

## **A Sign of Contradiction**

Adam Smith, J S Mill, Milton Friedman, et al, are economists whose theories underpin much of the capitalism that dominates today's society. Amongst the ideas they have promoted is the idea of 'Homo Economicus', the rationalistic self-interested individual who chooses and is the basic unit of society. So, we live in a culture where selfishness is encouraged, shopping is virtuous, and greed is an essential element in a not too well-hidden agenda. A highly individualised 'consumer society'. Our whole society is driven by the need to get us to go out (or indeed sit at our laptop) and buy. The prosperity of the nation depends on it, jobs depend on it, our pensions depend on it.

Marketing experts, however, know that we humans are not necessarily the most rational of beings, that we are all looking for happiness and are all likely to be tempted to try to find it in the wrong places, to fall prey to the sin of greed. We are told that there are things we need, that we must have in order to be happy - and it's gone way beyond the basics of a comfortable warm home and food on the table. That is why we are constantly bombarded with advertising that seeks to demonstrate how we can't be happy, can't have the feeling of fulfilment, until we have the latest gadget, fashion, perfume or car.

But greed is only part of the equation, avarice, envy and pride are all tools in the advertising kitbag. You see our system doesn't just depend on us buying stuff - it depends on us buying more stuff more quickly each year. You only have to watch the news to see that newsreaders present economic figures as either good or bad, hopeful or gloomy. Indeed, if we buy and sell less than we did in the last quarter or year it is called 'depression'!

So, we are encouraged to be a society that doesn't want to wait for things. This impinges on many areas of life. We don't want to wait - we want to be happy now. As the words of one of Queen's hits say, "I want it all, I want it all and I want it now!" Whether it be debt filled shopping sprees to buy things we don't need, or celebrity inspired attempts to be famous and glamorous, or indeed a sexually liberated code that tells us 'Lust, it's ok as long as you are not hurting anyone', it's all about the gratification of selfish desire.

But there are victims, they are to be found in the sweatshops producing goods at a ridiculously low price to maximise profit, in the brothels and porn industry exploiting those trafficked or hooked on drugs, in the families torn apart by infidelity and ultimately in a world struggling to cope with our waste, with plastic contaminating our oceans and with climate change as a result of our actions.

Our Christian faith begs to differ with the culture; it tells us that true happiness and fulfilment can only be found in God; it firmly places Greed, Avarice, Envy, Lust and Pride amongst the 7 deadly sins and Love, Humility, Temperance, Chastity and Patience as virtues. It calls us to be a 'sign of contradiction', to live our lives in moderation - with care and concern for others, as an example for all.

As GK Chesterton once said, "There are two ways to have enough, one is to accumulate more and more, the other is to desire less".

God bless you.