

# Sexual abuse - power and authority

Peter Adam  
January 2008

Reprinted from *St Marks' Review*, 205, 2008, pp. 51-68, with permission

In this essay, I refer to power as the ability to act, and authority as the right to act. Power without authority is frustrating or mischievous. Authority without power is frustrating and ineffective.

I try to set the issue of sexual abuse in the broader context of the use of power and authority. I also attempt to refute the idea that the gospel is susceptible to the accusation of affirming the validity of child abuse.

The right use of power and authority is one of the most demanding aspects of the human condition. It demands a keen sense of communal and ethical subtleties, and of the appropriate expression of various roles of responsibility in our many and various communities, a fine awareness of the perceptions and feelings of others, understanding of the culture or sub-culture of the immediate situation in which we are placed, the most absolute self-restraint and self discipline, a keen sense of timing, proportion, and changes in the immediate situation, the ability to act graciously, and with patient love. If even one aspect of one of this is missing or slightly askew then 'building up' easily turns to 'tearing down.' As there are few expressions of human behaviour more attractive than the appropriate application of power and authority, so there are few expressions that are more distressing than their misuse or absence. The call to the right application of power and authority is the call to be imitators of God, in whose image we are made.

## 1. Imago dei

Humanity was well described by Alexander Pope as 'the glory, jest and riddle of the world.' Our great challenge is that that we are both made in God's image, and also 'of the earth, earthy.' We are both called to act as God's vice-gerents in the world, and yet we are also part of the world in which we are called to serve.

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'  
[Genesis 1:26-28].

Men and women in their createdness are images of God, the God of Genesis 1, who spoke to create, who brought order and purpose to his creation, and who delegated some responsibility for the welfare of the creation without diminishing his own power and authority.

Human responsibility for the welfare of the world is meant to match the delight which the creator finds in the creation: 'God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.' [Genesis 1:31].

Humanity is responsible to God, and humanity is responsible for the welfare of the world, and for its own response and stewardship.

This responsibility and privilege is reflected in Psalm 8.

O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and

the stars that you have established;

what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you

care for them? [Psalm 8:1,3,4]

We might expect the answer: 'nothing very significant, nothing but dust.' A very different answer is given.

Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour.

You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet...

O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

[Psalm 8:5,6,9].

God's gift of power and authority to humanity does not diminish his own glory and majesty.

Our power and authority are fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God: 'we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.' [Hebrews 2:9].

And the role of humanity lasts into the renewal and transformation of the universe:

They sing a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.' [Revelation 5:9,10].

And,

But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. [Revelation 22:3-5].

So the responsibility that humanity has to exercise power and authority is given by God, and we are accountable to God for it. There are two ways in which this responsibility may be corrupted. Either by failing to exercise it, or by exercising it for our own glory and satisfaction, rather than for the glory of God and the welfare of God's universe.

As we drink in the benefits of our society, so we also drink in its weaknesses and sins. This is true in the area of power and authority, as it is in sexuality. We are naturally conformists, despite our pride in our freedoms from arbitrary authorities and in our independence and ability to make our own decisions. A sea of fundamentalisms surrounds us, and it is painfully easy to sink and drown.

It is one of the ironies of our age that though we pride ourselves in being heirs of the Enlightenment, set free from external authorities, like tradition, the church custom or God, in fact modern Western society is thoroughly conformist if not fundamentalist, and accepts without question what it is told to be the results of scientific research, or what are the customary assumptions of its culture. Neil Postman quotes George

Orwell as having observed that most of his scientific beliefs derive from the authority of scientists, and George Bernard Shaw's comment that his contemporaries were more gullible and superstitious than people in the Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> Postman suggests that training in scepticism, education in divergent ideas, and training in asking questions would help us escape our contemporary fundamentalisms.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Corrupted good

The corruption of power and of authority is either the failure to use them, or their use for self-serving and self-glorifying purposes. The agony of humanity lies in this ever-present possibility. I think that one of the most distressing discoveries of life is that we may misuse them even when not intending to do so. When I was young I thought that if I wanted to do good and to love people, I could do so, and if I wanted to harm and hurt people I could do so. However one of the convincing signs of our human depravity and failure of integrity is that we so easily harm when we intend to do good, and hurt when we intend to love.

