

FRANCISCANS AND MONEY

Compiled by John Fox in 2009 under the aegis of TSSF Study and Prayer

OVERVIEW

Introduction

The stimulus for this booklet arose from contemplation during a private retreat at St Michael's Convent, Ham Common in February 2009, at the height of the financial crisis. In the recent book 'My God, My All – A Friar's Journey' about Brother Bernard, SSF, attention is drawn to seven priority issues that Bernard felt would spread the Franciscan charism today. One of these reads:

'Creative and detailed studies of world development and the search for realistic alternatives to offset the motivation of gain which drives capitalism to expansionism and consumerism, at whatever cost to non-replaceable resources, pollution, recognition of human rights. The earth cannot sustain an ever-increasing population at the current Western level, even if that was desirable. The Franciscan witness to the rich world points to the motivation to 'live simply, that others may simply live'.

2009 has been a year for reflection on the implications of the global financial crisis that has shaken the foundations of society, and jolted many into reappraising their life priorities. As Franciscans we may have been as directly affected as others, but have perhaps been able to take a more compassionate, philosophical and independent view of the various outcomes of this crisis. Indeed, one contributor has positively welcomed the crisis as an opportunity for people to change their ways; a fresh perspective on 'wealth' has been perceived by many, whether affected personally or not. Tertiary Franciscans have generally had an ongoing problem with money, wondering whether this or that indulgence were reasonable or luxurious. Consequently this crisis has tended to focus the mind for Franciscans, and to draw attention to determining personal, corporate and political priorities.

Various written offerings have been received in a request for relevant contributions on the topic, and they tend to fall into the following categories:

Section A The Global Economy

Economic overview – Nigel Herriott

Is sustainable capitalism possible? - Nancy Adams

The wisdom of Francis and Clare in economic hard times – Jeff Gollither

Section B Corporate Culture

A perspective on interest/usury and money-making – David Swain

Be close to the poor – write-up by John Fox

The value of principles in today's business world – Jackie Nelson

Ethics and finance – John Fox

Section C Individual Behaviour

The theology of enough – John Fox

Paying taxes in a recession – Steve Hackett

Francis poor and lowly enters heaven rich – write-up by John Fox

Section D Capitalism through to Franciscan Charity

The spirit of poverty and the credit crunch – John Franks

Money, the market, and people in need – John Franks

These articles provide us with some fascinating insights as to how Christians, and specifically Franciscans, see the implications for themselves personally, for their employing organisations, for their families and for their world – it is a heady mix.

In mulling over the causes of the crisis and attempting to learn lessons for the future, the material does seem to highlight the following aspects:

The Love of Money

One of the most striking inputs came from Paul Moore, the HBOS Whistleblower, who, in telling his story, claims that *'The love of money, with its pride and vanity, blinds good people'*. If you think about it, the working material within financial institutions is money, it is the commodity with which banking employees are consistently dealing, and money figures persistently in everyone's mind. From the perspective of an engineer who became a management consultant in various process or manufacturing situations, including a long spell in the City, there has always been some discomfort about working in a financial institution where there was no tangible end product, and where the service aspect seemed to be secondary to the money content involved. Though a personal perception, people working in banks are surely more prone to loving money disproportionately, and this love really could seem potentially 'evil' in that it might lead people to distorted judgements and catastrophic actions.

Ambition and Success

Ambition and achieving success are virtues that we all hope to realise in our chosen careers, family and social relationships, personal or church lives. However, ambition and success have their darker shadow side, which is when the balance is tipped over from prudence to greed, and you can unwittingly become overwhelmed. I believe that, when further success beckons and everyone else applauds the achievements made, there comes a point when the next step could represent greed, even fraud, or aggressive bullying within an organisation. That additional achievement, when everyone will fall back with admiration at your boldness, and the superiority you demonstrate, is just too tempting. A typical example is the foolhardiness of lenders who provided 125% home loans, and then, to minimise risk, sliced and diced them into composite packages and sold them on. The application of Christian values is so desperately important in this context.

Simplicity

It is considered by many that the complexity of the fringe financial products offered by banks contributed to the financial crisis, in that the directors responsible just didn't appreciate the implications or current status at any one time. Stephen Green, Chairman of HSBC and an Anglican priest, has said *'The complexity and opacity of certain financial instruments reached a point where even senior and experienced bankers had trouble understanding them, let alone investors. This meant that people were selling and buying assets whose risks they had not properly assessed.'* If financial institutions had stuck to simpler, less risky products and practices they would not be in the mess in which they found themselves. Simplicity is a Franciscan virtue that is undoubtedly not applied or appreciated sufficiently widely, and which should be at the heart of our Franciscan commitment.

The Shadow Side of Capitalism

In a recent play by David Hare about the credit crunch, 'The Power of Yes', one of the participants makes the trenchant comment *'Capitalism only works well when greed is balanced by fear'*. This is a fascinating observation, as it so well describes the situation regarding the emergence of self-certification for mortgage loans; there was no evidence of ability to pay required, so sub-prime loans were created without difficulty. Greed overtook fear in a big way, and the world is still suffering the consequences.

Salt and Light

A major implication for us as Christians, and Franciscans, is that we are called to be 'salt and light' in whatever situation we may find ourselves, particularly in relation to organisational behaviour, where we could have the opportunity of influencing significant decisions. This is consistent with our TSSF aim *'to spread a*

spirit of love and harmony, and to counter prejudice and seek justice (Principles Days 7, 8 & 9). This aspect is so relevant at a time of crisis, when there tends to be a general atmosphere of fear and panic.

Humility

Humility seems to be feature that has been absent in the financial sector following the crisis, and there are few visible signs of repentance or intentions of changing the mode of operation. Bankers appear to be rushing headlong to re-establish operations exactly the same as before, with high levels of pay and bonuses, and extravagant lifestyles. One would have hoped for a suitable gesture, such as a reduction in total pay levels, to demonstrate a willingness to undergo some 'sacrifice' in the wake of the traumas that their clients and customers have been facing.

The Value and Privilege of Work and Money

In John Frank's powerful paper on 'Money, the market and people in need' he highlights the incredible privilege of having a job and earning sufficient money to be comfortable or well-off. He demonstrates starkly that each time we spend money we are making a moral choice, eg tiling his hall at a cost of £700 could imply that 14 less children in a poor African country would be educated for one year, at £50 per child – similarly with a new car, TV or kitchen. This financial crisis has heightened an awareness of the value of money, and it behoves us, as Franciscans, to be diligently considerate in the disbursement of our earnings.

