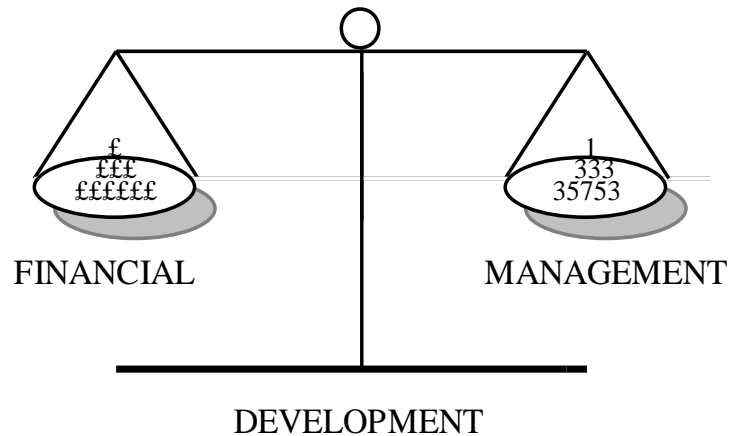


FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT

CHRISTIAN MANAGEMENT

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WALKING WITH GOD DO WE NEED TO CHANGE DIRECTION?



ONE OF A SERIES OF GUIDES FOR
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This is one of a series of documents produced by David A Palmer as a guide for managers on specific financial topics to assist informed discussion. Readers should take appropriate advice before acting upon any of the issues raised.

WALKING WITH GOD

DO WE NEED TO CHANGE DIRECTION?

This paper is designed to help YOU

- Consider the causes and implications of the current financial situation
- Reflect on our own complicity in the mess that has been created
- Consider the effects of recession and how to help other individuals, our Church and our society not only to cope, but to learn from it to improve the future

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And so be more ready and able to be good stewards of God's creation and help others to do so with a view to helping to bring about God's Kingdom on earth.

"I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation." (Philippians 4:20) We live in "interesting" financial times. Previously when the Church has commented on the "Debt crisis" it has meant the extent to which "rich nations" have a duty not to be unduly harsh on "poor countries" who have overborrowed. Now we have realised that as a world we have spent money that we cannot repay. This has consequences.

Concentrating on practical examples in a personal, corporate and church context this paper will look at Biblical precedent, Church teaching and contemporary practices regarding living in financially difficult times. It will consider how we can seek the spiritual fruits of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness and self-control" in our financial affairs and help others to do so. Firstly we will look at some guidelines, then we will consider real issues so we can pray into them.

"Listen! Today I am giving you a choice between life and death, between prosperity and disaster. I command you this day to love the Lord your God and to keep his commands, decrees, and regulations by walking in his ways. If you do this, you will live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you and the land you are about to enter and occupy. Deut 30: 14-16 (NLT)

WHERE ARE WE AND HOW DID WE GET HERE?

The world is in crisis. A major symptom of the problem is what the media call the "credit crunch". However the real crisis is that modern society - to use the words of the spin doctor Alistair Campbell - "Doesn't do God".

The current economic crisis comes as no surprise. It was forecast by many people several years ago. One Christian Economist Peter Warburton described the problem in 2001 in a technical but compelling article "Inflation but not as we know it." As a world economy, which is after all composed of lots of individuals, we have created too much debt. By this simple process we have managed to spend more than we earn. We have not just borrowed from each other, but we have mortgaged the future. We appear to have no shame about committing our children to pay for our excesses:

Charles Bean Chief economist at the Bank of England in July 2004 wrote the following as a sign of the healthy (Sic) development of the UK economy "Faced with higher house prices, a lower initial debt-service burden as a result of lower interest rates and an increased availability of mortgage finance, first time buyers and those trading up the housing chain have been both willing and able to take out larger mortgages, thus adding to the upward pressure on house prices.....In essence, higher house prices have induced a transfer of lifetime wealth from younger generations to their parents."

In Ezekiel 18:2 it says "The fathers eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge." This is an old proverb from Israel, and this chapter points out that even though others may suffer, the sin is ours.

Financial crises happen when greed blinds people to reality. We have had it before with tulips, canals, railways and computers. What is surprising is the speed with which it took effect. But when you press ahead at full speed when you should be breaking, it is likely that the crash will be worse. We need to be clear that this crisis is self-inflicted.

