THE CHURCH AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

Paul Santmire

It's a very special honor for me to be able to address this Synod. This is my home Synod, after all. I was baptized here. I was confirmed here. I was ordained here. And much more. Now, if all letapaK this does not exactly guarantee the truth of everything I want to say, it does suggest the personal seriousness and the gratitude with which I take the invitation you have extended to me.

Last February, youfExecutive Board decided that it wanted these talks at this Convention to deal with "the implication for Christians fpf) changing lifestyle" in relation to "the social and environmental issues of our times." Accordingly, I have chosen a topic, which, it so happens, is near and dear to my heart: "The Church and the Environmental Crisis."

I want to begin immediately, lest you have any doubt, by assuring you that I am not here to lay a doom trip on you. Most of you have probably heard a good deal -SgE from environmental doomsayers, the various prophets of ecologiaal gloom, who see death and destruction lurking behind every bush, or perhaps I should say, behind every ecosystem. To dwell on doom and gloom, I believe, is neither [redacted] biblical, nor psychologically helpful.

This is not to say that I do not bring a deep sense of urgency to our topic. I do. Our natural resources around this globe, many of them irreplaceable, in this fragile, finite hMoriipWae biosphere, are being consumed recklessly. Our great natural systems, the cycles of air, water, soil, and so on, are being disrupted and polluted to the point of irreparable damage. Our global population continues to expand extensively, notwithstanding major international efforts to control its growth over the last decade. Most sobering of all, all around

the globe, the rich continue to get richer and the growing numbers of the poor continue to get poorer, many of them living at the edge of starvation. Today and IMMW tomorrow as we talk, for example, some 20,000 people around this good earth will die of starvation. And behind all this, perhaps more horribly than we can bring ourselves to imagine, lurks the apocalyptic monster of the arms race and the daily possibility of thermonuclear holocaust, by design or by accident.

These are some of the frightening signs of our times. This is the urgent situation, the daily news we read in the press, in which all our deliberations about the Gospel, the good news, have to be set. But precisely for the sake of the Gospel, we cannot allow ourselves to get bogged down with all this gloomy daily news. ~~feBMmtiiiiKgBnnaiiyMfcim~~n My point of departure for these two presentations, therefore, is my concern for the meaning of the Gospel, rather than the gloom and doom of the crisis that we can see emerging all around us.

Tonight I will try to highlight what Paul refers to as the groaning of the creation. I am convinced that those of us who hear and believe the Gospel are called also to hear and believe the groaning of the whole creation, and to understand why it's groaning. Tomorrow morning I will discuss the mission of the Church, in thjK context of, crisis£ I'm persuaded that as the followers of Jesus Christ you and I are called to lead a very special kind of exemplary lifestyle in these times, to be XK the gloriously liberated children of God that the Apostle says we are, to be a light to the nations, as we can be, by the Grace of God.

I. THE GROANING OF THE CREATION: THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

I want to betzin the substaaice of my remarks tonight not with some sweeping world-historical [illegible] observations, nor withtk any comprehensive theological analysis, but much closer to home, with a rathaa personal question, which I address to myself as well as to you.

Imagine for a molneftf that you've been asked to write a paragraphs about yourself, which somehow is supposed to summarize who **you** are and what you stand for. Let's say your nMe is to go into Who's Who, or something like that. As you think about the matter now, you begin to ask yourself: what is it that holds my life together? When the chips are down, when push Somes to shove, what do I stand for?

Anyone who has gone through the good kind of catechetical training I had in this Synod will not long be at a loss for words. As Christians, we know, we live to honor God above all else, through Christ cur Lord; and, empowered by the Spirit, we seek to love our neighbors as curselves and to exercise responsible stewardship over the earth. Something like that.

I have written variously about such here and there ~~many~~ themes, ~~As have others~~, and I will happily discuss them with anyone who cares to do so. For those o f you who are **ospBAiglly** specially concerned with the theology of ecology, allow me to call your attention to the LCA Social Ministry booklet, The Human Crisis in Ecology, which I had a hand in preparing. From this emerged the excellent LCA social statement in 1972, with the same title^L, which I also commend to you for rereading, especially with regard to its global scope and its social policy directives.

I have a feeling, however, that if I were to write personal statement an honest about what holds my life together I would say something^far less theological than I learned in my catechetical training at seminary, something much more visceral, much more conventional, and, in this sense, much more revealing.

Something such as this: I'm interested in Surviving as a person. I'm also interested in the survival of my family and friends, and to that degree the Survival of the whole world. In a nutshell, a key concern of mine, hopefully not the only one, but a key concern, nevertheless, is -- security.