So there is much to consider further, and the topic of 'Franciscans and Money' will continue to be debated at Local Group and Area levels for many years to come. We believe, that through the gift of the life and witness of Francis and Clare, we are blessed by being able to view money in a realistic perspective. The sections that follow attempt to summarise the main points of the articles submitted; the full versions may be accessed through the TSSF website www.tssf.org.uk.

Section A The Global Economy

Future Global Scenario

In Nigel Herriott's overview he claims that the challenge for the human race is how to develop an economic system that will work for the 21st century. We have all lived for many years in a false 'bubble', created by the use of cheap overseas labour and borrowing huge sums to fund our lifestyles – in effect, it's time for reality to set in. The problem is that the government seems reluctant, if not powerless, to make any changes that might damage our generous welfare state and a cushioned life, including the biggest Ponzi scheme on the planet, unfunded public sector pensions.

Western economies have experienced steady growth and expect this to continue; the entire economic system is based on an assumption of growth. Yet there are predictions that such growth is unsustainable. World population continues to grow alarmingly, from 2 billion 100 years ago to 6.8 today and a forecast 9 billion by 2050. In a recent Cambridge lecture by a defence security specialist, Ian Shields, he claimed that of the 9 billion quoted, 1 billion would be living comfortably, 2 would be getting by, and 6 billion would be living below the poverty level. The growing population is placing huge burdens on natural resources, particularly water, and is driving global warming through the production of greenhouse gases. It is estimated that we shall reach the limit this century, but no one wants to take the painful decisions necessary; so it is a daunting scenario against which to consider the implications for Franciscans and Money.

Franciscan Wisdom in a Time of Change

Jeff Gollither's paper relating to economic hard times is highly relevant to our review. He claims that the 'environmental crisis' is really a crisis in our economic system, ie that we are taking more than we give, destroying what is not ours to destroy - when it is actually God's. Environmental problems have economic causes; talking about 'the environmental crisis' is misleading and diverts attention from the real situation. Francis knew 'how deeply the delusions of the world take root in our hearts and minds', so Franciscan rules and principles in this context are very appropriate. 'Land reform' has caused environmental and economic injustice in Central and South America. Rich people benefit, poor people suffer. We mislead ourselves by the structure of our thoughts, and it is suggested that we should be careful about the use of words. We should find out what words such as 'simplicity' and 'community' really mean to us in our hearts and minds, and hold fast to that. Words get distorted and we can be deflected from our inner interpretation. For example, the global financial system is not based on 'livelihood' - the reality is that livelihood and community are sacrificed for the sake of the economic system (as in the communities being destroyed in Borneo through deforestation).

Jeff reflects on his own experience and tells a pertinent story about his great grandfather, Joel, who was a 'dowser' (water diviner) in the Blue Ridge Mountains in Appalachia. The family were gathered around the lunch table one Sunday - Joel never said a word but usually smiled benignly at the head of the table - when Jeff, as a young boy, queried where the chemical residue from the local furniture factory was being disposed of. He was greeted by a stony silence, because no one had even thought about it or knew the answer; but Joel challenged them through his sad look: 'Has someone poisoned the well?'. This obviously set in train various corrective actions, and it showed Jeff how powerful straightforward questions can be, and how forceful can be the impact of just one person. He points out that his small town knew about 'sustainable communities' long before legislation was introduced to protect workers and the environment; the family-owned factory was deeply rooted in the community, where people listened and responded without creating a fuss. 'Sacred knowledge of this kind is, above all, practical. It brings together our primeval instinct for survival, the basic need for livelihood, and an awareness of community, with the higher calling of the sacred in the most intricate and intimate way.'

Francis said that 'we must be firmly convinced that we have nothing of our own except our vices and sins.' The web of life is not ours for the taking. Words matter, and our vows really do make a difference; we should take them to heart, finding out what they mean within ourselves, and we'll learn to live again, Jeff suggests.

Sustainable Capitalism?

Nancy Adams complements Jeff's comments and questions by querying whether capitalism in its present form is sustainable in the longer-term. She had hoped that the crisis would prompt long overdue changes in our lifestyles, reinforcing Jeff's point that we are living beyond our means and that this cannot continue as before. The assumption has been that unlimited growth would be possible via free trade, and that regulation and unfettered capitalism would sustain us as we continued to grow, GDP being the main indicator of economic development. Personal and corporate 'want' has taken over from basic human 'need' as the governing force of consumption.

Nancy sees the crisis as an opportunity of reinforcing awareness of our future environmental bleakness, and of stimulating positive action to slow down or eliminate climate change. She urges us to take note of the following 'life lessons' to counter some of the illusions which have contributed to our current situation:

- We are all interconnected, in contrast to apparent independence.
- We need to live lives of moderation, rather than of unlimited prosperity.
- We must ensure that our values are virtues, since all values are not identical.

She quotes Jonathan Porritt, author of 'Capitalism as if the World Matters', calling for a system of wealth creation that simultaneously addresses both the climate crunch and the oil crunch. President Obama has given some hope of positive thinking on climate change, on security issues, on nuclear disarmament, on a transformed global economy, which wasn't there in the US before.

But the signs are that we are returning basically to the status quo, though there has been a welcome thrust in the direction of green manufacturing initiatives and new investment in energy efficiency and renewables. The flaws of capitalism still remain starkly present, however. John Franks, already referred to, challenges the motivations behind capitalism, and expresses a doubt that the model would ever be capable of reform. He quotes instances of the way markets behave impersonally, eg organisations merging to obtain better shareholder value, whilst causing those made redundant untold misery. Relating to David Hare's comment in his play about personal greed being balanced by fear for capitalism to work well, there was evidently insufficient fear present when self-certified mortgage loans were introduced – what an indictment of the system!