Augustine described this human dilemma in terms of that love of self which is aboriginal to the human community after the fall, that the rejection of the common good which involves dismissing, neglecting, and despising God: that self love created the earthly city.<sup>3</sup> He thought of the Fall in terms of pride, *superbia*, for 'the beginning of all sin is pride' [Ecclesiasticus 10:15]. This has certainly been a common understanding of the Fall. John Donne, followed the same theme in one of his sermons.

But in Adam's wife, Eve, her first act [that is noted] was an act of  
Pride, a hearkening to that voice of the serpent, *Ye shall be as Gods...*  
This love of place, and precedency, it rocks us in our Cradles, it lies  
down with us in our graves.<sup>4</sup>

John Calvin described the sin that was the fall as unbelief in the word of God. 'Therefore, unbelief was the root of defection; just as faith alone unites us to God.'<sup>5</sup> Eric Smith claims that John Milton thought of the primal sin as that of disobedience to the voice of Reason. 'Obedience to the right leader is the key to Milton's psychology as well as to his theocracy, and the right leader is Reason.'<sup>6</sup> My own view is that the description we find in Genesis 3 does not demonstrate pride as much as the failure to exercise personal responsibility, expressed, as is so common, in blaming others: 'The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate."' [Genesis 3:12].

However, what look like opposites actually concur, so that, paradoxically, avoidance of the right use of power and authority is itself a form of pride.

Evil is corrupted good, and the greater the good, the greater the evil when it is corrupted. Our greatest mutual responsibility is to work for the common good, by the expression of love for our neighbour. We are to exercise power and responsibility to express love for our neighbour, to want their welfare, not their destruction. Yet power

---

<sup>1</sup> Neil Postman, *Building a Bridge to the Eighteenth Century*, Melbourne, Scribe, 1999, 169

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 161-169

<sup>3</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-love in Augustine*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1980, 93-98

<sup>4</sup> From Logan Pearsall Smith, *Donne's Sermons: Selected Passages*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1919, 180-182

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *The book of Genesis*, Calvin's Commentaries, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1981, 153

<sup>6</sup> Eric Smith, *Some Versions of the Fall: The Myth of the Fall of Man in English Literature*, London, Croom Helm, 1973, 26

and authority are so easily corrupted, and their corruption is devastating in the destruction that it causes.

It is a mark of our fallen-ness that we find corrupted good so much more interesting and enticing than goodness itself. In the words of Simone Weil,

Imaginary evil is romantic and varied; real evil is gloomy, monotonous, barren boring. Imaginary good is boring; real good is always new, marvelous, intoxicating. Therefore imaginative literature is either boring or immoral [or a mixture of both].<sup>7</sup>

We find in the Bible two clear examples of the misuse of power and authority. One illustrates oppression, and the other avoidance.

In the first, King Rehoboam misused power and authority by being oppressive by warning that his strength will be used to destroy. He threatened his subjects with these words.

"My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions." [1 Kings 12:14].

In the second, the High Priest Eli shows his lack of power and authority when he fails to discipline his priestly sons.

Now Eli was very old. He heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting. He said to them, "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all these people. No, my sons; it is not a good report that I hear the people of the LORD spreading abroad. [1 Samuel 2:22,23].

Indeed it is possible to see the failures of kings, priests, and prophets in the Bible as a nearly unrelieved history of thugs or wimps.

### **3. Power and authority in the church**

The church of Christ, the people of God, is meant to be a sign of hope for the world, the first-fruits of the saving death and resurrection of Christ, the temple of God's Holy Spirit, and to be an expression of 'the wisdom of God in its rich variety', and with the certain hope that God will be glorified 'in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.' [Ephesians 3:21].

