

A Epiphany 06 13 February 2011
St Michael's Studio City

Global Warming and The Footstool of God

If someone told us there was a way we could save 2.5 million to 3 million lives a year and simultaneously halt global warming, reduce air and water pollution and develop secure, reliable energy sources – why wouldn't we do it? Especially if we could do this with existing technology and at costs comparable with what we spend on energy today.

According to a new study from Stanford University we could accomplish all that by converting the world to clean, renewable energy sources and dispense with our addiction to fossil fuels.

Mark Jacobson, a professor of civil and environmental engineering wrote, "Based on our findings, there are no technological or economic barriers to converting the entire world to clean, renewable energy sources. It is a question of whether we have the societal and political will." ¹

I read this article earlier this week and came away from it much encouraged. We often hear that the environmental problems we face are almost insurmountable. It was good to hear an engineering and scientific voice say that, based on solid research, we can make the changes needed at almost no cost above what we will be spending anyway. But it will require change. We must forswear fossil fuels (they are running out anyway). We must turn to renewable wind, water, and solar resources. We must plan and decide and make our political representatives take action that will safeguard our children and their future. I won't bore you with the details in the report, but if you're an engineer you may want to read reputable fellow voices showing the way.

Today we are joining churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques throughout the world in focusing on the threat to our civilizations from global warming in the context of our human stewardship of God's creation. In our pew bulletins are facts sheets and pre-addressed postcards to our Senators; all you have to do is add 28 cents postage and fill in the reverse side and mail the postcard. Knowing the facts and urging our government is part of "the societal and political will" that the report cites.

Well, let us turn our attention from these encouraging engineering and scientific findings to what we as Christians can add to the conversation: our prayers and our commitment to God as His stewards. No better place to go than the Bible.

In today's gospel reading, we hear Jesus turn his followers away from the ethic of minimalism to the ethic of love. His followers do well not to murder, commit adultery, or throw out an adulterous mate. But Jesus says there is more to a moral life than these easy-to-see situations; it is also immoral to allow anger or lust or indifference a place in our lives. In other words, it is

not only what we do but what we are that is important – important to God, important for our own welfare and healthy living. The general principle here is to use the obvious transgressions to search out the more subtle ones. If we do that, if we accept the work of a really moral life, we will come to a fullness of life here and hereafter that we name salvation, the health of our soul.

So what might this principle mean in our current environmental situation? I think it is this: except for a few seemingly-willful deniers of reality, most of us are aware of the necessity of preserving and conserving limited resources – food, potable water, energy, plants, animals – for our own welfare. But our own welfare leads us inevitably to consider the welfare of others, the others in this case being those not-yet-born or newly born. We are in the process of learning and accepting the morality of denying ourselves now for the lives and well-being of those to come. Our world is not what we have inherited from our grandparents but what we have borrowed from our children. This is not extraordinary goodness on our part; it is part and parcel of an all-encompassing, God-centered morality that is how Jesus would have us see things. He calls the heavens God's throne and the earth God's footstool and cities God's dwelling place. Old-fashioned metaphors perhaps but telling nonetheless. The heavens and the earth and all that is in them are not ours to loot but God's to share.

Even more stark are the words of the prophet Moses in today's reading from the Old Testament book of *Deuteronomy*. Addressing the people he has led out of slavery in Egypt and whom he must soon leave in death, Moses rehearses God's call to His people, God's mercy and blessings, and the temptations and choices that are to come. Then Moses says, "...I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days,..." (30.19-20) For those ancient people of God and for us modern people of God, I think this statement is both metaphorical and literal. We have choices to make and there are consequences. When we align ourselves with God and Her vision, we are walking the way of life for ourselves, for all humanity, indeed for all earthly life. To depart from God's all-encompassing passion for the welfare of all earthly life is to enter into death. Except, perhaps, for the mentally ill, the choice is clear, the way we should go not in doubt. Let us choose the life that God desires for us and for all.

So now we see that "the societal and political will" that the Stanford University report talks about is for Christians part of our relationship to God and therefore part of our spiritual life. We are called to believe and trust in God and to act for His purposes. Some of us will be called to more work and activity than others, but all of us will be called to a basic minimum of informing ourselves, praying for the welfare of our planet – "our island home" – and doing what we can. Please take home those postcards in your pew bulletin and mail them to our Senators. Read and meditate on those facts sheets. Be as concerned about those to come as we are about today's necessities. Let us do our share in holding up God's throne of the heavens and God's footstool, the earth. After all, it is God's work we share in, and no one ever lost out by working for God. The wages may be minimal, but the retirement benefits are out of this world.

Let us finish our meditations this morning by praying from our Prayer Book: Almighty God, in giving us dominion over things on earth, you made us fellow workers in your creation: Give us wisdom and reverence so to use the resources of nature, that no one may suffer from our abuse of them, and that generations yet to come may continue to praise you for your bounty. Increase our reverence before the mystery of life; and give us new insights into your purposes for the human race, and new wisdom and determination in making provision for its future in accordance with your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*Book of Common Prayer*, pages 827 and 828)

¹ Stanford University. "World can be powered by alternative energy, using today's technology, in 20-40 years, experts say." *Science Daily* 27 January 2011. 28 January 2011
<<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/01/110126091443.htm>>.