

# **This Land Is Home to Me**

## **Appalachian Catholic Bishops, 1975**

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# **This Land Is Home to Me**

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Many of our Catholic people  
especially church workers  
have asked us to respond  
to the cries of powerlessness  
from the region called Appalachia.  
We have listened to these cries  
and now we lend our own voice.  
The cries come now from Appalachia,  
but they are echoed  
across the land  
across the earth  
in the suffering of too many people.  
Together these many sufferings  
form a single cry.

The Living God hears this cry  
and tells us,  
what long ago  
on a different mountain,  
was told the servant Moses that,

God had heard the cry of a people.  
God would deliver them out of the hands of  
oppression.  
God would give them a rich and broad land.

But before we turn  
to this message from God,  
we must hear first  
the cry of Appalachia's poor.  
Their cry is a strong message,  
not because we have made it that way,  
but because the truth of Appalachia  
is harsh.

In repeating this message  
we do not put ourselves  
in judgement of others.  
The truth of Appalachia  
is judgement upon us all,  
making hard demands on us bishops,  
as well as on others.

We know that there will be other opinions  
about the truth of Appalachia,  
other views than those of the poor.  
But we must remind ourselves  
that the poor are special  
in the eyes of God,  
for we have been told,  
in the voice of Mary,

God has pulled down princes from their thrones,  
and exalted the lowly.  
The hungry have been filled with good things,  
the rich sent empty away. (Luke 1:52-53)

Even so,  
we know that our words are not perfect.  
For that reason,  
this letter is but one part  
of an unfinished conversation  
with our people  
with the truth of Appalachia  
with the Living God.

Yet we still dare to speak,  
and speak strongly,  
first,  
because we trust our people  
and we know  
that those who belong to Yahweh  
truly wish to do God's will;  
and second,  
because we believe  
that the cry of the poor  
is also a message of hope,  
a promise from Jesus,  
that there can be a better way,  
for Jesus has told us,

The Truth will make you free. (John 8:32)

## Part I: The land and its people

Appalachia makes us think  
of people who live in the hills,  
who love nature's freedom  
and beauty,  
who are alive with song  
and poetry.  
But many of these people are also poor  
and suffer oppression.

Once they went to the mountains  
fighting to build a dream  
different from the injustice  
they knew before.  
Until this day,  
their struggle continues,  
a bitter fight  
whose sound still rumbles  
across the hills.

Yes, the poor of the mountains  
have been wounded,  
but they are not crushed.

The Spirit still lives.  
The sound of music  
still ripples through the hills.  
Continually the tears of song  
burn in outrage,  
and outrage lives in struggle.

But the hillfolk of the mountains  
are not the only ones who struggle.

Besides the struggle in hollows,  
typical of the central region,  
there are struggles in industrial centers,  
grown grey with smoke and smog,  
blaring with the clank and crash  
of heavy machinery  
and urban congestion,  
where working people,  
and those who wish there was work,  
white and black,  
native and immigrant,  
speakers of one and many languages,  
battle for dignity and security,  
for themselves and for their children.

So too there is the struggle in farmland,  
typical of rolling hills in the southern sector,  
where little farmers and sharecroppers,  
day laborers and migrant workers,  
who help the earth  
yield its food to the hungry,  
battle for that same dignity and security,  
for themselves and their children.

In all three areas  
- the center  
- the north  
- the south

In every labor  
- the mine  
- the factory  
- the farm  
the struggle is different, yet remains the same.

It is at once the struggle  
- of all Appalachia  
- of the whole nation  
- of the human family.

The Appalachian mountains  
form the spiny backbone  
of the Eastern United States.  
This whole stretch,  
which the Federal Government calls  
"The Appalachian Region",  
runs from Southern New York  
to Northern Georgia and Alabama.  
It contains 397 counties  
in 13 states,  
parts of  
- Alabama,  
- Georgia,  
- Kentucky,  
- Maryland,  
- Mississippi,  
- New York,  
- North Carolina,  
- Ohio,  
- Pennsylvania,  
- South Carolina,  
- Tennessee,  
- Virginia,  
and all of West Virginia.

In the region there are:  
mountain folk,  
city folk,  
country folk,  
coal miners and steel workers,  
union workers and non-union workers,  
industrial workers and service workers,  
farmers and farm laborers,  
housewives and children,  
teachers and health workers,  
ministers and rabbis and priests,  
artists and poets,  
professionals and technicians,  
lawyers and politicians,  
lobbyists and interest groups,  
executives and managers,  
little business people and big business people,  
coal companies and chemical companies,  
industrialists and bankers.

So, you see,  
Appalachia is not a simple place.  
There are rich and poor,  
big and little,  
new and old,  
and lots in between.

But somehow,  
no matter how confusing it seems,  
it's all tied together  
by the mountain chain  
and by the coal in its Center,  
producing energy within it.

Of course,  
there is more than coal  
in the region.  
There is  
gas,  
timber,  
oil,  
farms,  
steel mills,  
cheap labor,  
but coal is central. Coal

There is a saying in the region  
that coal is king.  
That's not exactly right.  
The kings are those who control big coal,  
and the profit and power  
which come with it.