The exercise of power and authority in the church is the way in which God encourages us to care for each other, to love our neighbour, to guard the truth, to bring honour and glory to Christ, to bring others to believe in Christ, and to adorn the gospel of our God and Saviour. The authority of the church is derived from the authority of Christ, to whom 'all authority in heaven and in earth' has been given. [Matthew 28:18]. The power of the church is the power of the gospel and the power of the Spirit. Romans 1:16, Luke 24:49].

Power and authority are charismata, charisms, given for the common good; given, not to puff up, but to build up. [1 Corinthians 8:1].

We all have a duty to exercise the power and authority that we have for the common good and for the glory of God, and we all have the duty to allow others to exercise the power and authority they have for the common good and the glory of God, and to welcome their ministry and receive it with humility and joy.

---

<sup>7</sup> Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963, 62, 63

As in other contexts, there are two dimensions of sin in this area, sins of commission and sins of omission. We abuse our power and authority if we exercise it for the destruction and defeat of others, to destroy, rather than to build up, and also if we fail to exercise it. I believe that there are signs of both dimensions of sin in our churches. Those who are liable to commit one version are most likely to be blind to it, and to condemn those who commit the other version. Or, perhaps, we are liable to commit both, and be blind to both

There are different levels of responsibility for the exercise of power and authority in the church. This includes the mutual responsibility of members of the church, and also the special responsibilities of leaders.

The exercise of authority in the church will be expressed in many activities, including, as we find in *The Gift of Authority*, 'Proclaiming the Gospel,' 'Persevering in the Truth,' and in 'Discipline within the church.'<sup>8</sup>

### **Proclaiming the Gospel.**

Rowan Williams uses the immediate engagement in the missionary activity in the years after Jesus' death and resurrection as a sign of how he impacted his age as a divine person.

The mind-stretching dimension of what is going on in Jesus is there from the start. And it is reinforced by the conviction that drove the friends of Jesus out into foreign lands, to share the new in foreign languages. They were quite sure that what they had to say about Jesus would be equally relevant wherever they went, and whoever they met... They saw Jesus as a man for all seasons, a man for all climates and languages, capable of transforming any human situation by his presence.<sup>9</sup>

This expresses the universalistic claim of Christianity, that is implicit in monotheism, and in the belief in the one Son, one Saviour, one Spirit, one faith, one church with one apostolic foundation, and one baptism.

We can easily see how the power and authority of the church and the preacher has been misused by over-authoritarian and manipulative behaviour. We should also that when the church and its clergy fail to use their authority and power to evangelise, that is also a significant failure. It also represents the sin of the abuse of power and authority. In one of Barbara Vine's novels, one person observes of the local Vicar,

I thought then that in all the time I knew him I had never heard Eric make a single reference to God or the Christian faith or heaven or hell except when he was conducting a service.<sup>10</sup>

The same person also observed,

The Church of England fascinated me then. Now it only disappoints me. In those days I used to marvel at an institution dedicated to a religion where no one seemed to believe in God and everyone believed passionately in ritual and rubric... [As the parishioners repeated the Creed] Were their minds devoutly full of Christ's passion, his suffering, his descent into hell and his mystical resurrection? Or did

---

<sup>8</sup> *The Gift of Authority: Authority in the Church III*, Anglican Consultative Council and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 1999

<sup>9</sup> Rowan Williams, *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief*, Norwich, Canterbury Press, 2007, 64,65

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Vine, *The Minotaur*, Camberwell, Viking, 2005, 283

they think of the roasting joint and whether their neighbours would be coming back after church for sherry?<sup>11</sup>

### **Persevering in the Truth.**

It is significant that the New Testament places equal weight on the responsibility of the apostles of the risen Christ and the congregations they planted to exercise power and authority to ensure that the church persevered in the truth. It is also striking that the need to persevere in the truth is seen as a constant and demanding responsibility, because of the immense pressure of lies, confusion, heresy and idolatry in all books of the New Testament from Matthew to Revelation.

