woman in the pickup, and she led us down the hill back to the guard-house. “How much would the guard and pickup driver earn?” I asked. “Remember Massey Coal broke the United Mine Workers’ Union,” Maria responded. “The pickup driver earns $10 or $11 per hour, the guard a little more.” We saw no coal trucks on the way out—mining was indeed winding down.

Maria took us to one of the few remaining coffee shops. “Mining coal underground was dangerous and hard,” Chuck shared.

It was a boom and bust industry, and yet these communities that grew up in the hollows were good places to live. The mountains were beautiful. We walked through the woods. One fellow knew every squirrel tree on the mountain. Now the trees and the mountain I knew are gone. When they started mountaintop mining they bought people out of those areas and tore their houses down. When they scraped clean areas along creeks, they hydro-seeded Japanese knotweed, which spread downstream, killing off the native plants. Many who stayed got cancer, emphysema and other sickness from poisons in the water and air.

“The mountaintop removal area we saw today was vast,” I said, “and yet as we drove here I had no idea how big it was.” “The last step in planning a mountaintop removal coal mine is to review plans by the West Virginia DEP,” Maria responded. “They adjust the boundaries to minimize their visibility from the main roads.”

Saturday night Martin, Allen, and I watched “Blood on the Mountains,” a history of southern West Virginia from the viewpoint of the people who lived here, worked the mines, and built lasting communities. Energy in coal stored for countless millennia was mined to power expanding industries. As coal companies got bigger, the successful ones excelled in making as much profit as they could from land and labor. When times were good men came to work in the booming mines.

Then came the “bust” depressions when jobs dried up. Ruthless owners exploited miners every way they could as paying in script which could only be spent at company stores. When a man was injured and could not work again, or was killed in an accident, the overseer threw out the family from the company house in which they lived, so that a new hand could move in and keep the mine going. In like manner when mines played out, the big companies sold what was left to little operators who, of course, soon went bankrupt. As the owners saw, they escaped liability to clean up despoiled and polluted land, and to pay pension and health care costs for the silicosis, black lung disease, and cancers of the miners who had labored for them.

For generations Appalachia has been a sacrifice zone, supplying fuel that keeps vast cities going and making big profits for companies. Local communities, however, can gain control of their land. Devastated ecosystems can be restored. Poisoned water can be cleaned up. Clean, organic food can be grown. Loving, consecrated teachers can revitalize schools. Native forests can be replanted, and creatures we have almost driven to extinction can be restored to their homelands. Industries of the future with well-paying jobs can be created. Light shines in dark times. When you and your people end up on the bottom of an oppressive pyramid and are barely surviving, you want above all to be free and to live long and happy lives, and yet cannot help wondering, “Is there light at the end of this dark hole in the earth?” People from southern West Virginia, like Larry, Chuck, and Maria have a message everyone needs to hear.

It is time to invest in the future we want to live into. It is time to pay back some of the debts we owe to a land and its people. If we have money, we can give. If we are educated, we can write and teach. If we have power, we can use it to make life better there. If we are religious, we can pray for uplift and teach that when one goes down, sooner or later we all go down together. As Jesus Christ did and taught, when you see somebody fall, put out your hand and help them up!²

¹ In strip-mined areas of Kentucky, elk have been re-established by landowners working with conservationists and the Game Department, bringing income from eco-tourism and hunting. After a concerted reintroduction effort two decades ago, the state of Kentucky is now home to the largest population of elk east of the Mississippi. The animals home is reclaimed strip and mountaintop removal coal mines. “Elk Return to Kentucky, Bringing Economic Life.” New York Times, June 20, 2020.

² Massey Energy owned and operated Upper Big Branch Mine where 29 miners were killed in April 2010. The Mine Safety and Health Administration announced a $10,825,368 levy against Massey, the largest monetary penalty imposed by the agency in history. The resulting $10.8 million in total was from 369 citations and orders. Following Alpha Natural Resources’ acquisition, Alpha additionally settled Massey’s potential criminal liabilities for $209 million. Wikipedia.

Note: Chuck Nelson will pictured at Jarrell Cemetery in obituary pate 18. More on Mountain Vision Fall 2021 on page 19.

Owen Owens is co-chair of the National Religious Coalition on Creation Care; past chair of the National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Working Group where he coined the term “eco-justice; past director of the American Baptist Department of Environmental and Racial Justice. Owens has extensive experience restoring trout to urban streams.
NEW YORK, 20 August 2021 – Young people living in the Central African Republic, Chad, Nigeria, and Guinea-Bissau are the most at risk of the impacts of climate change, threatening their health, education, and protection, and exposing them to deadly diseases, according to a UNICEF report launched today.

‘The Climate Crisis Is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children’s Climate Risk Index’ is the first comprehensive analysis of climate risk from a child’s perspective. It ranks countries based on children’s exposure to climate and environmental shocks, such as cyclones and heatwaves, as well as their vulnerability to those shocks, based on their access to essential services.

Launched in collaboration with Fridays for Future on the third anniversary of the youth-led global climate strike movement, the report finds approximately 1 billion children – nearly half the world’s 2.2 billion children – live in one of the 33 countries classified as “extremely high-risk”. These children face a deadly combination of exposure to multiple climate and environmental shocks with a high vulnerability due to inadequate essential services, such as water and sanitation, healthcare and education. The findings reflect the number of children impacted today – figures likely to get worse as the climate crisis accelerates.

“For the first time, we have a complete picture of where and how children are vulnerable to climate change, and that picture is almost unimaginably dire. Climate and environmental shocks are undermining the complete spectrum of children’s rights, from access to clean air, food and safe water; to education, housing, freedom from exploitation, and even their right to survive. Virtually no child’s life will be unaffected,” said Henrietta Fore, UNICEF Executive Director. “For three years, children have raised their voices around the world to demand action. UNICEF supports their calls for change with an unarguable message – the climate crisis is a child rights crisis.”