John Franks opens by repeating Jesus' statement that 'You cannot serve God and money' (Luke 16 v 13), one of his most emphatic statements, and surprisingly Jesus refers to money and possessions in over 20 parables. Jesus chose money as the antithesis of God, and we can observe that, at the present time, even in recession, the increasingly global civilisation is obsessed with the acquisition of wealth and possessions. In this context John sees it as a spiritual battle for Christians, who can perhaps modify the adverse impact of market forces through personal influence wherever possible. Christians, too, can assist in developing appropriate business ventures, such as micro-credit initiatives. He suggests that we can embrace the spirit of poverty and ask ourselves, and God within us, what we should be doing with the money and the 'stuff' we have stewardship of, day by day, transaction by transaction. Jesus told us to be responsible, to be generous, to be good stewards of the material, whilst not loving money or the system.

Nancy mentions Ghandi's exhortation 'be the change you want in the world' and suggests we should ask ourselves whether we have the vision and courage to meet the money-related challenges that are facing us. This booklet contains some pragmatic approaches to doing just that in our personal and corporate lives, whether we be involved in business, public service, professional life, the Church, charities or retired.

Section B Corporate Culture

Ethics and Finance

As an example of the spiritual battle referred to earlier there can be none more relevant than the painful experience of Paul Moore, head of regulatory risk at Halifax/Bank of Scotland (HBOS) from 2001, having had a distinguished career in risk and regulation up to that point. He began a talk about his experience by reading from Psalm 62: *'My soul finds rest in God alone: my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and salvation; he is my fortress, I shall never be shaken. How long will you assault a man? Would all of you throw him down... they fully intend to topple him from his lofty place; they delight in lies...'* Paul was anxious to point out that he was not motivated by revenge, but felt that there were important lessons to be learned by the finance industry from his experiences. Interestingly he said 'God transforms us through problems and grace', and has mentioned privately that he had subsequently found nothing but peace and joy through God's grace after the initial trauma of his dismissal.

Following concerns by the regulator about HBOS's finances in 2003, Paul was promoted to resolve the situation that had arisen from the bank's overriding objective of outselling the competition. He made his own assessment and gave the Audit committee an early warning in March, followed by a more specific injunction in June with strong evidence to back this up. Risk management in the bank was very lax, and he concluded that 'We could never hit sales targets and sell ethically; sales come first.' Based on further evidence a Board report was tabled by the Audit Committee in October. The outcome was dismissal personally by the Chief Executive in November 2005; power doesn't take kindly to the truth being spoken, and he had to leave promptly.

Paul said that he hadn't appreciated the possible personal implications of the HBOS crisis coming before it happened, but with hindsight he saw it as a gift, with faith, hope and charity being the key to addressing the situation. He claimed that the personal suffering involved had done him the world of good; an honest perspective had removed anger from his soul. *'The love of money, with its pride and vanity, blinds good people'* he said. This is a wonderful example of putting Day 9 of the Principles into practice, resulting from a deep, inner conviction of what is right in ethical terms, borne of a strong Christian faith – for which Paul lost his job and his livelihood. He claims that he was not a radical or risk-averse person, but believes that everything is possible with God, a course of action that he followed through with courage and persistence.

Values and Principles

There are many instances of the benefits of a more ethical approach within business being taken, and more notably the potentially drastic consequences arising when this has been absent. A set of Principles, as a guide for those in business and organisational life, was published in 2006 by the Christian Association of Business Executives (www.cabe-online.org), with one feature for each day of the month, a concept borrowed from the Franciscans. In her paper Jackie Nelson, CABA's Director, highlights the following as examples:

- **Work ethically:** *'...Leading businesses care how results are obtained and will choose the course of highest integrity in guiding their affairs,....'* The penalty for failing in this is starkly illustrated by the collapse of Enron, but the reputation of many other businesses (and their consequent positive results) stands in marked contrast.
- **Courage:** *'...This quality requires an underlying strength and preparedness to speak out for the truth....'* Paul Moore's courage in facing the HBOS Board with the truth cost him his job.
- **Care:** *'We aim to show a sympathetic response to all we meet during the course of our professional and business lives...'* The attitude shown by John Franks and his colleagues in setting up and operating debt counselling centres is a wonderful demonstration of this quality.
- **Contributing financially:** *'We all expect to give generously when discharging our community responsibilities....'* Franciscans have an opportunity to lead the way on giving through embracing poverty.
- **Prayerfulness:** *'We seek through prayer to discern the divine will for our lives; we recognise that we cannot fulfil these aims unless our lives are supported by prayer....'* Prayer for the workplace is as necessary as for other parts of our lives, as Franciscans will appreciate.

Some interesting aspects were raised during a Finance Forum mounted by CABA in 2009 and described in the paper 'Be Close to the Poor'. The bankers present agreed that it was both a moral and a leadership crisis that was being experienced. Though the system models were seen to be foolproof, inappropriate decisions were taken by flawed individuals because of an unstoppable chase for competitive business success, because of greed. There was a welcome degree of humility present, and a positive move declared in relation to a search for more ethical products, such as micro-credit and investment in green ventures, such as

forestry. There was also a wish expressed of doing more for charitable ventures, such as an active involvement with the local homeless.

Capitalism as a Potential Force for Good

During 2008/9 statements have been made by some notable individuals, including leading churchmen, declaring that 'The end of Capitalism' has been brought about by the financial crisis. This would seem to be an exaggeration, since capitalism represents the only viable economic system that currently exists. Isn't it rather like the way money can be put to good or evil use, and the Internet is similarly a potential force for good, but equally a potential source of evil. The Christian message is promulgated throughout the world via the Internet, for example, and the Franciscan websites offer many positive sources of Christian guidance and interest. It is the way that capitalism is operated, and the behaviour of decision-makers involved, that will determine the outcomes. Tomorrow's Company, an offshoot of the Royal Society of the Arts and Manufacture, has developed some improved guidelines on how corporations should operate more fairly and ethically. Essentially these guidelines are based on giving fair recognition to all the stakeholders in a business; employees, suppliers, customers, investors, the local community and so on. This is quite different to the skewed perspective of companies operating to benefit bosses and shareholders, which has been the traditional view. Today, companies are frequently assessed regarding their corporate social responsibility initiatives, ie the extent to which they sponsor community projects and other charitable ventures, which is a very positive trend.

