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AMERICAN BAPTIST RESOLUTION ON NUCLEAR POWER: SEEKING RATIONAL SOLUTIONS

The American Baptist Policy Statement on Energy asserts: "As Christians we have special concern about energy use and resources. Responsible stewardship is an historical obligation and we are charged with the stewardship of the earth, not only for ourselves, but for future generations." The Policy further states: "National energy policies must provide for justice and equity with particular concern for disadvantaged groups."

The American Baptist Policy Statement on Human Rights declares one human right to be "The right to a secure and healthy environment, clean air, pure water and an earth that can nurture and support future generations."

In 1973 an embargo by many of the major oil-producing countries of the world and the subsequent rise in the price of oil stimulated public awareness of energy. What was perceived at that time as a crisis has become a continuing problem. As the costs of energy increased, the use of energy declined. Total energy use in the U.S. in 1995 (90.6 quadrillion BTU's) was up 21.9% from 1973 (74.3 quadrillion BTU's) while the population increased 25.2%.

While all people felt the impact of the increasing costs of energy, these costs added disproportionately to the burden of the poor whose direct and indirect energy costs equal almost one half of their income.¹

Since 1973 energy use per capita in the United States has declined. In addition, energy use per unit gross national product has also declined. With the increasing application of conservation techniques in all sectors of society, projections for the energy necessary to maintain a comfortable standard of living and a healthy economy also declined. Many of the large generating facilities under construction in the 1970's and 1980's assumed much larger increases in energy consumption than proved to be the case. While there is still wide disagreement about the total amount of energy necessary, there is general agreement that the amount will be much less than once projected.

Commercial nuclear power is used almost entirely for electrical production.

In 1995, nuclear power contributed 7.9% of total United States production. In the same year, electricity represented 17% at the point of use. Of the total electrical energy used in 1995, about 2% was produced by oil, 22.5% by nuclear, 9.8% by hydro, 10.3% by natural gas, 55.2% by coal and less than 0.2% by other sources such as solid waste and wind. All of these sources of electrical production have their own inherent risks and problems. The conversion of energy from one source (such as coal or nuclear) which produces heat, to another source used for work (such as electricity) always involves a substantial loss of energy. While the production of electricity may be relatively inefficient, it can be close to 100% efficient at the point of use. Such factors need to be considered in choosing options.

Today there is a considerable disagreement among technical experts and among members of the general public on the viability of nuclear power as an energy source. Four areas deserve our attention and a look at representative opinions.

For many the specter of Hiroshima and Nagasaki remain uppermost and the ties of nuclear energy production to nuclear weapons production present unacceptable problems. Others state that the technologies for weapons and energy can be separated. Nuclear plants cannot explode like nuclear weapons. The fuel and light water fission reactors of the type used in the United

States is not directly usable for nuclear weapons. Yet there is no technical fix to prevent diversion of waste materials containing plutonium to weapons production. The problem of proliferation needs an international political solution.

Another set of issues is ecological and environmental. One perspective points to the effects of low-level radiation, the chances of an accident, the accumulation of enormous quantities of high-level radioactive wastes, the inability to devise a method and accept a plan for waste disposal, the lack of health and safety precautions for miners, and the desecration of Sacred Lands for mining uranium. Another perspective argues that nuclear power is the safest and cleanest energy source available for electrical production; that there is a minutely small increase in low-level radiation from operating nuclear plants when compared with background radiation; that a technical solution exists for waste disposal and the problem is political; that Three Mile Island demonstrated the ability of the industry to prevent harm to the general public during a major accident; and that effects of coal mining are considerably worse than uranium mining.

Economic aspects of nuclear power are no less complex. One perspective argues that capital costs of nuclear plants have increased over twice as much as coal plants; that over 30 plants were canceled since 1978 for financial reasons; that utilities with over-committed capital expenditures for nuclear plants are extremely risky investments; that an overall decreasing use of energy in the United States is both possible and desirable and that such a decrease can be made without major lifestyle change; that conservation and renewable alternatives can provide a sufficient amount of energy for the future; that nuclear energy is capital intensive and provides fewer jobs than other alternatives; that nuclear plant construction creates rising utility rates which are particularly burdensome for senior citizens and the poor; and that appropriate economic development of the Third World is imperiled by the export of nuclear plants from the United States. Another perspective argues that capital costs of coal and nuclear plants have increased at about the same rate; that we need to insure that an adequate supply of energy is available for the future; that coal and nuclear are the principal alternatives for electrical production at present; that we need to have economic growth and therefore energy growth to maintain our standard of living; that conservation and alternatives are necessary but not sufficient; that jobs are provided by an expanding growth economy; that nuclear plants create cheaper utility rates than other resources available in developing countries.