The churches have the power and authority to preserve the truth. Most New Testament letters are addressed to churches, not to leaders.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, <sup>2</sup>who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood: May grace and peace be yours in abundance. [1 Peter 1:1,2].

And Jude, not yet a patron of lost causes, wrote to the church, Beloved, while eagerly preparing to write to you about the salvation we share, I find it necessary to write and appeal to you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. [Jude 4].

And crucial to apostolic ministry is the preservation of the gospel. This is a greater imperative than the preservation of unity, as Paul demonstrated in his public rebuke of his fellow-apostle Peter.

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned...I said to Cephas before them all, 'If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?' [Galatians 2:11,14].

At issue was the content of the gospel. As Paul had rebuked Peter, so now he warns the church,

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed! As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed! [Galatians 1:6-9].

It is because others have avoided the right expression of power and authority or have used it wrongly that Paul must exercise it.

### **Discipline within the church**

Again, discipline within the church in the New Testament is the responsibility of the members of the church, its leaders, and the apostles. Any abuse of power and authority must be resisted, either in individual instances, or in long-term practice, and either in the structures of the organization or in the actions of individuals.

The Bible calls for discipline within the people of God in terms of life, worship, truth, and ministry. All these areas are of fundamental importance.

Why then does sexual abuse deserve special attention? There are three reasons:

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 233

### **The deep power of sexuality.**

The first is because sexuality is such a powerful element in our humanity, for good or ill. This is why Paul wrote,

Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. [1 Corinthians 6:18].

Presumably the body sinned against is that of the fornicator, but this will also be true of the person with whom fornication has been committed. And it is instructive to reflect that *soma* may include the notion of personality as well as that of physical body. There are many possible distortions of our human sexuality. These include self-absorption and self-hatred, coercing others and being coerced by others, diverse issues of self-worth, the rejection or worship of sexuality, the worship or hatred of the body, obsessive behaviour, fear, idolatry, the need to be loved and affirmed, and the abuse of power and authority. It is simplistic to view inappropriate sexual behaviour as solely the result of unbridled lust. It may be an expression of self-hatred, low self-esteem, the need for affection and respect, idolatry or despair.

### **The associations between power, authority and sexuality.**

The second is because the associations between sexuality and power and authority are themselves powerful, complex, often hidden, and this deeply subversive of godliness. So abuse may turn to sexual abuse because of the needs of the person with power and authority, because that person can only express sympathy by physical or sexual means, because the parishioner or patient may only be able to receive sympathy and love in its physical or sexual dimension, because for some sexuality is primarily a matter of personal power. Some are drawn so sexual abuse because they have an innate belief in the power of sexual activity to bring healing  
And sexuality by its very nature involves the use of power and authority, and the response to power and authority.

### **Our society is calling us to repentance.**

We must pay particular attention, not least because Western society has called us to account in this area of abuse. And the issues of sexual abuse raise questions not only about those who perpetrate that abuse, but about how the leaders of the churches deal with that abuse. As Neil and Thea Ormerod observe,

In handling this whole issue, the churches are facing important pastoral and moral problems, Sexual abuse undermines the churches' moral authority and calls into question its pastoral practices, not just in the original abuse but in the ways in which disclosures of abuse are handled.<sup>12</sup>

As Paul reminds us in Romans, the sign of God's wrath is found not only in those who commit sin, but also those who approve them. [Romans 1:32].

