

FREEDOM, POWER AND AUTHORITY

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Biblical quotations are from the Revised Standard Version, except where otherwise stated.

This paper falls into four sections:

- 1) Authority, Power and Freedom in God Himself and how these attributes are reflected in the Creation He has made
- 2) The effects of the Fall of Adam on Human Freedom, Power and Authority
- 3) Christ's Freedom, Power and Authority as exemplified in the Gospels
- 4) Summary and Conclusion: further implications for our lives today.

1. Authority, Power and Freedom in God himself and how these attributes are reflected in the creation He has made

GOD IS ALL AUTHORITY

The Almighty God, Pre-eternal, all Holy, the Everlasting Father, the Lord of Hosts,¹ is the Author of life itself, the Origin and Creator of all that is, There is no higher authority. Who can number the hairs on our heads² more expertly than the one whose fingers have fashioned them? A mother may forget her children but God never forgets. For we are his own.

As the Author of all things his word is true. 'I am that I am, saith the Lord.' God is, and He is himself. He cannot be anyone else because there is no-one else to be. He is by nature authentic, true to himself because He is all Truth. Therefore He is the ultimate authority.

POWER

Who is so great a God as our God, the Lord, Mighty in battle, whose hand is not shortened (Isa 59:1), who can do whatsoever he wishes? He who casts the mountains into the sea, who bestows life and decides the length of our days; who makes the clouds his chariot (Ps 104:3) and flies on the wings of the wind (Ps 18:10), whose eyes are in all the earth, who knows the secrets of men's hearts³ and raises the dead; He who is subject to nothing is all powerful and the origin of all power. He is the

¹ Isa 54:5.

² Mt 10:30

³ Heb. 4: 12, 13 'a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart'.

foundation of all things and preserves and embraces the world binding it in its totality to himself.

God created the world in an out-pouring of Himself. The world continues to exist only because God sustains its life with the everlasting arms of his powerful love, with the loving gift of Himself. God is love and He loved and loves the world into being because He wills it so. In His love and power he grants us sovereign freedom each and all. This freedom is an untrammelled capacity for whole hearted response and responsiveness. It is this gift of self from the Heart that is Love.

FREEDOM

The transcendent God, uncircumscribed, unknowable and beyond description, who cannot be owned, bound, contained or compelled, who is subject to no limitation, who does what He wills, is free. There is nothing outside God nor can anything exist outside Him. Therefore He cannot be acted upon, limited or compelled for who would act on, limit or compel Him. Therefore He is all freedom 'for He does whatsoever pleaseth Him'.⁴

His Holy Spirit cannot be contained or controlled by persons or by institutions: the Spirit 'bloweth where it listeth'.⁵ God's Spirit is a free spirit.⁶

Christ brings divine authority, freedom and power to the fallen world, saying of Himself:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed. To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.⁷

As we are made in the image and likeness of God we share his attributes of authority, power and freedom and are called to employ them as Christ himself does. We too are called to authentic life, living and doing, to truthfulness. Our consistent failure in being authentic, true and authoritative is the tragedy of the world.

To the extent that we conform to the likeness of the one in whose image we are made, we respect the God-given freedom of the other. We have no mandate to collude with oppressors, to oppress others or ourselves.

⁴ Eccl. 8:3; Ps. 115: 3; Ps. 135: 6.

⁵ John. 3: 8.

⁶ Ps. 51: 12.

⁷ Luke 4: 18, 19 (NIV).

To the extent that we share his likeness so also do we share in the divine power of self-emptying. We are not called to 'faint'⁸ but to commit ourselves totally, to give ourselves totally, whole-heartedly as God gives Himself totally to the life He has created and which we share.

It is owing to the power of God's love, his authority and his divine freedom that He is able to take creative risks.