The Children’s Climate Risk Index (CCRI) reveals:

- 240 million children are highly exposed to coastal flooding;
- 330 million children are highly exposed to riverine flooding;
- 400 million children are highly exposed to cyclones;
- 600 million children are highly exposed to vector borne diseases;
- 815 million children are highly exposed to lead pollution;
- 820 million children are highly exposed to heatwaves;
- 920 million children are highly exposed to water scarcity;
- 1 billion children are are highly exposed to exceedingly high levels of air pollution.

While nearly every child around the world is at risk from at least one of these climate and environmental hazards, the data reveal the worst affected countries face multiple and often overlapping shocks that threaten to erode development progress and deepen child deprivations.

An estimated 850 million children – 1 in 3 worldwide – live in areas where at least four of these climate and environmental shocks overlap. As many as 330 million children – 1 in 7 worldwide – live in areas affected by at least five major shocks.

“Climate change is deeply inequitable. While no child is responsible for rising global temperatures, they will pay the highest costs. The children from countries least responsible will suffer most of all,” said Fore. “But there is still time to act. Improving children’s access to essential services, such as water and sanitation, health, and education, can significantly increase their ability to survive these climate hazards. UNICEF urges governments and businesses to listen to children and prioritize actions that protect them from impacts, while accelerating work to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

Without the urgent action required to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, children will continue to suffer the most. Compared to adults, children require more food and water per unit of their body weight, are less able to survive extreme weather events, and are more susceptible to toxic chemicals, temperature changes and diseases, among other factors.

“Movements of young climate activists will continue to rise, continue to grow and continue to fight for what is right because we have no other choice,” said Farzana Faruk Jhumu (Bangladesh), Eric Nyagura (Kenya), Adriana Calderon (Mexico) and Greta Thunberg (Sweden) from Fridays for Future, who authored the report’s foreword and are joining in support of the launch.

“We must acknowledge where we stand, treat climate change like the crisis it is, and act with the urgency required to ensure today’s children inherit a livable planet.”

UNICEF is calling on governments, businesses and relevant actors to:

1. Increase investment in climate adaptation and resilience in key services for children. To protect children, communities and the most vulnerable from the worst impacts of the already changing climate, critical services must be adapted, including water, sanitation and hygiene systems, health and education services.

2. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions. To avert the worst impacts of the climate crisis, comprehensive and urgent action is required. Countries must cut their emissions by at least 45% (compared to 2010 levels) by 2030 to keep warming to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius.

3. Provide children with climate education and green skills, critical for their adaptation to and preparation for the effects of climate change. Children and young people will face the full devastating consequences of the climate crisis and water insecurity, yet they are the least responsible. We have a duty to all young people and future generations.

4. Include young people in all national, regional and international climate negotiations and decisions, including at COP26. Children and young people must be included in all climate-related decision making.

5. Ensure the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic is green, low-carbon and inclusive, so that the capacity of future generations to address and respond to the climate crisis is not compromised.
Mountaintop Removal Coal Mines Continue to Consume West Virginia
by Vernon Haltom Executive Director, CRMW NAOMA, WV

Coal River Mountain Watch is continuing the work to stop the destruction of our communities and environment by mountaintop removal mining, to improve the quality of life in our area, and to help rebuild sustainable communities. Mountaintop removal (MTR) is not "essentially over", as some have claimed.

On Coal River Mountain, 7,635 acres (11.9 square miles or 15% of the mountain) are active or approved MTR or sludge dams, with more MTR on the drawing board or proposed for the area. Multi-billion-dollar Alpha Metallurgical Resources has applied for yet another permit within a mile of Clear Fork Elementary School. Existing MTR sites drag on for years, such as the Edwight MTR site, in "reclamation only" and "inactive" status since 2015 above the old Marsh Fork Elementary School. "Contemporaneous reclamation" variances are common, so companies don't have to reclaim as they go, creating vast, dusty wastelands. "Reclamation", when done, is a joke, and not the "higher and better use" that the coal companies claim.

While coal companies and their puppet politicians portray our work as a conspiracy to destroy jobs while protecting bugs, our focus is on protecting human health. Blasting on MTR sites sends airborne dust, mostly fine and ultra-fine carcinogenic silica, into neighboring communities where it threatens public health. The WV Dept. of Environmental Protection (WVDEP) refuses to consider human health, such as the significantly elevated rates of cancer, birth defects, and heart disease in their permitting decisions.

WVDEP also refuses to issue citations based on citizen photos or videos, such as this photo showing a blasting dust cloud on Coal River Mountain that travelled over two miles through nearby neighborhoods. WVDEP claims that such videos and photos can be altered, but their blast complaint inspections rely solely on the company's blasting logs, diagrams, and nearby seismographs. inspectors claim that they never see blasting dust escape the permit, but they have provided no documented evidence that they've been on hand to witness a blast. We monitor the sites the best we can, from drone flights and on the ground, but the violations that WVDEP has cited are usually for failure to maintain sediment controls, and the fines are too minuscule to deter bad behavior.

Decreasing demand for coal won't end MTR. Bankruptcies won't end MTR. When coal companies enter bankruptcy protection, they either sell off their permits to other companies or get extensions on their regulatory obligations. Existing laws and regulations won't end MTR or protect residents from the fallout. So what do we do?

Coal River Mountain Watch spearheaded the Appalachian Community Health Emergency (ACHE) Campaign beginning in 2011 after the death of our executive director, 2003 Goldman Environmental Prize winner Judy Bonds, from the cancer that plagues our communities. We got the ACHE Act introduced in 2012 and every Congress since. Currently it is in the US House of Representatives as HR 2073. The ACHE Act would impose a moratorium on new or enlarged MTR permits unless and until the US Department of Health and Human Services conducts a definitive health study concluding that MTR does not pose a threat to neighboring communities.

What can everyone do to help end this public health threat, which also serves as the cradle of the climate crisis by obliterating carbon-sink forests while extracting climate-killing coal? Go to our website, www.acheact.org and click on “Take Action” to contact your US congressional representatives and urge them to support the ACHE Act (HR 2073 in the current Congress). If you represent an organization, please click on “Endorse the Act”.