Many of these kings  
don't live in the region.

A long time ago in this country  
when big industry just got started,  
Appalachian coal played a big role.  
It fed the furnaces  
of our first industrial giants,  
like Pittsburgh and Buffalo.  
The coal-based industry  
created many jobs,  
and brought great progress to our country,  
but it brought other things, too,  
among them  
oppression for the mountains.

Soon the mountain people  
were dependent on the coal companies  
and on the company towns  
that came with them.

An old song sings,  
Another day older  
and deeper in debt.  
That was life for many people  
who lived in the shadow  
of the mountain's coal.

Many of our Catholic people  
lived under this suffering  
- in the coal mines,  
- in the steel mills,  
- in the other harsh jobs  
that surrounded coal and steel.

Then came the unions,  
as men and women fought hard  
to change their lot.  
The unions did good work  
and for that reason  
they were bitterly attacked  
by enemies of justice.

But seeds of injustice  
were also sown  
within the labor movement.

Sometimes criminal forces entered  
to crush their democratic structure,  
or to use one union base  
to prevent union growth in other areas,  
or to turn contracts  
into documents of deceit,  
both for labor and management,  
thus encouraging their breach  
from both sides.  
Sometimes workers allowed themselves  
to be used for selfish ends,  
like keeping out blacks,  
or women,  
or Indians,  
or Spanish-speaking people.  
Sometimes the labor movement  
thought only of workers in the U.S.  
and did not take seriously,  
their membership in the global human family.

Sometimes, too,  
they used the unions  
to protect the relative advantages  
of a few workers  
and little concern for  
the great disadvantage of the many.

The real power of the labor movement,  
a power which has not been totally crushed,  
is the vision that  
an injury to one is an injury to all,  
whether to white or black,  
whether to male or female,  
whether to worker or consumer,  
whether to union member or non-member,  
whether to U.S. citizen or to citizen  
of any nation.

But later on for many people,  
whose lives were tied to coal,  
the unions didn't matter so much any more.  
Coal gave way to oil,  
and a different suffering  
came across the mountains.

The mines in the hills  
began to close.  
The industrial thunder  
of cities near the mines  
weakened.  
The people from the mountains  
fled to the cities

looking for jobs.  
But in the cities  
the jobs were few.  
It is a strange system which makes people suffer  
both when they have work  
and when they don't have work.

## **The Wider Picture**

The people had to fight one another for the few  
jobs:

- mountain people against city people,
- white people against black people,
- Irish people against Polish and Italian people,
- skilled workers against unskilled workers,
- union workers against non-union workers.

As the people were forced  
to fight over jobs,  
self-defense became a way of life,

- in wars,
- in sports,
- in movies,
- even sometimes at home.

Our country meanwhile  
grew strong and powerful  
because of

- exploding war-stimulated technology,
- cheap raw materials from abroad,
- lots of oil,
- and a large work force.

But many people stayed poor,  
and suffered attacks on their dignity,  
especially

- Native Americans,
- Blacks,
- Mexican Americans,
- immigrants,
- Puerto Ricans,
- and poor whites, like Appalachians.

Brothers and sisters in suffering,  
these people were often forced  
to turn against one another,  
for some meager piece of a pie,  
which, however big  
(the biggest the world had ever known),  
refused to feed all its children.

As industrial production grew,  
it brought blessings to the human family,  
but the more it grew  
the more some felt  
it became like a cancer  
eating away its own foundation.

The system produced  
for production's sake,  
and it tried to train people to consume  
for consumption's sake.  
The ever growing production and consumption  
needed ever more energy,  
more than domestic gas  
and domestic oil  
can supply.

When foreign oil producing nations  
suddenly became more demanding  
on the world market,  
giant U.S. business interests  
(who before used to decide prices  
of things like oil  
on the world market)  
got frightened.  
They began to plan for  
U.S. "energy independence".  
One way to do that  
was to go back  
to a half dead and forgotten past,  
to coal.

## **Back to the Mountains**

So the corporate giants turn their eyes  
to the mountains once again.  
Slowly, but powerfully,  
their presence rumbles in  
the heavy tread of  
the powerful among the powerful,  
those who control:  
- finance and credit,  
- information systems,  
- and energy resources.

Already voices from this camp  
have spoken of Appalachia as  
an "energy reservation",  
or "giant industrial park".

Appalachia,  
a field of powerlessness,  
may soon become the seat  
of economic power in the United States.

But the new power,  
which a return to coal  
could bring to Appalachia,  
would probably not make its people  
any more powerful.  
Instead, they would live  
a different kind of powerlessness,  
one common to the rest of our society  
the powerlessness of isolated little people  
in the face of the most powerful corporate giants  
on this earth.

