LENT COURSE 2007

THE MAGNIFICAT: A PRAYER FOR TODAY

Kevin Carey

Contents

LENT COURSE 2007 - INTRODUCTION

THE MAGNIFICAT: A PRAYER FOR TODAY

Preface

This Lent Course was born at the Affirming Catholicism Conference at St. Chad's College, University of Durham from 7th to 10th September 2006. The title of the Conference was *Living the Magnificat: God's Cry for Justice, Mercy and Humility* and this Course covers some of the same ground.

I am indebted to all of those who spoke at the Conference: James Alison, Fran Beckett, Father Joe Cassidy, Bishop Michael Doe, Shami Chakrabati, Father Mark Chapman, Bishop Stephen Conway (Ramsbury), Bishop Stephen Cottrell (Reading), Father Mongezi Guma, Linda Hogan, Richard Jenkins, Father Charles Lawrence, Sister Margaret Magdalen. I am also indebted to Margaret Carey for her help with Unit Four on criminal justice and to Tim Moulds for his help with Unit Five on economic justice. Needless to say, any errors are mine.

As with my 2006 Lent Course, I have maintained the practice of providing analytical tools before tackling difficult problems. In this case the tools concern the status of different kinds of statements and the extent to which we can attribute causality and motivation to outcomes and the problems are criminal, social and economic justice.

Kevin Carey
Hurstpierpoint
December 2006.

Introduction - A RADICAL PRAYER

- Preacher: God means every word of it; we must take it literally
- Philosopher: Justice is a complex human institution responding to imperfection
- Politician: We have to respect the ideals but they will take a long time to implement
- Pilgrim: Why, in the words of the Psalm, do the wicked flourish?

The *Magnificat,* echoing Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2.1-10, is one of the most socially direct statements in the New Testament and the most radical prayer in everyday use in the history of Christianity. It is remarkable that its prominence in our liturgy, as the first Canticle of Evensong, has not been reflected in its impact on supposedly Christian institutions where it is said and sung, whereas its aspirations are almost commonplace in secular life.

Let us remind ourselves, using the well loved text of the *Book of Common Prayer*, what it says:

"My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden. For behold, from henceforth, all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath magnified me and holy is

his Name. And his mercy is on them that fear him throughout all generations. He hath shown strength with his arm: he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts; he hath put down the mighty from their seat; and hath exalted the humble and meek; he hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich he hath sent empty away. He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed forever." - Luke 1.46-55.

Over and above the fact that this passage, like the one from 1 Samuel, is spoken by a woman, it makes some powerful socio-political claims:

- God's people are all equal as His creatures, regardless of time, place, gender or socio- economic position
- God is prepared to intervene directly to ensure that this equality is realised.

This course is based upon a further statement that follows from these two, expressed succinctly in Theresa of Avila's words: "God has no body now but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours":

- We, as God's creatures, the agents of His mission and the recipients of His grace, are the instrument for realising the first two statements.

In order to understand the meaning of the *Magnificat* we are going to look at the ways in which we interact with each other and see ourselves. We will use four prototype, or representative, figures:

- Preacher: primarily looking at issues from a Christian, Biblical point of view
- Philosopher: primarily looking at issues from a dispassionate point of view
- Politician: primarily looking at problems from an aspirational point of view; and
- Pilgrim: you and me, primarily looking at issues in a rather imprecise, unfocused way.

We will also meet six teenagers from a 'sink' estate (Grunge Park) and Mustaq Khan's extended family with its roots in North West Frontier Province, Pakistan.

Together we will learn about how language is used to transmit ideas, how we select and synthesise ideas to find patterns and, using our prototypes, we will think about criminal and social justice and the concepts of power and humility.

The Course will be split into six Units:

Unit One - What Is Truth? The question that all philosophers (and Pontius Pilate - John 18.38) have asked down the centuries is notoriously difficult. In our tradition there has been an attempt to abstract truth from individual and collective experience but in other traditions there is no such distinction. We will examine our own tradition and try to distinguish between fact, truth, theory, paradigm and belief.

Unit Two - Why Stuff Happens. Our tradition is very exercised about causality, about how things happen. At a human level we tend to put more emphasis on motive, on why people do something, rather than on outcome, on what people do and how it

affects others. But this is changing in two fundamental ways: first, the idea that anything happens without a definable cause is losing ground; and, so, secondly, even within Christianity there is now a strong tendency to judge (whatever that might mean) on the basis of a supposedly known motive that links an action to an outcome that can be categorised as good or bad.

Units Three/Six - Who made me? How much am I a product of my culture and inheritance and how much am I self made? Unit Three is a homework unit to help each of us to examine ourselves. We will conduct an audit of our power and wealth to see how we compare with poor people in our own country and poor people in developing countries. Then, after studying Units Four and Five, we will come back to look again at our self assessment to see if anything has changed.

Unit Four - Whodunnit? Traditionally we have taken personal circumstances, as a component of motivation, into account when dispensing criminal justice but the trend is now towards less flexible, more punitive measures. Why is there such a strong correlation between poverty, alienation and criminal convictions? What are the purposes of criminal justice? How important is motive compared with outcome? Can we punish and rehabilitate simultaneously?

Unit Five - Whose World? For most of the second half of the 20th Century it was widely believed that it was our responsibility in richer countries to provide development assistance to poorer countries but even in the face of Jubilee 2000 there are many who think that this money has been wasted. At home, while we debate the economics of inequality, the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. What have Christians to say about global and local social justice, including justice between generations, an issue raised by the prospect of global warming?

Unit Six – Power Point. After studying Units Four and Five, we will come back to consider what we said about ourselves in Unit Three and whether we see our relationship with less powerful people in the same light.

Without wishing to anticipate the work in the first two Units, it is fair to say that we will be much more interested in the broad principles set out in the *Magnificat* than with trying to use the Bible as an ethics textbook. At the collective and individual levels (as far as there has been an individual level), notions of criminal and social justice have changed radically since St. John 'laid down his pen', just as they changed between that date and the first Biblical writings more than 600 years before, and notions of personal identity have changed almost beyond recognition since the figure of Abraham emerged from the mists of time. Hopefully, discussion will generate a creative tension between scripture and contemporary ethical sensibilities. This is not a novel situation but has, rather, been an under-current in Christianity throughout its history, manifesting itself in areas as diverse as the relationship between church and state, the relationship between citizens and the state, lawful rebellion, land tenure, the just war, money lending, slavery and genocide.

Our aim is that by the end of the Course we will be much more sure of who we are, how we relate to other people in our own society and how our society relates to the world, particularly to its poorest peoples. We need to consider to what extent we should take *The Magnificat* at face value and what that may mean for our ethical and

spiritual lives.

We may not know exactly how to continue as faithful pilgrims (for we are "Pilgrim" in this course) but at least we will know why.

Unit One - WHAT IS TRUTH?

"For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed".

- Preacher: The truth can only be found in Jesus
- Philosopher: Beauty is truth, truth beauty
- Politician: The fact of the matter is, things are getting better
- Pilgrim: I don't know what to believe.

Because the *Magnificat* makes a number of important social statements we need a social mechanism to discuss them. In other words, we need to think carefully about language if we are to use it to communicate with each other so that, to the deepest extent possible, what I understand you to say is what you intended that I should understand.

This Unit could easily become an argument about the meaning of the words which represent ideas rather than the meaning of the ideas; so we are going to use words in a highly technical way which will not precisely correspond with the way these same words are often used loosely in ordinary conversation. This does not mean that these same words could not be used to mean other, different ideas. The objective is not to define terms universally for all cultures or points of view but simply to use them in an internally consistent way in order to allow us to hold a discussion where we are not forever arguing about the meaning of the words themselves.

- Fact. At the lowest level of complexity, a fact is a phenomenon which we apprehend through our senses. For example, I see a bowl of oranges sitting on a table. However, that is not just a fact for me, it is also a fact for you. You can see the same bowl of oranges sitting on the same table. You and I agree about the nature of what it is to be a table, a bowl and an orange, so we both agree that there is a bowl of oranges on the table. At a wider level still, just about everybody we meet agrees with this statement about table-ness, bowl-ness and orange-ness. This is where the common idea of the word ‘Fact' arises.