There is enough food in the world to feed everyone. Problems arise when we do not share it out. As individuals, companies, nations we have overindulged and funded the excess at the expense of others - especially our children.

Whilst the Church has grappled with the problem of the rich oppressing the poor, in recent years it has not made its voice heard loudly enough to point out the problem of excessive consumption. Ezekiel 33:1-6 makes it quite clear that not to warn a sinner of the consequences of sin leaves "the watchman... accountable for the sinner's blood". We are the Church! We need to speak out, not just walk the walk, but talk the talk!

This is not a new problem. The Church adapts slowly as it considers the commercial needs of a more and more urban, industrial civilisation. Until the Fourteenth Century the Councils of the Church (Arles 314, Nicaea 325, Carthage 348, Aix 789, Third Lateran Council 1179, Lyons 1274) attacked usury - lending and borrowing were not seen as productive. Until the Seventeenth Century the payment of interest on debt was banned by the (Roman Catholic) Church, although some exceptions e.g. to compensate the lender for loss of profit were allowed. Gradually, however, commerce became the norm and the first real accounting textbook was written in 1494 by the Franciscan Friar Luc Pacioli. This included the formal recording of liabilities (debts).

In Nehemiah much of chapter 5 is devoted to criticism of the practice of charging interest to fellow countrymen and it exhorts people to cancel debts. Now the Church encourages economic activity and the quest for equitable profit, but condemns usury (unfair interest, making a profit out of other people's needs) - especially between nations.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church was published in 1994. It is the product of nearly 2,000 years of Christian thought guided by the Holy Spirit. It is essentially an extended commentary on the Bible with over 3,000 separate references to Biblical texts. It has been developed slowly and it reflects a changing world. It will never be up to date, as it is constantly being updated. It is, like our lives, work in progress.

The Catechism makes little mention of financial markets. In paragraph 2269 it says: "The acceptance by human society of murderous famines, without efforts to remedy them, is a scandalous injustice and a grave offence. Those whose usurious and avaricious dealings lead to the hunger and death of their brethren in the human family indirectly commit homicide, which is imputable to them."

In Paragraph 2432 it says "Business managers are responsible for the economic and ecological effects of their operations. They must consider the good of persons and not only the increase of profits, even though profits are necessary to assure investments, the future of the business, employment, and the good progress of economic life."

The Compendium of Social Doctrine published ten years later in 2004, has a full chapter on "Economic Life. It notes that "A financial economy that is an end unto itself is destined to contradict its goals, since it is no longer in touch with its roots and has lost sight of its constitutive purpose. In other words, it has abandoned its original and essential role of serving the real economy and, ultimately, of contributing to the development of people and the human community. In light of the extreme imbalance that characterizes the international financial system, the overall picture appears more disconcerting still: the processes of deregulation of financial markets and innovation tend to be consolidated only in certain parts of the world. This is a source of serious ethical concern, since the countries excluded from these processes do not enjoy the benefits brought about but are still exposed to the eventual negative consequences that financial instability can cause for their real economic systems, above all if they are weak or suffering from delayed development."

It goes on to say (prophetically) "The sudden acceleration of these processes, such as the enormous increase in the value of the administrative portfolios of financial institutions and the rapid proliferation of new and sophisticated financial instruments, makes it *more urgent than ever to find institutional solutions capable of effectively fostering the stability of the system without reducing its potential and efficiency*. It is therefore indispensable to introduce a normative and regulatory framework that will protect the stability of the system in all its intricate expressions, foster competition among intermediaries and ensure the greatest transparency to the benefit of investors." (369)

Quoting from Paul VI's encyclical on the Development of Peoples in 1967 it notes *One of the fundamental tasks of those actively involved in international economic matters is to achieve for mankind an integral development in solidarity*, that is to say, "it has to promote the good of every person and of the whole person".(373)

The Church accepts that some parts of capitalism - the desire to better oneself and to improve the lot of all - are acceptable, but does not accept its total reliance on market forces and the motive of profit maximization where the strong exploit the weak. The Church accepts free markets, but notes that they are there to serve all people as part of the common good, and not just the rich. The problem is not that economic activity is bad in itself, the problem is "Original Sin" - left to itself, mankind has a tendency to turn good things towards evil. Money is like manure - spread around it can help bring life and fertility, piled in a heap it brings decay and smell.