For all the good theology I hat open max/ to know, it turns out, I take more that a passing interest in the size of my salary. Likewise, I am more than peripherally concerned with matters such as cost of living increases(when I can get them), health care, teate health insurance, various kinds of equity, retirement benefits, life insurance, and all the rest. Do you recognize the picture?

Now, for the sake of this story, let's imagine that this understandable quest for security gets untracked somehow. Let's imagine for a moment that all you or I care about is security: economic, political, familial, personal, and so on. Let's imagine that our natural desire for security gets out of hand, that it becomes the reason for living, the reason for doing everything, or virtually everything, the driving force that holds our lives together.

What do you do then? If security is what your life is all about, what do you do to make sure that you've got it? Well, many things, I'm sure. But probably sooner or later, you'll get to the point where you'll want to build some kind of temple or cathedral, some kind of monument, to establish your security, once and for all. At least that's what seems to keep happening is the Boston area, where I live. When in doubt, you build insurance buildings.

First, the so-called Prudential Center, towering over every other building, far beyond any human scale, surely dwarfing any traditional kind of church or cathedral. But then, somehow, that one cultic center for the celebration of security doesn't seem to be enough. You need Me bigger and better things. So you build another insurance building nearby, SBMK ten stories higher, more or less, which because it is Digger will better symbolize the highl gods of

financial and family security. Nevermind now that that particular building pops out its windows all over the place, as if to signal that somehow pride goeth before a fall. Nevermind that; build your tower to economic security anyway. Indeed, reminiscent of the tower of Labels as you build, you strive to make a bigger and better name for yourself, so that you can be sure that your security is better than anybody else's security. You can then put your John Hancock on their ~~dafaui~~ John Hancock, secure in the knowledge that that's the tallest kind of security available anywhere in your part of the world.

But, of course, the story doesn't end here, anymore than Don Juan's story ended with his first so-called "successful conquest." Once you get yourself hookafon the security trip, the story goes on and on^ You need more money, and on. don't you, always. You need a bigger house for a more stable family Life in a better neighborhood. You need fancier gadgets to get you through life faster and easier, so you BK can have more time for doing what you want to do, in peace and quiet. If you attain a certain measure of "success," you'll find that the more you acquire, the more you'll seem to need.

You'll need bigger and better automobiles, telephones in every room TV in the bedrooms as well as in the so-called livingroom. You'll need a prestigious education for your son or daughter that sets you back $6000 a year, a yearly $1000 physical for yourself, $3000 worth of psychotherapy and for youy spouse, Trnfrnn mu All for the sake of more and more security for you and your family. Who knows how many more additiorv^Layers of security blankets you'll also need — a summer home at the shore /"motor boat^, not to speak of bottles of scotch by the case. Politically, who knows how powerfully the compulsive quest for security will prompt you to vote for politicians who will allegedly protect the value of your dollar by cutting back food aid to developing country Who knows where it all might end?

Am T makine mvself clear? Not about vou. versonallv. not about me. necessarily;

not about anyone in particular. But about a pattern of living, so-called living, in our society, a lifestyle — a security lifestyle. This is the quest for security run wild. This is the quest for security become compulsive, even obsess ive.

Now, what does all this have to do with the environmental crisis and the groaning of the creation? Everything.

Imagine yourself now in a different situation. Imagine yourself being with the people of Ancient Israel, millenia ago, as they have set up their new nation in the poomised land of Canaan. You were wandering in the barren wilderness for 40fi years or more — you lived through the Great Depression, for example. You leaned heavily on God for every tidbit of food and hope you could find in those days. You murmurred in your LM^xLMkS tent maybe, wondkeing about this upstart, God-possessed prophet Moses, wondering whether the security of Egypt wasn't better after all. But you worked hmckx hard and you persevered in that wilderness, by God's help, and here you are now in the promised land. Maybe your parents or your graddparents were immigrants. Perhaps. Anyway, now you're established in this land of opportunity, called Canaan.

Jump across a few more ancient centuries now, and imagine that yaiipiK you've found yourself a position within the bureagpracy of King Solomon. Imagine, further, that somehow your natural desire for security has faagaect begun to take over your life, that it's begun to get out of hand. Taking Solomon as your role-model, accordingly, you begin to accumulate wealth of your own; sometimes, it seems,at any price, casting the less fortunate out of your way, or passing them by, as you reach out to gather things in for yourself.