The structure of a company is also a topical feature within this debate. Mutual or co-operative companies have become increasingly recognised as sound models for involving employees and investors to beneficial effect. One prominent example is the John Lewis Partnership organisation, which has a very collaborative ethos that has been commercially successful. There are many other examples, though, and it is the people-based approach of involving different stakeholders that is attractive to the Christian. Consequently the task for us as Franciscans is surely to influence positively any organisation that we are involved with, so that it becomes as much a force for good as is possible.

Section C Individual Behaviour

The Theology of Enough

This appears to be a concept which Francis would have embraced warmly, though he himself always survived on much less than enough – but the definition of 'enough' depends entirely on individual judgement, and would be quite different for each person. A teenager (when he badly wanted something) commented: 'The luxuries of one generation become the essentials of the next'. In a tough economic climate, however, the norm for 'enough' can perhaps be lowered to meet ongoing demands less indulgently.

Studies show that the 'Theology of Enough' emerged around the mid-70s, evidenced from two main sources:

- **'Enough is Enough'** was published by John Taylor, the newly appointed Bishop of Winchester, in 1975. In his book he describes the Hebrews' dream of *shalom* being much broader than peace. He referred to the harmony implicit in an awareness of God. It meant a dancing kind of inter-relationship between various elements, 'seeking something more free than equality, more generous than equity, the ever-shifting equipoise of a life-system. Economically and socially this dream of *shalom* found its expression in what I call the theology of enough.' Taylor mentions that the Old Testament has many references to covetousness and greed, but

that another quality *betsa* (Hebrew) - the desire of overriding ambition, and using unjust or fraudulent means - is also roundly condemned. He points out that the New Testament has a stern veto against grasping excess, or covetousness, wanting more and more, and that it is frequently linked to sexual lust with which it has much in common. He emphasises that one should fit one's own needs to the needs of others and shun an inherent lust for possession and domination. He concludes by saying: 'The prodigal son remembered his father's home as the place where even the lowest paid servant has enough and to spare, and this is the emphasis that the New Testament gives to the theology of enough. Excess is not simply prohibited; it is replaced by a lavish generosity of both give and take.'

- **Habitat for Humanity**, the well-known international housing charity, was founded by Millard and Linda Fuller in the 70's in the US - it has spread throughout the world, and there is now a branch in the UK that has recently built many houses for people in the poverty trap unable to afford their own home, initially in Peckham, using business sponsors and volunteer labour that includes the new house owners. Millard was a dedicated Christian and his understanding of needs and wants - what he called the 'Theology of Enough' - was grounded in his Christian faith. He wrote: 'There are sufficient resources in the world for the needs of everybody, but not enough for the greed of even a significant minority.'

This concept, however, really started with Jesus. When he asked the disciples what they had to feed the multitude and they said five loaves and two fishes, he said in effect 'That is enough'. What is 'enough' for us though?

Other writers and theologians have taken up the theology of enough. Michael Schut, the author of *Simpler Living, Compassionate Life*, says it 'allows us to move away from worshipping the gods of consumption and material need. In living out a theology of enough we will no longer expend our physical resources in consumption and our emotional resources in worrying over status.' John Madeley, writing in the *Guardian* on 31 January 2009, highlights the implications of 'enough' in relation to the economy. He makes the point that employment may fall in firms that make products that go well beyond 'enough', but if they were socially useful products, eg green technologies, then this could help to stabilise the economy. He suggests that the expectation of year-on-year, across the board economic growth is unrealistic and unsustainable. For an optimistic scenario he points to an ideal state when economy growth per quarter might rise or fall by 1% without the stock market having a nervous breakdown. The blight of short-termism, the requirement to increase profits every quarter, has been the downfall of many notable businesses in the past, and this is likely to continue in the future if the status quo is maintained.

There is, of course, a downside to 'enough'; for example, if you are satisfied by achieving only just enough rather than aiming for excellence. However, most organisations nowadays set targets for achievement - in hospitals, schools, businesses - and many working individuals are subject to penetrating personal assessments of their performance each year. This is usually a positive process, and a useful means of raising overall standards through encouragement rather than chastisement. It does, however, raise the question about 'What is enough?' when setting these targets.

Franciscan Relevance

The above comments appear to highlight the fact that 'enough' can be a delicate balance between excess and scarcity. Franciscans will observe how Francis embraced both **simplicity** and **poverty**, and how these characteristics may help us to determine what is enough in a given situation. It is rather like when an

organisation has to reduce costs dramatically to survive in a recession; often the first round of cuts don't go far enough, and to everyone's amazement, it proves possible to have one or two further rounds of costs before 'enough' is reached. The lesson drawn from this is that you can reduce expectations down to an acceptable level by revisiting the target several times. Similarly you can move upwards, eg when deciding how much to give regularly to a church; you can perhaps settle for a painless sum at first and then, after challenging oneself, talk the amount up to a more reasonable level (and then again to a sacrificial level if one is sufficiently courageous!). There is no defined figure in such situations – it is a question of judgement, which we well appreciate from trying to follow Franciscan guidelines when spending money on cars, houses, holidays, furniture, etc.

In a tough economic situation, though, what was previously enough may no longer be appropriate, and that is why it can be helpful to look to Jesus and Francis to remind ourselves where our priority values lie. Let's try to test out some challenges regarding what is 'enough':

1. Eating out: Related to circumstances, once a week, a month, or 3 months?
2. Holidays: Go away for how many weeks per year? 1, 2, 3, or 4? Spend no more than £1,000 per person per year? Or other?
3. Charitable giving: 10% of gross income or less – or more?
4. Housing: Own a house with the mortgage paid off by age 60? Or rent?
5. Savings: Valid amount for a rainy day, or care in old age?
6. Entertainment: Go to a cinema, theatre, concert once a week, or month? Buy books, CDs, DVDs or use a library? Own a TV, mobile phone, ipod?
7. Clothes: One or two new garments/shoes per 3, 6 months or a year?
8. Pension: Have all steps been taken to optimise a pension?

These are just some key expenditure items to consider – and there are few rules! Everyone will have a different response to the above questions, but for Franciscans this is particularly challenging, especially if one is not well off (many would claim that the volumes mentioned are far too liberal, and should be considerably less if one were a genuine tertiary!).

Another Franciscan quality that relates indirectly to 'enough' is simplicity, which is a most attractive quality. In an extract from The First Rule Francis wrote: 'But the spirit acceptable to the Lord wishes the flesh to be disciplined and despised, vile, worthless, and blameworthy. It seeks to establish humility and patience, **pure simplicity**, and true peace of spirit.'

