

RENEWAL Module 1: A Crime Against Creation

Summary

In the opening episode of "Renewal" we watch an ecumenical gathering of witness and resistance to the practice of mountaintop removal in the hills of Appalachia in Eastern Kentucky. Christians of different denominations travel to Appalachia to learn about how large mountainous areas are destroyed in order to extract coal. The story is a heartfelt cry for environmental justice for all living things: animals, plants, and human beings. The religious leaders on this tour bear witness to the ways the destruction of God's creation leads to the degradation of human health. Whenever natural resources are extracted without attention to their negative health effects (the "garden of the Lord," as the episode's opening song puts it) is laid to waste, and all of God's creatures, including the human community, are affected in the process.

Possibly the most poignant moment in this episode is when the mother of the little girl narrates what is happening to her daughter when she bathes in water now made toxic from the removal of coal. "We have well water that is contaminated," says the mother. "It has high levels of arsenic in it. My child bathes in this water and tries to drink the bubbles in the water. She doesn't understand this is going to hurt her, she is just three years old." At this point, the viewer may ask whether our culture has arrived at the point where we trade the well-being of our children in exchange for revenue through fossil fuels?

Other scenes from the episode may impress upon the viewer what happens when whole mountains are blown away to extract coal: the rumble of dynamite in the background, the grey clouds of coal dust wafting dark and menacing on the horizon, the outstretched arms of the traveling Christians now gathered as a community of worship on the plateau of a newly split-open mountaintop. The episode ends with a call to commitment by Peter Illyn of "Restoring Eden": Will those assembled on the mountaintop (and, by implication, will society) finally give up its addiction to unsustainable fossil fuels? Can we envision a new moral and economic order in which planetary waste is no longer a byproduct of human habitation?

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the nature of sin in an age of ecological peril?
2. Some might claim that as a society, we have lost our way to the false gods of money and wealth. Do you agree? Why or why not?
3. How does religious belief and practice provide the necessary foundation for genuine and lasting sustainable social policy?

Resources

Books

Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999)

Mary Grey, *Sacred Longings: The Ecological Spirit and Global Culture* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004)

Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008)

Mark I. Wallace, *Finding God in the Singing River: Christianity, Spirit, Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005)

Magazine Articles

"Can Religion Save the Environment?" *E: The Environmental Magazine* 13 (November/December 2002)

Web Links

Evangelical Environmental Network

<http://www.creationcare.org/>

Evangelicals for Social Action: Creation Care

<http://www.esa-online.org/Display.asp?Page=creationcare>

Moyers on America: "Is God Green?"

www.pbs.org/moyers/moyersonamerica/green/watch.html