Along comes some prophet, perhaps, who says, as Isaiah actually did, to those folks who were on-the-make financially: "woe to those who join house

But people are too busy with their work to hear any such wild-eyed, radical prophecies. People are too **pirffawncpfirirrii** preoccupied with the rush to accumulate the HL 1th they think they'll need if they're truly going to find security in this promised land. So the prophet goes unheeded, by and large.

Notice now: as some people KKKstata&aMKat accumulate wealth, others lose it. That's a fundamental law of life in a finite world, especially in times of relative or extreme scarcity. As Barry Commoner once observed with regard to ecosystems, there is no such thing as a free lunch. That's also true for human systems. Something or somebody will always pay the price, sooner or later. So in Solomon's day the accumulation ofMaith by the few meant the 1'nip M-l'iii'l'l: impoverishment of the many. Likewise for the earth. Solomon buil'4' a great temple, with many cedars from Lebanon. We can well imagine that after the time of Solomon, that great stand of majestic! Lebonese cedars was not long for this world.

Translate all this into Pauline terms, if you wish: the wages of sin is death. The compulsive quest for security on the part of the powerful sooner or later pushes the people of the land toward the brink of poverty, and sooner or later ravages the earth to the point of total barrenness. The wages of sin is death? externally, as it were: the poor begin to starve and the earth begins to lose its vitality. The wages of sin, it seems to turn out, is also death internally, for the powerful themselves. This, at least, is the biblical testimony. The ruling classes of Solomon's Israel were finally thrown into exile in 587, never to recover. Some observers of our own culture — looking at the despair in the faces of some of our wealthy young people, seeing the breakdown of "the best" families, witnessing people of all ages turning to self-destructive patterns of behavior, such as excessive consumption of various drugs, including alcohol -- some would say that in our society, too, for the irirfrfrhy wealthy, the wages of sin is death.

For all these reasons, any many more like them, the whole creation

in considerable measure because others lord it over them in their wild quest for security and fame. Right now, for example, there happens to be enough food on this planet to feed everyone. But we don't manage to do that. Some people, apparently, have cornedthe food market for themselves. Many of these powerful folfcs, it turns out, seem to be more concerned with the programs of Weight Watchers than with any programs to feed the hungry.

But not just the poor masses are affected by the eaapHfeMtare security lifestyle, as we know so well in our time: many other creatures, in addition to human creatures, are being plundered, killed, poisoned, despoiled. So the unrestrained quest for security on the part of the powerful unleashes the powers of death and KK£K destruction throughout the whole of God's good creation.

This, I suBbiit, is the essence of what our LCA statement calls "the human crisis in ecology: the unrestrained quest for security on the part of the affluent. This, I suggest, is the basic reason why the whole creation is groaning.

But more needs to be said here'.' 9®^ that destructive ipmsecurity lifestyle, because as ıu'wqj-v it operat^M inWM our own world, is a hundredfold, even a thousdndfold more powerful than in the time of Solomon s empire, when he and his cohorts so severely oppressed the poor and so insensitively devastated the earth.

Today, as everyone knows, we have vastly complex and powerful forms of political and economic organization^ Above all, we have access to incredibly at our disposal. powerful technologies, unknown to King Solomon. A bow-and-arrow, for example, can do just so much harm; a thermonuclear bomb can do a hell of a lot more literally. So our modern security lifestyle results in poverty geosue an excess of mi Hethunn in l'ln1ninnn*~ times and a rape of the earth that was never really possible in Solomon's day.

Hence, I venture to say, in our day the whole creation is groaning with a voice louder than human history has ever heard before, with many more decibels, and with much* more pathos than ever before. God's good earth screams out for peace, and there is little genuine peace aroudd the world, notwithstanding balance-of-power politics/^God's good earth cries out for justice for all God's children, and there is little justice. The leviathans of the deep add the inces to ■"the groaning, the net great whales cry out for the healing of the earth and the seas^^lSutT there is little healing. The powers as well as the earth, of death seem to have the upper hand almost everywhere. Even the rich themselves, as anyone who pastors among them knows, are feeling their own kind of malaise, their own kind of despair, their own kind of meaninglessness, KKKHxkaxkkKxpaiHkxafcx at times even to the point of suicide. Here, too, the wages of sin is death.