Watch a video of a flyover online: https://youtu.be/X2E20OFh24s. Thanks for your help!

Vernon Haltom is Executive Director of Coal River Mountain Watch. https://www.crmw.net

The above article is adapted by gracious permission of The Heartbeat, a twice-annual newsprint publication of Heartwood. This is from Fall, 2021, issue.

Heartwood is an is a regional network that protects forests and supports community activism in the eastern United States through education, advocacy, and citizen empowerment. We are people helping people protect the places they love.

https://heartwood.org

Why Mountaintop Removal Must End!!!

Yes!!! Mountain Removal must end. There are so many reasons, too.

Yes, it is ugly. Yes, it impoverishes landforms and soils. Yes, it pollutes streams with toxic heavy metals such as Selenium. Yes, the blasting and dust and roar of heavy equipment is so noxious it drives out many local residents, whose houses are consequently devalued. Yes, surface mines hire relatively few workers in comparison with underground mines.

Coal mining in Appalachia, especially in mountaintop removal mining areas of West Virginia and other central Appalachian areas, is associated with a set of serious public health problems, including:

- Higher cancer rates; *Higher heart and lung disease rates; *Higher kidney disease rates; *Higher rates of birth defects; *Higher levels of impaired functioning due to health problems

Data also show that the economic costs of health problems in Appalachian coal mining areas are more than 5 times greater than the economic benefits from mining.

The pattern of results shows that:

- Health problems are present after statistical adjustment for age, smoking, obesity, poverty, education, availability of doctors, and other risks
- Health problems are most severe in areas where amounts of mining are greatest
- Health problems in mountaintop removal mining areas are worsening in more recent years versus earlier years
- Health problems are present for men, women and children and reflect more than occupational exposure.

Over two dozen peer-reviewed studies on mountaintop mining communities show evidence that elevated dust originating from surface mining sites contains primarily crystalline silica, sulfur, organic carbon, aluminum, iron, and many other trace elements. Dust collected from mountaintop mining communities has been shown to be toxic to animal tissues. Levels of ultra-fine particles in the air are significantly higher in communities close to mountaintop removal than communities farther away.

Yes, to help, please go to https://www.acheact.org
The Mountain Vision Fall 2021

Young Christians Take Action on Climate Change

A perceptive reader of The Bible will pick up that young adults take on prominent faith roles. Youthful David defeats the giant Goliath; stepping up are courageous young women such as Ruth and Esther; young lads such as Joseph and Samuel; Daniel, and his three young friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; and likely many of the Hebrew prophets such as Elisha and Jeremiah. John the Baptist was about thirty as he preached repentance in the Jordanian wilderness. Mary the mother of Jesus was likely a teenager. Plausibly many of Jesus's disciples were young adults. And most notably, Jesus was about 30 when he began his public ministry!

The voices of young adults and upcoming generations clamoring for immediate and effective massive transitions away from carbon-addicted lifestyles and economies must be heeded. They are the ones whose lives and hopes for a future quality of life are at stake. To ignore their voices is tantamount to stoning the prophets of yore.

"In the last days," God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on my servants—men and women alike—and they will prophesy. And I will cause wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below—blood and fire and clouds of smoke. The sun will become dark, and the moon will turn blood red before that great and glorious day of the Lord arrives name of the Lord will be saved.'


Catholic Youth And Young Adult Action On Climate

Formerly called the Global Catholic Climate Movement, the Laudato Si’ Movement is a first-of-its-kind international coalition of Catholics from many nations, continents, and walks of life. Laity, religious, and clergy, theologians, scientists, and activists are united by their Catholic faith to work in various roles and organizations on climate change issues. Programs and resources are active in many nations and languages. www.laudatosimovement.org

One project is the Laudato Si’ Generation High School Guide that guides student leaders to form clubs to proactively engage climate issues. This includes (1) Spiritual Dimension that includes ecological conversion; (2) A “change of heart” that can motivate an integral ecology and a more passionate concern for God’s creation; Lifestyle Dimension to lead the Catholic community by example to shrink its carbon footprint to zero in line with the urgency of the climate crisis; Public Policy Dimension that works on raising a prophetic voice for climate justice calling for bold policies to accomplish the Paris Agreement’s goal of 1.5 C.

Catholic Climate Covenant is another organization that sponsors a Youth and Young Adult Mobilization toward building a movement of young Catholics ignited by the joy of the Gospel, attuned to the cries of the earth and the poor, and capable of turning back the clock on climate change and creating a livable future. https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/program/YYA

Protestant And Orthodox Youth And Young Adult Action On Climate

Creation Justice Ministries sponsors several programs to prepare the next generation of climate and environmental justice leaders in the vital continuous work of protecting and restoring God’s creation. The Faithful Climate Action Fellowship comprises young climate activists and leaders of faith gaining leadership skills and delving deeper into environmental and faith topics by participating in monthly webinars. Additionally, each person delivers a message at their house of worship and publishes their message. They also work on petition circulation campaign that is meaningful to them and their community.

Creation Justice Ministries is comprised of mainline Protestant and Orthodox denominations. They publish well-researched, theologically-sound education and action materials available for all ages online at https://creationjustice.org/
Young Evangelicals for Climate Action. (YECA)

Young Evangelicals for Climate Change is both community-oriented and action-focused. YECA is about coming together to unite voices and act collectively focused on three overarching goals integral to overcoming the climate crisis: (1) Mobilizing their younger generation of evangelicals; (2) Influencing senior evangelical leaders; (3) Holding political leaders accountable.

YECA projects include a Climate Leadership Fellows program has trained dozens of college students across the country to be effective activists, organizers, and advocates in their communities for just and compassionate climate action. There are 28 fellows on 18 campuses in 12 states. Thousands have signed the YECA call-to-action pledge, and more than 25,000 young people have performed at least one of its “actions,” from starting an environmentalism club at their school to launching a recycling campaign at their church to advocating for legislation with their elected officials.