Simplicity is a clean, crisp, ordered virtue that is practical in its application and not overtly spiritual. The outcome of simplicity may well be spiritually beneficial, however, because it enables complexity to be avoided. There are some people who seem to revel in life being complicated, and everything is therefore complicated because they lack the will to aim for simplicity. However, aiming for simplicity in one's life, both personally and in relation to a career, can be highly beneficial.

A few examples may perhaps illustrate this aspect:

- **Solving business problems:** When faced with a difficult problem in business or organisational life it is generally necessary to reduce the number of variables down to a manageable level. In other words, one has to determine which elements are trivial and which are really significant. This is sometimes known as the 80/20 rule. As an example just take the level of giving in a church; you will normally find that 80% of the stewardship income will come from approximately from 20% of the membership. Consequently you have to identify the key factors in any given situation, and then make decisions based accordingly.

- **Choosing between 2 or 3 options:** There is a helpful method of choosing between options by identifying the key factors involved, drawing up a list and then rating each factor 1 to 10. You add up the total for each option and then play around with the figures, which helps to identify the preferred option. This can apply, for example, when looking to move to a new house, giving ratings to each factor such as attractiveness, price, location, space, garden, etc
- **Managing one's life:** We can often face the danger of being involved with too many tasks and activities in life. Aiming for simplicity can help to clarify, when seeking guidance from God, which activities he thought were priorities and which we should drop or not take on. This is a fundamental issue in life, and some Franciscans are vulnerable to taking on too much and making their lives unbearably complicated and demanding. So striving for simplicity when seeking guidance from the Holy Spirit is really helpful.
- **Appreciating God's world:** Looking at the simplicity of nature and observing the sheer beauty of flowers, bushes and trees that just emerge during spring and summer can sometimes overwhelm one. Keeping things simple seems to enhance the attractiveness and relevance of surroundings. A wonderful example are many Franciscan chapels, which are just gorgeous in their simplicity – in contrast to some over elaborate churches you might come across! This can help one to pray, and it is the unfussiness of Franciscan life and worship that is very appealing – one can envisage Francis as he walked through the fields and lanes of Umbria, spreading peace, love, harmony and joy as he went.
- **Silence:** The simplicity of silence is something to be nurtured and enjoyed. Away from the hubbub of life, undisturbed by noise, it is possible for God to speak to us more clearly. There is a beauty in silence, particularly when walking in a park or garden, focusing on God and his love for us. This appreciation may take some years to acquire and silent retreats, particularly individually guided ones, seem strange at first. But the simplicity of silence is worth pursuing!

Tertiaries have long striven in their life to achieve that clear, focused approach which the Franciscan way of life implies. Simplicity helps guide one to determining more easily what is 'enough'. It is important to do this if one wants to avoid worrying too much about any particular problem, or falling into depression, which it is all too easy to do. Simplicity helps to lift the soul, and concentrates the mind on drawing close to God as a priority – if only we could achieve this more consistently!

Wider Implications

One of the main outcomes of a harsh economic experience is that it seems to highlight genuine lasting assets, such as love within one's circle of family and friends, one's connections in the workplace, membership of a church and clubs, and above all one's relationship with God. You cannot say that any of these aspects merit an assessment of 'enough' – you cannot have too much love or companionship; this doesn't depend on having possessions or holidays, and is not harmful to the community, environment, etc! This is real wealth that we are talking about, based on true values. We shall also be concerned for people we know who do not have much money, and we shall be even more aware of the urgent charitable needs that are not being met as donation levels fluctuate. But we should be positive, and rejoice in the love of Christ we experience that transcends these worldly considerations.

In Timothy Radcliffe's book 'Why go to Church?' he emphasises that Eucharist means 'Thanksgiving'. He quotes Ronald Rolheiser: '*To be a saint is to be fuelled*

by gratitude, nothing more and nothing less'. Also Meister Eckhart: 'If the only prayer I ever make is 'Thank You'.....that is enough'. We should be reminded of Jesus' sayings referred to earlier regarding the five loaves and two fishes, and the prodigal son when he yearned to be as well off as his father's servants: 'There is enough and to spare'. Doesn't this really apply to most of us, as individuals and in working lives? So shouldn't we aim for a positive shift away from acquisitiveness, towards a spirit of gratitude and generosity? This would seem to identify the heart of the theology of 'enough'. Perhaps there is a need for a radical change in attitude if we are to follow Christ in the way of Francis more devotedly.

Francis poor and lowly enters heaven rich

This was the title of the talk given by Brother Philip Bartholomew, SSF at an Area Day on 14 March 2009; the title comes from the liturgy of the Transitus, held on 3 October on the eve of St Francis (TSSF manual p D8).

Br Philip illustrated his talk by relating two passages from Scripture to aspects of Francis's life, as summarised below:

1. **The Beatitudes** in Luke 6 v 20-23, focusing on 'Blessed are you who are poor'. He told of observing a woman in an optician's in Canning Town, East London the day before, asking how much an eye test would be. When told that it would be £25 her body language demonstrated clearly her utter disappointment, she was completely crestfallen because she could not afford it and left the shop. How could he tell her that she was blessed? Br Philip related this to Francis's 'crossover moment' when he met a leper; he threw away pretence and subsequently adopted poverty as his focus (or bride, he would say). Francis, dressed in fine clothes and probably riding on a horse, saw a bundle of rags at the roadside and dismounted to find that it was a person. Horror of horrors, when the face was revealed it turned out to be that of a leper, apparently a well-known aversion for Francis. But Francis met the grace of God; a shameful object became an object of love and compassion, and he was blessed by this encounter. At first, confronted by poverty, Francis offered his purse to the leper (don't we all feel absolved by giving money?), but then got closer and the leper croaked 'For the love of Christ, give me comfort'. So one might say that Francis got off his high horse into the gutter, encountered and engaged with the leper – and found Christ, the 'crossover moment'. Francis becomes identified with Jesus, embracing pain and inconvenience to find an inner joy through being identified with the poor. Br Philip indicated that for him as a Friar, who has no possessions, he places an emphasis personally on his use of time when encountering the needy and poor. He suggests that we should always be ready to listen, to comfort, to embrace the poverty of the moment and encounter holy and precious joy.
2. **The Rich Man** in Mark 10 v 17-24, emphasising how shocked the rich man was after being told by Jesus to sell all that he had and give the money to the poor. Br Philip linked this to Francis's act in giving back his clothes to his father, and, in an unforgettable gesture, publicly standing naked in front of the Bishop of Assisi. Br Philip remarked that God can do great things for us when we stand naked before him. Apparently Francis said 'I have only one Father' when he handed back his clothes; the separation of father and son was a tragedy for Francis, and a sacrifice also for the family. So this reminds us of the phrase in Day 27 of the TSSF Principles '.... and gladly give of ourselves, remembering that love is measured by sacrifice' – a telling comment. 'Losing all, I own the world' was the cry of Francis. When Francis gave back his clothes the poor clothed Francis and welcomed him as one of them. Francis really entered the Kingdom when he renounced wealth and identified with the real world, the needy and poor.