Some would argue, I am E aware, that "this is the way things are," that tjfeere can be no other way. Life, they say, in scientific essays and novels, too, — life has always been the survival of the fittest, the struggle for survival in a harsh world, dog-eat-dog. So you'd better grab what you can this time 'round. Heed those so-called natural impulses!^ for territory, property. Nevermind the price others have to pay, or the price the earth has to pAy, as you follow that primordial imperative. That's what life is all about, they say. territorial X

So what if you sonsign the peasant in Bangladesh to starvation! So what if you rape the oceans, so they become barren like the hills of Lebanon! So what! SWFH Eat, drink, and make sure that the Gross National Product keeps growing, lest you die. Of course, you will die. That's the tragic rub of the so-called 1 i.ir.tJiBiix heroic life struggle. But/try to live with gusto while even so?) you can, and let the HxxiKiamiKHfcaix human and environmental chips more or less fall where they may.

This, of course, is the familiar doctrine of Social Darwinist, sometim es Iwniclily nrpsftntAd under the euise of rueeed individualism, sometimes bla^antly

espoused as the objective truth about life. But this so-called objective truth is as far removed from the truth of the Gospel as one could possibly imagine. So I mention it mainly to acknowledge it's presence all around us, so we can be on the lookout for its insidious influences everywhere. But then I will quickly put ^lontHe shelf, like a niiTinmnijr *c (- **fcandasK** tumor in a glass of formaldyhyde.

Social Darwinssm aside now, I'm aware that overall the kind of analysis of the human crisis in ecology I have been presenting— this way of hearing the groaning of the creation -- is somewhat rhetorical, even LarrxxLxL a little fanciful. But I believe that in fundamentals it's true. A sober reading of the Bible, I believe, and a careful **anaigtax** study of human history will bear me out. I'm suggesting, in a word, that the creation is groaning as loud as it is today because of the Compulsive quest for security by the **t.ywtnwi^l,- dc v i? da 1 lijTgaaajE*qMriRW&** especially as that quest takes the form of amassing wealth Iqec by those who have the immense powers of modern technology at their disposal.

I want to begin to bring this discussion to a close now, and hear what kind of comments you have. But before I do, as a kind of promise of things to come, I want to W-t tell you a story. I know this particular narrative from the philsopher, William James. You may know it from some other source.

A certain man is walking in the woods, far from his home. For some reason he begins to wander and, slowly but relentlessly, night begins to fall. The man then begins to become anxious, even fearful for his own safety. After trying to reassure himself for awhile, he begins to hurry through the dark woods frantically, looking for some familiar sign. But, all of a sudden, he trips.

He tzegins to fall abruptly down a steep incline that indeed seems

and he grabs despartely for something to hold onto. Almost at the last minute it seems, he manages to grab hold of a large root with both hands. And there he hangs, breathless, overcome by fear. He cries out for help for what seems to be hours on end. Then he hategrr begins to whimper, with his strength giving out. Finally, despairing, he LiMkir lets go — and falls Mtz^feet to the ground ~~Uriwiii~~ below!

What I want to do tomorrow is to trace the life of this one soul, now that he has let go of his compulsive desire for security. Sure, it made sense, did it not, for him to hold onto that root. But, I will try to suggest tomorrow, it can make much more sense, once know where the ground is, to let go of our security lifestyle.

Tomorrow I will reshape William James' story in light of the Gospel. I will suggest that the man in the story did let go, actually, not out of fatigue and despair, although there were there. He did it actually, when Jesus emerged into his Mds world, ~~and xxx~~ said to him, as Jesus once said to the rich young ruler: "It's okay. You can let go of all your riches, and with them all your security. It's okay. Indeed, *vaffes.* verily, not only is it okay, it's fulfilling for you and fiwi'jmniVt for all righteousness. Come now, I want to give'you a guided tour ~~«d>udew~~ ^tho ou~~k~~ ~~[illegible]~~ God's good creation."

Or to ~~translate this rather than to parap~~ it, **iga.so** "Vo not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothingjf.... Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

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II. THE GLORIOUS LIBERTY OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD:
THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS AND
THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

My topic this morning is "The Glorious Liberty of the Children of God; the Environmental Crisis and the Mission of the Church."[1]

Last night I concluded by pointing to the entrance of Jesus into a world dominated by the environmental crisis, particularly as Jesus relates himself to the compulsive human quest for security./yite^invites us to let go of that compulsive quest for security, I suggested, and he calls us to participate in a new life lived in the fullness of God's good creation. This is the glorious liberty of the children of God that I want to discuss this morning. Christ enables us to be free from that often deadening quest for security and to be free for an enlivening commitment to participate in his ministry in the world.

Remember the story of Sysyphus? He's the famous character in Greek mythology who's condemned forever to push a large stone up a hill. The stone is just large enough that when he almost makes it to the top it toles back down again. And the^^he G begins the process all over again, to eternity. That, I think, is what the security lifestyle^.comes, to mean for most people. Not a particularly happy or meaningful prospect for life, it seems, although modern writers like **Affirmrt** Camus have tried to argue otherwise.