On the question of Sin the Catechism is much more forthcoming and it is worth repeating in full:

The Proliferation of Sin

1865 Sin creates a proclivity to sin; it engenders vice by repetition of the same acts. This results in perverse inclinations which cloud conscience and corrupt the concrete judgment of good and evil. Thus sin tends to reproduce itself and reinforce itself, but it cannot destroy the moral sense at its root.

1866 Vices can be classified according to the virtues they oppose, or also be linked to the capital sins which Christian experience has distinguished, following St. John Cassian and St. Gregory the Great. They are called "capital" because they engender other sins, other vices. They are pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth or acedia.

1867 The catechetical tradition also recalls that there are "sins that cry to heaven": the blood of Abel, The sin of the Sodomites, The cry of the people oppressed in Egypt, The cry of the foreigner, the widow, and the orphan, injustice to the wage earner.

1868 Sin is a personal act. Moreover, we have a responsibility for the sins committed by others when we cooperate in them:

- by participating directly and voluntarily in them;
- by ordering, advising, praising, or approving them;
- by not disclosing or not hindering them when we have an obligation to do so;
- by protecting evil-doers.

1869 Thus sin makes men accomplices of one another and causes concupiscence, violence, and injustice to reign among them. Sins give rise to social situations and institutions that are contrary to the divine goodness. "Structures of sin" are the expression and effect of personal sins. They lead their victims to do evil in their turn. In an analogous sense, they constitute a "social sin."

The root causes of the problem of the current recession need to be identified in order to identify the solution. You have to know where you are to work out where you are going. It may be unfashionable to say so, but the causes can be categorised as "The Seven Deadly Sins".

The Seven Deadly Sins can be found throughout the Bible, although there is no chapter or verse that contains an all-inclusive list. Pope Gregory the Great created a list in the late sixth century in "Moralia in Job". The Seven Deadly Sins he listed are Pride, Envy, Anger, Avarice, Sloth, Gluttony, and Lust. Gregory produced the list to help his parishioners to avoid them.

They are called deadly because they are in opposition to love and damage to our personal relationship with God. "God is Love" (Benedict XVI 2008) and "He created us to love Him" (St Augustine 388). "All you need is Love" (Beatles 1968). Augustine's view was that sin was disordered love. This can be related to the Seven Deadly Sins. The love of objects brings avarice and gluttony. The love of people can lead to envy and lust. The love of oneself often results in pride, anger and sloth.

PRIDE, ENVY, ANGER, AVARICE, SLOTH, GLUTTONY, AND LUST

The first Deadly Sin is **Pride**. This is the sin that caused Lucifer's fall from grace. Saint Augustine called pride the root of all sin. Pride is an excessive confidence our own abilities that interferes with our acknowledgment and understanding of the grace of God. Pride can incite many other sins including vanity, arrogance, conceit, superiority, and egotism. Pride places the love of oneself above the love of God. It prevents man from being humble before God. In the presence of pride there is no recognition of the supremacy of God. We live in a Society obsessed by status. Never apologise, never admit weakness. Insist on your rights.

The second Deadly Sin is **Envy**. Envy is a feeling of discontentment at the success of others. Envy is mentioned numerous times throughout the Bible. It started with Cain, continued with Joseph's brothers, but did not stop there. Matthew 27:17-18 "When the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" For he knew it was out of envy that they handed Jesus unto him." The first chapter of Romans lists envy along with other sins: "They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of, murder, strife, deceit and malice." (Rom. 1:29).

The letter to the Galatians says envy will keep a person from enjoying the bliss of Heaven "Envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Gal. 5:21). Envy is fostered by the marketeers who rely on it to persuade us to buy more, to satisfy wants, not needs. A perverse version of envy is the delight in the downfall of others. The media delight in this through the exposure of the weaknesses of politicians and celebrities. We participate in supporting it through game shows which emphasise the humiliation of losers and reward predatory competitive behaviour.