One often-quoted definition of a fact is that it is a proposition the contrary to which has not been proven. In this wider context a 'Fact' may simply be a statement within a paradigm. So, looking at the statements of our prototypes, when the politician uses the word ‘Fact’ he is actually introducing a piece of contestable analysis; whether or not the lives of people have improved this is not, whatever else it may be, a fact. It depends which statistic you use and what you mean by improvement. All the statistics might show 'improvement' but phenomena which are not quantifiable might have got much worse so that no matter what the politician says, the people themselves may hold precisely the opposite view. In this instance: "Things are getting better" is not the same kind of statement as that about a bowl of oranges on a table.

- Truth. The truth of a statement is the way in which it is individually understood. It is obvious that two people cannot see that same bowl of oranges from exactly the same place at exactly the same time, so if the only way of absorbing this fact into a truth system is through the physical senses - as advocated by our philosopher - the way that the phenomena are seen by two people cannot be identical. Further, people may have very different life experiences of tables, bowls and oranges: one

might be a carpenter particularly focused on the table, another a dealer in fine bowls, a third a chef. Another might be an artist with an eye for the way light strikes a table, a bowl or an orange. A fifth may have had a very bad tummy upset from oranges, a sixth might have poor vision and only see the whole scene in a very fuzzy way, an seventh might have been brought up in a place where oranges have green skins ... We could go on forever but the point is that all the observers of the bowl of oranges on the table might agree with the fact of the phenomenon but the truth of the fact would be different for each of them. The important thing to recognise is that this makes truth personal.

- Theory. A theory, or hypothesis, is a way of explaining a limited series of factual statements. The great mathematician Kurt Godel said that the more complete a theory (he used the mathematical term "Theorem"), the fewer the phenomena to which it would apply. Theories are usually proposed to explain things and then they:

a) are fitted into wider scientific, cultural or economic frameworks or paradigms
b) ultimately break apart existing paradigms and cause paradigm shifts or
c) do not fit existing or generate new paradigms and are rejected.

2000 years ago a large number of people would have been able to agree with the fact and experience the truth of the bowl of oranges on the table but their theories about how this came to be would have been very different. Some thought that 'the gods' made everything happen, others thought that because the world was flat, things could naturally be stood on top of each other but most never gave it a thought as there was not much access at the time to theoretical philosophy. But the philosophers themselves were divided into two factions: followers of Aristotle said the table, bowl and oranges were natural phenomena perceived through the senses; whereas followers of Plato said these artefacts were only imperfect representations of a perfect (or archetype) table, bowl and orange.

In our own lifetime there have been a variety of propositions about the interaction between man and the environment. Half a century ago there was a paradigm that we lived in a steady state with predictable ice ages caused by the predictable changing relationship between the sun and the earth (Milankovitch cycles). Thirty years ago there was a theory that the fluctuations on the surface of the sun (sun spots) had a profound effect on our climate and that we were due for an unusually ferocious onslaught. Twenty years ago there was a theory that if we went on consuming fossil fuels, the climate change would cause a 'nuclear winter". Neither of these theories became a paradigm or were absorbed into the existing steady state paradigm. Today the theory of global warming is fast destroying the old paradigm and becoming its replacement.

In a more particular way an account of a series of actions is a theory. Two people experiencing the same series of facts will produce different accounts or stories. Quite regardless of their different understandings of the motives of the actors, two narrators will select different incidents. We can see this in the four Evangelists writing about the life of Jesus; these special kinds of theories are usually described as theologies. At a much more down-to-earth level we can see the idea of theories in different accounts of the same football match and this is an interesting case because it alerts us to the

danger of bias.

This issue is immensely more complicated by the question of whether the theory or proposition anticipates the selection of facts - known as a hypothesis - or whether it is formulated as a result of them. A theory, in this sense, can either be a speculative proposition with which events can conform or a distillation of what has been experienced which forms a pattern.

The most unreliable kind of theory is one where an individual case or personal experience is generalised.

- Paradigm - A paradigm is a framework of understanding within which we fit a large number of facts and theories. If only a small number of facts will fit into it, then it isn't a paradigm, it's a hypothesis or theory. So, when Newton articulated the idea of the solar system being governed by gravity this was a new paradigm and all sorts of consequences flowed from that which helped people to understand the physical universe, such as the idea that the force of gravity held the table on the floor and held the bowl on the table and stopped the oranges floating in mid air. Then scientists developed an atomic paradigm which changed the idea of tables, bowls and oranges from being static matter to being made up of dynamic atoms which were made up of molecules which were in perpetual motion with their own micro gravitational pull. Then Einstein and his contemporaries changed the paradigm of gravity, time and space and shattered the predictability of the atomic paradigm.

Between the end of Newton's paradigm and the adoption of Einstein's paradigm there was, to use the famous phrase of Thomas Kuhn* "A paradigm shift".

Often when we refer to things as being true, obvious, or matters of common sense, what we really mean is that they fit into a some sort of cultural, economic or scientific paradigm. What we need to remember is that paradigms are provisional, they last as long as they are useful frameworks. By this yardstick, Darwin's so-called Theory of Evolution isn't a theory at all, it's a profound biological paradigm; it is, in other words, the best way we currently have of explaining why we are how we are. When Creationists say that their way of looking at things is on a par with or even better than Darwinism, they might be saying that the paradigm shift from the pre scientific paradigm of the Bible to the scientific paradigm of Darwin explains fewer facts and theories; but they might also be making a 'category mistake', using the idea of competing paradigms when they are really equating a scientific paradigm with a belief system.

We do not know how soon Darwin's paradigm will be overtaken by another but there will almost certainly be a wider and deeper paradigm of which the external data on natural selection is only a symptom.

- Belief. A belief is a personally or collectively affirmed paradigm which, often independent of physical experience, informs outlook and behaviour. If we believe, like our preacher, that the truth can only be found in Jesus, we will have a completely different attitude to the New Testament from a person who does not believe any such thing. Further, however, we will have a completely different

view of oranges. A person looking at the oranges who simply accepts a theory of evolution will see them quite differently from someone who believes that they are, literally, the fruits of God's creation.

This use of the word 'believe' is often confused with the common use of the word 'believe' which means that, at an individual level, circumstantial evidence gives rise to a theory, as in: "I have reason to believe from what I have heard, that you are John Smith". The giveaway word in that phrase is 'reason'. The belief is based on evidence. This is the way in which the idea of belief is sometimes used in the Christian tradition where the Bible is treated as evidence in the way that scientists treat a biology textbook as evidence of Darwin's evolutionary paradigm. Indeed, one of our contemporary problems is that in trying to understand biology some people equate the Bible with Darwin's writing.

Just because we use the word 'belief' it does not mean that there is no evidence-base. After all, Jews, Christians and Muslims all hold that their beliefs are based on documentary evidence. In this context belief simply means that we take a selection of facts, truths, paradigms, theories, and we make our own personal belief paradigm based on this selection. The three Abramic religions treat Hebrew Scripture differently and within each belief system there are sects.

What is important here is the understanding that belief is personal. A belief is simply a state of affairs accepted individually and personally; it is incidental that it is accepted by a large number of different people. A belief in itself cannot exist without personal acceptance.

- Prejudice. A prejudice is a theory which is held regardless of or without evidence. Many people who introduce their propositions with "It is a fact that" or "I believe that" really mean that they hold a prejudice which is not based on a paradigm, a theory or even a smattering of facts. Most people use the word negatively as in 'racial prejudice' but one can equally hold a benign prejudice; we could, for example hold that all black people are inferior or superior to, the same as or different from, white people.

Our prototype pilgrim uses the word 'believe' in the sense of his need to hold onto something in the face of confusion; but it is perfectly possible for us to enjoy all the following experiences simultaneously without conflict; we could:

- Believe in the Resurrection
- Accept Darwin's paradigm
- Hold conflicting theories on the origins of the universe
- Understand the truth of our individual experience
- Accept facts that we have not personally experienced through our senses
- Hold prejudices which are both helpful and harmful.

Having considered all these terms, we are now left with the idea of truth as a universal phenomenon.

