

The Great Nuclear Debate-and a Christian

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Thank you Vic for inviting me, and thank you for commenting on my remarks. I'm very honored. I can't do better at greeting everyone than St Paul did in his letter to the church at Galatia: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen." (Galatians 1: 3-5)

My texts are:

Luke 18:1-8 (read 1.) The parable of the persistent widow

John 14: 15-17 (Read)

2 Timothy 3: (16-17)

Introduction

Let me share with you how I have been led into this turmoil about nuclear power, and what I have been guided to believe about it. All for whatever help it may be to you.

Background

I grew up a minister's son hearing the word from my earliest days but I was reluctant about it. After a car accident in Taiwan where I was not hurt and the others had only minor injuries, the Spirit moved me to publicly stand up in Church and give thanks for being saved from injury. Then I became fully committed to Christ.

I was in New York for the first Earth Day, having just gotten out of the nuclear Navy and gone to work. I entered the Navy via the ROTC after a BSEE at Duke. I was standing on the sidewalk at lunch time, across from Wall Street where picketers were protesting capitalism and the Vietnam War, and promoting Earth Day. Down Broadway, filling the street from curb to curb came dozens of construction workers in hard hats, from the building of the World Trade Center, with an American flag in front of them. They chased away and beat the picketers. This was my first contact with the passion of the environmental movement.

I followed the issue and debated at graduate school, and like the Pharisee I wanted to justify myself.

The accident at TMI happened in March and we returned from Taiwan that summer and settled in Massachusetts. I jumped right into the energy debate. On a beautiful fall afternoon at an Energy Fair, I got into a discussion with a white haired lady at a booth. Somehow it rather quickly, as I recall, escalated to raised voices. She even said I should leave the nuclear industry because there would be plenty of jobs in alternative energies. I remember thinking to myself that there has got to be something wrong with this, yelling at an old lady on a gorgeous autumn day!! Especially for Christians, there has to be a better way – a Christian way - to dialogue with opponents of nuclear power.

During the '80s I was active in our church as Church School Superintendent, teaching and other things. All the while I was studying my Christian faith and trying to apply it to my life and our family's life. I had the opportunity to be in Yankee's Speakers Bureau, to attend many environmental conferences, state meetings and to participate in party politics and political campaigns, including a 1988 referendum to shut down the nuclear power plants in Massachusetts, which was defeated 2 to 1. I really believe we are called to be in the world but not of the world. We must be careful to not get swept up by the lust for power and money. As Christians, in our advocacy of a good thing, we must not resort to the tactics of the world.

There was a break in my advocacy while at a new position in Illinois. We found a wonderful church there. After five years we left and I had the privilege of being the American Nuclear Society's second Congressional Fellow in 2001 – quite a year to be in Washington! We also became associate members of a church here, and still are.

Returning to New Hampshire and retirement, at least from getting a regular salary, I've been reaching out to nuclear opponents by attending public meetings and hearings, and meeting them there. I've also had my hat in the ring in politics, working on the Kerry campaign in 2004. This was part of being in the world and a chance to show that nuclear power can be part of a legitimate political agenda. This led to a private lunch with a member of the board of the New England Coalition, an organization dedicated to the shutdown of nuclear power plants. I met her while we were phone banking. I also was in a coffee house meeting with the founder of the Citizens Awareness Network (CAN) – another organization dedicated to stopping nuclear power. At meetings and hearings I have met and talked with many opponents of nuclear power, consciously maintaining a calm and polite manner. They are willing to dialogue this way but can't – not won't but can't – change their minds, because of their emotional commitment.

We are just a few miles from Vermont which is a target rich environment for Nuclear Public Outreach, which is the name I am doing business under now.

Analysis

I have told you about my background, to show how the Lord has been nudging me on. I have not always been eager and have been tired and wanted it all to be over. At least I may have finally recognized opportunities, when they hit me in the face like a wet towel!!

During these years I have been changed. I've moved from being frustrated and seeking justification, through anger to calmness now. Having experienced the opponents' real fear and anger, and the raw emotion driving them, I have nothing but compassion for them, and believe it is unjust to not try to do something about it. First it is an obligation as a Christian to treat your neighbor as you would be treated. If I had great fear and concern about something I would certainly like someone who could do something about it. Second it is an obligation of professionals as citizens to be in the arena. I believe that telling the whole truth in context, in terms that the public can understand is what must be done. Technology must be related to the everyday technology the public experiences. To illustrate the problem we face, there was a letter in the Brattleboro paper by a man who heard and explosion and packed to leave because he thought it was the nuclear power plant. He discovered it was a transformer on a pole, "Whatever that is."

I have come to understand that every issue needs to be analyzed in a Christian framework, including the issues of energy, environment, climate change and sustainability. We are taught that God created all things, and a garden, and placed us, his children in it. We are to be the gardeners, to take care of it, but as sinners have been acting like the owners!! We have built a whole world society and infrastructure that, without explicitly saying so, treats the earth as an unlimited store of resources and an infinite sewer. I remember my Mother's expressions: "Do you think that grows on trees?" "You're using it up like water." We were able to get away with this when the world population was small and technology weak. This misapplication of the Bible may be traced to the belief in God's unlimited bounty of love and power. The universe is unlimited but the planet is not. NASA's pictures of the earth don't show any pipeline coming in or any sewer going out. Only the sun's energy comes in. Therefore I believe that there is a moral imperative to make everything sustainable. The practical political difficulty of course is how we as a world society get from here to there.

Nuclear power runs out of fuel in hundreds of years, at least, if not over a thousand, depending on the assumptions, so it is a great transition energy source. Nuclear power is morally good and safe as a transition source lasting centuries, but not unlimited – as a policy matter- if you do the integral as time goes to infinity as environmentalists do, fuel runs out.

Examining nuclear power's social and moral history, early enthusiasts in the 1950's and 1960's promoted it as being able to supply "unlimited" power. When the environmental movement arose in the 60's I believe they took unlimited nuclear power to mean a continuation of unlimited use of the environment, particularly as a sewer. Coupled with nuclear weapons, nuclear power was a perfect political target because its expansion and promotion was taking place, and the licensing hearings provided a perfect toe hold to debate national energy policy. Of course Lewis Strauss, first Chair of the Atomic Energy Commission did say nuclear power would be "too cheap to meter."

To the extent any of our colleagues and companies and I were thinking of building a monument to their own egos, we were repeating the sin of the builders of the Tower of Babel-placing ourselves above God. Those builders said they would build a tower to prove how great we are, not "How great Thou Art."

In conclusion, energy from the atom is a good gift from God, as is everything. This does not mean that everything God's children use his gifts for is good. On the contrary since we all are sinners we can expect bad uses to be dreamed up and errors made in good uses.

Based on my Christian beliefs, I find there is a moral imperative to build to sustainability, and nuclear power is a vital transition energy source, safe, and good for hundreds of years.

So how do we keep at the struggle? Where do we find the strength? Be warned by C.S. Lewis, writing in the Screwtape Letters, that the devil loves to see how close you can get to success before he seduces you into quitting

So pray in all things, pray every day, pray without ceasing. Be open to the Holy Spirit. Turn to All scripture, not just the verses that are convenient for what we want to do.

God be with you.

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