It is perhaps typically the case that sexual abuse is perpetrated as a sin of commission, and then covered up by church leaders as a sin of omission. Perhaps a church which prides itself in the dispersion of authority is most likely to commit sins of omission in matters of difficult discipline. In the words of Joe E. Trull and James E. Carter, 'Sexual exploitation ordinarily occurs in an atmosphere of enforced silence.'<sup>13</sup>

I might also observe that clergy who have been trained in non-directive counselling, non-judgemental relationships, and the supremacy of the needs of the person in front

---

<sup>12</sup> Neil and Thea Ormerod, *When Ministers Sin: Sexual Abuse in the Churches*, Alexandria, Millennium Books, 1995, 19

<sup>13</sup> Joe E. Trull and James E. Carter, *Ministerial Ethics: Moral Formation for Church Leaders*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Grand Rapids, Baker, 2004, 163

of them might well be least able to exercise discipline of errant clergy when they become Bishops. There must be some healthy middle ground between being a thug or a wimp.

It is the separation of love from power and authority that lies at the heart of the problem. As John Cornwell wrote of Cardinal Pacelli, Hitler's Pope, 'His is not a portrait of evil but of fatal moral dislocation - a separation of authority from Christian love.'<sup>14</sup>

#### **4. The suspicion that God has engaged in cosmic child abuse**

Some consider that our integrity is undermined by the fact that the gospel includes at its heart the belief that God has engaged in child abuse in the suffering inflicted by God on Jesus Christ on the cross.

My belief is that such an accusation exposes a deficiency in Trinitarian Theology. I wrote recently in the Melbourne Anglican:

One of the great mistakes to express something of the significance of Christ's death without at the same time asserting the Trinitarian life of God. For the substitutionary atoning death of Christ only makes sense in the context of the Trinity. The idea of the Trinity communicates both the unity of God, and also distinct roles of the persons of the Trinity within the one saving act of God. Without the doctrine of the Trinity, the atonement is easily presented as Jesus Christ winning forgiveness from a reluctant Father, or implies that the Father's treatment of the Son was a form of cosmic child abuse. [Sadly, some of our simple explanations of the gospel sound like this.]

However many theologians have expressed the reality that God is our 'God and Saviour' and that the death and resurrection of Jesus the one and only Son of God is instrumental in this work of God for us.

There are many truths to be expressed to begin to appreciate the fullness of the gospel. One is Christ's willingness to suffer on our behalf. Hilary of Poitiers wrote: 'He offered himself therefore to the death of the accursed, that he might undo the curse of the law, offering himself voluntarily as a victim to the Father.'

Another is that the one who died was the eternal Son of God, not a human being distinct from God. So Cyril of Alexandria wrote:

he who knew no sin, that is Christ, has been brought under the judgement, having endured an unrighteous sentence and having suffered that which became those under the curse, in order that he... might free all from the accusation of disobedience... The one would not have equalled all, if he had been simply man; but if he be reckoned as Incarnate God suffering in his own flesh, the whole creation is small compared with him...

The one who died was the eternal and incarnate Son. The poet and preacher John Donne used these words:

[T]o make Christ able to pay this debt, there was something to be added to him. First, he must pay it in such money as it was lent; in the nature and flesh of man;

---

<sup>14</sup> John Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope: the Secret History of Pius XII*, London, Penguin, 2000, xi

for man had sinned, and man must pay. And then it was lent in such money as was coyned even with the Image of God; man was made according to his Image: That Image being defaced, in a new Mint, in the wombe of the blessed Virgin, there was new money coyned; the Image of the invisible God, the second person in the Trinity, was imprimed into the human nature...his person fulfilled all righteousnesse, and satisfied the Justice of God by his suffering.

In that atoning death Christ endured the curse of God, making peace by the blood of his cross.

The Crosse, to which a bitter curse was nailed by Moses, from the beginning, he that is hanged is, [not onely accursed of God as our Translation hath it], but he is the curse of God, [as it is in the Originall] not accursed, but a curse; not a simple curse, but a curse of God.

So if one rejects the atoning death of Christ, 'he makes Christ Jesus, who is the propitiation of all the world, his damnation.'