One can begin to see how Francis entered heaven rich. He began to appreciate the nature of true wealth, and surely that is relevant to where we find ourselves in relation to our use of money. How do we preach 'Blessed are the poor?'. Br Philip drew attention to the often remarked 'cleansing nature' of a financial recession, which is worth considering more deeply. There have been some surprising outcomes recently, such as Comic Relief raising £59m in 2009 compared with £42m in 2008, up 40% in the middle of a recession! Wouldn't we say that the Spirit of God was moving them to give so generously? We are a global community and the poor can be found everywhere, particularly in African countries such as Zimbabwe, and perhaps people are gradually realising the compelling reasons for supporting these poverty-stricken areas even more. Br Philip told us he had been delighted when snow brought the city of London to a standstill – it demonstrated that things can be wiped out at a stroke, such as our investments, which seems to reinforce the perception that worldly aspects are not vital.

In the discussion that followed in three groups, a number of interesting points were raised. They included these:

- A priest described how her church had a number of Zimbabwean members, and consequently that the church was collecting clothes for the people of Zimbabwe, which they would then send through a contact at Harare airport and a Pastor in Zimbabwe. To achieve this they had to collect £280 for one load to get the clothes there; quite a challenge for a relatively poor church.
- The same church was also concentrating on cookery as a means of reducing the cost of meals. So they had initiated cooking classes and parties, where all the participants were cooking together and having a high old time! The social benefits had been huge, as the communal interaction had proved very stimulating. We heard of another church that has started up cookery classes – for men!
- One tertiary mentioned that he had been spending time with the homeless in Chelmsford, and he found that the financial crisis was passing them by – they had no money so they were not missing it!
- Another Franciscan reminded us that many older people were reliant on interest from their savings as their main source of income, and that this had virtually disappeared overnight. We should perhaps be more sensitive to this situation.
- There was much emphasis in discussion about the nature of true wealth, the values arising from our faith, and that as a consequence we felt that we should perhaps give more money charitably (as people who gave to Comic Relief obviously intuitively thought). The relevance of the Franciscan emphasis on Simplicity was felt to be a priority issue for us all.
- Whether or not to give money to someone begging was hotly debated. Some were very much in favour of giving (surely we could all spare a pound?) whilst others were doubtful because of the likelihood of the money being spent on drugs or alcohol (and that donations should preferably be given to homeless charities?).
- Br Philip suggested that we could always pray for poor and vulnerable people, whatever our age or condition. He also reminded us that we have a voice, and should act in specific situations either individually or for a charity implementing a particular advocacy campaign.
- A young black woman from Africa suggested that the people in the UK have much to learn from Africans regarding life as a community. She claimed that everyone helped everyone else there, rather like being in one big family, very different from what she had found here.
- We were struck by the words of the leper 'For the love of Christ, give me comfort'. We felt it important for us to know our own need of God, and to ask him for a more generous spirit. Sometimes we are called upon to offer hospitality of the heart (ie time) rather than money.

- In terms of physical hospitality, friends worshipping at St Mark's cathedral in Seattle have opened their hearts to homeless people and offered space in their 'Tent City' in the Cathedral grounds, ministering to them accordingly. This venture has been mutually beneficial, we understand.

Another thought that has come to mind, emerging from the time when Jesus was throwing out the money-changers from the temple: 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my father's house a market-place!'. This could be taken as a significant symbol for Christians, it is suggested, since perhaps our market places could be more important to us than our worship? We all have to review our financial priorities from time to time. Where are the genuine riches that we are seeking? Are we prepared to sell all that we have and give to the poor? One can only conclude that we all fall short of these high ideals, and it is apparent that we could improve significantly on our commitments, our loyalties to Christ and to the church.

Section D Capitalism through to Franciscan Charity

Money, the market, and people in need

John Franks, a tertiary in West Wales, reflects on his personal journey in corporate life, leading to charitable experience:

In a world where phrases like 'The economy', 'The financial market', and 'The banking crisis' tend to conjure images of nation states, networks of stock markets, and massive, impersonal banks, it seems vitally important that Christians - and perhaps especially Franciscans committed to The Spirit of Poverty - should be able to look beyond the impact of our Credit Culture on the global financial machine, to its human cost, and how we can help those people whose lives are being blighted by them both.

Money

'You cannot serve both God and money', Jesus said (Luke 16:13), which is perhaps, on reflection, quite surprising. After all, if we had been there and were trying to anticipate his last word, we might have been expecting 'power', 'self interest', or even 'The Devil', but as the target for one of the most emphatic statements of Christ's ministry, he chose money.

Money of itself is simply a token for exchange, be it gold, a cheque, plastic, or electronic transfer, but as soon as it is employed it compels the user to make a moral choice. If we buy ourselves a 'skinny cafe latte with an extra shot' then that is three pounds that we haven't given to the Big Issue seller who is trying to work his way back from a life on the streets. If we take that twenty thousand pound windfall to replace our car with a new one, given that a charity like Christian Aid can provide education for a child in Africa for about fifty pounds a year, that car represents four hundred kids who won't be going to school in 2010. We all face these choices, we all sometimes choose the cafe latte or the car - and obviously that can be the correct choice - but the point is that every time we use money we make moral choices that affect others. Another powerful observation regarding money concerns what might be called its universality, ie the world is afflicted by the effects of many sins, leading to many social ills, but while it is the lot of only some to fall deeply into violence, sexual exploitation or crippling addictions, every day, everyone - rich or poor - has to wrestle with the temptations and implications of the use of money.