A fourth set of issues is social. One perspective argues that nuclear energy creates a centralized society and that decentralization is more appropriate to a participatory society, that the security necessary to protect nuclear installations can violate civil rights, that a major effect of the accident at Three Mile Island was social and psychological with the dislocation of people and anxiety about their immediate future, and that in case of an accident at a nuclear plant in a densely populated area, evacuation would be impossible. Another perspective argues that even solar can be centralized, that centralization is necessary, that security at nuclear institutions is necessarily more than at other industrial locations, that the problems at Three Mile Island came from lack of knowledge rather than real danger, and that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission requires an adequate plan for notification and evacuation in case of an accident.

We recognize that there are no easy answers to complex energy problems, and that all human activities involve some risk. Yet in light of

- a. our understanding of Christian values;
- b. the significant social impact of decisions concerning energy in the public and private sectors; and
- c. the energy bill of 1992 streamlining nuclear regulations, speeding up the licensing process and continuing government subsidies to the nuclear industry in the midst of substantial cuts to other energy problems;

we feel compelled to urge dialogue about these issues and to recommend certain actions.

Therefore, be it resolved that the General Board of the American Baptist Churches, USA;

1) Urges American Baptists to educate themselves and the public:

- a. on the issues related to nuclear power and alternative sources of providing power for present and future needs;
- b. on the economic, social, environmental and military effects of nuclear and other sources of energy on human life and society; and
- c. on the global implications of our decisions on nuclear and other sources of energy;

so that persons may make informed decisions on these issues.

2) Urges all American Baptists in their own homes, churches, and workplaces to implement patterns of energy consumption which:

- a. are most consistent with our basic Christian values of stewardship of resources and justice for all people;
- b. produce the least harm to the health of people of the environment;
- c. conserve the most energy for future generations; and
- d. are cost effective.

3) Urges utility companies to increase present efforts to research, develop, and encourage the use of techniques for conservation and alternative sources for providing electrical power such as cogeneration and various forms of renewable resources.

4) Urges utility companies to place a hold on further construction starts of nuclear plants until:

- a. a plan is established for effective safeguards (at a minimum according to Nuclear Regulatory Commission standards) regarding plant management, safety, quality assurance in construction, and the permanent disposal of waste materials;
- b. the additional power capacity is shown to be necessary; and
- c. the increasing capital costs of those plants are justified in relation to all other alternatives including coal, renewable resources, and increased energy efficiency in all sectors of the society.

5) Urges the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to continue to monitor stringently nuclear energy operations and to enforce all nuclear energy regulations which serve to maintain:

- a. quality assurance in construction;
- b. safe operation of nuclear facilities; and
- c. safe and permanent disposal of waste products.

6) Urges the Federal Government to continue to research appropriate methods for permanent waste disposal and to develop and implement a plan for such disposal.

7) Urges state public utility commissions to continue to develop and implement plans for:

- a. comprehensive conservation programs and their application by consumers;
- b. use of those renewable resources which are cost-effective for the consumer;
- c. use of cogeneration;
- d. monitoring closely increasing utility rates based on construction costs of nuclear plants and other large generating facilities.

8) Requests all American Baptists and specifically the Office of Governmental Relations and the Social & Ethical Responsibility in Investments Program of National Ministries:

a. to urge the Federal Government and corporations not to export nuclear plants to other countries pending resolution of questions associated with their safety and the use by those countries of plutonium recovered from the operation of the reactors to build nuclear weapons; and b. to work with other countries in the development of energy sources and methods of conservation appropriate to their needs and economic capabilities.

9) Urges the United States to support the strengthening of the International Atomic Energy Agency in developing and implementing international inspection and controls to prevent the proliferation of nuclear materials for weapons and their use in acts of war or terrorism.

Footnote: Statistics on use and sources of energy are from the U.S. Department of Energy.

Adopted by the General Board of the American Baptist Churches - December 1982
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157 For, 0 Against, 4 Abstentions
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POLICY BASE

American Baptist Policy Statement on Energy - June 1977

Criteria for Energy Decisions:

2. National energy policies must provide for justice and equity with particular concern for disadvantaged groups.

4. A test of the validity of an energy program, in addition to cost and efficiency, is the extent to which it conserves resources, protects the environment and promotes human justice.

Public Policy:

2. The highest priority of funding must be given toward the immediate development of renewable, nonpolluting sources of energy.

3. The energy crisis must not be a rationale for allowing inadequate environmental and safety standards.

American Baptist Policy Statement on Human Rights - Adopted December 1976.

4. The right to a secure and healthy environment, clean air, pure water and an earth that can nurture and support present and future generations.

1) High Energy Costs: Uneven, Unfair, Unavoidable?, Hans H. Landsberg and Joseph M. Dukert, (Resources for the Future, John Hopkins, 1981).