THE CREATION OF BEING

The first creative risk God took was to create the world. Since God created the world it bears the imprint of His being. Contemplating it we see His fingerprints in the crafty devising of the nature, identity and uniqueness of even the meanest, lowliest and apparently most insignificant thing. This is because God who is Himself Three persons in one essence loves diversity, a unity of diversities. He does not desire uniformity but a conversation in which unlike beings each contribute their own unique faculties, perspectives and talents.⁹

He retains a constant relationship with each world and each being He has made. The worlds God created 'shew his handiwork'¹⁰ because they come from him. If all written scriptures disappeared we might still be able to discern God and the activity of the Holy Spirit through his works. Therefore those who despise matter and the material world despise God's work and God himself as He gave himself for it.

GOD'S CREATION AND THE DESTINY OF HUMAN BEINGS: MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

God confers freedom, power and authority on his creation in different ways and to different extents, according to the proper nature of each being. As Sons of God made in his image we are like him sovereign beings and derive our authority, power and freedom from him in whose image we are made. When we are truly ourselves and our hearts are pure, we have natural authority through our connectedness and commitment to God and his creation.

Each creature or element that God has made has its own appointed task in the economy of the world and its salvation. While all creatures are called to holiness they are never called to betray themselves by being something other than they are: after all, you cannot be loved for what

⁸ Luke 18: 1; Gal. 6: 9

⁹ 1 Cor, 12: 13 - 22

¹⁰ Ps. 19: 1

you are not. In Aesop's *Fables* we find the story of the Frog and the Ox. A little frog admires the huge size of the Ox and starts to inflate herself in the attempt to become just as big. But a frog is not destined to be an ox but a frog and she explodes! The frog's vanity results in a loss to the world of her Frog-hood: she can no longer play the important role of Frog for which she was created. God does not call any of us to be fakes of anything, nor to kill ourselves in the vain attempt to be something we are not: the kingdom of love and truth has no room for fakes.

For the body is not one member but many. If the foot shall say Because I am not the hand I am not of the body . . . or the ear shall say because I am not the eye I am not of the body – is it therefore not the body? If the whole body were an eye where were the hearing? If the whole body were the hearing where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him . . . and the eye cannot say unto the hand I have not need of thee.¹¹

GOD AND HIERARCHY

God is transcendent, beyond human descriptions of freedom power and authority, but these human words describe attributes, faculties, aspects, ways of being that we do know something about – and to the extent that God has revealed himself through scripture and the prophets he has also shown us his power, his authority and his freedom.

All the things in the world participate in God's nature and in his power to the extent that they are able. They also commune with one another. God's way of being with his world is totally unlike the hierarchical systems created by human beings since the Fall. He did not mould the world and then abandon it to take care of itself. Dionysius for example describes a hierarchical structure in which each helps the other to grow, and the book of Genesis tells us that while communicating with the world through his messengers the angels, God also walked and talked in the Garden with Adam and Eve and with the serpent. Like a loving father he remains intimately in contact with each of his children walking and talking with them, knowing them each and all by name and nature. His hierarchy is designed to create a loving and dynamic system of communications between all creatures, an invitation to be together, a

¹¹ 1 Cor. 12: 14 - 21

dialogue, a conversation. 'Behold I stand at the door and knock,'¹² he says, never forcing himself on mankind: 'Come let us reason together'.¹³

The Lord loves, nurtures and LISTENS TO His creatures. Because of this we can appeal to him: 'Send me a holy angel guardian of my soul and body'¹⁴; 'Oh Lord Hear my prayer and let my cry come unto Thee, incline thine ear unto me';¹⁵ 'Hear me and that right soon for my life draweth nigh unto hell'.¹⁶

God does not dictate from on high like a line-manager passing the message down the chain of command, never meeting or listening to those on the factory floor. In fact the example God gives us of his own priorities tends to overturn the whole notion of hierarchy as understood by many philosophers and theologians, in which the bodiless, physically or metaphorically are considered more spiritual and therefore closer to God. More spiritual they may be, but closer to the heart of God they are not. After all God entered the creation as a human being, not an angel.