The third Deadly Sin is **Anger**. Anger is the rejection of love. Anger leads to fury and sometimes to wrath. Wrath, the by-product of anger, is found throughout the Old Testament. Anger is a reaction, most often to a minor sin of another person. Anger does not have to result in wrath to be a sin. The feeling of anger alone can lead to damnation. Anger occurs when you choose not to forgive. "I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment." (Mat. 5:22). Anger is a major problem in society today, in all ages from grumpy old men to bullying children; in many products - films, DVDs, knives, guns; and in our own behaviour - irritation in queues, shouting to protest, road rage, trolley rage, etc, etc.

The fourth Deadly Sin is **Avarice**. Avarice is can be known as greed or covetousness. Avarice is the overwhelming desire to gain wealth. It puts the love of physical objects above the love of people or the love of God. Idolatry can be the result. Jesus said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (Luke 12:15). Society is obsessed with getting the best price, the cheapest deal. "The devil take the hindmost." The consequences of uncontrolled avarice are all around us. House price inflation, stock market excesses, "Fat Cat" bonuses, claiming of non-existent expenses. "Who wants to be a Millionaire?", the Lottery, buy one get one free etc, etc.

The fifth Deadly Sin is **Sloth**. Sloth is the procrastination or evading of either physical or spiritual work. Sloth causes us to become complacent. The Bible is filled with tasks performed by man in the service of God. Sloth prevents to completion of God's will. We were given

creation to be masters of it, to manage it wisely, not just to live off the fat of the land. Sloth can be a direct affront to the commandments of God. In particular failure to preach the Gospel is failure to follow God. Not speaking out against institutional and personal breaking of the 10 Commandments is slothful. Failing to do our work honestly and properly is a form of sloth. Failing to pick up litter, failing to pay the appropriate taxes, train tickets etc. etc.

The sixth Deadly Sin is **Gluttony**. Gluttony is the excessive desire for food or drink. Gluttony, along with avarice, places the love of physical objects above the love of God. Gluttony however can cause direct physical harm to a temple of God, the body. As a society, particularly in the West, we routinely eat too much, consume too much, waste the world's resources - and seem to pride ourselves on so doing. The supermarket shelves are full of Easter eggs before Lent starts. Are Christmas lights really in honour of Christ?

The seventh Deadly Sin is **Lust**. Lust is an excessive sexual appetite that results in one seeking immediate or ruthless satisfaction. Saint Augustine defined lust as sex not intended for procreation. Lust places the love of other people above the love of God. Lust can lead to masturbation, homosexual acts, and sex outside of marriage. All of these are sinful. Pornography is an industry based on lust. It is fashionable to describe sex as an industry with sex workers, sex aids, etc. Casual sex is extolled and encouraged throughout the media offerings. We can see the result in the exploitation of women, the break-up of families and the increasing sexualisation of children.

The seven deadly sins are the causes of many of society's problems. Giving in to temptation is the cause of the financial problems we face today. We want to satisfy our needs - now. We can't afford to do so, so we borrow money we can't afford to repay. There is a time to sow and a time to reap - a time to borrow and a time to lend. It is reasonable to borrow to buy a house to live in, while you earn the money to pay back the debt. It is reasonable that in old age the money saved during one's working life, is lent to the next generation to help them buy their house. The interest charged then provides the pensioner with income. Whether we do this as individuals or through the medium of a bank or insurance company, the effect is the same. It is a good use of "talents". What is wrong is that we have indulged ourselves using money that is not ours.

DEBT IS A SYMPTOM NOT THE PROBLEM

What is a Debt? In money terms it is a transaction that involves two people. A lender who has money but no use for it and a borrower who has no money but does have a use for it. They enter a mutually satisfactory agreement which includes interest being paid - effectively rent - for the use of the money. The problem is that the system only works when everyone is acting reasonably and sensibly.

There are several potential evils which arise around the issue of debt. St Paul goes so far as to tell Timothy that "the love of money is the root of all evil." Providing "free money" is like providing a teenager with the first drug fix for free in order to get them hooked. Borrowing money without the means to repay it, or the reasonable expectation of doing so, is theft. A profligate lender who encourages people to "borrow beyond their means" is guilty of leading "little ones into sin" and deserves the severest penalties. The consequences of adopting a harsh approach to debt collection are set out in the parable of the unforgiving servant and the Finance Industry is not known for its forgiveness.

