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Time for Real Energy Sacrificing

News reports indicate our dear world is getting yet more troubled. Prices we are paying for energy and for products needing energy are bringing these crises home in a new way.

I hear people suggesting that we “have” to take a fresh look at nuclear power. From all I know about chemistry, my whole-hearted response is, “Whoa!!”

Where I come from on this issue: As a consequence of going to 2 colleges and needing to change minors, I ended up with a teaching field in science. Though DuPont Chemical Company in Louisville had a major explosion two days after I arrived to start teaching high school chemistry, I stared down this possible sign from God about the wisdom of my being in a lab. It was impossible to cover the entire course in 1 year, so I skipped some sections and carefully covered the last 2 chapters on “atomic energy”. My thinking: when my students became adults they would need to be informed citizens about this energy source.

The 1960’s were such years of hope. In the spirit of “Atoms for Peace” and stretching into space, the scientific community’s wisdom was that atomic energy was plentiful, cheap and clean. There was a big problem about waste disposal—but then we were so very confident we would conquer that, too!

Near burial in math teaching followed those 2 years of chemistry teaching. When I emerged from math in the mid 1970s, our planet had tens of thousands of nuclear weapons supported by a large number of nuclear power plants (whose output primarily benefited our military-industrial complex)—and we had not dealt with the waste problem satisfactorily at all!!

I for one felt so betrayed and aggravated at us—that we all had rushed into this nuclear technology with such irresponsibility about what it meant for the future. It was

also a real lesson to me about the need to pay attention to what is being decided in our names and to get together with others and speak up.

Over the 1980s and 1990s, nuclear power fell into disfavor. It was not a good economic investment, and the nuclear weapons freeze movement helped rebuild some wisdom about the need to dismantle stockpiles. After all, the weapons couldn’t be used. Remember the days of “Mutually Assured Destruction”? (Just think of what we were saying...!)

Well, sisters and brothers, though we have a growing problem about oil supply, our planet is quickly warming and to date we have insufficient supply from alternative energy sources, and we still have NOT solved the nuclear waste problem!! There is no really safe nuclear waste place on earth, underground, in the oceans or in space.

We still have NO right to leave behind waste that is toxic for tens/hundreds of thousands of years!

Further, it takes a lot of energy to prepare uranium for use as an energy source (and for weapons manufacture).

It is a fallacy to believe that just because we CAN do something that we have to do it.

A really doable and humane response to our growing energy crunch: use less of it! Start really sacrificing in order to reduce our drain on supplies. Make every trip count several times over. Stop wasting electricity, materials. Push Congress to require much higher fuel standards for cars. Push our Executive Branch to look out for future generations when deciding energy and Earth protection policy.

The response to this call to sacrifice is up to you and me and us.

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