It is humankind, created from dust, that was given dominion over the earth, it is human beings who are called to be the intermediary between the material and heavenly realms. Only Man had God's own breath blown into his dusty nostrils to make of him a living soul,¹⁷ called to love and cherish the creation. King of the created world destined to sit on the right hand of God,¹⁸ entrusted with the judgement even of angels,¹⁹ God made him uniquely his in a particular way, a free and sovereign being like himself with a free will capable of choice and self-determination; a being of creative power capable of acting independently and of creating, of being the author of his own works.

This is why we also share with God intelligence, ardour, self-giving the ability to take risks, attributes of the One in whose image we are made. When the immortal God decided to enter His own creation bodily and subject himself to the limitations of mortality in order to save the world he chose to vest himself in human flesh, not the radiant garments of angels.

¹² Rev. 3: 20.

¹³ Isaiah 1: 18.

¹⁴ Evening Prayers.

¹⁵ Ps. 102: 1,2.

¹⁶ Ps. 88: 1 – 3.

¹⁷ Gen. 2:7.

¹⁸ Acts 7: 56,57; Acts 3: 33, 34; Col. 3: 1.

¹⁹ 1 Cor. 6: 2, 3.

Created a little lower than the angels,²⁰ mankind has been raised higher than them because uniquely he shares with God not only spirit and soul but free will, a body and a loving heart. As Metropolitan Anthony never tired of pointing out, there is a hierarchy in the Church but it is a 'hierarchy of service, not of power'.

Given our great calling then, how terrible, how tragic is our fall and continued separation from our origin and our destiny.

If we want to understand the attributes of humankind we do well to study the attributes of God because Man is made in the image of God. The study of God, or theology, should tell us something about ourselves. Unfortunately we don't know ourselves, not simply because the Fall has clouded our sight and our insight but because we are not complete: we are still in the process of becoming ourselves. Unfortunately our adversary the devil is very active. At every step we may trip up on one of his snares. 'Watch and pray',²¹ counsels Christ. We need to keep our gaze and our hearts focussed on the only one who can save us.

2. The effects of the Fall of Adam on Human Freedom, Power and Authority

THE FALL OF ADAM

When Adam fell he chose to follow another human being, Eve, his wife, who had been seduced by the serpent, rather than to trust God. Adam and Eve were tempted to 'become like Gods knowing good and evil'.²² They were tempted to become what they considered higher beings, fake higher beings. Rather like Aesop's frog, in fact, Adam's inappropriate aspirations led to his death. A human being is not called to be an angel, intelligent but bodiless, but an embodied spirit or ensouled body who could span the distance between material and immaterial being, lord of a material world, the world for which God gave his own life firstly at its creation and again for its redemption.

This desire to be a higher being besets us still today when in the name of 'spirituality' we reject the world, and when we do this, whether we know it or not, we reject God himself. Despite the tragedy of the Fall, God remains faithful to Man. He never ever goes back on his creative

²⁰ Ps. 8: 5; Heb. 2: 7, 9.

²¹ Matt. 26: 41.

²² Gen. 3: 5.

Word: He never compels him, rejects him or infringes on his freedom but continues to support him with his divine love and power. When Adam fell God did everything to try to save him, making him garments of skin so that he could die a mortal, so that sin could be put to death and through the sacrifice of God himself on the Cross he could be raised immortal rather than live eternally in the state into which he had cast himself.²³

However in breaking the link with the true source of sustaining life Adam's kingship was damaged. The now hostile earth no longer offered him sustenance, he had to wrest his living from it 'in the sweat of (his) face'.²⁴ Worse was to come. As Adam's relationship with matter became increasingly pathological He began to prey on it, he started to exploit, consume and despoil the world he was called to love and care for. It is not only our greed and violence but our excessive *dependence* on matter that we are asked to renounce so that we may recover our sovereignty and vocation as Sons of God, as members of the Royal Priesthood, co-workers with Christ in the salvation of the world. The pathological relationship between Man and the created world is not one in which true love is possible.