## **The Worship Of An Idol**

The way of life  
which these corporate giants create  
is called by some  
"technological rationalization".  
Its forces contain the promise  
of a world where  
- poverty is eliminated,  
- health is cared for,  
- education is available for all,  
- dignity is guaranteed,  
- and old age is secure.  
Too often, however,  
its forces become perverted,  
hostile to the dignity of the earth  
and of its people.

Its destructive growth patterns  
- pollute the air,  
- foul the water,  
- rape the land.

The driving force  
behind this perversion is  
"Maximization of Profit",  
a principle which too often converts itself  
into an idolatrous power.

This power overwhelms the good intentions  
of noble people.

It forces them to compete brutally  
with one another.

It pushes people into  
"conspicuous consumption"  
and "planned obsolescence."

It delivers up control  
to a tiny minority  
whose values then shape  
our social structures.

Of course, technological rationalization  
and the profit principle  
have served important functions  
in human development.

It is not they themselves  
that form an idol,  
but the idol is formed  
when they become absolutes  
and fail to yield,  
when the time has come,  
to other principles.

Neither do we believe  
that our people,  
or the people of the nation,  
have totally fallen prey  
to the power of this idol.  
But even without that happening,  
"Maximization of profit"  
in today's world,  
has become a crazy death wish,  
every day using up more and more  
of the earth's riches  
and our own dignity.  
Like those who write spy thrillers,  
its process is fascinated  
with everything that can  
"self-destruct",  
even if it is ourselves.

Without judging anyone,  
it has become clear to us  
that the present economic order  
does not care for its people.  
In fact,  
profit and people frequently are contradictory.  
Profit over people  
is an idol.  
And it is not a new idol,  
for Jesus long ago warned us,

No one can be the slave of two slave-drivers;  
the first will be hated  
and the second loved,  
or the first treated with respect,  
and the second with scorn.  
You cannot be the slave  
both of God and money. (Matthew 6:24)

This is not a problem  
only for mountain folk;  
it is everybody's problem.

## **Appalachia As A Symbol**

In a country whose productive force  
is greater than anything the world has ever known,  
the destructive idol  
shows its ugly face  
in places like Appalachia.

The suffering of Appalachia's poor  
is a symbol  
of so much other suffering  
- in our land,  
- in our world.  
It is also a symbol  
of the suffering which awaits  
the majority of plain people  
in our society  
- if they are laid off,  
- if major illness occurs,  
- if a wage earner dies,  
- or if anything else goes wrong.

In this land of ours,  
jobs are often scarce.  
Too many people are forced  
to accept unjust conditions or else lose their jobs.

Human services for the poor,  
and for the almost poor,  
are inadequate.  
Safety standards  
are often too weak  
or ignored.  
Workers are injured  
unnecessarily.

Legal and medical recourse  
for claims against occupational injury  
or occupational disease  
are often too difficult  
or unavailable.

Sometimes  
those who should be helping people  
in their claims  
seem to stand in the way.

Black Lung  
and mine accidents  
are the most famous examples,  
but not the only ones.

On the other hand,  
powerful reform movements  
are underway

- in the union movement,
- in community organizing,
- in the consumer movement,
- in public interest lobbies,
- in religious circles.

To these must be added  
even forces from within the  
business community:

- managerial personnel who are concerned not only with salaries and promotion, but also with the contribution of the economic order to social well being, particularly the bringing of jobs to poor areas;
- small and medium size business people, who wish to operate justly, but who struggle under the pressure of giant economic competitors ruthlessly trying to wipe them out;-

stockholders who rebel against  
the impersonal structure of ownership  
and try to make their voices felt  
for justice within large corporations.

Together these groups struggle  
to achieve what must become  
the foundation principle

- of our common life,  
namely citizen involvement
- in our productive base,
  - in our political institutions,
  - in our cultural life.

The main task for such citizen involvement  
will be to build social structures  
which provide full employment  
and decent wages  
for all people.

Despite abuses,  
we feel that a strong and broad  
labor movement  
is basic,  
one which can stabilize the labor market  
North and South,  
East and West,  
and prevent groups  
from playing off different sectors  
of working people  
against each other.  
Even so,  
these movements are just beginning  
and reach too few people.

We know also that as they grow stronger,  
they will be attacked;  
that other forces  
will try to crush them.

Unaccountable economic powers  
will continue to use  
democratic political institutions  
for non-democratic purposes.  
Sometimes this shows itself brutally,  
when officers of the law act like company  
enforcers.

At other times, it's more complicated  
when lawyers and legislators  
seem to get paid  
to keep the people confused,  
and to find loop-holes  
for the benefit of the rich.

These same massive economic forces,  
still accountable to no one,  
will even use vehicles of our cultural life,  
like communications media and advertising,  
and even the educational system,  
to justify their ways,  
and to pass their values  
as our national values.

This happens  
when news that's important to people  
can't get time or space,  
or when school programs  
are designed by experts  
without incorporating the voice of the people.

We know that there are many  
- sincere business people,  
- zealous reporters,  
- truthful teachers,  
- honest law enforcement officers,  
- dedicated public officials,  
- hard working lawyers and legislators  
who try to do a good job.  
But we know too that,  
the way things are set up,  
it's hard for good people  
to do a good job.