CONSERVATION IN MIND

Young lead their elders in global warming fight

By Frances Lamberts

Not many generations ago, poets could sing of the great beneficence of nature. Storms might be fierce and droughts or other natural occurrences calamitous, yet rainfalls and storms would not be to excess and would be predictable within their seasonal succession. Life in its manifold forms could thrive in a stable physical world, its Creator, merciful and kind, having made that world “good” for his children.

As Emily Dickinson saw and described this world in a poem, nature is “the gentlest mother,” not impatient of even her most wayward or feeblest children. Should “too impetuous” ones need restraining, “admonition mild” will follow, the poem insists. Nature’s “conversation” generally sounds “fair” to her household and her voice never harsh. When the children sleep, this gentle mother lights her lamps and, “with infinite affection and infinite care ... wills silence everywhere” to guard and benefit their rest.

Under the pressure of climate warming inflicted on her by her human children, nature no longer is this gentle and nurturing, nor her admonition so kind and light to bear. In a recent year, for example, we saw floods in South Asia take more than 1,200 lives and affect over 20 million people, including almost seven million children. Throughout three Asian countries, destruction of almost 1,800 schools put the education of hundreds of thousands of children at risk for a long time.

Millions of acres burned across Australia last year. Extreme heat, wildfires and flooding – in our western states, Europe and other parts of the world – have taken thousands of lives in recent months, causing inestimable economic and environmental damage.

No wonder we see young people express alarm and demand action, even through the courts, in efforts to preserve or restore for them some of nature’s benignity. They have brought their “Kids Revolts” to the United Nations climate conventions for years, have protested by the millions in climate-strike marches in over 150 cities across the world, and are suing states and countries, sometimes successfully. Germany’s supreme court, as one example, this year ruled for the interests of the next generation, ordering more adequate and accountable action from the government, to protect the climate.

A modern-day poet, Mary Oliver, thus opened her poem, The Journey: “One day you finally knew what you had to do, and began.” On the issue of climate change, we have long known enough to end denial and delay, and must urgently heed the children’s call for action.

Frances Lamberts is a long-time friend and frequent contributor to CFTM. A resident of Jonesborough, Tennessee, Frances is a retired psychologist active in environmental advocacy and anti-nuclear weaponry. She also raises a wondrous nature garden.

She frequently contributes articles to local press, such as the above essay to the Ervin Record (TN) August 18, 2021.
Christians For The Mountains

The Mountain Vision  Fall 2021

Reviewing Books of Daniel Salomon: Christian Neurodiverse Environmentalist

by Allen Johnson

The Mountain Vision is devoting a page to tout the God-giftedness that Daniel Salomon embodies in his life and work. Salomon is a relatively unknown person in the nexus of faith and environmental advocacy. Yet he offers creative insights coupled with deep emotional connection to nature and his intimate conversation with God. This is enhanced by his special gift (which can also be a societal handicap) of being on the autism spectrum as a neurodiverse man.

Daniel Salomon was a teenager in the late 1990's when his parents dropped him off at an Opening The Book Of Nature weekend retreat at Kumbrabow State Forest in West Virginia. Bob Marshall and I were co-facilitators of the 15 or so participants. Daniel made an immediate impression on all of us with his precocious faith and environmental insights. Over the next decade, Daniel and my family met often at our place in West Virginia and at his parents’ home in a Maryland suburb of DC. Together we participated in several conferences. Daniel graduated from Salisbury University, then a Master's degree at Andover Newton Seminary. He is working toward a Ph.D. in Urban Studies at Portland State U.

What early-on endeared me to Daniel Salomon was his personality that combined genius-level intellectual acumen, humility, humor, a massive grasp of spiritual and environmental issues, along with a childlike trusting and loving conversational relationship with God and also with animals. In his early college essays his footnotes might incorporate an extensive array of scholarly writings, with other footnotes of insight from God with, “God told me.” His neurodiverse condition opens fresh questions and creative thinking not cumbered with norms of societal appropriateness.

In her Review for the book, God's Kindness: Planetary Hope and Grassroots Empowerment, Sarah Morris writes of the author,

As an environmental scientist, Daniel Salomon understands the implications of the environmental crises facing our planet. As a theologian, with a unique background as both a Jewish intellectual and a Roman Catholic convert particularly influenced by St. Francis of Assisi, patron saint of animals and environmentalists, he embraces the sacred nature of creation and incorporates the hope born of faith in his approaches to advocacy for our created world. As a disability studies scholar, his work is enhanced by his own sacred story of his lived experience as a neurodiverse man, which is generously and authentically shared within his work.

In God's Kindness (Amazon, 2019), Salomon attempts to “make accessible to the various neurodiversity and disability communities around the world and allies an accessible interpretation of Judeo-Christianity, Christian environmentalism, secular environmentalism, the socio-planetary crisis and animal liberation and how to engage...” In other words, “this latest work is my follow-up autistic theology of liberation...”

Salomon was officially diagnosed at age three with Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD), and later with Asperger’s Syndrome, and now with Asperger's Syndrome, with the complications of anxiety and depression likely compounded by difficulty interpreting social cues and difficulty conforming to neurotypical socialization. Because of his disability, gainful employment eludes him. Thankfully, government aid has provided Salomon with rudimentary material essentials for life such that (in his words) “I am free to explore my God-given potential for enjoyable work and peace and well-being among all creatures.” (Daniel Salomon, Have Mercy On Me, An Ecological Sinner, Amazon, 2011).

Salomon’s books are lengthy, self-published, and lack professional editing and formatting. The books are personalized reflections on a wide variety of topics. The vocabulary and the resources Salomon draws upon is extensive. For those who might be interested in the creative gifting and social challenge of a high-functioning autistic neurodiverse person, reading Daniel Salomon provides much insight. He reminds one of Temple Grandin, the prominent animal behavior scientist also with an autistic spectrum diagnosis.

Following is a very succinct review of some of Daniel Salomon's books, that in his own words express God’s calling upon him. Some writings are available only on Kindle. Books can be purchased through his self-publishing site at Amazon.