Adam (and through him all humankind) lost his sovereignty, freedom and gradually his natural dialogue with God, with the world and with other human beings: wars, quarrels, envy and strife ensued. He lost life and the capacity to live eternally because he broke communion with Life itself. Instead he learnt the fear of death or non-being.

He lost authority because he no longer walked in the garden with God knowing and learning the mind of God. Instead he learnt deception, fear, shame and blame. The first recipient of his blame was Eve.

As disorder increased the Chosen People stopped listening to God and asked instead for a King to rule them so that they could be 'like all the other nations'. At their insistence and despite the warnings of the Prophet Samuel concerning what kings would be like in practice, God reluctantly agreed that rulers could be appointed.²⁵ Many of these rulers were not wise or good and instead of protecting and guiding their people, used and abused them.

²³ Gen. 3: 21 - 24

²⁴ Gen. 3: 19

²⁵ 1 Sam. 8: 5 - 22

How does the freedom, the power and the authority of God, given to human beings reveal itself? And how do we use these attributes since the Fall?

THE HUMAN CONDITION: freedom, power and authority in the fallen world

AUTHORITY

When Christ spoke He spoke 'as one having authority and not as the scribes'.²⁶ His authority came from knowing the Father intimately. Some people speak with authority because they are experts on a subject and speak from a position of knowledge. Others have authority because they have been appointed to a position. This is the case with an elected prime minister, the head of a department or business, and with the priesthood: priests are appointed and they have the authority to give others the sacraments of the Church.

These sacraments integrate those who partake in them into the Community of the Church as Christ ordained. The priest is able to do this because a unique power, coming down from the Apostles is conferred on him through the laying on of hands. The laying on of hands however only fits the priest for his sacramental duties. In all other respects he is an ordinary human being. Confession can be made to anyone and in the Early Church, confessions were a public, not a private matter, the penitent announcing his sins to the entire congregation. The priest gives Absolution but his advice is his own. It is sometimes assumed that he has supernatural powers for running departments or special knowledge about all sorts of other matters such as insurance or building or even in telling other people how to live their lives. He does not. The Christian priest is not a seer or a shaman. Those who do have the gift of insight and discernment regarding the lives of others are not necessarily priests.

Since the Church also has a worldly structure however, the priest often has a worldly power. When he is appointed we hope that his bishop has been wise in ordaining him but in any case, it is our responsibility to help him develop, to pray for him and not to lead him into temptation, especially the temptation of power. At the Last Judgement it is each one of us who will stand before God and account for ourselves and our deeds, not our priest and the restoration of our right relationship with God includes taking responsibility for ourselves.

²⁶ Matt. 7: 29; Mark 1: 22

The Gospels tell us to obey our masters. We must 'render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and unto God that which is God's', but we often render unto Caesar that which is God's.²⁷ We also read the scripture in a partial way: we remember 'Children obey your parents, honour thy father and thy mother' and forget the second half of the commandment – 'and ye fathers see that ye provoke not your children'.²⁸ Similarly 'Servants be obedient to your masters as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart and ye masters do the same things unto them forbearing threatening knowing that your master also is in heaven, neither is there any respect of persons with him'.²⁹

A very strange thing happens when people move into or are promoted to a position of authority and power. They often think that as if by magic they are not longer the same ignorant person they were yesterday – overnight they have become wiser, more informed, more important and more right – and even more strangely others often think this must be so too.

The person who was yesterday their colleague drinking with them at the pub, overnight becomes their boss and as if by magic more important, more right, more wise. Or we may be aware that our friend, no longer equal, now has power over us and may be a loose cannon. Instead of continuing as before we start to fawn on him, sucking up to him in the hopes that he will assist with our own promotion or at least not kick us. This is the way of the world.