It's strange, for instance,  
that despite earlier reforms,  
a country which took such richness from  
Appalachia  
left so little for the people.  
Great fortunes were built  
on the exploitation of  
Appalachian workers  
and Appalachian resources;  
yet the land was left  
without revenues  
to care for its social needs, like  
- education,  
- welfare,  
- old age,  
- and illness.

Some may say,  
"That's economics",  
but we say  
that economics is made by people.  
Its principles don't fall down from the sky  
and remain for all eternity.  
Those who claim

they are prisoners of the laws of economics  
only testify  
that they are prisoners of the idol.

The same thing which is so obvious in Appalachia  
goes on outside the mountains.  
Plain people work hard all their life,  
and their parents worked hard before them,  
yet they can't make ends meet.  
- Food is too expensive.  
- Taxes are too high for most.  
(Too low for the rich.)  
- Sickness puts people into debt.  
- College is out of reach for their children.  
- Paychecks keep shrinking.  
And it's worse still for those who can't work,  
especially the elderly.

Meanwhile,  
corporate profits  
for the giant conglomerates,  
who control our energy resources,  
keep on skyrocketing.

But now there is some promise  
of fresh "economic development"  
in the Appalachian region,  
at least if our industry returns  
to a substantial coal base.

From the rest of the world, however,  
we know now, after hard experiences,  
that "development" often brings little  
to the poor  
or to the workers;  
often the reverse.  
Yet even if it were to bring prosperity,  
there is a question we must ask  
about the new energy resources.

It is,  
"How will we use our energy?"  
as well as,  
"Where will we get it from?"

If our present system keeps on growing and growing,  
it will burn up us  
and our world.  
The present pattern of energy use,  
a great deal of which goes for military production  
or else for the production of discardable junk,  
is barbaric.

This nation,  
containing about 6 percent of the earth's population,  
consumes over one-third of the earth's energy  
and causes 40 percent of the earth's industrial  
pollution.

But even that doesn't tell  
the whole truth,  
because, at least by 1962 figures,  
1.6 percent of the population of this country  
owned 80 percent of the corporate wealth,  
so that averages or per capita statistics  
really mislead us  
about the ordinary people's situation.  
Some talk about a population problem  
among the poor.

There's an even bigger consumption problem  
among the rich  
consumption not just of luxuries,  
but of power,  
of the power to shape  
- economic structures,  
- political structures,  
- cultural structures  
all in the service of  
- more waste,  
- more profit,  
- more power.

Even worse,  
U.S. energy consumption is expected  
to double in the next decade.

What kind of a world would it be,  
where "Maximization of Profit"  
destroys life  
for so many today,  
and for future generations?

Ironically,  
most people in this country  
are not satisfied with the consumer society.  
It makes life a rat race,  
where nobody feels they belong,  
where all are pushed around,  
where roots disappear.

With so much busy-ness  
and clutter of things,  
- things that don't work,  
- things you have to keep fixing,  
- no time to play or sing  
like folks used to.  
We get lost in our busy-ness  
and grow to hate and abuse  
all our things.

Worse still,  
swallowing us up in things  
is the power of the idol  
which eats away at our openness  
to the Living God.

But the children of the mountains  
have fought for a different way.  
Their struggles and their poetry  
together keep alive  
- a dream,  
- a tradition,  
- a longing,  
- a promise  
which is not just their dream,  
but the voiceless vision  
buried beneath life's bitterness  
wherever it is found.

They sing of a life  
free and simple,  
with time for one another,  
and for people's needs,  
based on the dignity of the human person,  
at one with nature's beauty,  
crowned by poetry.  
If that dream dies,  
all our struggles die with it.

## **Defending The Struggle's Dream**

Many times before,  
outside forces  
have attacked the mountain's dream.  
But never before  
was the attack so strong.  
Now it comes with  
- cable TV,  
- satellite communications,  
- giant ribbons of highway  
driving into the guts of the land.

The attack wants to teach people  
that happiness is what you buy  
- soaps and drinks,  
- in gimmicks and gadgets,  
and that all of life  
is one big commodity market.

It would be bad enough  
if the attack only tried  
to take the land,  
but it wants the soul, too.  
When it has its way,  
the poet is silent.  
Instead comes  
noisy blare and din,  
the chatter of a language  
empty of meaning,  
but filled with violence.

This struggle of resistance  
is a struggle against violence --  
against institutional violence  
which sometimes subtly,  
sometimes brutally,  
attacks human dignity and life.

Therefore,  
although the Catholic tradition  
fully acknowledges the legitimacy  
of self-defense and force  
as the final recourse  
against injustice,  
we must beware of the temptation  
of a too easy violence --  
of a bitterness which can poison  
that for which we struggle,  
or which  
still worse,  
can provoke from forces of injustice  
an even more brutal and repressive  
institutional violence  
whose first victim  
is always the poor.

It is the mountain's spirit of resistance  
which must be defended  
at any cost,  
for at stake is the spirit  
of all our humanity.  
There are too few spaces of soul  
left in our lives.