In Creation Unveiled (Xulon Press, 2003, 2010), I was called to apply Rene Girard’s theory of scapegoating to challenge the anti-Christian strains in the various environmental and animal movements.

In Christian Environmental Studies (Amazon, 2008, 2012), I was called to examine the emerging Christian environmental and animal movements.

In Human-Animal Reconciliation (Amazon, 2008), I was called to apply Christian environmentalism and animal liberation to a particular problem of wildlife/human conflicts.

In Have Mercy On Me, An Ecological Sinner (Amazon, 2012), I was called to speak-up about my professional and personal struggles as a Christian environmentalist as a response to a personal crisis. As a neurodiverse Christian environmentalist, I was not receiving the professional and personal help I needed to continue on my journey of protecting and serving God’s Creation. I was called to ask for help and solidarity...from the various Christian environmental movements so I could fulfill my Christian obligation from God of being a good steward of God’s creation.

In Confessions Of An Autistic Theologian (Amazon, 2013) I positively disclosed how my unique neurodiversity and disability experiences informs my spirituality, my religious faith, my method of theological reflection even my ecological and animal rights commitments, articulating my own unique theology and ethic, in the process, arguing why Christian environmentalists and secular environmentalists alike absolutely must include disability and neurodiversity on the socio-planetary agenda.

[Since the publication of this book] I have many new understandings of where a diversity of Christian environmentalist approaches might be coming from through actively listening to their own point-of-view...As a result, I have begun to recover their good intentions. I am now beginning to understand.

God’s Kindness: Planetary Hope and Grassroots Empowerment (Amazon, 2019), is the articulation of the private revelation I received of ecological guidance and subsequent conversion which I experienced from dwelling in the presence of the Living God about not only my own personal future, but the Future of All Life on Earth, a future that we have nothing to be afraid of, but a future we can embrace despite chaos and uncertainties, in a spirit of hope, even faith...This book is part of my gift to the global Earth community as one neurodiverse Jewish Catholic Christian...In other words, in this book I focus on the good news.

Link for Salomon's personal book page below:

https://www.amazon.com/Daniel-A.-Salomon/e/B0045SY54K?%3Fref=dbs_a_mng_rwt_scns_share
“The most important thing you can do to fight climate change: talk about it.” Katharine Hayhoe is an internationally-renowned climate scientist. Yet it is her winsome personality and sincerity that make common ground with others that have positioned her as the face of communicating climate science to the public.

This book reads easily. Science is explained clearly. Anecdotal stories abound, often humorous. Hayhoe emphasizes that finding common ground with the other is an essential key to building trust and furthering productive dialogue. What will backfire is trying to shame people into a guilt trip.

Hayhoe, a professor at Texas Tech since 2005, is a prodigious author of over 120 peer-reviewed publications, including co-authoring the 3rd National Climate Assessment in 2014.

Katharine Hayhoe grew up as a daughter of missionaries, and is married to an evangelical Christian pastor. She speaks openly about her Christian faith in her many speaking engagements on climate. “Hope” is one of the three Christian virtues (with faith, charity). Hope is striving for the “good” through Divine inspiration and assistance. Katharine Hayhoe exemplifies Christian Hope.

Smokescreen is Chad Hanson’s strong rebuke to current counterproductive forest fire suppression strategies. Based upon solid scientific research in Western forests, Hanson demonstrates that natural fire cycles are essential in fire-adapted forests for their regenerative health.

Scientist and activist Chad T. Hanson explains how natural alarm over wildfire has been marshaled to advance corporate and political agendas, notably those of the logging industry. He also shows that, in stark contrast to the fear-driven narrative around these events, contemporary research has demonstrated that forests in the United States, North America, and around the world have a significant deficit of fire. Forest fires, including the largest ones, can create extraordinarily important and rich wildlife habitats as long as they are not subjected to post-fire logging. Smokescreen confronts the devastation cost of current policies and practices and ultimately offers a hopeful vision and practical suggestions for the future—one in which both communities and the climate are protected and fires are understood as a natural and necessary force. (UKy Press)
At the dawn of their third Millennium, Christians face a profound challenge to their task to bear witness to freedom in Christ Jesus. All society is ineluctably accelerating into an insatiable vortex of technological domination in all spheres of life.

Recent decades have witnessed the most profound impact of human creative power. One can speak of the expansion of accumulated and accessible knowledge as a mind-boggling reality; or, consider the impact of modern medicine, hygiene, and nutrition on human lives and their societies; or, ponder the exponential amplification of weapon killing-power in its actual destructive use and in its psychological bearing upon us. Yet the question is poised: Is all this the better for humanity?

Humankind has always used technology. Indeed, one could say that the creative, purposeful use of tools to manipulate the environment is a specific element to the definition of the human species. Technology has evolved through the ability of the human species to creatively engage and adapt to environmental change, to pass information to succeeding generations, and finally to dominate and control an environment for self-interest. Thus, from agricultural tilling evolved the stick, then the hoe, eventually the oxen-powered plow, and at present the fossil-fueled multi-plowshare, each successive development further generating significant impact into societal structure.

Certain technological innovations have had monumental lasting impacts upon successive human societies—taming of fire; invention of the spear thrower; domestication of animals; bronze then to iron tools; the manufacture of a wheel. Just as the constant shifting of continental tectonic plates shaping the earth erupts periodically in earthquakes and volcanos, so revolutionary technologies have powerfully convulsed civilizations. Indeed, a particular society’s discovery of a “breakthrough” often empowered that bearer to dominate or absorb less-equipped peoples.

The pace of breakthrough technologies has accelerated exponentially in the past few centuries. The road from the Gutenberg Press to the microcomputer, to name just one technological advance, has had and continues to have stupendous impact.

But where does this technological chase lead us? Will this maddening hunt for increased technological sophistication serve humankind, or will it become our master? One might well ponder that question in view of the evolution of instruments of war—from clubs, to arrows, to gunpowder, to the thermonuclear bomb. In the light of the Temptation of Christ narratives, one might pose to Christians the unquestioned pursuit of technological powers.