So far we have used truth in the rather narrow sense of the truth of a statement for the individual but it is, paradoxically, used to mean precisely the opposite, to mean a

phenomenon abstracted from personal experience which holds regardless of it. So, people commonly say:

- Preacher: The God of the Bible is the one true God
- Philosopher: The knowledge of truth can be objectively ascertained
- Politician: You are only a true democrat if you think that all people are equal
- Pilgrim: Things are so difficult I don't know what's true any more.

It is not difficult to see, now that we have come this far, that our four prototypes do not mean the same thing when they use this idea of truth. The first three, however, have something in common; they are using an abstracted idea of truth which implies that anything contrary to these statements is false. If I say that: the God of the Bible is not the true God, that knowledge of truth cannot be attained objectively, that you can be a true democrat without thinking that all people are equal, then I am in opposition to truth. In essence, the preacher is putting his belief in opposition to non believers; the philosopher is putting his objectivity against those who are not objective; and the politician is putting his theory of equality against other theories of social organisation, but each of these statements is based upon deeper, unstated assumptions: that belief, objectivity and democracy in themselves have uncontestable meanings and that, therefore, there is something perverse in contradicting them.

We could go much further down this route but, for practical purposes, the point is simple enough; when truth is said to be uncontestable, the argument about the nature of things shifts from being open to being closed, from being speculative and exploratory to being moral. It is not our capacity to think that is being brought into question but our integrity.

Let us now, as inhabitants of the so-called post-modern age, explore the opposite set of propositions:

- Preacher: All religions are equally true
- Philosopher: There is no such thing as truth
- Politician: I was economical with the truth
- Pilgrim: Each to his own.

What these statements tend to advocate is the exact opposite of traditional thinking. We are not expected to develop theories, to understand paradigms, to be discriminating in what we believe and reject. Clearly, even at a superficial level, all religions cannot be equally true; they may all direct us to the same god but they cannot account for that god in precisely the same way. Equally, if there is no such thing as truth in the sense in which philosophers use the word, then abstract language loses all meaning. The case of the politician is superficially the easiest to reject because economy with the truth is a contradiction because truth tries to transcend the particular and, therefore, you can't slice bits off it.

What this statement is taken to mean is that the politician only chose the bits of truth which suited him at the time. This is the nearest expression of what contemporary 'postmodernists' mean by truth. It is a consumerist phenomenon which is based entirely on individual, arbitrary preference. This may well possess many virtues (although we will see later that Christians would not accept this) but it is not a helpful

way of conducting social discussion. It may well be that believing in Jesus Christ and the efficacy of crystals are equally valid in some way but it is not comparing like with like, one depends upon a complex, doctrinal structure, the other on a biomedical theory.

Our problem is that in arresting our theological development at a stage of plain assertion we are inviting the criticism that we talk about Jesus in the way that contemporary consumerists talk about crystals:

- Consumerist: Crystals are good for your spiritual life.
- Christian: Jesus is good for your spiritual life.

It will emerge from Unit Two that the primary difference between Crystals and Jesus is that the first is about self improvement whilst the second is about concern for others but, in the meantime, we need to focus on the emotional, intellectual and spiritual resources we bring to bear in trying to enjoy a closer relationship with God. Nobody imagines, for example, that praying to crystals will improve their efficacy, whereas religious traditions testify to the efficacy of prayer. Very few people, not even the most venal of politicians, would equate consumerism with altruism; and, although the Western tradition has been to over-rationalise religion, very few people would argue that there is no value in trying to understand the idea of God using the intellectual gifts we claim are god-given.

Behind all these ideas lurks our cultural paradigm of truth as a universal phenomenon which urges us to try to transmit that truth to others. This is the most problematic 'category mistake' of all because what we as Christians want to transmit so that others may understand is our belief, our personal encounter, strengthened in a corporate context. What binds us is not an imposed truth or set of doctrines but our personal belief, our encounter with Christ in emotion, reason and spirituality.

Unit Two- WHY STUFF HAPPENS

"For He that is mighty hath magnified me; and holy is His name".

- Preacher: God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform
- Philosopher: There is a difference between causality and contingency
- Politician: Events, dear boy, events
- Pilgrim: I smell a rat.

Before we take a look at the idea of motive, of why people do things, we need to take a step backwards and put this in the context of two other phenomena:

- Chance - events without an apparent cause
- Causality and contingency.

    - Chance. There is a special kind of literature which specialises in the 'What if?' question:
        1. If the train door had not shut, parting them forever
        2. If he had got through the lights he would never have been caught up in the violence
        3. If she had not turned round at that moment she would never have seen him.

These three 'ifs' emphasise how subject we all are to arbitrary chains of events. Our lives can completely be changed by an apparently tiny event beyond our control. Once, for pure convenience, I changed my flight schedule and avoided being on a hijacked plane!

Some people regard such chains of events as chance, as sequences which depend on random factors; others use the word fate to mean that there is some overall, hidden, plan to which they are subjected; and some others believe that everything that happens is the result of divine intention.

Because people are always trying to understand the patterns in our lives, some people think that everything is causal and so elaborate theories have been developed to explain events. The most fashionable recent theory is *Catastrophe Theory* which makes such propositions as: "The wings of a butterfly quiver and, halfway round the world, a year later, there is a catastrophic landslide". The attractiveness of this theory is that there is a grain of truth in it. Quite often very large events happen because some apparently stable phenomenon tips, as when you make a pile of coins and at some point an added coin causes the whole pile to topple. Catastrophe theory depends on multiple topplings.

- Causality and Contingency. The problem with explaining why things happen is that there are so many strands that need to be disentangled. This is why we are always having enquiries about such events as train crashes. This is also why scientists are very careful to perform controlled experiments in laboratories, eliminating as many strands as possible and concentrating on one; this is known as eliminating variables.

The importance of variables is that they often cloud a clear chain of causality. A plane crashes in the jungle and the pilot survives. He is routinely breathalysed and it is established that he was well over the permitted limit of alcohol. The immediate conclusion drawn by all the media is that the crash was caused by his inability to control the plane because of the alcohol level. Much later, the analysis of the data from the recovered black box of the plane shows that there was a fatal malfunction in both engines which caused them to ignite. If the pilot had never drunk alcohol it would have made no difference. In other circumstances, if the pilot had misread his instruments or failed to react to an alarm, matters would have been different; but in this case the alcohol level wasn't causal, it was, to use a philosophical term, contingent. In different circumstances, then, the same factor, the alcohol, could either be causal or contingent.

One of the major mistakes we make in order to make sense of our world is that we conclude that certain things are causal when they are contingent. One of the key factors in this error is the way things come in and out of our lives. So, for example, an atypical micro climate is noted over a small city. During the time it prevails there are three serious car crashes. Next day the media say that the micro climate "caused" the three crashes because nobody bothered to establish the fact that the average number of serious crashes per day for that city is three. The micro climate may or may not have accounted for the crashes, they could have been caused by it but it is far more likely that the two phenomena were contingent.

If we think about an average city, hundreds of interesting things happen every day but what makes us take notice is when two or more things happen that look as if they are connected. Going back to our plane crash for a moment (this Unit seems to be full of crashes but they are good examples of mixed causality and contingency) aircraft are designed so that they do not crash if one or two things go wrong. When three or more things go wrong this might be causal (a fire spreading) or contingent. Our politician sums this up best (it is actually a quote from Prime Minister Harold Macmillan about what ruins governments) when he talks about events beyond his control. Stuff happens!

When we enter the field of human causality we are apt to carry our unscientific baggage with us; here are three well known propositions:

- Mrs. Thatcher, by encouraging a climate of greed, is responsible for today's youth culture
- Mr. Blair, by cultivating a climate of permissiveness, is responsible for today's youth culture
- The Church of England, by concentrating on its own internal quarrels, has abandoned youth to its own immoral devices.

There are any number of other theories to account for the way youth behaves from earlier puberty to rising disposable income. The thought behind these kinds of statements is that if only we could agree on the causes we could solve the problem. So, the call might be for a more altruistic society, less permissive legislation, a Church of England initiative, restrictions on pubertal pre-teens or a drastic reduction in the rates of pocket money. The problem is, as we noted in Unit One, all these suggestions are speculative theories; they are not fully tested hypotheses or

phenomena which fall within a paradigm. There are too many variables (we have only noted five) and, therefore, the resulting calls for various kinds of action are based on prejudice. Such prejudice is damaging to victims and perpetrators alike. Occasionally prejudiced solutions do solve problems - people can do the right thing for the wrong reason - but usually the failure damages everybody because the problem remains unsolved.