Once we all  
- knew how to dance and sing,  
- sat in mystery before the poet's spell,  
- felt our hearts rise to nature's cathedral.  
Now an alien culture  
battles to shape us  
into plastic forms empty of Spirit,  
into beasts of burden  
without mystery.

If the struggle's dream can be defended,  
and we believe it can,  
then perhaps the great instruments of attack,  
- cable TV,  
- satellite communications,  
- ribbons of highway,  
can become like so many arms,  
which instead of crushing life,  
reach out to make it fuller,  
to bring to others  
beyond the mountains,  
the promise of their vision.

## Part II: The answer of Jesus & his church

### The God of the Poor

The living God,  
the Lord whom we worship,  
is the God of the poor.

In Israel,  
God's very self was revealed to a people  
in their liberation from oppression  
under the bondage of Egypt:  
I have seen the miserable state  
of my people in Egypt.  
I have heard their appeal to be free  
of their slave-drivers . . .  
I mean to deliver them  
out of the hands of the Egyptians . . .  
And now the cry of the children of Israel  
has come to me.  
That day, Yahweh rescued Israel  
from the Egyptians . . .  
and the people venerated Yahweh . . . (Exodus 3:7-9,30-31)

Not only in the liberation of a people  
is God revealed  
as the Living God,  
but also within Israel  
by defending all those  
who are victims of injustice.

God will free the people who call out,  
and those who need help,  
God will have pity on the poor and feeble . . .  
God will redeem their lives  
from exploitation and outrage. (Psalms 72:12-14)

Thus, the God of Israel,  
who is also our God,  
is the God of the poor,  
because he frees the oppressed.

The Messiah & His Reign  
But Israel's mission  
was to the whole world,  
not just to its own nation.  
As injustice against Israel  
and throughout the world  
seemed to mount higher,

Yahweh promised to send a liberator.  
This one was to be a great leader,  
whose reign would bring justice.  
For this Messiah  
Israel prayed:

God, give judgement to your Anointed,  
to those who follow your justice,  
that your people may be judged in justice  
and your poor in right judgement.  
May the mountains bring forth  
peace for the people  
and the hills, justice.  
May your Anointed defend  
the poor of the people,  
save the children of the needy,  
and crush the oppressor. (Psalm 72:1-4,12-13)

And there came among us,  
a man from Israel,  
whom we confess to be  
God-with-us,  
the messiah long promised. And when he rose up  
to speak in his native Nazareth,  
he chose the words  
from the prophet Isaiah:

The Spirit of God has been given to me,  
for Yahweh has anointed me.  
God has sent me to bring the good news to the poor,  
to proclaim liberty to captives  
and to the blind new sight,  
to set the downtrodden free,  
to proclaim Yahweh's year of favor. (Luke 4:18-19)

And when, like Moses of old,  
this Jesus climbed a mount  
to tell the people his Father's law,  
he left no doubt  
that he was indeed  
the messiah of the poor:

How happy are you who are poor:  
yours is the kingdom of God.  
Happy you who are hungry now:  
you shall be satisfied.  
Happy you who weep now:  
you shall laugh . . .

But alas for you who are rich:  
you are having your consolation now.  
Alas for you who have your fill now:  
you shall go hungry.  
Alas for you who laugh now:  
you shall mourn and weep. (Luke 6:21,24-25)

The Messiah, the Creator and their Spirit  
are the Living God.  
They are different from the dead idols  
which clutter history,  
because they,  
and not the idols,  
act for justice.  
The dead idols prove  
to be gods of oppression.

I am Yahweh your God who brought you  
out of the land of Egypt,  
out of the land of slavery.  
You shall have no gods except me. (Exodus 20:1-3)

The choice between the Living God  
and inert idols  
is not only a choice between justice  
and injustice;  
it is also a choice  
between life  
and death.

Today,  
I set before you life or death,  
blessings or curse.  
Choose life, then,  
so that you and your descendants may live,  
in the love of Yahweh your God,  
obeying God's voice,  
clinging to God;  
for in this your life consists,  
and on this depends your long stay  
in the land which Yahweh  
swore to your ancestors . . . (Deuteronomy 30:19-20)

## **The Church's Mission**

Out of faith in the risen Jesus  
a new community of people is born,  
seeking to be united  
in one mind and spirit  
with him.

Upon this community  
Jesus pours forth his Spirit,  
the Spirit of truth,  
who teaches us everything  
and reminds us of all he said to us.

The whole group of believers was united,  
heart and soul;  
no one claimed for personal use  
anything that was owned,  
as everything they had was held in common . . .  
None of their members was ever in want,  
as all those who owned land or houses  
would sell them,  
and bring the money for them,  
to present it to the apostles; it was then distributed  
to any members who might be in need. (Acts 4:32-35)

Still the church  
is not perfect.  
Its early bishop James  
had to remind the people:

. . . it was those who are poor  
according to the world  
that Yahweh chose, to be rich in faith  
and to be heirs to all that was promised  
to those who love God.

