

Why the Faith Community is Involved in Green Energy and Energy Conservation by the Rev. Woody Bartlett

According to the three great monotheistic faiths (Christianity, Judaism and Islam), “in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1). Furthermore, on the sixth day, God created humankind in God’s image and gave humans ‘dominion’ over the other living things on the Earth (Gen 1:26). So what is the image of God? What is dominion? And what are we humans to do? Looking to the context of the passage for a clue as to the image of God, we see that God is doing two things. God is creating and God is valuing (God saw that it was good). If humans are made in that image, then our task is to participate in the creation of the Earth and to constantly value that creation in and of itself. We, like God, are to do these two things for the sake of the Creation, not for our own sakes.

Furthermore, we are given dominion over the other living creatures. That is we are given power. Again, this power is given so that we can participate with God in God’s creative work and, at the end of the day, proclaim that the Creation is good.

Unfortunately, the story does not seem to be working out this way. We surely have power but the result of our uses of power seems to be destroying the Creation through pollution of our air and water, degradation of our soil and land and an alarming drop in the numbers of other living creatures. Our presence on the Earth is severely stressing the Earth’s living systems. Far from being co-creators and co-valuers with God, we seem to be destroying the Earth.

How do we explain that? The answer is right in Genesis in the 2nd and 3rd chapters. It is that divinely inspired story of the Fall as described in the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In the Fall, our human focus is turned from the Creation to our Selves. Because of the Fall, we use our powers for creating and valuing not for the Earth but for ourselves. Our God-given dominion has been perverted into domination. And that makes all the difference.

So what do we do? First, we need redemption in whatever way our individual faith traditions might understand that. We need a change of heart so that the center of the Universe, the center of our attention, is no longer ourselves but is again the Creation – the way we were created to be.

Then we need to start using our powers to bring the Creation back into balance where the living creatures can share the land, the waters and the air in some mutually enhancing way. Mostly, we have to use our immense powers of creativity to find ways for the human race to walk more gently on the Earth, conserving, not destroying, enhancing the Earth’s resources, not exploiting them, providing habitat for the many creatures, not eliminating habitat.

This change in the hearts of humans and resulting ministry to the entire Creation is becoming a central task for the faith community in our day. Georgia Interfaith Power & Light is focusing on one important aspect of this new ministry – the way we generate and use our electrical power. It is central because it affects the quality of our air, our water and our land through the pollutants that electrical generation puts into these three elements. And the generation of electrical power accelerates global warming, changing the very climate of the Earth and threatening low-lying coastal and island cities and cultures.

This ministry is crucial for the future of life on the Earth, including the future of humanity, particularly the poor among us. We do not do this ministry with dread and a sense of defeat, however. We do it with great hope. We are born to be co-creators with God. We are not alone. God is with us. We are with God. Together we can turn the Creation back to creativity.