It is important to bear these basic ideas in mind because they will be central to our discussions in Units Four and Five. Before we allocate causes to certain kinds of collective behaviour we have to be sure that we have both collected adequate evidence and also eliminated variables.

However, the biggest variable of all is that we are all different. So let us look again at the alleged problem of youth culture, where we meet our six teenagers from Grunge Park Estate:

a) Causes.

- Phil likes walking around checking the scene
- Joe roams the streets because his parents spend all their evenings arguing
- Mary's parents spend all their evenings watching television
- Sam can't find anything to do because her intellectual resources are thin
- Jane's parents are violent alcoholics
- Bill likes a good fight.

b) Contingency.

There you have six people roaming the streets for very different reasons but because of the contingency of geography, they find themselves with other youths of their own age (all with their individual causalities) in the same place on a Friday night variously illegally consuming alcohol (sold to them by knowing shopkeepers) or narcotics (sold to them by Bill's brother).

c) Solution.

Our six situations require six different solutions:

- Joe's parents are in need of conflict resolution and life re-balance
- Mary's parents need to pay more attention to her but the root cause is industrial relations
- Jane's parents need urgent counselling and therapy
- Phil needs nothing
- Sam needs remedial classes and a stable life
- Bill needs a complete overhaul.

If there is any causality at all, everybody except Phil have problems caused by their parents. We can immediately see how unhelpful it is to lump these six characters together, and their peers, and come to any solution like those outlined earlier on.

So far we have only dealt with first level causality, whether an action or pattern of behaviour in one person directly causes some action or pattern of behaviour in another person. We have not traced the causality of parental behaviour back to other causes but as this could go on almost infinitely, let us leave it there.

This sequence, however, no matter how long, is a quite separate subject from motive, the reason why people, consciously or unconsciously, do something. It is highly unlikely that Grunge Park parents were behaving in a certain way in order to drive their children onto the streets; the children's fate was a kind of collateral damage. They might even have recognised that their behaviour caused their children to spend time away from home but in all likelihood this was, whether it should be or not, marginal to their concerns. Whether it was, respectively, pursuing a grudge, escaping from a dreary life or getting the next drink or fix, the fate of their children was marginal.

The problem with this kind of complex analysis is that Pilgrim is deeply suspicious; he smells a rat. He doesn't believe in random events or coincidence. If there is a large bunch of teenagers on the street drinking lager and taking drugs then somebody has to carry the can! He wants the causes analysed and dealt with. We will look at this again in much more detail in Unit Four but the central question is whether we design our political and judicial systems to accommodate our power structure and our prejudices or whether it has an element of impartial purity.

- Motive.

For Christians these questions are crucial because we base our ethical code on motivation, on intention - on why people do things - and not on the outcome - on what they do. Or at least we do this at a superficial level. At a much deeper level we have to face a more fundamental set of questions about the nature of humanity and free will.

Here is the classic set of paradoxes:

'Fallen', or imperfect, human beings are given free will by an omnipotent God.

Is this so difficult that we never really come to terms with it? The people who believe most strongly in the omnipotence of God and the 'fallen' nature of humans ought logically to be most generous in forgiving faults. If, after all, we have been created as imperfect then we can't help being imperfect; and yet it is the pessimists about the wickedness of humans that are most punitive. At the other end of the scale, the people who most believe in the free will of humans, who believe that we have a large degree of control over our own actions, tend to be those who are least harsh in wanting to punish people for the wrong they have done. How can this be?

The answer is not simple but it comes down to the two different paradigms we discussed in Unit One when talking about the nature of oranges: to the pessimists, we are fundamentally imperfect and can only be improved through punishment; to the optimists, we are naturally constructive people who need encouragement. Whatever your point of view - and both have Christian traditions going back to the contrast between Paul and Luke - there is always the problem of divine omnipotence and

human free will.

Having got this far, it is time to go back to our four prototypes and see how they might deal with this problem:

- Preacher: God is omnipotent
- Philosopher: Man is the master of his own fate
- Politician: There are so many competing priorities
- Pilgrim: I don't have any choice.

For once, the Preacher's standpoint is unhelpful to Christians. To say that God is omnipotent is to say nothing about the exercise of god-given human free will. At best we can say when we have made a choice that we have chosen what God knew we would choose. He knows forever that sometimes we will choose correctly, at other times incorrectly; he knows for all time that we are imperfect because that is how we were created. If we were perfect we could not choose to love God and that is why we were created. It follows from this that we should not be punished for our nature, for what we are, but only for what we consciously do that betrays God's love for us and our created purpose of loving God. In other words, we should not be punished because we are all sinners but only because we all sin. Whether or not we should impose punishments on each other for our sins or whether this is a divine prerogative is quite a different matter which we will discuss in Unit Four.

The Philosopher's answer is equally unhelpful. In theory we are in charge of our own courses of action but it is only an aspirational theory. As we will see, we have to resolve the difference between these two but in practice our two other prototypes are on the way to doing this. If we take events one at a time we are rarely, as the Pilgrim says, in control of our lives; but the Politician rightly points out that things don't happen in a tidy sequence, they overlap. Joe's parents, for example, are having interminable arguments because they have been let down by a trusted adviser. In an indirect way Joe is suffering because his parents were trying to do the right thing. Mary is roaming the streets both because her mother has changed partners but also because her new father's boss manages by fear and her mother needs to be there to support him even if this is only silently watching television. On the surface, Jane's parents have become alcoholics for economic reasons but there are almost certainly multi factoral reasons that can probably never be untangled. This, too, is the situation in which Sam finds herself; her problems at school arise from an almost interminable number of factors. Bill likes a good fight so that when he lashes out after a couple of cans of Export we feel entitled to draw the conclusion that his is a case where the motive is clear; but he has been brought up in a household of fighters.

We should recall here the question of our Pilgrim from the Introduction, why do the wicked flourish? If Bill liked a good fight in a society dedicated to peace and harmony where competition was unknown and co-operation was the norm, we would find his behaviour curious but the truth is (see Unit One) that our genetic make-up has designed us to be competitive and this is reflected in our academic and economic structures as well as in our mating rituals. Bill is simply an extreme form of competitor from a family who have learned to survive as best they can. Is he, then, the victim of a gross hypocrisy which allows economic competition to bring extreme degradation on millions but frowns on naked, physical violence on street corners or is

Bill responsible for his own actions? Is society even-handed in the way it deals with people like Bill, or does it only frown on such violence on suburban street corners not really caring what happens in slums?

As God made us the way we are biologically, where do we stand over the issue of competition? As we are all competitive, where do we stand on the limits to competitive behaviour?

These questions may sound a long way from our central theme of causality and motivation but they are central. The key issue is to resolve the contradiction between the preacher and the Philosopher. How much are we in control? How far are we responsible for our own actions? How far can we behave as individuals? And how far can we judge issues on their individual merits?

Having discussed these questions in broad outline we will consider them in detail in Units Four and Five; but before that that we need to complete our homework in Unit Three.

Unit Three – WHO MADE ME?

"For He hath regarded the lowliness of His handmaiden".

- Preacher: All people are equal in the sight of God
- Philosopher: All people are entitled to equal concern and respect
- Politician: Equality is an unrealisable aspiration
- Pilgrim: Some people are more equal than others.

Not too long ago people used to divide themselves by social class into wealth owners (capital) and workers (labour). Most people who were wealthy inherited wealth but some rose to that position as "self made men". Because we live in such a complex society where the state provides us with services such as health and education and where we rely on our trust in other people to conduct business, it is difficult to work out how much of what we are is inherited, how much is contributed by other people and how much actually depends on what we do ourselves.

This homework Unit is an attempt to see if we can find out a little more about ourselves so that we can compare ourselves objectively with our Grunge Park teenagers in Unit Two and also with Mustaq Khan's family in Unit Five.

WARNING:
Before we start, here are four important process points:

- First, what follows is an entirely confidential exercise. We don't have to tell anybody anything about us. We may want to complete the questions in a small group with friends we really trust.