A brief analysis of uses of money and sources of money may help make decisions. Investing is not wrong, particularly if you are providing for your needs (car, home etc.); and investing in "earning assets" like buy to let property, is vital if homes are to be available to others; but building huge barns for protection (parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:18) may be "too greedy". Spending on yourself is not wrong "Do not muzzle the ox while he is treading corn". (Deuteronomy 25:4) but conspicuous consumption is wrong - whether or not you can afford it!

There are four possible combinations:

1. To provide for future/ or make a profit?
2. To provide for future/ or make a profit?
3. To survive or to indulge?
4. To survive or to indulge?

INVEST

TO DO?

SPEND

Buy 2 a House	Put 1 in Bank
To 4 Eat	To 3 spend on Holiday

BORROW OWN

MONEY

SOURCE OF MONEY

Jesus exhorts us to "use money, tainted as it is, to win friends." Borrowing to finance an asset, something that will help you earn more, is a right use of the economic system and every time we put money into the bank we help the system, because in theory it then enables the bank to lend that money to someone else to use. What is wrong is that people are borrowing to satisfy greed, envy and to overindulge. Too many adverts are not for products to help make life better, they are creating a need based on envy, greed and overindulgence. "Go on, spoil yourself" is a phrase which has an unchristian flavour. When the same adverts are accompanied by offers to supply the means to "live now, pay later" they can become evil.

"Set my People free"

One of the biggest evils in the Western world today is the extent to which individuals and nations are enslaved to debt. Whatever the merits of discussions about who should pay for Further Education and at what stage during their lifetime, the impact of the Student Loan system is that most young people see debts of tens of thousands of pounds as normal and acceptable. This is highly dangerous. We teach our children responsible uses of dangerous but useful items like cars and electricity - but in our society the norm seems to be **borrow now pay later**. On an International level we have the "interesting" situation of the United States owing vast sums to China and continuing to allow these to grow. In Britain, it is estimated that as individuals we owe more than a Trillion Pounds. You would think that is enough to be going on with, but if you put "Loan" into Google you will get 200 million separate results - the overwhelming majority of which offer to lend you more.

In the parable of the Talents, Our Lord did not include anyone who said "You didn't give me any talents at all, but I borrowed some using your name and now you owe the bankers all the talents that the others have earned. Such stupidity needed the Twentieth Century to become possible. The current wisdom seems to suggest that we need to spend our way out of recession. This assumes that someone will bail us out. In practice we need to pray and work - in that order.

Starting with a review of the sins which led us into this mess helps us to identify the potential solutions. The obvious approach is the practice - on a personal, corporate and national basis - of the corresponding virtues.

Sin	Biblical Examples	Current Examples
Pride	Goes before a fall Adam and Eve	No 1, Cult of Personality, My Rights Not my fault
Envy	Cain, Joseph's Brothers,	Takeover fever, Knocking Copy, Upgrades, I Want
Anger	Saul Saul (Paul -before conversion)	War, Riots, Protests, Road rage, Trolley Rage, Video Games - body count, Hatred in Soaps.
Avarice	Ahab Rich Fool Saul	Madoff, Banking Industry, Sunday trading, Greece, Conspicuous consumption Bigger, better houses
Sloth	Pharisees "not lift a finger" Priest in the "Good Samaritan"	Health and Safety Benefit Culture Let someone else do it
Gluttony	Rich Man and Lazarus Herod's death Eglon of Moab	Obesity, Binge Drinking All you can eat, "Go on, Spoil yourself"
Lust	King David Solomon Herod	Sex Sells, Sex Industry, Sex Workers Pornography, Films, "Sex Education" Condom Culture, Family break up, Single Parent Families

WHERE SHOULD WE GO AND HOW DO WE GET THERE?

We have looked at the causes of the recession and linked them directly to the Seven Deadly Sins. One approach to solving the problem is to foster and encourage the Seven Corresponding Virtues - in our own lives, and also as an example and an encouragement to others - as well as in our corporate and national life. Here we look at some of the issues for us today. We may be facing a personal, corporate and Government attitude (possibly an addiction) to spending money that is not ours. This is at best unhealthy and sinful, and at worst will lead to disaster. We need to foster a culture of restraint. That is the basis of the Christian message. Put others first. We do not have to rely on secular organisations to promote "Simple Living." As Church, we can do it too; by Word, Witness and Works. It is called Evangelisation.