In spite of this,  
you have no respect for anybody who is poor.  
Isn't it always the rich who are against you?  
Isn't it always their doing  
when you are dragged before the court?  
Aren't they the ones who insult  
the honorable name to which you have been  
dedicated? (James  
2:5-7)

Yet the church continues, despite its sins,  
working for the poor,  
insisting on practical love,  
and not just prayers  
and good intentions:

In this way we distinguish the children of God  
from the children of the devil . . .  
we are to love one another,  
not to be like Cain  
who cut his brother's throat . . .

If you refuse to love, you must remain dead;  
to hate your brother or sister is to be a murderer . . .  
This has taught us love  
that Jesus gave up his life for us;  
and we, too, ought to give up our lives  
for our brothers and sisters.

If those who were rich enough in this world's goods  
saw that a  
sister or brother was in need,  
but closed their hearts,  
how could the love of God be living in them?

My children,  
our love is not to be just words or mere talk,  
but something real and active;  
only by this can we be certain  
that we are children of the truth . . . (1 John 3:10-  
12,15-19)

Through the ages,  
the church tries to be faithful  
to this message.  
At times it begins to stray from it,  
but always the Spirit is alive within it,  
stirring up new voices  
to call it back  
to its mission for Justice.

## **The Church's Social Teaching**

For a long time now,  
our Church has been restless  
with what many call  
"The Modern World".  
There is much in this modern world  
which is good and beautiful:  
the sense of freedom,  
the progress of science and technology,  
the personal creativity unleashed from  
under stifling traditions,  
the growing unity of the human family.

God has challenged us  
to take up as holy  
whatever is good and beautiful  
in the modern world  
as in all of creation.

But has also challenged us  
to resist what is evil,  
especially injustice.

Since the industrial age,  
we have been active,  
speaking and acting  
on behalf of the casualties  
of the new economic spirit.

At the end of the last Century,  
Pope Leo XIII,  
wrote a great letter,  
On the Condition of the Working Classes (Rerum  
Novarum, Leo XIII)

Our own past brother,  
Archbishop Gibbons of Baltimore,  
made a great plea that this letter  
reflect the views of the common people.  
He told the pope,  
To lose the heart of the people  
would be a misfortune  
for which the friendship of the few rich and  
powerful  
would be no compensation.

In the wake of Leo's letter,  
as the destructiveness of the new economic order  
continued unchecked,  
the U.S. Catholic bishops  
felt compelled themselves  
to draft a letter to their people  
on the question of social reconstruction.  
While acknowledging that the American people  
were not ready for major reconstruction,  
and that the present industrial system is  
destined to last for a long time . . .  
the bishops condemned three grievous abuses:  
enormous inefficiency and waste  
in the production and distribution of commodities;  
insufficient incomes for the great majority  
of wage earners;  
and unnecessarily large incomes  
for a small minority of privileged capitalists.

Further, they argued for an industrialism  
based on cooperation  
rather than on competition:  
The majority must somehow become owners,  
or at least in part,  
of the instruments of production.

Finally, in discussing remedies,  
they laid down the following principle:

. . . human beings cannot be trusted  
with the immense opportunities for oppression and  
extortion that  
go with the possession of monopoly power.

Still the injustices continued,  
so much so that Pope Pius XI felt obliged  
to publish another letter,  
forty years after Leo's letter,  
On Reconstructing the Social Order and Perfecting  
It Comfortably  
to the Precepts of the Gospel.

Pius XI pointed out that,  
. . . in our days not alone is wealth accumulated,  
but immense power and despotic economic  
domination  
is concentrated in the hands of a few . . .  
This concentration of power has led to  
a threefold struggle for domination.  
First, . . . the struggle for dictatorship  
in the economic sphere itself;  
then, the fierce battle to acquire control of the state,  
so that  
its resources and authority  
may be abused in the economic struggles;  
finally, the clash between states themselves.

The Catholic bishops of the United States  
again responded with their own letter,  
The Church and Social Order,  
in 1940.

They lamented that an unjust society  
had caused many working people  
to become alienated from religion  
and to have lost faith and hope.  
Reminding economic powers that  
the earth is God's and  
the fullness thereof, (Psalm 23:1)  
they especially denounced  
concentration of ownership and control,  
the anonymous character of economic interests.

The social system at that time,  
at the end of the great depression,  
was generating great economic insecurity  
for many people.  
The bishops judged then that,  
an important factor making for insecurity  
is the immense power and despotic domination

which is concentrated in the hands of those few  
who frequently are not the owners,  
but only the trustees and directors  
of invested funds.

They single out one group  
in this attack:  
Those who, because they hold and  
control money,  
are able also to govern credit  
and determine its allotment,  
for that reason supplying,  
so to speak,  
the life-blood to the entire economy,  
and grasping as it were in their hands  
the very soul of production.

They called for a more just social order,  
where property would be broadly distributed  
and people would be truly responsible for one  
another.