- Secondly, the objective is to learn a little more about ourselves before we discuss how we think about the people in Units Four and Five and to see whether those discussions change our self-assessment in any way, particularly about power. So it's important, if we're being confidential, to be really straight with ourselves.

- Thirdly, don't agonise too much over the figures; the disparity between us and the other three groups of people is likely to be so great that a guess here and there doesn't matter; this isn't a tax return, it's a confidential personal audit. But when in doubt, round up!

- Finally, although the questions are about "You" they are really about the household unit you live in. Of course family sizes are different but because poorer people tend to live in larger families the disparity of household figures would be even more magnified if we were looking at per capita figures.

Below each question there is a blank on the left hand side for our self score, followed by three estimates. N.B. they really are estimates, not official figures of:
- The UK average
- Grunge Park and
- Mustaq Khan.

a) Power

1. Education: How much formal education do you have?
Score 1 point for every year at primary school; 2 for secondary; 3 for sixth form; 4 for further education; 5 for higher education, up to 30 points:
[ ] 25 17 4

2. Time: decisions over our own time are difficult to compute because some people like working long hours and others do not; some people are unemployed and others retired; so this is a self score.
How much control do you feel you have over your own time on a scale from 0-10 where 0 points is no control and 10 points is complete:
[ ] 6 4 1

3. Place: As with question 2, how much control do you feel you have over where you live on a scale from 0-10 where 0 points is no control and 10 points is complete:
[ ] 6 2 0

4. People: How many people do you know well enough to ask for help about anything from a gardening tip to completing a form? For every ten people score 1 point up to 10 points:
[ ] 6 2 1

5. Media assets: How much access do you have to media assets?
Score 2 points each for a television, a radio, a CD/DVD player, every hundred books; up to 10 points:
[ ] 4 3 0

6. Transport: score 10 if you own a car or 5 if you are within easy reach of public transport.
[ ] 8 5 1

7. Lifetime Influence: How much influence have you had or do you have in your community? Score 10 for being a full-time teacher; 3 for chairing any body; 2 for membership of any body; 1 for attending a public meeting or sitting on a jury; up to 20 points:
[ ] 3 1 0

Total (out of 100) [ ] 58 34 7

b) Income and Wealth

1. Income: How much is your gross income per year? For every 5,000 up to 100,000 score 1 point:
[ ] 6 3 0

2. Capital: If you own a home, how much is it worth? Don't worry about whether it's under mortgage &c. For every 10,000 of value up to 300,000 score 1 point:
[ ] 16 0 0

3. Goods: for how much are your personal good insured: score 1 point for every 5,000 up to 50,000:

[ ] 4 1 0

4. Physical capital: Score 5 points for access to each of the following:

- Transport
- Community centre/meeting place
- Fresh water
- Gas or electricity

[ ] 5 4 1

5. Social Capital: Score 5 for access to each of the following:

- Religious or civic groups
- Independent financial advice
- Independent civil liberties advice
- Impartial broadcasting or newspapers

[ ] 15 2 6

Total (out of 100)
[ ] 46 10 7

c) Health
1. Longevity: Score 1 point for every five years of your life expectancy up to 100 years:
[ ] 16 13 8

2. Serious illness/addiction: looking over your life so far, assess your freedom from serious illness and/or addiction with 0 points for chronic, serious illness/addiction and 10 points for complete freedom from them:
[ ] 9 7 2

3. Diet: Again, using self assessment, score the health of your diet with and 0 points for completely unhealthy and 10 points for completely healthy:
[ ] 7 3 3

4. Mental health/well-being. How would you self assess your mental well-being with 0 points for serious problems and 10 points for top form:
[ ] 9 7 5

Total (Out of 50)
[ ] 41 30 18

We can then multiply our total mark out of 250 by four and divide it by 10 to give us a total percentage score.
[ ] 145 74 32
[ ] 58% 30% 13%

If we go back over the questionnaire again it would be helpful to make a rough estimate of what proportion of our score depends on our own efforts and how much of it is part of our cultural, social and economic fabric.

Here are some issues to think about as the result of the comparative analysis of the score card:

First, how much does it matter what kind of family we are born into? It is too difficult to untangle the influence of different kinds of family make-up on the life chances of children so the point here is simply socio-economic: is it broadly true that the greater the income and wealth of the family we are born into, the better the chance we have of education, high income and wealth and a longer life? The answer may seem obvious but it is important to understand the extent to which we agree with this kind of question when we think about social and economic inequality.

Secondly, how much does it matter where we are born? In the United Kingdom this often reflects our socio-economic status which in turn affects the kind of schools and hospitals we have access to and that in turn affects our life chances. That situation is even more critical between countries and within poor countries.

Thirdly, because of these previously noted variables, is there a relationship between effort and outcome? People in Pakistan work longer hours than UK workers and certainly longer hours than the very rich who do not work at all but their incomes are infinitely lower.

Fourthly, in all categories 'upward mobility' is possible but is it broadly true that the 'lower' your starting point the more difficult it is? So, for example, is it is easier for Grunge Park kids to get into university than the Khans?

Finally, if we had used a different, more complex method it would have become clear that if a person suffers a disadvantage in a number of areas then the fairest way to represent that disadvantage is to multiply scores rather than adding them up; in other words, multiple disadvantages exacerbate each other.

If we look at the top of the Unit it is easy to understand the positions of all four of our speakers. We might be equal in the sight of God but we know that concern and respect are often linked with income, wealth and status; we also know how hard it is to achieve greater equality in our society, even if we want to. We will discuss justice and equality in Unit Five.

So here are some more statements to think about:

- Preacher: Religion should steer clear of politics
- Philosopher: Inequality is inevitable
- Politician: Self help is the only option
- Pilgrim: I can't stand scroungers.

Now that we know a little more about ourselves, we are ready to look at some practical problems in Units Four and Five before returning to our score cards in Unit Six.

Unit Four - WHODUNNIT?

"He hath showed strength with His arm. He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble and meek".

- Preacher: We are all sinners
- Philosopher: Society is not possible without justice
- Politician: Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime!
- Pilgrim: Most downtrodden people still behave.

Having looked at some theoretical ideas in Units One and Two and looked at ourselves in Unit Three, we are now ready to apply some of our thoughts and doubts to more practical matters.

Here are some ideas about criminal justice; it should be:

- Predictable - people should know in advance what the penalty will be for an infraction
- Open - it must be seen to be done, not transacted in secret
- Communal - the community administering to itself
- Impartial - those dispensing should not favour one side
- Objective - those dispensing should not be swayed by their own feelings or experiences
- Balanced - sentences must take account of containment, deterrence, punishment and rehabilitation
- Holistic - the needs of the perpetrator, victim and society must be taken into account.

The first obvious thing to note here is that some of these ideas are in direct conflict with each other; for instance the idea that justice should be predictable but take different circumstances into account obviously presents some problems.

However, before we go any further, let us return to our Grunge Park teenagers. They have been accused in the Magistrates Court of taking part in a punch-up with the Khans (see Unit Five) and the Magistrates have found them guilty of affray and have asked for reports; here, in summary, is what they get back:

- Phil lives in a settled, happy home but prepares the open air to sitting in his house with a computer or watching television.

- Joe's parents are in financial difficulties. His father was defrauded of all his life savings in a financial scandal for which no compensation is available. His parents have left their comfortable, suburban home and are now in a scruffy and cramped flat. Joe's father is working huge amounts of overtime and his mother has taken up work for the first time. When they are at home the parents row continuously. Joe, who has also suffered through these changes, feels disappointed and rejected. Joe has a previous conviction for shop-lifting basic foods.

- Mary's 'parents' are not interested in her. Her mother wanted a boy and she is the only child and her step-father deliberately ignores her. Mary's father is desperately hanging on to his job in spite of being bullied continually by his boss and so he escapes in television and his wife feels she needs to support him.

- Sam's mother is a poor character in every way, not very bright, weak willed, a prey to men. Sam has never settled at any school for more than two terms and she never knows where she is at home or school. She has special needs but the school is very poor and there is no budget.