At the same time, for Donne, Christ's death demonstrated and conveyed God's love. 'I cannot name a time, when God's love began, it is eternal, I cannot imagine a time, when his mercy will end, it is perpetual.' This was God's initiative:

[H]ow early did he seek thee, when he sought thee in Adam's confused loynes, and out of that leavened and sowre loaf in which we were all kneaded up out of that massa damnata...he sought and sever'd out that grain which thou shouldst be; yea millions and millions of generations before all this he sought thee in his own eternal Decree; And in that first Scripture of his, which is as old as himself, in the book of life he wrote thy name in the blood of the Lamb which was slain for thee, not only from the beginning of this world, but from the writing of that eternal Decree of thy Salvation.

So it is not that God the Father was reluctant to forgive us, or that God the Father required a human being independent of him to suffer.

Modern theologians avoid those two errors, by reminding us of the unity of God and of God's work of providing atonement for sin and wrath. Jürgen Moltmann states the paradox in two complementary claims:

On the cross the Father and the Son are so completely separated that their relationship breaks off. Jesus dies 'without God' – godlessly. Yet on the cross the Father and the Son are at the same time so much at one that they represent a single surrendering moment.

Eberhard Jüngel states even more simply: 'In the fatal encounter, God remains one God.'

As Bishop N. T. Wright wrote,

Because the Messiah represents Israel, he is able to take on himself Israel's curse and exhaust it...The crucifixion

of the Messiah is...the *quintessence* of the curse of exile,  
and its climactic act.

For, in the words of Tim Chester, ‘Who could offer the sacrifice, but God? Who could accept the sacrifice, but God?’ The atoning death of Christ was, as John Stott described it, the ‘self-substitution of God.’ Christian theology asserts that God acted in Christ to save us. Von Balthasar wrote that,

Only God, taking manhood in Christ, becomes in a single Person both “subject and object” of judgement and justification, and places himself on the side of men so as to defend, on their behalf, the cause of God.

In the words of Catherine Mowry LaCugna,

The purpose of the doctrine of the Trinity is to speak as truthfully as possible about the mystery of God who saves us through Christ in the Holy Spirit.<sup>15</sup>

The answer to the accusation that God has engaged in cosmic child abuse is found in a fully rounded doctrine of the Trinity.

## **5. Hope in the gospel of God’s grace in Jesus Christ**

John Chrysostom wrote of the difficulties and pressures of ministry.

If it is true that those who are entrusted with civic government subvert their cities and ruin themselves as well, unless they are wise and watchful, what about the man whose task is to adorn the bride of Christ? How much strength in himself and from above do you think he needs to avoid complete failure?<sup>16</sup>

Are there any signs of hope? Yes because God’s grace in the gospel of Jesus Christ offers us both forgiveness and transformation.

There is forgiveness and transformation because of the work of Christ, our great High Priest, and his blood shed on the cross.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. [1 John 1:8,9].

This forgiveness and transformation has the effect of restoring the damaged and defaced image of God within us.

For because Christ is, ‘the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation,’ [Colossians 1:15], our transformation in Christ is a daily experience. So Paul wrote that you ‘have have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.’ [Colossians 3:10]. Or as he wrote elsewhere: ‘clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.’ [Ephesians 4:24].

This transformation is also the work of the Spirit of God.

And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same

---

<sup>15</sup> Peter Adam, ‘Trinity essential to understanding the Atonement,’ The Melbourne Anglican, December 2007, 17

<sup>16</sup> John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood*, III.6, tr, Graham Neville, London, SPCK, 1977, 75

image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. [2 Corinthians 3:18].

And we believe that God in his grace and mercy will complete this work of transformation. ‘Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.’ [1 Cor 15:49], and, as John wrote, ‘Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.’ [1 John 3:2].

This transformative work of God should also be expressed in the lives and ministries of leaders in Christ’s church. As Peter wrote,

I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it—not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away. [1 Peter 5:1-4].

This will reflect our response to Christ’s challenge,

[W]hoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. [Mark 10:43-45].

Christina Rosetti  
As a tree my sin stands  
To darken all lands;  
Death is the fruit it bore