

**AMERICAN BAPTIST
POLICY STATEMENT ON ENERGY**

I. BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

Finite Resources

The energy crisis has forced us to recognize that fossil fuels are finite and capable of exhaustion. While projections vary as to what resources of fossil fuels remain undiscovered, how much of these resources can be recovered and utilized and how long they will last, the fact still remains that they are limited. Long before they are exhausted, they are becoming so scarce or difficult to secure that they will not be available to be used for the production of energy.

Stewardship

As Christians we have special concerns about energy use and resources. Responsible stewardship is a biblical injunction and a moral obligation and we are charged with the stewardship of the earth, not only for ourselves, but also for future generations.

Because we are aware of the limitations of fossil fuels, and while they are still relatively abundant, it is essential that we consider our stewardship of the earth's resources for present and future generations. The use of energy in our society, must be balanced with the needs of persons in the rest of the world and the options presently seen for the generation of energy currently and in the future. The choices we make concerning energy will greatly affect the future of all people on this planet.

Cooperation in an Interdependent World

No country can live for itself. We must cooperate with each other. Cooperation by definition connotes interdependence, a recognition by all of us that we share global responsibility for the stewardship of resources and justice for humanity.

Increased Burdens of the Poor

Already the rising prices for fossil fuels has fallen disproportionately on the poor in this nation and on the inhabitants of Third World countries. People with low and fixed incomes do not have the funds to pay for increases in the cost of fuel or for the price increases on food and clothing that are brought about by the higher cost of oil and gas.

For Third World countries the increasing cost of energy has reasserted the specter of hunger. Advances in agriculture like, "the green revolution," depend on oil as fuel for tractors and other mechanized equipment and as the basic component in the production of fertilizer, insecticides and pesticides. Not only are Third World countries hard pressed in agricultural development, but many also find themselves with a considerable balance of payment deficit because of the interaction of supply and demand in the world market. Eighty percent of traded oil is bought by industrialized countries. The ability of these highly industrialized countries to pay increased and increasing energy prices has pushed Third World countries out of the market even though the need for the oil still remains.

The limitation on agriculture and the lack of energy for other purposes cuts back sharply the possibilities for development in Third World countries. At

the same time prices of finished products coming from the industrialized world reflect increased energy costs and increasingly place these goods out of reach for the poor.

Need for Conservation

The abundance of low cost energy in the United States has enabled and encouraged wasteful practices. Inefficient heating and transportation, the use of fossil fuels when other resources might be utilized and a low priority set on research into the development of the generation of energy through the use of renewable non-polluting resources are practices which cannot be continued. We must conserve our fossil fuel resources so that they will last until alternate forms of energy become more widely available and so that they will be available in the future for the production of materials in which they are an essential element.

Ecological Considerations

As we utilize and search for alternatives to oil and gas, it is important that we recognize that we are stewards of this earth and that pollution of the environment and rape of the earth are not acceptable. Stripmining that results in silted streams, unstable hillsides or the destruction of land is a violation of that stewardship and a callous disregard of the rights and needs of present and future generations. People have a right to clean air and water and an unpolluted land, and our need for energy cannot be a license to violate those rights.

Need to Develop Alternative Sources

Too little attention and funding have been given to the research and development of technologies that use forms of energy that are widely available and that are renewable and non-polluting. Research indicates possibilities in such sources of energy as organic waste and crops grown for bio-conversion, temperature gradients in the oceans, waves and movements of ocean currents, wind, hydroelectric power and the sun.

In addition, research and experience demonstrate that it is feasible to have individual energy generating units that measurably lessen dependence on centralized generation. The production of energy in small decentralized units has been contrary to our past practices but opens possibilities for persons to have more control over the things which affect their lives. The development of inexpensive units which can be used in this country and in developing nations should be a strong priority.

A Solvable Problem

We have serious decisions to make in the years ahead as we face issues related to energy. We believe that the energy problems of our society are solvable, depending on the context in which a solution is sought. We cannot depend solely on technological breakthroughs or ingenious methods of allocating reduced supplies of energy among present users to solve our energy problems. Yet, certainly technological innovations and policies governing certain aspects of the use of energy would be elements in any comprehensive energy policy. We believe that the proper context for a national energy policy is the field of social and environmental policy with reference to the quality of life.

The years ahead will require us to think through our theological, moral and ethical beliefs and will test our commitment to those ideals which we have professed.

Need for Criteria

It is important, therefore, to choose carefully the criteria we should use to determine the stance we should take with regard to energy use and the support we will give to differing forms of energy generation.

II. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

This earth belongs to God (Psalm 24:1). God created it and left humankind to care for it. Each generation of human beings are temporary inhabitants upon the earth with the opportunity to live on its bounty for a brief time before leaving it to another generation. Each generation should care for the earth responsibly.

Humankind was created from nature and so is within nature, not above it (Psalm 104). God is present in the totality of creation, not in human beings alone. Nature has rights and so receives God's care. What happens to nature affects Human beings and their relationships. Human beings can be co-nurturers with God or they can abuse nature and thus rebel against God. The decision human beings make as they exercise their power will affect the well-being of persons around the world and the kind of world in which future generations will live.

God's concern for nature is seen in the limitations that God placed upon human beings. The produce of the land was to be harvested but the land was not to be abused. When God created human beings in God's image and gave them dominion over the earth, God was not granting them license to destroy creation. God created the world and fashioned the life upon it with love and care. To live in the image of God, human beings must show that same love and care for creation.

God loves the world and decided that it was worth redeeming. In Isaiah, salvation history and creation history are together. God's redemption of Israel and the nations renews nature as well.

In the New Testament redemption involves the whole cosmos inclusive of nature and calls for a new creation that the old creation may "be set free from its bondage to decay" (Romans 8:21).

God is present and active in all history, the past, the present and the future. God's love is seen in the past, felt in the present and reaches to future generations. God is the God of Justice who is allied with the poor and the oppressed of the nation and of the world. From the laws in the book of Deuteronomy where provision was made for the poor to share in the harvest from the fields (Deuteronomy 24:19-22) to the description Jesus gave of his mission in his own synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-21) God's concern for the poor and oppressed is an ever constant theme.

On the other hand, the affluent who gathered their wealth at the expense of the poor were often warned of God's wrath by Old Testament prophets (Amos 2:6-7) and Jesus noted that wealth can change persons' priorities and blind them to relationships that really matter when he said,..."it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:24).

As an affluent society this same blindness can keep us from recognizing those things which are really important in our relations with people around the world.

We are called to be co-laborers with God, to work with God in the care and redemption of the world and for the people of the world.

III. BASIC POLICY FOR DECISION-MAKING

The energy crisis is more than a matter of whether or not there is or will be sufficient sources of available energy to enable us to maintain our standard of living and to enable people and nations to pursue their legitimate goals. It is a crisis of stewardship, of interdependence and of Christian commitment. The development, distribution and use of energy in a manner inconsistent with Christian standards of stewardship, equity and justice will promote evil. A Christian's primary concern must be with justice, which is love in action, and is characterized by the absence of human obstacles to an individual's right to holistic development. Justice is the only foundation upon which goodwill and enduring peace among people and nations can be built.

A. Criteria for Energy Decisions

1. All persons have a right to the energy necessary to sustain life and to meet their basic needs.
2. National energy policies must provide for justice and equity with particular concern for disadvantaged groups.
3. Energy policy must be a matter for major public discussion, with access for the public to information and their inclusion in the determination of public policy.
4. A test of the validity of an energy program, in addition to its cost and efficiency, is the extent to which it conserves resources, protects the environment and promotes human justice.
5. Constructive measures designed to alleviate the world-wide energy problem will require international cooperation.
6. An energy course must be pursued that will not be prejudicial to the developing nations, that will help narrow the gap between the rich and the poor, and that takes into account the needs of local people and nations.

B. Public Policy

1. A vigorous program of energy conservation is essential. The efficient use of energy and the elimination of waste are imperative.
2. The highest priority of funding must be given toward the immediate development of renewable, non-polluting sources of energy.
3. The energy crisis must not be a rationale for allowing inadequate environmental and safety standards.
4. The government must establish broad energy policies designed to utilize both private and public means for achieving its goals.
5. Private, United States and international support should be given to the development of energy generation technology appropriate for developing countries that enables them to utilize non-polluting renewable resources. Access to such technology should be available to them on terms that maximize their development and their control.

6. New energy technologies should be available for development and distribution under competitive conditions.
7. Support should be given to government officials and others working for a national energy policy that is consonant with the principles of justice and ecology.

C. Personal and Church Policy

1. Individuals should implement changes in their personal life style reflective of their call to responsible practices in their use of the earth's resources.
2. Individuals, as well as churches, should be influencing agents encouraging just decisions on energy at the local, state, and national levels.
3. Churches need to educate their members on the relationship of energy issues to love of neighbor and concern for God's creation; seek to raise the consciousness of all persons to energy issues; be prophetic in their call for justice and responsibility and model their concern through their own practices in the use of energy.

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