The Market

If these points get us closer to a deeper understanding of why Jesus chose money as the antithesis of God, and preached over twenty parables on the subject of money and possessions, then we can still go further: Perhaps more than at any time in history, western civilization - and increasingly global civilization - is obsessed with the acquisition of wealth. The machine of society teaches us that we should be rich, successful, and find our fulfillment in worldly goods and comforts, not least because the atheism that so often accompanies this mantra preaches, 'this is it' and by implication, 'get what you can while it lasts'. Free market capitalism works through two mechanisms: the loaning of money at interest (forbidden between Jews in Old Testament law; see David Swain's paper for more detail) and the market trading of goods and companies, which is the province of the banks. Market trading can be seen as a form of gambling. The banks trade vast sums, with the traders being remunerated accordingly, and, as recent world events have shown, if they sustain catastrophic losses the banks have to be bailed out using public money to avoid a collapse in the world economy. In practice the downside is that the system tends primarily to protect the interests of the super-rich. It works by drawing money from the relatively poor (developing world, consumers) to the very rich (major corporations and shareholders). It tends to create considerable wealth for some at the expense of others less fortunate. This is surely in direct conflict with the Christian principle of chastity, which tells us that we should not use or exploit others for our own benefit, though it is clearly possible to live within this system in a Christian manner, loaning responsibly, investing in worthwhile enterprises, giving generously.

I have had the privilege of sitting in the boardrooms of one or two moderate sized public companies, and met and worked with people whom I admire enormously; people who have achieved much for both their staff and their customers. But I have also witnessed those pressure points when the influence of the people in those rooms is ultimately overridden by the expectations of the market: when the needs of the people in the business (a job, decent pay) or the business itself (investment in infrastructure) are overborne by the market expectation of year-on-year profit growth and the increase of the company's market value. In short, without even being in the room, the need of the market outweighs the needs of the business itself. Why insist on year-on-year growth for every company? In a competitive environment if one company fails the investors can switch their investments to the one that's now doing better or best. Another dimension of the free-market system is that there are inevitably some companies that become casualties, and the outcome tends to favour the organisation rather than the individual. I have known many people who have been made redundant 'under new management' because they were either an unwanted cost or duplicated a role. This is a necessary choice for the organisation, but that cost requirement takes no account of the needs of the individual in question, and once they are 'gone' they are no longer of any concern to that organisation. Likewise, technology replacing staff to reduce costs and increase efficiency, is a real need for an organisation in the free market system. I have been involved in such a management decision, and it is alarming how readily you find yourself regarding an employee not as a person but as a resource, a unit, a potential cost saving.

Perhaps surprisingly the outcome can extend to the money market itself. I was in a fairly senior role in a company that was bought-out by another. An initial bid was followed by a series of counter-bids until the market value of 'my' company had nearly doubled since the market was anticipating the takeover; cost-efficiencies followed by increased profits, and an enhanced return on investment. There was then a lengthy monopolies and mergers investigation, which decided ultimately that there was no bar to the takeover. However, by this time the market value of the company had dropped down to below its original level (the market no longer sure of that extra return) and the prospective new owner was allowed to put in a fresh bid at a much lower level which went through. The new company made their cost efficiencies in line with the expectations of the market - largely disposing of duplicate roles and applying technological developments to further reduce costs (and staffing). It was done very well, and very humanely,

given the requirements of the new organisation. Meanwhile, the market could buy-in at a low price and look forward to growth without having had to swallow the high share price at the peak of the bidding. What I found fascinating was that the financial performance of 'my' business, and its infrastructure and operations, had not changed one jot during this entire process, and yet its perceived value had gone up and down like a yo-yo until it settled - in this case - at the point of lowest cost and greatest advantage to investors. I think it very important, though, that we understand that this is not all about 'nice innocent people' being taken advantage of by 'horrid powerful people'. At both ends of the scale, there are wonderful, generous and genuine people, but none of them can escape the demands and dictates of the 'market'. You could quite reasonably say that all of them are controlled and constrained by market forces; perhaps we could call it 'The Spirit of Capital'. It is a spiritual battle, I believe.

In the early days of the credit crunch I had a fascinating conversation with a journalist who works in the Square Mile. I asked him how the 'market' perceived the days ahead. He said that with restrictions being placed on credit, savings and investments already starting to creep-up, the view was that the 'market' would stabilize within a few years. I pointed out that it was projected that millions of people in the UK were likely facing redundancy and/or deep indebtedness that could lead to the ruination of their financial circumstances, loss of homes, and so on. I asked whether he meant that the 'market' thought that it would stabilize at the expense of the ruination of all of those individuals. He replied that yes, that was it, of course.... Horrific. And I went away wondering what the 'market' was? Was the Square Mile full of monsters? No, of course not: ordinary people. It was the 'market' itself: that abstract set of rules and processes, that impersonal 'spirit', that didn't care about the individuals that would fall by the wayside in order to stabilize itself. And it is that 'market', that 'spirit', that is the ultimate arbiter of decisions in the stock market economy.

People in Need - Franciscan Charity

And so we return to the contrary perspective of Christ (and Francis?). He made it clear that money is a spiritual battleground, and we're caught up in it, like it or not. He told us to be responsible, to be generous, to be good stewards of the material, whilst not loving money or the system. I have always been struck by C.S. Lewis saying that the world is heavily concerned with institutions and organisations, because they are perceived to outlive individual people. Companies, banks, museums, 'markets', they all can be seen as outliving the individuals that make them up. But he went on to say that this cannot be the Christian view. All institutions and 'markets' will pass away; it is only individuals that can live forever. So, we shouldn't be as concerned about the fortunes of entities as 'the world' is, nor the survival of institutions at the expense of individuals: instead, we should be massively concerned with loving and helping eternal beings. I think this leads to three areas of focus for us as Christians. Firstly, that Christians in positions of influence in the government and the economy speak up and encourage society to develop a more compassionate marketplace. Secondly, that the Church be seen to be different from the world in how it deals with money - I fear that at the moment we may look entirely similar. Thirdly, that as individuals we should ensure that we are truly embracing The Spirit of Poverty and ask ourselves, and God within us, what we should be doing with the money and the 'stuff' we have stewardship of, day by day, transaction by transaction.

