



# Interfaith Power & Light

A Religious Response to Global Warming

## **Changing the Focus on Non-Renewable Energy and the Stewardship of the Environment**

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When I was a young boy growing up in Winchester, Massachusetts many years ago, my brother and I used to play in the apple orchards and open fields near our house that made up what was then called Century Acres, part of a large farm that once was a working farm until the early 1950's. Up the road from Century Acres was another farm consisting of almost 50 acres. To the north of Winchester in the small town of Stoneham, was a large dairy farm, with over 100 acres of lush, open pasture bordered on the south by a beautiful, majestic, emerald green sheepfold, where one could lie down in the lush grass on a beautiful Spring day and look up at the sky and see the shapes and images of white puffy clouds floating by in illusions that we could picture as abstract images of animals and inanimate objects of our imaginations.

Then there was the Middlesex Fells Reservation, a protected forest, surrounding the town reservoir, a forest that still contained deer, fox and other woodland creatures that reminded us that we lived, so close to the city of Boston and yet seemed to be a million miles away from the urban chaos of one of America's large metropolitan cities.

Crisscrossing the woods, the pastures and the open spaces of my youth were small streams and one magnificent river named the Aberjona, a word from the language of the Narragansetts, the first peoples of that part of Massachusetts. Its name meant "beautiful water." Massachusetts likewise translated from the native tongue of the Narragansetts meant "Land of Sparkling waters. These streams and the Aberjona were filled with fresh water fish of many different kinds. The little spring fed brooks that crisscrossed these open pastures and woods teemed with beautiful multi-colored, golden, red-speckled brook trout.

To the south of our town was the Mystic Lake, a deep cool body of water created from the gouging of the glacial movement of the last Ice Age. It was a lake so clear and pure that you could drink from its cool, pristine waters and swim unafraid of infection and bacteria. One could fish this beautiful lake for rainbow and lake trout with no fear of eating the catch of the day. And then this beautiful lake, spring fed, and then enlarged by the flow of the Aberjona River was met by the head waters of the great Charles River that snaked its way through the cities of Medford, Somerville, the Newton's, Brookline, Cambridge and eventually called to engage the Atlantic by way of Boston Harbor.

I grew up 7 miles from Boston in what in the late 1940's and 50's was a veritable paradise of nature where there was a harmonious balance between life, nature and development. My parents were survivors of the Great Depression and were part of the "Greatest Generation," with my father having served in the Navy as a Commander, stationed here in Washington. Because of living with very little during the Depression, when food was scarce and work almost non-existent, we were taught as very

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young children that resources were precious and waste was unacceptable. During WWII the rationing of gasoline, significant reductions in electrical usage, the salvaging of metals, rubber and paper along with the prudent use of heating oil and natural gas was a way of life for everyone. As a family were taught to live with less and to be thankful for what we had. That lifestyle, centered on recycling, even of bacon fat turned in at the local grocery store each week in a coffee can was all a part of a teaching that said more is not necessarily better and everyone has to do their part during national emergencies. In the Winters of my youth I can remember thermostats being turned down to 55 degrees in the evening and the responsibility we all accepted of turning off all lights in the house when not necessary for reading or home living.

Today, we face not only a National emergency but also a significant global emergency. As our nation's economy continues to lead the global community and grow unchecked, so has our inability to remember our past and to engage a new generation who never knew the scarcity of the Depression and the rationing and recycling of the WWII years in understanding that we are now in the middle of a national and global energy crisis. We have been unwilling or unable to teach our young that more is not better and that our identities as human beings is not defined by how much we have and how much we are able to own and control. We have shown little regard for engaging the hard truth that not only are we rapidly depleting natural, non-renewable energy resources at an alarming rate, but in so doing we are guilty of unfairly impacting Third World, emerging economies and their industrial growth by our overwhelming, disproportionate use of the world's natural, non-renewable resources and the subsequent pollution that accompanies such action. By our disregard for the environment we have also sent a message as a worldeconomic leader that such disregard for the environment is an appropriate way for other nations to grow their economies and raise their standard of living. With our unwillingness to sign the Kyoto Agreement and our willful disregard for the future of our environment and the environment of our global partners, we have violated a sacred covenant with our creator God that translates this way: "with all that we have and with all that we are, we honor you." In other words, all that is, is from the God of all creation and as such is a sacred gift given to us in sacred trust. As stewards of the earth we have been given a special charge by our sacred, Holy Texts that tell us we have a responsibility to future generations and that our broad theologies call us to respect all that is a gift from God. We are reminded that we are to share the fruits of our labor, not hoard them.

We are facing today not so much an energy crisis although that is in fact truth, but in reality we are facing a spiritual crisis, a crisis in theology and our understanding of our Covenant with God that calls us into account for caring for and preserving the natural resources of this God given earth and for its future survivability.

And now we must extend a clarion call to our own generation that has too often ignored its responsibility as guardians of the natural resources of the earth; a call that says legislation is not enough to end the tragic depletion of the earth's precious resources. We must extend this call as well to a new generation that is growing up with a belief that they are the rightful heirs of unlimited abundance and that somehow they by legislation alone, the organic future of this nation and the planet can be managed by the head and not the heart.

Today in Winchester Massachusetts, Century Acres is a housing development. The farm lands that once were green spaces in this small suburban town are all gone. The Aberjona River has died an agonizing death because of Tannery pollutants, toxic wastes, and fertilizer run-offs. And there is nothing left to swim in it but a few fish with horrible lesions that cover their bodies.

The dairy farm in Stoneham is now an industrial park and the sacred sheepfold is a parking lot. The

cold, crystal clear streams that once traversed the pastures and open fields and farmlands are now dead. No aquatic life is present in them and the Mystic Lake is no longer swimable because of toxins and sewer run off. Fish, if they can be caught, can no longer be eaten. And the Narragansetts who once claimed this land as their sacred hunting ground would now weep bitterly if they could see what we have done to this once beautiful part of Massachusetts.

The time is now for us to reclaim the sacred covenant drawn between heaven and earth and to start once again the educational process to change the future of our countries energy and ecological policies. We must lift the mantle of selfishness and unabated consumerism that have negatively impacted the future growth of the global community. We, as a people who claim to walk this earth by a code of behavior and conduct defined by our Holy Books as the universal moral imperative of the stewardship of the sacred, must now impart this knowledge to a new generation of Americans. And this new generation, in partnership with our aging one, must reclaim the sacred covenant between God and humankind so as to correct this nation's faithless acts of over consumption, disregard for the environment and its failure to heed the call of its religious leaders to address this crisis from a broadly centrist theological and scriptural basis. For us not to begin this effort is to leave us open to the judgment of a creator God who had faith in his people that by so loving him, his people would also so love his creation.