Perhaps we should see the current crisis as part of the purification process by which humanity slowly learns to be more "God-like" in its way of life. We need to follow the example of Christ who suffered and died for us and seek to emulate the self-giving expressed in John 3:16.

THE POWER OF PRAYER NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD (Luke 1:37)

"Not by might, not by power but by my Spirit says the Lord."(Zechariah 4:6). Prayer has to be our first priority. Pray for ourselves and for others.

But Prayer is not a surrogate for action. Jesus prayed, spoke and did ...normally in that order. St Benedict said "To work is to pray". See James 2:14-26 which finishes "As a body without a spirit is dead, so is faith without deeds." God has asked us to be in the world for a reason. Sometimes we are called only to pray. More often we are called to be in the world and improve it by our presence by exuding "the fragrance of Christ" (2 Corinthians 2:15).

Prayerfully consider Matthew 5:43-48. This passage follows the Beatitudes (or the Be Attitudes) "blessed are the merciful... the peacemakers ...and those who hunger and thirst after justice." "You are salt and light... you are not to lose your saltiness ... or be hidden on a hill." "Leave your offering at the altar and go and be reconciled....go the extra mile".

"You have heard how it was said, 'You will love your neighbour' (Exodus 27) and hate your enemy. But I say this to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down his rain to fall on the upright and wicked alike. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Do not even the tax collectors do as much? And if you save your greetings for your brothers are you doing anything exceptional? Do not even the gentiles do as much? You must therefore be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

St Paul notes the following in **ROMANS 12:1-21** *I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect. For by the grace given to me I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than one ought to think, but to think soberly, each according to the measure of faith that God has apportioned. For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them: if prophecy, in proportion to the faith; if ministry, in ministering; if one is a teacher, in teaching; if one exhorts, in exhortation; if one contributes, in generosity; if one is over others, with diligence; if one does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be sincere; hate what is evil, hold on to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honour. Do not grow slack in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. **Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer.** Contribute to the needs of the holy ones, exercise hospitality. Bless those who persecute (you), bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. **Have the same regard for one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly; do not be wise in your own estimation.** Do not repay anyone evil for evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all. **If possible, on your part, live at peace with all.** Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." Rather, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head." **Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good.***

CONQUERING EVIL WITH GOOD

To conquer evil with good we need to consider the Virtues to counteract the Seven Deadly Sins. Jesus gives us many examples to follow and there are many simple ways of practicing the Virtues. Here is a list as an example but feel free to make up your own.

Sin	Virtue and Biblical Examples	Current Examples
Pride	Humility Not to be served but to serve Washed Feet, You call me master and so I am"	Mother Teresa 1 Bucket, 2 Saris After You.....
Envy	Brotherly Love, Kindness, Charity Cross Be like little children	Rejoice for those who defeated you Be satisfied with enough
Anger	Meekness, Forbearance, Patience Christ on Trial Father forgive them	Forgo rights Forgive wrongs
Avarice	Liberality, Charity Go sell all you have, Widow's mite Let your left hand not know	Don't claim Help others
Sloth	Diligence Go extra mile Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is	Can I help you? Work for no reward
Gluttony	Temperance, Abstinence When you fast My bread is to do the father's will	Enough is enough No thank you
Lust	Chastity Woman taken in adultery Woman at well	Family first Don't Look! Don't buy! Complain!

WHO'S FAULT IS IT ANYWAY?

We are all at fault for letting it happen. As Lord Alton pointed out "You get the Government you vote for." As a nation we have lived off the fruits of selling past assets through privatisation; and spent the proceeds from the work of future generations through mortgaging the nation's assets - toll roads, sale and leaseback, student loans, promises of unfunded pension liabilities etc, etc.

On a personal scale the results are just as bad.