What Is Technological Hubris?

In a penetrating critique, the late French sociologist-theologian Jacques Ellul defines the technical problem as “the one best means in every field. It is the aggregate of these means that produces technical civilization. The technical phenomenon is the main occupation of our time; in every field people seek to find the most efficient method…on the basis of numerical calculation.”

Ellul does not confine what he terms technique only to machines, but also to economic technique, organizational technique, and human technique…“ranging all the way from medicine and genetics to propaganda…nothing at all escapes technique today. There is no field where technique is not dominant.”

For example, economic growth is an axiomatic principle in Keynesian economics, predicated on stimulating new investment through the generation of new products and services through inducing artificial demand for these goods. Thus, Western society (and increasingly every society) is trapped in an upward spiraling economic technique of consumerism far beyond any semblance of basic human need, with portentous social and economic consequences.

Finally, it is not enough to assert that most people in technologically efficient societies seem happy, or are envied by less technologically advanced societies. From the Christian perspective, the fullness of humanity as definitively expressed in Jesus Christ is not realized through material satiation, securities of health and police systems, or in relief from the unpredictability and strain in struggle with nature, but rather in the freedom expressed in covenantal love with God and humankind.

Technological Idolatry

Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves…” (Genesis 11:4a NRSV)

The theological explanation of unbounded technical prowess is rooted in the Biblical story of Babel. Babel signifies the attempt by humans to build an existence apart from God. Babel is an arrogant human attempt to assume god-like power and control. Babel includes religion that seeks to control the gods. The biblical Babel resulted in scattering and confusion. One might well ponder this significance of Babel in light of our present-day colossal technological sophistication with the accompanying confusion of values, division, lack of community, and family breakdown.

The Bible commands against the fashioning of images to worship (Exodus 20:4-6). Contrary to pagan practice, altars to Yahweh were to be simple, undorned, made of earth (Exodus 20:25). An altar constructed with elemental materials of creation could count as a sign for the glory of God. An altar of elaborate human shaping and fashioning might point as a sign for the glory and honor of humankind. Significantly, the Eucharist uses simple elements of bread and wine from the raw ingredients of wheat and grape with only modest human transforming involvement. Israel was often besieged by foreign enemies, yet biblical Israel was to reduce its army size, avoid cutting edge weaponry, and refrain from allying with pagan nations so that God would have the honor of defending the people.

The Bible affirms humankind’s role to take care of the garden (Genesis 2:15), which carries over after the Fall as work (Genesis 3:17-19). The Bible reveals that humankind can utilize technique for good ends or for evil—skilled craftsmen built the Ark of the Covenant, while other craftsmen devised idols. Paramount, then, is the ends to which technique is employed. The theological question for contemporary society is this: Are we humbly using the stupendous powers of technique at our disposal for the glory of God, or are we using these techniques as a means in itself? If the latter, then we will find ourselves ensnared by the idols of our own devising! (Psalm 9:16)

Technique And Communication

Unquestionably the most profound feature of our contemporary world is its explosion in communication technique. Communication is both global and instantaneous in a variety of techniques. The volume of recorded knowledge, even that which is readily accessible, is mind-boggling. Libraries abound in developed nations. Sophisticated communication technique is inexpensive and accessible. Powerful computer devices including the smart phone is omnipresent globally to all but the very poor.

The question arises: “What is being said, and who is responding?” Jacques Ellul writes, “The habit of speaking without saying anything has eaten away the word like a cancer…no word can be taken seriously, because the rush of these words prevents us from discovering the one which, in the midst of the torrent, has meaning and deserves to be listened to.”

Somehow, many of us still strive to take everything in, as our stacks of books, magazines, and clippings (many...
The Modern Technological Problem (continued)

yet unread) reveal. Yet even as we cram in one more “must see” film, tune into the “must see” daily news, listen to one more “must hear” musician, peruse on more “must read” book, and pursue one more “must follow” issue, our lives drown in despair that we are still not sufficiently abreast of what is going on in the world. Words, images, and sounds demand our every moment with an insatiable lust. Each of us, and society, should draw limits.

The next problem one frequently encounters with modern communication technique is its facelessness. Whether voice-synthesized computer messages, a form letter from a government bureaucracy, or the myriad advertisements that clog our senses, words become separated from the character and responsibility of their initiators.

Trivialization and perversion of language threatens our humanity as it undermines our rational thinking process and our interpersonal relationships. Commercial advertising is compelled to create a catchy ad that grabs attention and induces a desire to buy the product—otherwise, competition drowns it out in their own thundering audio-visual-emotional-psychological cacophonous din.

Word is separated from meaning (and therefore truth) in myriad nefarious ways. State-supported lotteries continually tempt the masses with seductive commercials with succulent lies of easy-gained riches. Artificial intelligence will go from one village to another (October, 1985)p.30. Quoted by Dale Aukerman, Reckoning With (Alfred A. Knopf, NY, 1965) introduction.

Propaganda is perhaps the most serious threat to democracy. Noam Chomsky writes, “Propaganda is to democracy what violence is to totalitarianism. The techniques have been honed to a high art, far beyond anything that Orwell dreamt of."5

Propaganda is a technique of psychological manipulation. The objective is effectiveness—not truth, not recognition of human dignity, not respect for freedom. Propaganda is violence to the human soul. Nevertheless, many welcome propaganda to fill a need for certainty, justification, and group identity.6

Sadly, even church communities succumb to the temptation to utilize the manipulative power of propaganda. This is evident in the seductive power of the false “prosperity gospel” that induces people to donate money to millionaire preachers. It is also keenly evident in partisan politics when religious leaders dub a candidate for office as “God’s anointed” while demonizing the opposing candidate. The sound-image combination of television can be an overwhelming tool of propaganda.