The Chtistian Gospel, in any case, is thfs. Jesus walks up to Sysyphus, maybe at the bottom, maybe somewhere along the ascent, and says to him -- "You don't have to do that friend. You can put that burden down. You can stand up and be free from that rock. You can feo over the mountain to the land of freedom. All you have to do is come with me. "

So this morning I want to talk about the Christian lifestyle, as it now comes to replace the security lifestyle, —the glorious liberty of those

So this morning I want to talk about the Christian lifestyle, as it now comes to replace the security lifestyle. I want to do a little celebrating of the glorious liberty of those of us who respond to gteaanMNE Christ's invitation to follow Him to the land of freedom.

To this end, I want to talk about two things, basically, First, the meaning of Christ's ministry in our world. Second, the meaning of the mission of Christ's Church in this world, especially as that mission is a response to the environmental gtes crisis.

First, then, the ministry of Jesus. How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds, in a believer's ear![1] Surely, but we always have to be cautious, don't we, that we are responding to Jesus himself, and not mainly to some image of Jesus that we have created for ourselves. The Christ we want to follow, definitely, **mimijtif** is not some Christ of our own creation, but, as our JiMilriwi, nn confessional books continually remind us, the Christ witnessed to by the prophets and the apostles.

On occasion, for example, a student will ask me Whether I have taken Jesus Christ into my heart. I think I know the feelings behind such a question, many of them quite authentic. Still, sooner or later I will want to raise my own question: which Jesus?

And when we answer that question, biblically speaking, we won't be able to be satisfied with the image of a Messiah who dwells only in the hearts of pious individuals. Such a Jesus comes perilously close, at times, to being a domesticated Christ, the captive of our own psychological needs^xnxa as we live in a disturbing^-aari distressing world. A more appropriate question, biblically speaking, is not riave you taken WchSL Christ into your hearts but "has Christ begun to transform your world?'

This question already pointfcl^to two observations I want to make about Jesus, as he's presented to us in the Scriptures. **Fitst,** we see a poor Christ ministering to a poor world. Second, we wee a physical Christ ministering to a physical world.

By the first observation I mean to draw attention to the rather obvious fact that Jesus's own life was/mq^T predicated on any compulsive quest for security. Quite the contrary. He came from the other side of the tracks, to begin with. He didn't grow up in the right part of town. He came from the "people of the land," the faceless masses. Even more, as soon as he began his public ministry, if not before, he was homeless, without roots, without security. He was born in a stablejand he^ministered as one who (*t*i/ezu had nowhere to lay his head, as even the foxes had burrows^, ~~in which to dwell~~. He had nowhere to be, no^ place to put down secure roots. As far as we know, moreover, he had no material possessions of his own, no private property, no territory of his own. He was poor in that sense, too, landless as well as homeless.

Jesus was also poor in the sense that the primary focus of his ministry was on the poor and the outcasts of society, with whom he associated consistently and intimately, scandalizing the religions establishment of his day. This motif is dramatically highlight?Cy St. Luke, as you know, who depicts Jesus with these programmatic words on his lips:

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives.... to set at liberty those who are oppressed.(4:18f.)

This is the poor Christ of biblical faith, come to minister to a poor world.

In the Scriptuees we also see ~~Christ YYYYYYYYYYYY xxx xxxxxxxxxx~~ Jesus as a very ~~physx~~ physical Christ ministering to a very physical world. There have always been tendencies in the history of the Church, from the very beginning^to spiritualize Jesus, sometimes to the point where he becomes a kind

of other-worldly phantom. But no. Christ as he's presented to us by the prophets and the apostles is very much a physical Christ ministering itz. s fully material world. He is our incarnate, enfleshed, resurrected Lord. Although,sur he's very much a spiritual reality also, he's spiritual only insofar as he's incarnate, fleshly, living in this tkhgible created order. This is one of the important LssLuLW apeeks, I mitzht say, of that much KHdsKK misunderstood teaching of Luther about the ubiquity of the risen Christ. Christ for Luther, as for the Bible, was always very much a tangible, enfleshed Christ, living in this visible, material creation.

Accordingly, a central aspect of Christ's ministry in our midst is to transform our bodies, to renew them with his glorious/yresurrected ££$ vitality, to "^each us how to dance his dance of life. He is the Lord of our bodies, no less than our souls. He pours his resurrected, fleshly life into our flesh MBK in this life, as fee will all the more gloriously give us the perfected resurrected life in the world to come.

