

The American Church in London

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SOFTENING THE CRUNCH

The economic crisis has become normal to us now. What seemed like a storm or earthquake or some other catastrophe has morphed into business as usual. The British-American financial partnership has taken more than a few body blows over this past year, but it's starting to feel, well, like just another day at the office.

I suppose that's both good and bad.

On the (relatively) bright side, getting past the shock has put people back on the task of figuring out how to dig us out of the mess we made for ourselves. As I wrote in the last issue of this magazine: "When bad news takes over it's too easy to forget that there is still good in the world. Children still laugh, works of art are still beautiful, and music still has its power to challenge and inspire. It takes a certain amount of discipline to remind ourselves

of these truths." I've seen some of that discipline in the lives of people I meet—people who might not know if their jobs will survive from month to month, but who refuse to let that alter their ability to see the good and the beautiful in their daily lives.

But there's a dark side as well. Experiencing the present crisis as an ongoing thing has created an atmosphere of suspicion and even stinginess that isn't helping us move ahead. Banks are clinging tightly to their cash, and so are many of us. There is a story circulating of a shop owner with £50000 in the bank, who was refused a business loan for £40000 ... from his own bank! Living in a constant state of crisis isn't helping the financial industry get out from under the financial mess.

Charities are feeling the pinch, too. Most are reporting a drop in donations to their annual budgets, and the flow of funds to building and other projects has dried up significantly. Diminished giving is a sad symbolic irony of a banking crisis that exposed, among other things, the way that extravagant compensation contributed to the collapse of financial institutions.

As I write this the Parliamentary expenses scandal is continuing to make headlines and put an end to careers. The sense of being duped or taken advantage of is heightened by the impact of the current recession; too many people are hurting, making the exposure of a porous system even more frustrating and shocking. In a sense the Parliamentary scandal and the broader financial crisis are feeding on each other, and that's not very good at all.

In our adult Sunday School class we've been talking about issues of faith and money. The Bible, while fairly neutral on the topic of currency itself, has a lot to say about what we do with our money, and the relationship between those who have it and those who don't. One of the texts of Scripture we've been studying is familiar to many of you in an unfortunately altered form. How many of you have heard that "money is the root of all evil"? It's a saying most of us know and most of us reject—the clear nonsense of the common version makes it too easy to ignore the real teaching behind it.

The real saying goes like this: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." (1 Timothy 6:10) It was a saying that was common back in the first century, and given the wisdom of it that makes sense. We all know people who love money just a bit too much,



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and when we're brutally honest with ourselves we'll admit that we do too sometimes. Most will agree that not much good comes from that kind of love, and that brings us back to the present crisis.

In the Bible the word love is reserved for the most important relationships in our lives—it can cross the boundaries among and between the important spiritual, sacrificial and sexual connections we have in our lives. When we confuse love with money we cheapen both, and that's not good for anyone.

As we all learn to survive in this time of sustained financial crisis, let me invite you to be conscious of the real love and *loves* in your life. Some of us will have to say goodbye this summer, while others will have to build new relationships here. The key is to remember that what makes us fully human—what allows us to live the way God intended—isn't what we own or earn or spend, but rather who we know and how we demonstrate our care for them. Crisis may feel like the norm these days, but it's not. Loving and sharing and giving are the ways we were meant to live, and now, more than ever, it's important to remember that. ■

*With God's blessings to you and yours,
Rev. John A. D'Elia*