The foremost step in Christian political engagement in our present age of technological communication totalitarianism is to resolutely refuse to use it, and to expose its falsehoods relentlessly. Dale Aukerman states emphatically, “The struggle to live and proclaim God’s truth over against false prophecy and not the attempt to transform the world should be the most determinative stance for the political involvement of Christ’s people."7

Christian Restraint In Technology

The trajectory of future technique is a juggernaut of new and expanding human capabilities. CRISPR gene editing is still in a relative infancy. Microtechnologies are still nascent to their potential. New technologies arise to control adverse side effects of older technologies (think green energy to tame fossil-fueled climate change). Artificial intelligence will become what? Undreamed possibilities await the future for today’s children. The pace of new technologies is outpacing corresponding ethics to serve and not exploit humanity and the earth. How does humanity restrain nuclear weaponry? Climate change? Important ly, how might a follower of Christ respond to the allure, promise, and danger of our technological age?

A Christian engagement in behalf of environmental sustainability might consider the following: (1) Cultivate a personal lifestyle that relates more directly and interdependently with the created world, restraining technology from displacing this relationship; (2) Consider excessive consumption seriously as an addiction; (3) Advocate truthful economic analysis that takes into consideration the burden upon earth ecosystems; (4) Encourage public policies that foster decentralization, conservation, alternative intermediate technologies, and personal nurture of natural resources.

Recognizing that technique is indispensably integrated within the human experience, we cannot deny its use. Yet we must seek its restraint, set its limits, expose its pretensions, and battle its excesses. Following are some suggested guidelines.

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(1) Maintenance and strengthening of family, community, and other interpersonal harmonies have priority over raw technological efficiency.

(2) Sustainable land and resource use is essential, and is best achieved by establishing a daily, harmonious, living relationship with the inhabitants and materials that have been created, as we have been, by the Creator God, recognizing with humility our own unique privilege and responsibility as Imago Dei.

(3) Refusal of all propaganda manipulation, and renunciation of trivialization of language. Proactively, demanding clear statements of truth from embodied voices in matters of social policy and responsibility.

(4) Humble, open dialogue with conscientious people both of Christian faith and outside, in matters of discernment to new ethical questions posed by new technologies.

(5) Consciously refusing some technologies of high efficiency, even at the expense of time or money, in order to break the absolute hold of technique on our lives. In other words, engaging in technological fasting.

(6) Urging of technological variety in society rather than monopolistic techniques.

(7) Renunciation of consumer addiction, including excessive material consumption and excessive information consumptions. Appreciation and responsible care for the things we use.

(8) Following Christ with fervency, joy, and in hope through dependence upon His grace. Repentance of sin. Gratitude for the wondrous free gift of salvation. Proclamation by word and deed that Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth. Loving others as Christ has and does and forever loves us.

In some rural villages in Kenya, more than 200 Maasai women go from one village to another riding their donkeys. They bring solar panels, rechargeable batteries and lighting kits. www.green-energy-africa.com

Endnotes

1 Jacques Ellul, The Technological Society (Alfred A. Knopf, NY, 1964) p. 21
2 Wes Jackson, Altars of Unhewn Stone (North Point, SF, NY, 1987)
3 Jacques Ellul, The Humiliation of the Word (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1985) pp. 155, 156
4 Jean Staker Garton, Who Broke the Baby? (Bethany, 1979) I recall with sadness a news item long ago in the Charleston Gazette (W.V.). A pregnant woman had been in a traffic accident and had lost her baby in a consequent miscarriage. The news article in several places referred to “the loss of the fetus.” How insensitive, perverse!
6 Aukerman, p. 71.
Chuck was known throughout the anti-mountaintop removal movement as a humble, warm, conscientious, level-headed, truth-talking leader. Chuck was best of friends with Larry Gibson, which is how I first got to know Chuck. On two occasions I invited Chuck to participate as a leader in meetings I had put together for outside religious leaders. Chuck adamantly refused honorarium payment.

Chuck compassionately cared for his aging and faltering father on a daily basis until he passed, and then lovingly cared for his wife, Linda, who suffered debilitating health problems until her passing in August 2019.

On May 19 Chuck and I met at a restaurant in Beckley for a long-awaited visit. Chuck, who lived in Glen Daniel about 20 minutes away, had come in for another of his many medical appointments. Chuck’s health had been poor for several years. He had lost one kidney, had seven stents, and had episodes of severe foot pain. Yet he was cheerful, upbeat, and hopeful during our time together. Chuck has been one of our best sources of information on Larry Gibson for our biography project. We also discussed our mutual Christian faith. Chuck firmly believed in the salvation promised by Jesus. He trusted that he would reunite with his beloved wife, Linda. In the meantime, he lived alone, sharing his home with three cats. Maria Gunnoe would call him every morning and every evening to check on him, as well as come over periodically to help out.

When my friend, Owen Owens, asked about coming down from Pennsylvania in June for a tour of mountaintop removal, Maria Gunnoe tackled the considerable logistical obstacles in order to get permission to visit Jarrell Cemetery, which to reach would bring us through the large active Twilight Surface Mine. Maria set up the visit for Friday June 18, inviting Chuck Nelson to come along. (see pages 8, 9 for Owens’ story of this tour)

When we passed through the small hamlet of Bandytown, Chuck asked if we could stop by the Middle Ferrell Cemetery. His grandparents are buried there, and he wanted to see if he could find their graves. The cemetery is on a rather steep hill. Worried about Chuck’s severe heart condition, Maria gave up and went back to the car. Not one to give up, Chuck insisted on clambering up the cemetery hill to look for himself. And after considerably more searching, Maria and Chuck found the small, almost obscure gravestones. Chuck was satisfied. Chuck knew his time on earth was most likely short. Respecting the dead, honoring the legacy they left future generations, was on his mind as he reflected upon his own life.

Over the next several hours, the four of us rode in Maria’s pickup truck into the massive mountaintop removal operation, to the cemetery, then afterward to the small towns abandoned because of the noise and dust nuisances of the mining. After eating a late lunch in a local café, we hugged our good-byes. As it turned out to be, our last goodbye to Chuck on this earth-side of heaven.