Anthony Elliott published a report in April 2005 (Centre for the Study of Financial Innovation) based on work with individuals who had "overborrowed who were clients of CCCS (the Consumer Credit Counselling Service). This seemed to suggest that contrary to the normal view which is that people get in debt trouble because something unexpected happens (i.e. they had correctly worked out what they could afford, but something happened like illness or unemployment); **it was their behaviour and that of the lenders that was mainly responsible for financial catastrophe.** In many cases the Debt was the cause of illness not vice versa. He formulated three things which can lead to major problems:

1. External Pressure (home, children, parents, peer lifestyle, business) or Internal Pressure (gambling, spending, greed) when those pressures are not resisted.
2. Personal financial management is foolhardy with thoughts like "It will sort itself out" "ignore the cost" or the classic "Borrow to pay off debts!"
3. Deliberate temptation by lenders - unrequested increases in limits, pressure marketing (often associated with products) consolidation loans, no credit checks.

As a rough guide it is suggested that unsecured debt should not be more than 50% of gross income, and he noted that probably 4,000,000 people are living in households who are over indebted in the UK.

There is a Biblical precedent. We can go right back to Genesis - Adam and Eve.

Crafty serpent tempts Eve, with the promise of riches at little or no cost.

Eve puts peer pressure on Adam (even though there were no neighbours to keep up with and fashion had not yet been invented). Foolishly they ignore the consequences and we, their children are still suffering because of it.

In our society bankers stopped being doctors and became barmen.

HOW DO WE GET OUT OF THIS MESS?

Which actions bring the spiritual fruits of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness and self-control"? Life is not easy.....It wouldn't be any fun if it was. We have free will but we may need help to make decisions. In particular we need the gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in Isaiah 11:2-3:

Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude Knowledge, Piety, Fear of the Lord

The Catechism makes several instructive points:

CCC 1786: "Faced with a moral choice, conscience can make either a right judgement in accordance with reason and the divine law, or on the contrary, an erroneous judgement that departs from them."

It goes on to suggest that we can learn from experience and notes that:

CCC 1786: "Some rules apply in every case:

1. One may never do evil so that good may result from it;
2. The Golden rule - Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them;
3. Charity always proceeds by way of respect for one's neighbour and his conscience: "Sinning against your brethren and wounding their conscience...you sin against Christ (1 Corinthians 8:12) Therefore it is right not to ...do anything that makes your brother stumble." (Romans 14:21)

The Pope is a scandal (to help us)

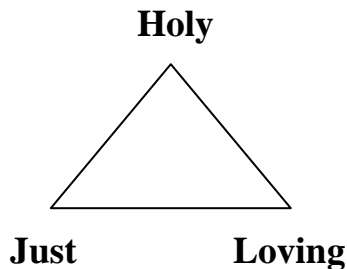
Pope Benedict highlighted the need to accept our failings:

"Throughout history Catholics have held up the Pope as an idealistic image, making a distinction between Peter the denier of Christ and Peter the Rock. "But in reality he was both of these....Has it not been thus throughout the history of the Church that the Pope the successor of peter, has been at once Petra and Skandalon - both the rock of God and a stumbling-block? In fact the faithful will always have to reckon with this paradox of the divine dispensation that shames their pride again and again." (Pope Benedict XVI quoted in the Magnificat April 2009.)

AN APPROACH TO HELP CONSIDER THE RIGHT THING TO DO

In a book called "Just Business" by Alexander Hill he notes the three attributes of God in the Bible:

GOD IS



and keeps all three in healthy tension

God is Holy and pure, avoiding evil. God is just, fair to all. God is Loving. But God is not so holy that we are wiped off the face of the earth because of our sins, nor is He so Just that He gives us the just retribution for our misdeeds. However, nor is He so besotted with us that He allows us to totally escape the consequences of our actions. We have free will, but if we are wilful we will reap the whirlwind!

Proverbs 16:3 "Commend your works to the Lord and your plans will succeed." NOT We tell God what we are going to do and then ask Him to bless it. We should prayerfully ask God to guide us as we consider what we should do in given situations.

WWJD

(What would Jesus do?)

WWJWMTD

(What would Jesus want me to do?)

WDIWTD Grace builds on Nature

(What do I want to do?)

WHAT ABOUT CHURCHES AND US AS INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIANS?

There are some instructive Biblical Comments that apply to many of the Sins noted above:

Philippians 4:12 "I know what it is to be in want and what it is to have plenty." Be Content in all situations. "I can do all things in him who strengthens me."

