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## *Are We Consumers Of The Earth?*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip**

Have you noticed how important the word "consumer" has become for Americans in the last century?

What happened? Some of our most popular radio and television shows are about becoming "wise consumers." Our government has published the "consumer price index" since 1919. In my childhood, one of my favorite magazines was "Consumer Reports." After the paralyzing tragedy of September 11, 2001, our president urged us to go out into the world and spend. We will be asked to do the same thing when we receive special tax rebate checks from the United States government later this year.

One of the meanings of "consume" is "to burn up." It certainly means "to use up." But "burn up" makes more sense to me when I see how some folks burn through money. That money burns a hole right through their pockets. I have also seen how the love of money can burn through a person's soul. Finally, I have seen people "crash and burn" from wasteful spending practices, spending so much money on what does not satisfy.

One of my favorite verses in Scripture is Exodus, chapter three, when Moses is on Lenten retreat beyond the Midian wilderness. He turns aside to see the strangest thing. A bush is burning, but it is not burned up. Exodus 3.2 says that "the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed."

That fire of Yahweh in the burning bush was an important sign both for Moses and for us. For Moses, it meant that God is a roaring energy that is yet never exhausted. God has an eternal life and an eternal presence that is always strong.

For us today, the burning bush sign might well be an example of what it means to be proper stewards of God's resources. For much of recent human history, we have used and abuse a good deal of God's earth and air and water is utterly wasteful ways. We have consumed them in such a way that they are burned up-used up-for ever.

Is there a way to enjoy the gifts of God without consuming them? Is there a way for us to use water and air and minerals and animals and trees and vegetables without burning them up for ever? If so, we might be learning how to live as God lives. We might be learning how to use as God uses.

God was able to burn in a bush without consuming it. I hope we are able to do the same with our trees and plants and rivers and oceans. Those precious resources from God are meant to be renewable, able to be used again and again by us and by the generations who follow us.

I have nothing against spending and supporting local and global economies. Spending money on what is worthwhile, and making financial transactions with friends and trusted associates, is truly part of a healthy human economy. We need to be part of a healthy economy.

But a healthy economy also is able to renew and replenish itself. It does not waste and abuse, and it is able to count the true costs of God's natural resources. I simply don't like being labeled a "consumer." It means I have used up something, or burned up something. I want my money to be used for making something grow. I want my money and my resources to be

a roaring energy that keeps on burning, but does not consume. We were not created to consume the earth; we were created to replenish the earth and to steward it.

Sam Candler signature



The Very Rev. Sam Candler