The first two areas I cannot engage with much, being neither a church leader nor a politician, but I must engage with the third. About eighteen months ago I was standing in the small hallway of my cottage in Wales. It had a bare concrete floor that normally I would have tiled to make it look good - to 'finish it off'. I added up in my head the rough cost of materials, and estimated about £500 to £700 pounds. Not having much spare money at that time I thought 'I'll just have to wait'. God then stepped in and asked me whether the next time I had £700 to spare was I really going to spend it on making my hall floor look nice?.... I had to

admit that I could no longer allow myself to do that. For me, that £700 was now more likely to be for a child to have fourteen years education in Ethiopia, or for whatever God told me to do with it when the time came. Strangely, a year later, we were given four hundred tiles free by a couple renovating a house. Recycled materials, no profits, local (good carbon footprint), helping out the renovators - a pretty good solution. I'm almost reluctant to lay them, as I rather like my concrete floor and what it means. But I'm grateful, as I do like old tiles - and when that £700 turns-up, I still won't be spending it on a piece of floor.

Over a similar period, God led me to work in the Money Advice Sector for the charity Community Money Advice (CMA), where I'm applying skills learnt in the commercial world to help our advice centres help people blighted by debt. I've encountered hundreds of people across the country - many in churches, but not all - who are giving of their time to help those afflicted by money troubles. It has been estimated by Credit Action that up to four million people in the UK are going to seek debt advice during 2009/10, and demand is outstripping supply. Money troubles often lead to loss of homes, breakdown of relationships, addictions, and even suicide. Once again, I am seeing how money is not only a spiritual battleground but, when it becomes indebtedness, the biggest ill facing UK society today. UK individuals are the most indebted in the world; our personal debts are nearly twice the GDP of Australia, and the credit culture (must have more, now!) has part-imploded with the credit crunch, leaving a swathe of broken lives.

CMA centres have clients with widely varying griefs: some with over £100,000 of debt on twenty or more credit cards; executives who have lost their jobs and cannot cover their repayment schedules any more; young mothers whose housekeeping puts a tin of beans and a packet of cornflakes in the larder, and nothing else; who dread the bailiffs coming to the door, or are awake at night wondering how they are going to feed their children tomorrow. There are so many people in these straits that by 2010/11 it is likely that every tenth home in the UK will be blighted in some way. These are the people that the 'market' is prepared to sacrifice to ensure its own stability. And these people need love, hope and support.

I have visited many towns where churches are working together to offer debt and money advice services; open food banks and clothing banks; develop poor funds, and many other initiatives. At CMA most of our clients are helped compassionately through a process of debt repayment while being taught how to manage their money well. There are so many stories of lives healed. But sometimes, that Debt Management Plan doesn't have to be managed through, because Christ just wants to help that client then and there through his people. This is a true story, in the manager's own words, from one of our centres that opened during 2009:

We had a young mother come to our centre in tears. The bailiffs were coming and they had told her on the phone that she might end up in prison unless she paid her debt. Her concern was over who would look after her children. Amazingly she did not even know who she owed the debt to. We are a centre in our first year and felt a bit overwhelmed as we had to try and react within 24 hours to help this woman. So after a few phone calls in-between the clients tears, we managed to find out that it was an unpaid TV Licence fee which had been to court in her absence and was now a larger debt with costs and fines added to it - just over £500. It appeared that her partner had torn up letters and warnings and details of her court appearance and had even met the bailiff on an earlier visit - but been very abusive. The young mother had no knowledge of any of this.

We hold a one-hour prayer meeting every Wednesday, which is when our centre is open, and we get a few minutes to put forward any prayer requests - which we did on this occasion. I remember being upset because we really felt that we did not have enough time to help this lady postpone the inevitable - and this was after talking to the courts and the bailiff. I was almost in tears myself as this was one of our first cases and we had not anticipated that we would not be able to

help. We wanted God to intervene supernaturally and perform a miracle. So that is how we prayed, and other church members stood with us and said Amen. Following the prayer meeting three people came to me separately to offer to pay this lady's debt – which was a miracle in itself. Now I know that this is not the way it normally happens, but it was fantastic to phone the bailiff - who was astonished to get the cash and had a lot of questions about who we were and what we were doing in the community. Moreover, it was so wonderful to phone the young mum herself and tell her that her debt had been paid in full. We have since heard that she cannot stop telling people on her estate how good and kind the Christians have been, and how it was a miracle to have her debt paid for her.

And this is where I end: God first, money last; people first, markets last; Christians helping people whose lives have been blighted by debt. There are many responses to this need, many callings. The one I know is money advice. If you believe this is how you should be helping, then get more information through the contacts listed in an Appendix by me, John Franks, Operations Manager of Community Money Advice.

APPENDIX

Organisations involved with helping people and their money issues:

People in money trouble can be sign-posted to their local CAB, and to Consumer Credit Counselling Services (CCCS) - a free phone and online debt advice service:

<http://www.cccs.co.uk/>

Information on the debt sector and a range of resources (including UK Debt Statistics) are available through Credit Action:

<http://www.creditaction.org.uk/>

If a church is looking to teach people about budgeting and managing money well, there are a range of free resources (from self-help resources to sermons) available from Stewardship's red2black website:

<http://www.red2black.org.uk/>

And if they want to get more actively involved in budget coaching and promoting biblical approaches to money management, further information is available from Stewardship's main website:

<http://www.stewardship.org.uk/money/>

The final option is to provide local debt advice services. There are two Christian organisations that a church can work with to achieve this:

Christians Against Poverty (CAP) - The church provides local case workers and the debts themselves are managed from CAP's (award winning) Head Office in Bradford. (Currently over 90 churches in the UK have a CAP centre).

<http://www.capuk.org/home>

Community Money Advice (CMA) - The church sets-up and manages a debt advice service themselves, enabled by training, set-up and ongoing support services from CMA. (Currently nearly 90 churches, community groups, and organisations in the UK have a CMA centre).

<http://www.communitymoneyadvice.com>

... and you can contact John Franks direct at:

john@communitymoneyadvice.com

or phone him, on: 01570 480584