- Jane's parents are both out of work. They were at the local factory but when it closed because of "Globalisation" they could not find anything else to do. In their late '40s they have lost hope and escape through alcohol but this makes the father violent and the mother retaliates. Jane feels unsafe and creeps back into the house late at night when her parents are asleep.

    - Bill comes from a long line of criminals, some of whom have resorted to violence. His father and elder brother are both drug dealers and all the family are users. Bill has a previous conviction for a similar offence and has been fined for possession of cannabis.

Questions:

1. The Court will consider criminal records before social background when deciding on sentences; is this the right way round? Which is more important? Is this a general answer based on a theory or should it be different for each case?
2. How do you balance social background and previous convictions? Should Phil get a heavier sentence than Bill because his behaviour seems to come out of a stable background even though Bill has previous convictions?
3. The court is very limited in what it can do by way of remedial action. It cannot, for instance, recommend a rise in benefits for the families of Joe or Jane, or special educational facilities for Sam.
4. Should the court sentence Bill to a period away from home on, say, an adventure holiday?
5. Finally, how just is a system that treats criminal behaviour separately from everything else?

These questions in turn should lead us to think about underlying causes. The first question we need to resolve is whether or not we accept the concept of underlying causes and, if we do (remember Unit One) is this a personal belief, a theory or a paradigm?

If we do not believe in underlying causes then we are likely to discount social reports and concentrate on previous convictions. If, however, we accept some notion of causality, is it sensible for us as a society to go on dealing with the individual and collective pain of thousands of children and their families as if they lived in social isolation?

- First, then, we have to establish how far back we are prepared to apportion responsibility. Should we apportion all the blame to our six teenagers or should

we also hold their parents to account? Further, should the children and their parents be able to plead in mitigation that they were not wholly responsible, that there were circumstances beyond their control?

- Secondly, if we accept some degree of mitigation, should such places as Grunge Park exist? Should our so-called 'social housing' be grouped together on so-called 'estates' or should it be scattered throughout our communities? How responsible are we for housing segregation? Are we acting fairly when we say that we are against integrated social housing because it is our primary responsibility to maintain the value of our property for our children who will inherit it? On this last question, might our children not be better off in a fairer and less violent society, even if this meant that their financial inheritance was less valuable?

- Thirdly, we need to think about our economic system. Is it inevitable that 'Globalisation', which has blighted Jane's life, should operate in the way that it does? It might also have caused problems for the boss of Mary's step-father and for Joe's father. In three out of the six cases the problems in the households are not directly the result of the behaviour of the parents. The problem, of course, is to go backwards into what causes globalisation and ask whether the phenomenon can be reversed or, in any case, humanised. We will return to this in Unit Five but, for the time being, let us simply ask whether we should use domestic resources like legislation and taxation, to mitigate the kind of economic problems faced by three of our families.

- Fourthly, what are we supposed to do about Sam's household? From what we know she is highly likely to continue to get into trouble until such time as she, like her mother, becomes prey to a man and is a serial single mother herself. As this is so predictable, what should we do about it?

- Finally, Bill is in a worse position than Sam but it is equally predictable. Ever since he was born Bill has been marked out as a future criminal; his parents knew this as did his nursery school teacher, his primary school head, his social worker, his doctor and his vicar. What were they supposed to do about it, individually or collectively?

Having thought about the individual cases and underlying causes, let us now go back to the ideas about justice at the head of this Unit.

- Predictable - Is it possible to reject causality completely? Do we accept that predictability can only be within certain bounds, that sentences cannot be uniform?

- Open - Can the process be totally open when reports are confidential? After all, the parents are not on trial. It is also true that Family Court proceedings are currently held in private although there is a current debate about whether they should be. What is the reason for making some proceedings private and others public?

- Communal - All three magistrates live in the same local authority as Grunge Park but they have never been there. They live in leafy suburbs and are comfortably

well off. How communal is this?

- Impartial - The police give evidence clearly and simply but the Legal Aid Solicitor is hurried and harassed. Of course, the reverse could be true. How helpful is an adversarial system?

- Objective - We can never really measure this criterion; so it is important to be careful when discussing it. How objective are the kind of media reports we read on criminal cases?

- Balanced - The sentences attempt to strike a balance but they would not be universally welcomed. Many people think that containment and punishment are the sole criteria for sentencing. Over the past two decades there has been a relentless populist push to raise prison sentences so that in the UK we have more prisoners per head than any other country in the EU. Our ratio is only exceeded in democracies by the United States. Countries with much lower imprisonment in the EU have similar crime rates to ours; and while imprisonment rates have been rising the incidence of crime has been falling. How should we strike a balance between the purposes of sentencing?

- Holistic - Inevitably, perhaps, the victims of the Disorderly Behaviour think the sentences were all too light. Should they have some say in the sentencing or should we preserve our arms-length system which allows impartial people to determine guilt and sentences? Is there a conflict between caring for the victim and the criminal?

Having looked at individual cases and some of their ramifications, let us return to our four prototypes.

So far we have really been examining the positions of the Politician and the Philosopher. We have asked about where the balance has to be struck between dealing with the individual criminal and the underlying causes and we have implicitly accepted the Philosopher's position that society is not possible without justice, and we have also implicitly accepted the Politician's position that any act is a combination of social circumstances and individual will. However, our Pilgrim and Preacher raise some uncomfortable points which question the whole of what we have discussed so far.

Pilgrim raises the point that people from the same, difficult circumstances behave differently. For all we know, Bill has a younger brother who has reacted so much against his family that he has never committed a crime and is determined to stay that way. Phil's sister has never been in danger of hitting somebody on a Friday night and Joe knows plenty of children worse off than him who are completely law abiding. Yet it has to be admitted that although there are crime free paupers and millionaire criminals, there is a general pattern in rich countries that relates poverty to crime to such an extent that, quite independently of legislation or sentencing, there is an inverse relationship between crime and economic growth. Nonetheless, Pilgrim's point is the most serious objection to the idea that society collectively bears some responsibility for individual crime.

Most uncomfortable of all is Preacher's idea that we should not judge. Perhaps this is moderated by Philosopher's idea that in an imperfect world we have to judge in order to survive but, still, Christians at least ought to give more thought to what Preacher says. We might link the universality of sin with the famous dictum: "Judge not that ye be not judged" (Matthew 7.1). On this basis we might accept civic justice in an imperfect world but what does this mean for Christians as citizens and opinion leaders? Is it appropriate for Christians to call for ever more punitive prison sentences or should they call for ever lighter sentences?

Behind this question there are three more which we should not ignore:

- First, how much do we know about the fitness of people to stand trial and be sentenced? Where do we draw the distinction between wickedness and illness? We know that there are many people in prison with mental health problems but, at the extreme end of the spectrum, are mass murderers truly evil or are they profoundly ill?

- Secondly, do we think that alcohol abuse and drug addiction, which now lie behind so much crime, are illnesses or simply criminal?

- Thirdly, even if we accept the principle of public trial and censure, should anybody be sent to prison other than for rationally determined public protection?

Underlying the whole of this discussion there are two final issues which we need to discuss:

- Crime and economics
- The nature of the problem.

- Crime and Economics. We have already alluded to the link between Grunge Park and crime but this needs closer examination. Is it a coincidence that the people most likely to advocate punitive sentencing are also those who deny the link between socio-economic status and criminality? If people hold that behaviour is not linked to socio-economics, is this a belief, a theory or an alternative paradigm? This, in turn, leads us back to another topic from our earlier discussion: how far are we prepared to accept any idea of causality and, again, whichever 'side' we come down on, what is the nature of the position we hold?

- The Nature of the Problem.

Finally, we need to look at the fundamental nature of the problem. There are essentially two paradigms which have their Christian equivalents; human beings are:

- Sinful, incomplete, 'fallen'
- Loving, constructive, reflections of the divine.

We should note immediately that these two views are not entirely incompatible but they represent the dichotomy in Unit One between Plato and Aristotle and they broadly represent the two views of humanity in the Christian tradition.

The way I like to ask the question is: "Is there a Mozart on every street corner or only one in a million"? Having provisionally accepted that these are two paradigms, we have to ask on what basis we choose the one or the other. Are these fact-based paradigms or simply reflections of our individual prejudices about the human race? When we say that genius is rare, are we basing this statement on the story so far or on a theory of humanity as a whole? Are we, in other words, saying that this paucity of genius is remediable or not?