Inseparably related to this, Christ's ministry in our midst works to restore us to a rightful relationship with the world of nature, our environment, with the whole of god's good creation, where we are created to *1* God's children live as . Christ ministers among us itz> this respect also, so that we might have a new life in this physical world, enjoying its blessings, giving thanks for all its beauty and its sweetness . Those of us who are Lutherans ought to be very familiar with motif, as the follwtking quote from Luther will show.

> Now if I believe in God's Son, and bear in mind that he became man, all creatures will appear ahundred times more beautiful to me than before. Then I will properly appreciate the sun, the moon, the stars, trees, apples, and pears, as I reflect that he is Lord over all and the center of all things.

This is part of what I mean to suggest by the phrase, a physical Cffrist for a physical world. Christ renews our bodies and opens up new possibilities for positive relationships with the good earth and all its creatures.

But there's more . And here the images of the W poor Christ and the physical Christ faaaKi begin to merge.

The Jesus who's depicted by the Bible is a Messiah who lays claim to the entire lives of those who follow him. As the one who ministers to the poor, in particular, Jesus lays mrtrr claim to the material well-being of the rich. The promise he proclaims is a promise of a universal commonwealth. So Jesus, precisely because he wants to minister to the poor, turns to the rich and lays claim to their wealth. I should also say, he turns to the rich because he loves the rich, too. He longs for them to find human fulfilment, too He longs for them to be able to put their burdens down, too, and take up his yoke. This is precisely what he says to the rich young ruler.

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You will recall that the mar^ had kept all the commandments. Jesus says to him: "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."(18:22 Lk.)

meaningful

For Jesus, all are supposed to have a^share in the blessings of Sutqsec God's good creation. Hence the rich have a special responsibility; hence Ae proclaims a special word to them: of those to whom much has been given, much will be required.

Which Jesus, then? Who is the Jesus who comes into our world to minister?

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No domesticated Jesus, for sure. The biblical Jesus is ft poor Christ who minister to a poor world. The biblical tfesus is^very physical Christ who ministers to a very physical world, who claims the whole material world for his ministry of life. This is the Jesus who comes up to Sysyphus and invites him to put his burden down. This is the Jesus — this poor, physical Christ — who invites Sysyphus to let go hf his deadening quest for security and to follow him into the land of freedom. The glorious liberty of the children of God takes its meaning from the^Christ who is poor and enfleshed, homeless and incarnate.

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We come now to a somewhat delicate point. I want to talk about the n**flai0it. ,uf the Church, especially **sa nil baMMiB can ale** u> to the environmental crisis. But to do that, we have to talk about the Churchy and tint **igsgte**. cause some problems. A-fee^thi-s.^o±n£^-^3L4Uw^may=4>ave- noticed, theologians often tend to get Very tenuous,/ It's really gratifying to talk about Christ®\for so many reasons. But to talk about the Church sometimes tends to be enibarassing. You will recall the bumper sticker from the 1960's: "I love humanity; it's people I can't stand."

Likewise, we're often tempted to love Jesus, but to regrei the Church, or at best just manage^ to tolerate the Church. It does have all manner of problems after all, including spiritual blindness and greed, at lu—Tht times. But, be that as it may, there's little doubt that, biblically speaking, Jesus casts his lot with a community of followers who take his name as their own, a community of ordinary, fallible folks in whose life he wants to be glorified and mdfciiSested to the world.

"For consider your call,,brothers and sisters," writes St. Paul, "not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the worlg& to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even the things that are not, to bring to nothing the things that are."(I Cor 1:26-28) So here we are in this barren land, a new Israel^ called to follow this new Moses toward axuKwxkKaxan the promised land of salvation for the whole world. If Christ has so gathered us together for this journey, why not follow him? Why not trust him? Why be so overwhelmed with our own shortcomings and stupidities?

I come, then, to the last part of this presentation, concerning the mission of the Church in this world of environmental crisis. What is our mission today, environmentally speaking?

I want to put this in schematic form, right here, so MWMX you'll know precisely where I'm trying to you, if that isn't fairly clear already.

The environmental mission of the Church today, I believe, is to manifest the life of Christ to the world by consuming less. enioying it mo re, and sharing our wealth with the poor.