Now, close to our own day,  
the popes have continued to speak  
on the social question.  
Many will remember the warm letters  
of Pope John XXIII,  
Peace On Earth (Pacem in Teris) and Mother And  
Teacher (Mater et  
Magistra),  
and Pope Paul's letters  
On The Development Of Peoples (Populorum  
Progressio)  
and A Call To Action.  
In a more contemporary context,  
with w view to the poor across the globe,  
the popes have called us back  
to the message of Jesus  
and to Yahweh, the God of Justice.

We bishops have not been silent either.  
At the Vatican Council  
we spoke strongly for justice and the poor  
in The Pastoral Constitution On The Church  
In The Modern World  
"The joys and the hopes,  
the griefs and the anxieties . . .  
of this age,  
especially those who are poor  
or in any way afflicted."

And finally, when we gathered in Synod  
with all our fellow bishops of the world,  
scrutinizing the signs of the times  
and listening to the Word of God,  
we were  
"able to perceive the serious injustices  
which are building around the world  
a network of domination, oppression, and abuse . . ."

But we also noted  
"A new awareness which shakes (people)  
out of any fatalistic resignation  
and which spurs them on to liberate themselves . . .  
Action on behalf of justice  
and participation in the transformation of the world  
fully appear to us  
as a constitutive dimension  
of the preaching of the Gospel,  
or, in other words,  
of the Church's mission  
for the redemption of the human race  
and its liberation from every oppressive situation.

Thus,  
there must be no doubt,  
that we, who must speak the message  
of God who summoned Moses,  
and whose mouth was opened  
in Jesus of Nazareth,  
and who keeps the Spirit alive  
on behalf of justice  
for so many centuries,  
can only become advocates of the poor.

This is not to be simplistic,  
to see all in black and white,  
to be ignorant of economics  
and the contributions of other human sciences,  
but in a profound sense  
the choices are simple  
and stark:  
- death or life;  
- injustice or justice;  
- idolatry or the Living God.

We must choose life.  
We must choose justice.  
We must choose the Living God.

## **PART III: Facing the future**

### **A Process of Dialogue And Testing**

More and more people recognize  
that a new social order is being born.

Indeed,  
the Spirit of God  
presses us to this recognition.  
We do not understand it all,  
but we know we are part of it,  
- in Appalachia,  
- in our nation,  
- across the world.

In what follows,  
we hope to give some guidance  
to our Catholic people  
for sharing in that birth struggle.

We have no easy answers,  
so this is but a first step.  
It must not be the last step.  
Hopefully, this letter,  
itself a product of dialogue,  
will start a process,  
wherein the Catholic community  
can join together with people of good will  
throughout the region  
to reflect on and act for  
a more just society.

While we have no answers,  
we have some principles  
to guide the process.  
Our searching must carefully balance  
the following three elements:  
closeness to the people;  
careful use of scientific resources;  
a steeping in the presence of the Spirit.

In regard to the first element, we must  
continually take time and invest creativity  
into listening to our people,  
especially the poor.  
For it is they who,  
out of their frustrations, dreams, and struggles,  
must lead the way for all of us.

Next we must listen to the vast majority  
of plain people  
who would not be called poor,  
but who are not rich,  
and who increasingly share  
in the powerlessness of the poor.  
Finally, strange as it may seem,  
we must also challenge the rich.  
For although Jesus himself  
has told us that  
It is easier for a camel to pass through  
the eye of a needle,  
than for the rich  
to enter heaven, (Matthew 19:24)  
and although one rich young man  
went away sad,  
for he was a man of great wealth, (Luke 19:22)  
there is also  
the story of Zacchaeus  
who accepted the demands of justice,  
who returned his property to the poor  
and paid back four fold  
whatever was stolen.

That day salvation came to his house,  
The Messiah has come  
to seek out and save what was lost. (Luke 19:10)

Throughout this whole process  
of listening to the people,  
the goal which underlies our concern  
is fundamental in the justice struggle,  
namely, citizen control,  
or community control.  
The people themselves  
must shape their own destiny.  
Despite the theme of powerlessness,  
we know that Appalachia  
is already rich here  
in the cooperative power  
of its own people.

In regard to the second element,  
we must be careful with science,  
because scientific models are not value free.  
So much of science has been used,  
in the contemporary world,  
to oppress rather than liberate,  
but science is not itself evil.  
Rather it is our task to take it up,  
and to infuse it  
with wisdom and humility,  
in the service of justice.

In regard to the third,  
we note with joy  
to renewed zeal  
for the presence of the Spirit  
in prayer and meditation  
among our Catholic people.  
We know that if this renewed presence can mature  
into a convergence  
with the thirst for justice,  
a new Pentecost will truly be upon us.

To begin this process  
of dialogue and testing  
we invite  
the Catholic Committee of Appalachia  
to draft  
for us and with us,  
as well as for and with  
all people of good will,  
a comprehensive plan of action.  
Together we may begin to test it  
throughout the region.  
This plan would constitute  
our first tool which,  
hopefully, each year  
could be brought up to date,  
in the light of fresh experience.