Taking the idea further, then, are we saying when we talk about the sinful nature of humanity that this is inevitable and that nothing can be done about it other than to put one's faith in God or are we saying that there are constructive approaches to our individual and collective falling short of what God requires of us?

Unit Five - Whose World?

"He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away".

- Preacher: Socialism is the enemy of religion
- Philosopher: While equality of input is possible it will never achieve equality of outcome
- Politician: Charity begins at home
- Pilgrim: It's throwing good money after bad.

The minor injuries received at the hands of our Grunge Park teenagers by nephews of Mustaq Khan were only one of the misfortunes which befell them as the result of a chain of unfortunate events whose beginning is disputed. Depending on our point of view it might have been:

- Entrenched feudalism in North West Pakistan
- Colonialism
- World trade agreements or
- Limited educational opportunities in an Islamic society.

Having reached Unit Five we are surely all far too cautious to pick one of the items on this list to the exclusion of the others but are we now experienced enough to see that there is a deeper trap in the way the question has been put than the simple matter of paradigms in Unit One and causality in Unit Two. Should our behaviour towards the Khans depend in any way on why they are how they are and what role we and our ancestors might have had in how they are now?

In looking at economic justice there are three sets of problems which we will need to consider:

- Basic relationships - First, there are ethical problems revolving around ideas of generosity, reciprocity and compensation
- Outcome - Secondly, there are practical problems relating to how well we achieve the ends designated by donors and/or required by recipients
- Power - thirdly, there are questions concerning the donors and recipients entitled to determine what is received and how?

- Basic relationships. It is no accident that generosity, reciprocity and compensation are set out in descending order. Generosity is the highest ideal for the Christian. We are required by Jesus to give unconditionally, expecting nothing back. This does not stop us making rational contracts with people for mutual benefit; and neither of these should ever take the place of proper restitution.

Generosity, however, has come under strong attack in terms of its outcome. First, it is often said recipients of generosity, not obliged to work for benefit, become lazy and end up squandering what they receive; this philosophy is summed up in the idea that something is only valued by people if they pay for it. Secondly, and connected with the first point, generosity, even on a large scale, is said to lead to no long-term change; even if we could construct a situation in which everybody started out with

exactly the same physical resources and opportunities, the very differences between us would guarantee different and unequal outcomes. Thirdly, it is often said that those who receive generosity feel dependent and inferior.

The first and third points raise the question of whether we should simply give unconditionally, taking no interest in what people do with our gift. Should we worry about outcome and if we did not would this in turn reduce the possibility that recipients would feel inferior?

The second point, however, is much more difficult to deal with. There is a great deal of evidence that straight generosity does not alter underlying problems. How do we, therefore, square our ethic of generosity with our practical wish to change the lives of people for the better?

Further, regardless of outcome, should we simply give everything we have to the poor and look to the lilies of the field? There are a number of issues which we should consider:

- Can inequality be justified if it benefits the poorest? Without the rich and their capital, there would be no jobs for the poor. They could only be subsistence farmers.
- Is this theory simply a justification for the rich remaining rich?
- Is inequality, on the other hand, part of God's plan?
- Then ask about the degree of inequality. Should the Director earn 100 times the salary of the shop assistant? Should he earn the same?
- And is poverty also part of God's plan? St Francis chose to become poor. Jesus said 'you always have the poor with you'.
- And what about the degree of poverty?
- Finally, how consistent is giving everything away without a thought for tomorrow with prudent financial management and the care of ones family?

➢ Outcome. There are fewer fundamental issues with contractual agreements, although it is always important to agree what we mean by "fair". How often do we regard contracts as the outcome of an adversarial process, a compromise between conflicting avaricious parties? Are we aware, for example, when we make a contract with a developing country, of the power differential between a rich country with an economic surplus and a poor country whose people are starving? Underlying this is a further question: if we made fair contracts with people and countries that were weaker than us, would we need to be generous?

- Restitution. The third kind of transfer, that of restitution, is as problematic as the first because of the issues of causality and motive that underlie it. Many people believe that we owe resources to poor countries because of our colonial involvement with them. If we base our generosity on an outcome independent basis and are prepared to enter into fair contracts, how legitimate is it for countries then to ask for restitution for what our ancestors did or failed to do? In other words, if we can define some kind of causality, how far are we still responsible for restitution and, if we are, must this go alongside generosity and reciprocity?

- Relationships and Outcome. It is difficult to separate issues of relationship and outcome but we need to look more closely at a discussion of outcome between donors and recipients. The highly principled position of generosity implies that we should simply give without taking any interest in outcome, that we should not use our power - even if benignly exercised - to influence the independent action of recipients. In a fair contract, on the other hand, we might well wish to stipulate a set of outcomes in return for a loan or a grant. The outcome of restitution is far more hazy.

- Power and outcome. Finally, in considering the arrangements between the rich and the poor, we must ask who amongst the donors and recipients should have the power to determine the outcome. For our purposes the donor problem is not acute because although imperfect, we live in a democracy with a strong 'third sector'.

Here, on the other 'side', is the liberal nightmare:

A donor agency upholds the policy that recipient communities should determine how development assistance is deployed. The community decides that rather than accepting the advice of the donor to provide primary health care to the whole community it wants the health expenditure to be spent only on males for the purpose of trauma surgery, mostly resulting from internecine warfare.

Should the agency:

- Change its policy
- Divert the funding to another community or
- Keep its word?

Having considered these issues in somewhat abstract terms, we now need to look at them through the eyes of Mustaq Khan and his family.

It will soon become clear why we will work in reverse order, starting with restitution.

Iqbal lives with his three sons, two daughters and one wife in a tiny village at the foot of the Khyber pass. The land is arid and there is frequent crop failure. Surveying all his ills, Iqbal believes (see Unit One) that colonialism and unfair trade agreements are responsible. His eldest son points out that the feudalism under which they live came before and has survived colonialism and that the same feudal, absentee landlords, who keep them in poverty are also the government ministers who make the trade deals to buy luxury cars instead of agricultural machinery. It is this same feudalism which allows him to go to school but not his sisters.

Mustaq wonders whether he should follow his cousin's family to Grunge Park. Iqbal reports that although things can be very tough, he is much better off than he would have been if he had stayed at home with Mustaq.

Looked at from Iqbal's point of view, however, matters are not so simple. First, he believes that what has forced him to England is not feudalism but the basic unfairness of colonialism. He was working in the same factory as Jane's parents but now that it

has shut down he cannot find work; colonialism has been compounded by economic imperialism. He wonders whether his children are suffering because of the limitations of the education in their Islamic school but, on the whole, he prefers to blame everything on the prejudice of people around him and the hostility of the 'colonial' government.

At last we are coming to the crux of the problem. Leaving aside conflicting views of history, the Grunge Park 'community' is beset by a series of differences of perception which are not necessarily in conflict, so we will pair them:

- Immigrants have 'taken over an area / so-called 'immigrants' were born here
- Immigrants are treated less well than natives / immigrants get grants at the expense of natives
- Immigrants are not prepared to integrate / natives know how to exploit the system.

Setting aside the extremely important issue of perception - that what matters is what people believe to be true rather than what can be factually ascertained (a critical factor in the first pairing) - there are some fundamental problems about justice which have to be mutually settled.

- First, whether we are thinking about a community or the world, do we simply want a level playing field or do we want some kind of mechanism which weights outcomes in favour of the least advantaged?
- Secondly, therefore, should we insist on greater immigrant competence in seeking grants or should we establish interim quotas?

These questions apply equally to the planet as a whole and to Grunge Park. The question we keep asking ourselves in a different form is whether we simply rely on unconditional generosity, apply forms of positive discrimination or whether we are satisfied with equal opportunities.

It is important for Christians to consider these issues in their own terms because increasingly the debate is not about equity but simply about using social resources to prevent social disruption. Iqbal's eldest son, Hanif, has begun to attend meetings of a fundamentalist sect which says it wants to destroy Western secularism. The solution proposed by 'Community leaders' is that the economic conditions of immigrants are so improved that their radicalism is 'bought off'. this is the ostensible cause of the fight with Bill and his mates. They have heard of vast new plans to help immigrants and they feel trapped in Grunge Park and resent what is happening. Well, that is what they say to the Magistrates but we will have to decide how far we accept that kind of 'causal' argument.