First, we have to begin to come to terms W. th our wealth, small perhaps to us, but great compared with most of the rest of the world. We will have to learn to get by with much less, not only less energy, but also -s&mucless. of SueA wasteful luxuries as a regular diet of meat(which you have heard about, I understand, from this podium before). We have to learn as quickly as we possibly can that 'less is more?* We have to learn how to simplify our lives, to become much more self-sufficient, much less dependent on a whole range of resource-consumigg patterns of life. aMBtafssne

In this finite world, which has been likened to a space-ship, we have only so many resources on board. This means that the only way for the poor masses of the globe to have a f(Barer share in tfiuuiJvMJunimmin M the commonwealth that God gives to everyone is if those of us who are affluent some^fiw are able to share our wealth with those who are impoverished. SHddrosaxka Of those to whom much is given, much will be required.

This injunction to consume less clearly has important political ramifications, too, as well as personal lifestyle implications. It will not be enoughsto simplify our lifestyles while continuing to live in a society that permits its citizens to glut themselves with all that protein consuming, protein caainMwffig wasting beef that we have trained ourselves to need. As Christians, perhaps thoaugh groups such as Bread for the World, we'll for new kinds of nnnnnnmntinn laws, for examnle. analogous to

the civil rights laws we worked for a decade ago. For the sake of the poor Christ, who calls us to feed the hungry, we will need to be about the maybe painful business of learning how to eonsume muchlyless of this world's goods.

~~So; CtEiaghinEfest = = nfcChrist in th'a g jjggigb td world ,v gifrf l consume less.~~ But that's not all. We'll also discover that, through Christ, we can enjoy it more.

I remember a Christmas season a few years ago when my children were quite young. I remember excitedly wrapping some fancy technologized toy for one of them, and then avidly watfahing as he opened the present. He casually set that wonderful gadget aside and beg£n to play enthusiastically with the box and the wrappings.

In some such childlike way, you and I are called by Christ not only to set aside our fixation on consuming, but also to enjoy the simple things that God gives us all arouhdg.ua **iwhis-grgutjaafe.** Remember? Do you remember the wisdom of that popular song? '*rhe best things in life are free?[4] Dp, you remember? Do you understand?

Look at yourself in the mirror sometime^ **Wlrd-L** ~~do you see?~~ Do you see Ricardo **Montesstn** standing next to a Cordova? Do you see Fara Fawcett Sajors caressing the seats of a Mercury? Or do you see just plain old you with an occasional bump or wrinkle/* Well, plain old you — in the^body you have brought with you to this meeting --^is the very you whom the physical, enfleshed Christ waats to bless with new life. Not to consume more and enjoy it less, which is the primrose path of Ricardo .Msntsvsn and Fara Fawcett Majors — but to consume less and enjoy it

Maybe, indeed, my gpsmdnfckx fastidious German grandmother was on to something when she «i^KcTeanliness is next to godliness^ Only she didn't go nearly far enough. Biblically speaking, she might have said; bodiliness is

Even perhaps: sensuality is next to godliness.)

next to godliness.A So jogging might be more Christian thati you imagine.

So Caressing your spouse may be more Christian than you were brought up to think. Likewise for taking a waikxs<xfckxMis«xfKx leisurely walk with some friends downtown or along some distant shore. The resurrection of the body isn't only an after-death doctrine. It's a doctrine of reAlized eschatology, if you will, as well as futuristic eschatology.

These considerations have all matter of implications for our worship, when you think about it. A congregation, for example, which basically only knows how to sit and listen, and has not yet learned, literally, to move its bodies through the liturgy, is indz probably being trained in an unbiblical spiritualism, and to that degree remains out of touch with ~~unattuned to~~ the fleshly, incarnate dimension of biblical faith. ~~When you think Wsdt it, indeed,~~ Actually isn't it much more fun, much more enjoyable, to "get into the act," as it were, than just to sit there and listen? — when it's right — Liturgy^dan help teach us how to consume less, how to rest content with the simple things of life, the ~~simple~~ meal together, for example, and, at the same time, how to enjoy *itfigai*EK it more.

To manifest the life of Christ to the world, then, by consuming less and enjoying it more. And then, lastly, by sharing our wealth with the poor.

This last point is a touchy one. Not just because all of us tend to want to hold on to what we've got, but because it's downright difficult at times to know just how Christ wants us to share our wealth with the poorL^ and the oppressed. Maybe ~~we~~ are we'*W», called to sell all our goods and give them to the poor, as the rich young ruler was? but then maybe we *re called to play some other kind of role, say, as some wealthy of the -women in the early church were, who opened up their large homes to the Church and its ministry to the world.

Since I've alluded to the matter so often, I should perhaps pause here for just a moment to say something about money. Isn/t it interesting that

Jesus hag, so very little to say about the dangers of sex, but such a great deal to say about the dangers of money? Isn't it interesting, in contrast, that the Church throughout the ages, to our own day, has had so much to say about the dangers of sex and so little to M say about the dangers of money? Perhaps we Christians have not been fully faithful to Jesus's teaching in this respect.