There are several specific points  
which now we would like to recommend  
for inclusion in the action plan.

First, and most important,  
in accord with our recommendation  
from the Synod document,  
Justice in the World,  
we would like to  
commend where they exist  
and recommend where they do not,

Centers of Reflection and Prayer,  
in the service of action,  
throughout the region.

Such centers could  
integrate the analytical social science skills  
and the profound spirituality  
necessary for persevering creativity  
in the struggle for justice.  
They could also link fragmented struggles  
from different parts of the region,  
and even outside the region,  
thus supporting healthy localism  
with the richness of a wider national  
and international network.

In addition,  
we would like to know in what way  
the Church might cooperate  
with other major institutions  
of the region,  
provided they are open  
to the voice of the poor.  
Especially we welcome  
the opportunity to share with  
university people,  
people skilled in economic life,  
artists and poets,  
government people.

Also,  
as suggested by the letter of Paul VI,  
A Call to Action,  
we commend where they exist,  
and recommend where they do not,  
Centers of Popular Culture,  
in every parish,  
or in areas where there are no parishes,  
as a sign of the Church's concern,  
linked to the broader action centers,  
places where the poor feel welcome,  
spaces for people to come and share  
at all levels,  
so that if a new society is to be born,  
it will emerge from the grass roots.

Especially we stress emphasis on the economic questions, for these are the first and most basic questions for all people.

We call attention to the presence of powerful multinational corporations now within our region.

The fate and role of these institutions is a major question not only for Appalachia, but for the whole world.

Pope Paul VI has warned us that,

The multinational enterprises . . . largely independent of the national political powers and therefore not subject to control from the viewpoint of the common good . . . can lead to a new and abusive form of economic domination of the social, cultural, and even political level.

The excessive concentration of means and powers that Pope Pius XI already condemned on the fortieth anniversary of Rerum Novarum is taking on a new and very real image.

As a counter-force to the unaccountable power of these multinational corporations, there must arise a corresponding multinational labor movement, rooted in a vision of justice, rising above corruption and narrowness, with a universal concern

- for all workers,
- for all consumers,
- for all people.

We are happy to note that some voices at least are raising up such a vision within the ranks of labor.

Finally, there are a number of issues which we hope the Committee will take up in its investigations.

We simply list them here, knowing that there may be many more:

- role of coal in the life of the region & nation;
- energy consumption patterns and lifestyle;
- strip mining and deep mining;
- land acquisition;
- retribution and redistribution;
- tourism and recreation industries;
- exploitation of cheap labor;
- occupational health and safety;
- union reform and extension;
- community unions;
- community organizing and citizen control;
- public voice in local, state and national politics;
- church investments as seed money;
- cooperatives;
- education;
- health systems;
- family life;
- the elderly;
- arts and crafts;
- music and poetry;
- prayer.

## Conclusion

As this letter closes, sisters and brothers,  
we wish you  
and all people throughout the region  
the gift of peace in Jesus.

We know that all those who love Jesus  
will struggle to follow his path,  
no matter how confusing that may be  
during these times.

We ask you to weigh seriously with the Spirit  
the matters we have put before you,

- in your own silence;
- in your families;
- in your work;
- in your parishes.

We ask you to share in dialogue and testing  
with the leaders of your local church  
and with us bishops  
what we have presented here.

There will be different views,  
but let us test them together

- with the people,
- with one another,
- and with the Spirit.

We wish to thank  
the many Spirit-filled and dedicated  
people of our Church,  
who all along have been struggling  
in hidden or dramatic ways,  
for justice and unity among people.

We thank the youth  
who have not given up hope,  
and who continue to believe in freshness  
in human experience.

We thank parents,  
whose lives have been such  
that our youth have reason to hope.

We thank the elderly,  
who despite great hardship,  
continue to survive  
with spirit and grace,  
and whose quiet wisdom  
inspires us all.

We thank the volunteers,  
not of this region,  
the countless sisters and brothers,

priests and lay people,  
who have come to work at our side.

We especially thank  
women in the region,  
for we cannot but note the great role women  
have played here  
in the struggle for justice.

In the contemporary mission of the Church,  
the voice and action of women  
bring a special charism to the struggle  
for justice.

Dear sisters and brothers,  
we urge all of you  
not to stop living,  
to be a part of the rebirth of utopias,  
to recover and defend the struggling dream  
of Appalachia itself.

For it is the weak things of this world  
which seem like folly,  
that the Spirit takes up  
and makes its own.

The dream of the mountains' struggle,  
the dream of simplicity  
and of justice,  
like so many other repressed visions  
is, we believe,  
the voice of Yahweh among us.

In taking them up,  
hopefully the Church  
might once again  
be known as

- a center of the Spirit,
- a place where poetry dares to speak,
- where the song reigns unchallenged,
- where art flourishes,
- where nature is welcome,
- where little people and little needs  
come first,
- where justice speaks loudly,
- where in a wilderness of idolatrous  
destruction the great voice of God still cries  
out for Life.