There is, then, it turns out, a fourth kind of resources transfer in addition to generosity, reciprocity and restitution which we might call damage limitation. This is quite different from reciprocity because one party is acting under threat. Again, this is not simply a domestic phenomenon, it is the kind of behaviour which characterises North Korea and Iran.

Let us now look at the attitudes of our four prototypes. Superficially, they are

commenting on the highly specific issue of economic redistribution but this is usually a cover for much deeper divisions.

It is quite difficult to get to the root of what the Preacher is saying. 'Socialism' is one of those portmanteau words that means what the user wants it to mean but let us be generous to the Preacher and say that what he means by socialism is the use of central, elected Government to redistribute income and wealth from the rich to the poor. We can see how this might be the enemy of all kinds of things but what makes it the enemy of religion? What does religion or, more pertinently, our Church, have to say about redistribution?

We have already discussed the Philosopher's point at some length but we need to ask, as Christians, how much the outcome matters. This may be an issue for practical people but should we not simply be generous out of love without any care for outcomes? Would it be treating recipients like inferiors or children to say that generosity might 'spoil' them?

The problem with the Politician's maxim is not the obvious one that it looks deeply selfish, its real problem is how you decide when the beginning is over and we can move on to a new phase. If it "begins" at home then at some point charity should move on to somewhere else but, of course, under this formulation it never does. Would it be more accurate for the politician to say: "Charity should be confined to home" and, if he said this, might he then go on to draw the logical conclusion that redistribution within the 'home' is justified? Or does this not end up being a bald statement that people should be allowed to hold on to what they have got?

Having been so hard on the Politician, it is important not to tar Pilgrim with the same brush. The Politician wills the end but Pilgrim pays for it; if there is money wasted in North West Pakistan the chances are that it's Pilgrim's money. He has been paying taxes and donating to charities since the Bob Geldof famine appeal of 1984 and he sees no end to it. Well ordered democratic countries keep giving money to badly ordered, corrupt dictatorships. Why should he be generous to Pakistan when his own children are out of work?

This last question is not easy. If there was a simple ranking that those at the top gave to those at the bottom we would be advancing the argument that nobody can have cake until everybody has bread; this is a variant of the absolute equality problem. Further, however, is there a point at which Pilgrim should be forced to be generous in a certain direction or should he be allowed to choose. In our society the answer is both: private generosity runs in parallel with public policy on domestic and global redistribution. Is there a clear case for this kind of redistribution in the case of natural disaster and famine? And how do we handle choices between giving fish and giving out rods? Is this a real choice or are we so well off that it is only a theoretical choice, a kind of play that excuses us from doing what we should?

The one outstanding issue with respect to redistribution is what we think the obligations might be in the poor and the weak to understand why they are how they are. Necessarily, people who are not very gifted cannot be expected to equal the subtle analysis of those who have degrees in economics but what about the economics graduates in Pakistan or even in Grunge Park? Are the responsibilities all on the one

side, on the side of those who are being asked either through taxation or generosity to give up some of their income and wealth?

Finally, and this is only a further extension of what we have already considered, how do we strike a balance between our current level of prosperity and what we should leave to those who follow us? The emerging paradigm is that if we go on as we are doing now, our successor generations will be infinitely worse off than we are to the extent that we might be damaging the planet irreversibly. How do we balance contemporary justice and justice between generations? It might be argued that we have given scant regard to this question, given its massive importance, but it is only possible to tackle this issue if we have some firm ideas about paradigms, causality and the principles of economic justice.

The final challenge for this Course is for us to use all that we have learned to make a reasoned and moral response to our current global warming crisis.

Unit Six – POWER POINT

"He, remembering His mercy".

- Preacher: Thine be the Kingdom, the power and the glory
- Philosopher: Power corrupts
- Politician: In office but not in power
- Pilgrim: I am powerless.

In this final Unit we will try to gather together all that we have learned, and learned about ourselves, in order to arrive at an objective assessment of our position in the society in which we live.

To do this, we need to think about the word "objective". To use the ideas in Units One and Two:

- An objective assessment is a theory which best explains the known facts. This last qualifying condition is important because it excludes what we do not know.

Quite often self assessment contains delusions of grandeur, thinking that we have far more influence or power than we really have, but what about the danger of under estimating our power which sets the context for indifference or passivity?

We will start by examining the statements of our four prototypes. The Preacher says what we all say at the end of the Lord's Prayer but does this mean that we must leave all that happens in our world to the heavenly power? Does this justify inaction? Do we really accept the caricature of Luther that in proclaiming that we lived by faith and not good works the matter of good works was irrelevant to salvation? How far do we accept the idea of the exercise of free will in the context of God's Grace?

The Philosopher's quotation from Lord Acton is usually hurled at all political leaders regardless of their conduct but is it such a universal phenomenon that it applies to all those who hold power? Does it, for example, apply to us when we hold power or do we think that we can resist the inevitable advance of corruption? If this power-induced corruption is inevitable, should ethical people in general and Christians in particular refuse to take any kind of power and become communally passive, leaving political office and the governance of community organisations in the hands of non Christians? In which case, are we saying that non Christians are less prone to corruption or that we don't mind if they run that risk as long as we keep our hands clean?

Thinking back to Unit Two, what do we know about people in power? When we say that our politicians are corrupt, what do we mean? Are we, putting the question in a slightly different way, saying that all the politicians we know of are corrupt or that every politician is corrupt? How do we know? What do we know of our own politicians? When they make decisions are take actions which are deemed to be corrupt, how much trouble do we take to find out the precise circumstances of actions and decisions? Are politicians, for example, less or more powerful and less or more corrupt than the media through which we learn about them?

Politicians who cannot hold office without being elected almost inevitably - this is a theory on its way to being a paradigm - pretend to more actual power than they really have. This is because we expect them to fix things that we cannot fix on an individual basis but also because they are usually being asked to fix things which are incompatible, i.e. more spending on road and railway building while levying lower taxes. Is it true that they never answer the question and they always say one thing and do something else? If so, how fair and sensible are the questions and how much consistency do we expect in a complex world?

The reason why all of these questions are important is that we need to apply them to ourselves acting as politicians. If we think back to Unit Three, most of us will have concluded that we possess power through our income, wealth and social position. In that case, how tenable is Pilgrim's position? Is it really true that even people with modest incomes and social positions are powerless? In Unit Three the scores show that Mustaq Khan's Pakistan family have least power, with their England based cousins having more; our Grunge Park teenagers would probably have slightly more power than the England based Khans but less than the national average and most of us would probably be above the national average.

If it is true that most of us have power above the national average, is it therefore true that we are dangerously open to corruption and what might that mean? Of course many of us might be reluctant to accept that we have power at all. We might just accept the idea of (benign) influence but shy away from the negative connotations we have already noted. Yet the ability individually or collectively to undertake the following or to persuade others to do as we have decided to do is the exercise of power:

- Alter consumption to take account of development or ecological issues
- Alter the distribution of our disposable income
- Work for pressure groups
- Join political parties
- Vote.

In drawing our thoughts towards a close, we need to ask the question, might our danger of corruption lie not in doing too much but in doing too little? Might we be more guilty of saying nothing than speaking out unfairly? Might we be more likely to influence events too little rather than too much? Far from influencing the lives of the poor in our own country and abroad through excessive pressure, might we not be more likely to sit back and care and give too little?

In other words, might our central failing be abdication rather than oppression?

If we conclude that we are more powerful than we would like to think or than is convenient for individual and community peace and quiet, what might we want to say in conclusion about the power that, according to the Preacher, comes to us through God?

The last question of all is whether we think we have changed while considering these issues?

Finally, in showing ourselves to be willing to take risks, to move out of our safe zone or our comfort zone, we need not worry. We simply need to consider the last section of the *Magnificat.* If we believe that God will keep His promises to us then we can be his eyes, hands and feet here on earth without fear. The greater risk is to do nothing.

© Kevin Carey 2006
www.Jesus4U.co.uk