In any case, the thing® that needs to be said about money at this point ZUsc simple enough, abrassive as it might sound to a few^SsWs-r If you are a follwer of Jesus, then the money you earn is not your own. We've sometimes been taught by the Church to assume that maybe ten per cent of our money doesn't belong to us, but to Christ. But the Gospel truth is that none of our money belongs to us. The earth is the Lord's first of all; and insofar as Christ leads us into the life of freedom in God's good creation,* our money is his. M take that to be a self-evident biblical teaching. Our wealth isn't ours; it belongs to that poor, homeless Christ who came to minister to a largely impoverished, hornets human family.

Now, this is not to say that the policy for most of us ought to be to sell atl we have and give to the poor. But it is to suggest that our life with Christ and with each other, as the New Israel wandering in this wilderness, is to travel light, to receive what wealth we do earn as manna from heaven, rather than our own private property. Then, in addition, we will also have to experiment with a politics of sharing; we'll have to be discovering new and more effective political and economic to share the manna that we've received with the poor 'oT~the" earth.

""Do undertake such experiments, I believe, we'll have to make many reforms in the life Kf the Church, liturgically, structurally, and theologically. But let me mention just one, which will come as no surprise to many of you, since vou are alreadv engaged with this kind of experiment. ML If we are

to share our wealth with the dispossessed of the earth, I strongly suspect that we won't be able to go it alone, as individuals. We'll have to join together in various kinds of support groups, within congregations, and ẋHAMHE intermurally as well, even nationally and internationally.

One group might meet together, for example, ataH^the problem of money, which preoccupies so many of us. Not to raise more money for the Church, necessarily — and at this point I have^iwme questions about theAsfidafe^Strength for Mission'program — but much more comprehensively to work together to find ways to consume less, enjoy it more, and share our gooisij^with the poor. Such a group could function as a kind of Consumer's Anonymous(you know, when you get the urge to buy a new color TV, you call up a Christian friend and he or she comes over to your house and talks you out of it). Another wgstax wrinkle might be income sharing. A group of Quakers, fairly well-to-do folks actually, in this part of Mew York^ have joined together in such a group: they've agreed on a^cut-off point for their iailBwiM. Anything they earn that is more than such-and-such a figure they give to a common fund, wtrxxhxxh<LyxLMxLfa«n: whtetesfrhoy thenrmg&fc to dimsux G_xndve ~nvtay tgi causes and projects that help SHTlHgextbstructural poverty of various people who have been excluded from thecommonwealth

But whatever shape these support groups will take, I'm sure that we'll need them. By ourselves, as individuals, the temptation tos greats fao keep our wealth, even to help ftp aid LL. But within the liberating matrix of the Church, supported by what Luther thought of as the mutual consolation of the brothers and the sisters, we may just be fable to turn the Conner on our ingrained American fegaa fiX wealth.

Can you believe it? Can you believe that your Church, your local rather conventional looking, sometimes grumbling—in-their—tents nit-picking bunch nf folks can manifest the life of Christ in the world this way? Can you believe

that your Christian community can turn away from the security lifestyle that's captivating so many in this society to a genuinely Christian lifestyle, *"ib* a Christ-like lifestyle? Can you believe that your Christian community can set an example for the entire civic community by consuming less, enjoying it more, and sharing its wealth with the poor, politically as well as philanthropically? Can you believe that the glorious liberty of the children of God is truly glorious, that the Church can be a S^city set on a hill, whose light cannot be hid? Can you believe it?

I can. I can believe it because the Church, when all has been said and done, knows that it's fallible, that it's sinful,^that it doesn^ever live by its own strength. The Church, you and I, and all our Christian brothers and sisters aroudd this globe, know deep inour hearts that the strengrt^we have, when we have any, is Christjs. We also know, deep inour hearts, that Afe is faithful, that as he has KaiiKdxaaxkagKfckHXxfcaxpKkxHKKxkiiiKdKH invited us to put our burdens down and called us together to bless us, so he will inspire us and empower us by his WA Spirit, as we move with him toward the land of freedom for all^peoplesVt^inaTT^^ be consummated the new heavens and the new earth, in which righteauaness dwe 11

That's the promise of Christ for you, Sysyphus. That's the promise of Christ for all of us, brothers and sisters. This is the glorious liberty of the children of God, in a world thatjji®' groaning desparately for a new lease on life.