Matthew 6:19 "Do not store up treasure for yourself here on earth.....store up treasure for yourself with God" trust in God for material needs - like the flowers and the birds (6:28)

1 Timothy 6:8-10

"Indeed, religion with contentment is a great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, just as we shall not be able to take anything out of it. If we have food and clothing, we shall be content with that. Those who want to be rich are falling into temptation and into a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all evils, and some people in their desire for it have strayed from the faith and have pierced themselves with many pains. But you, man of God, avoid all this. Instead, pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness."

Proverbs 23:2

"Put a knife to your throat if you are given to gluttony".

1 Corinthians 13:4

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud."(1 Cor. 13:4).

Psalms 37:21

"The wicked man borrows and will not repay, but the upright is generous in giving."

Leviticus 26: 27-29

If, despite all this, you still persist in disobeying and defying me, I, also, will meet you with fiery defiance and will chastise you with sevenfold fiercer punishment for your sins, till you begin to eat the flesh of your own sons and daughters.

In Isaiah chapters 45-48 God sent a destructive agent of change (King Cyrus) to bring the Israelites to repentance. Do we, like Lazarus in the parable have to die before we notice those in need at our gates?

Galatians 5:15 "For you were called for freedom, brothers. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love. For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement, namely, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." But if you go on biting and devouring one another, beware that you are not consumed by one another. I say, then: live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh."

Have I, through my profligate use of the benefit I have received through government give aways, the boom years, cheap food, or higher house prices begun to **eat the flesh of my own sons and daughters**? What do you want to leave your children - a house or a debt? We have a duty to future generations not to trap them in chains of debt.

RECESSION - GOOD NEWS OR BAD?

Is this analysis of the recession Good News? In one sense, yes. Where sin increases, grace increases more. We have the opportunity to help our neighbours. To help them become free from their chains of debt, by recognising them for what they are. First we may have to cleanse ourselves. Do we have more debt than we can afford? Are there areas where our own spending is profligate or overindulgent? Scrupulosity and small mindedness are to be avoided, and Jesus came so that we might have life and have it to the full, but before we seek to help others, we need to be sure we have removed any planks in our own eyes.

Pray for the Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds and hearts. Do I need help with managing my debts? To whom should I go for advice? Do I know of others who need my help? Do they need advice, counselling from professionals, or financial help from me, or from others? Is my lifestyle in keeping with my Christian faith?

THEY AND WE CAN ALWAYS BE HELPED BY PRAYER.

Just as with ecology, God has created the world to be in balance and if one group or generation is profligate and wastes resources or fails to produce them, someone will suffer. We should not let the consequences of our sin fall upon our children. Earlier generations left their children legacies and we received them with gratitude. We live in a time when there is a real prospect that this generation will leave its children nothing but unpaid debts. Like the watchman in Ezekiel 33 we have a duty to warn others. Jesus lived simply, and others who had money supported him. Joseph in Egypt hoarded corn to good purpose; Joseph the Carpenter worked to serve Christ; Joseph of Arimathea had wealth to use to honour his body. We are all called to help our neighbour, Christ's Body on earth. We can help them realise that the Prince of Peace can help them cope with anxiety.

We thank God for the gift of money, so that the labour of all can be pooled and shared and we ask God's help for each one of us to use our money and our time wisely, so that the name of Jesus may be lifted up and all are drawn to experience His grace. Perhaps Our Lord foresaw this time, and the words of the Our Father are for us, now. **Help us be content with our daily bread....Forgive us our Debts.**

WE NEED TO LEAD BY EXAMPLE

In Mary's Magnificat in Luke 1 she noted that "He casts the mighty from their thrones and raises the lowly". On Holy Thursday, Christ demonstrated the long term solution to our economic and social problems: "You call me master and rightly so. If I, the Lord have washed your feet, you must wash each other's feet." (John 13:13)

Call it corporate responsibility if you will, but it is personal too. The celebration of this act of loving service in Churches throughout the world is more than purely symbolic; it is an example of servant leadership and brotherly love. It is only surpassed by the loving sacrifice of Good Friday.

As Pope Benedict said "God is Love" and as the Beatles said "All you need is Love" and "Money can't buy you Love." We need to use our individual talents wisely. We all hope to be at the banquet in Heaven where Christ - an impoverished Asian and former refugee from Africa - will welcome us.