The Son of Man will come again with divine greatness, and all his angels will come with him. He will sit as king on his great and glorious throne. All the people of the world will be gathered before him.....

Then the king will say to the godly people on his right, ‘Come, my Father has great blessings for you. The kingdom he promised is now yours. It has been prepared for you since the world was made. It is yours because when I was hungry, you gave me food to eat. When I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. When I had no place to stay, you welcomed me into your home. When I was without clothes, you gave me something to wear. When I was sick, you cared for me. When I was in prison, you came to visit me.

The truth is, anything you did for any of my people here, you also did for me.'

( Teaching of Jesus in Matthew 25: 31, 34-37, 45)
The New Boone County Partnership in WV

Most news coming out of Boone County nowadays is bleak, to say the least. Our local communities have responded in ways that have set precedence for other outside communities to rebuild beginning in their own communities with their own neighbors. The Boone County Partnership is a coalition of new Boone county non-profit organizations that work in a broad network to bring opportunities to our own communities that they otherwise would have never known. We have sidestepped our hindrances and challenges to meet the needs of our people at a most desperate time.

The Boone County Partnership began to work together in 2020 to create sustainable food sources for our people and to help meet the catastrophic need that the COVID19 crisis highlighted. The BARN Community Group (BARN), Dig In, and Mother Jones Community Foundation have worked in our networks to meet the needs of people throughout Boone County. The downturn of the coal industry created challenges for every level of government and we simply couldn’t wait for help. Our communities have for the most part been abandoned. We responded by being “the good” that we wanted to see in Boone county.

BARN supplies many resources to the people of Boone County. BARN is in Nellis, WV in a school building that had been closed in 2016. The community took that school building and turned it into a resource center that supplies hundreds of people with basic needs. There is a free clothing closet and food pantry. A well-stocked library offers computer access. Office space is rented out to ENACT program that helps to pay for emergency assistance for disconnection notices and winterizing homes. ENACT also pays for maintenance and tires for people’s cars. Another office is rented out to Compass Counseling that has free counseling covering many areas including family counseling, drug addiction, and recovery.

BARN has been able to serve its community as a full-service resource center and has been available to help our communities that don’t have a meeting space to utilize.

Dig In Supports Appalachia Gardening

Dig In teaches and helps people grow their own food. For example, a community garden with 7 raised beds and a high tunnel helped people to understand the potential of what can be grown in limited space. Dig In plows small spaces, sets up seed and plant sharing, and provides the training that is needed to produce good healthy foods.

Forest Dolin says: The Mountain Sol Survival Skills Class was a huge opportunity that our local students took advantage of. They showed that our people here can rise to match the potential of those in other communities across the state.

Dig In has far exceeded even our own expectations with a good year growing community gardens and helping people to have food security in a very food insecure place. Dig In is currently establishing a learning center on Rt. 85.

Youth Learn Outdoor Leadership Skills

When we began this partnership all we had was the will to do something more for our communities. After we helped to secure people’s needs during the beginning Covid pandemic, we began to reach out to help people learn and teach our traditional culture of survival and to pass this on to our generations to come. In November of 2021, we had a Mountain Medic training to teach our people to once again thrive in these mountains that our families have called home for centuries.

Mountain Stewardship and Outdoor Leadership School (mountainsol.org) based in Morgantown, WV, spent a Fall day with the Boone County Partnership and 12 youth participants. All of us learned to tie knots to hang a hammock and tarp and how to identify plants that are helpful in emergencies. Each person who participates will have an opportunity to test for certification as mountain medics when we complete this program. This gives our people the opportunity to advance this work to the next generation by simply mentoring and teaching the upcoming generations the culture of thriving in our mountains.

Forest Dolin says: The Mountain Sol Survival Skills Class was a huge opportunity that our local students took advantage of. They showed that our people here can rise to match the potential of those in other communities across the state.

Jennifer Osha Buysee of Mountain Sol says: Mountain SOL can hardly wait to return to Boone county. Even though there are difficulties figuring out how to teach this material for the first time off of our own campus, we are thrilled with the new connections and relationships that we are forming. We are grateful to everyone who worked to make this new class possible and is committed to making our Mountain Medic class meaningful for our participants.

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Forest Dolin says: The Mountain Sol Survival Skills Class was a huge opportunity that our local students took advantage of. They showed that our people here can rise to match the potential of those in other communities across the state.

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The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 19:34)

"We applaud efforts to expand relevant statutes of international law to include ‘ecocide,’ defined as the unlimited and unlawful destruction of ecosystems through oil drilling and spills, industrial fishing and livestock farming, plastic pollution and mountaintop removal, but also nuclear weapons and testing.”

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew is spiritual leader to 300 million Orthodox Christians worldwide.

During his speech October 28, 2021 at Notre Dame during his U.S. Tour, Bartholomew denounced mountaintop removal as an ecocide.

A month earlier, Bartholomew, Anglican Archbishop Justin of Canterbury, and Roman Catholic Pope Francis had issued a first ever joint statement calling for humans to make sacrifices in order to care for the environment.

"That trip changed my worldview!” exclaimed Orthodox theologian John Chrysavagis about his CFTM tour of mountaintop removal in October 2018. Chrysavagis is environmental advisor to Bartholomew.

God’s mercy is for those who fear God from generation to generation.
God has shown strength with God’s arm; God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

(from The Magnificat of Mary, pregnant with Jesus, prophesying about Him)
(Luke 1:50-53)

"The Magnificat is a revolutionary song of salvation whose political, economic, and social dimensions cannot be blunted. People in need in every society hear a blessing in this canticle. The battered woman, the single parent without resources, those without food on the table or without even a table, the homeless family, the young abandoned to their own devices, the old who are discarded: all are encompassed in the hope Mary proclaims.” – Sister Elizabeth Johnson, 2012.
(kairoscenter.org)

"May your Christmas be joyous, and your New Year be fulfilling. May God’s blessings flow to you and through you so as to bring good news of exceedingly great joy, for our Savior is born and lives and reigns forever!

-with love and hope to all,
Christians For The Mountains."