The Christian view of authority and the power that goes with it, however, is connected to answerability. The one who is promoted should stand in awe and trembling for he is now subject to judgement. Instead of thinking 'Great! Bigger desk, more pay, longer holidays and I can finally fix that person I have been waiting to have a go at for years,' he should say 'Oh God, what have you done to me by putting me in this position? If possible let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless not my will but Thine be done. Give me the strength and wisdom to treat those in my care fairly, responsibly and with love and to do Thy will in this situation; make good what is lacking. Make haste to help me O God of my salvation!' If we cast our minds over situations in our lives we will recognise how

²⁷ Matt. 22: 21; Mark 12: 17

²⁸ Eph. 6: 1 - 9

²⁹ idem

rarely we have ever seen Christian power in practice and also perhaps how seldom we have practised it ourselves.

We encounter authority in all aspects of our lives: civil authorities, Church authorities, authority at work and in the family. The Gospels tell us that the husband is head of the wife, and that he must give his life for his wife as Christ does for the Church. This relationship of care and attention applies to all authorities. All those in seats of authority or who hold power of any kind, structural, professional or personal bear a heavy burden because they are called to behave like Christ behaves towards the Church: to love subordinates and do everything to help, heal and save them. They are called to create order and justice tempered with mercy within their organisations. They are called to discern the spirits and to take decisions, to judge fairly and with the constant awareness that they themselves must answer to Christ's judgement. In judging they are not invited to exploit the weakness of others or to condemn.

Today, rendering unto Caesar that which is Caesar's generally means dealing with bureaucracies that operate in an impersonal way. It is the result of 'policy' or 'the system' that things take place: no-one is apparently responsible. If you query a decision you are told it is happening 'higher up the food chain' or 'above my pay-grade'. We should remember that someone somewhere has done or not done something and they hide behind the structure apparently absolved of responsibility. This is why bureaucracy is such a problem: it is mechanistic. Instead of serving the real needs of real people it often makes people serve and perpetuate an unresponsive and sometimes inhuman system. Structures can favour the development of evil or of good behaviour. Those responsible for creating and maintaining structures of any kind need to ask themselves, 'Is this system likely to foster growth and good human relationships or not?' The Church as an organisation needs to ask these questions too. Do its structures and practice serve the people in uniting them with Christ and one another or not? If not, change is required.

At the Last Judgement those in authority will have to answer for how they have discharged the responsibility given them. Christ reserves his heaviest condemnation for those lawyers and priests who put burdens on people too heavy for them to bear and the Bible is full of warnings directed at those with power and authority: 'he hath put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree'.³⁰

³⁰ Luke 1: 52

When St Paul tells us that in the world we are all called to the service of one another he continues: 'we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places'. Since we are responsible for ourselves it is very important to whom we give our allegiance. St Paul advises us to 'discern the spirits, whether they are from God'.³¹

POWER

Our attitude to power is equivocal. We either see ourselves as the ultimate authority on all things. Answerable to no-one, blinded by vanity and pride, we claim licence to use the world and other people as we wish. On the other hand we may focus on our limitations, our weakness, sinfulness and mortality and refuse to consider the greatness of our destiny. While this second appears to wear the holy mask of humility and reason it also absolves us of the responsibility of making any effort. It is fake.

Generally,³¹ whether we see ourselves as omnipotent or weak we resist change and we cling in myriad ways to being important. One easy way to become important is to acquire power and this often involves a lot of self-deception. If we have been brought up in a Christian home we may be conditioned not to own our own legitimate power or to feeling guilty for secretly desiring it. If we are enthusiastic about monasticism we may believe that it is important not to possess the power of self determination and wait to be told what to do and think by a priest or monk assuming that such people have authority and insight and truly know what is best for us. We may look to canon law and the rules as we see them of the Church as regulations to be followed without question. If we are rather more crafty we may attempt to acquire some power of our own by allying ourselves with those who have it or by seeking office.

Sometimes we like to let people know that we are in a position of influence or possess special knowledge or secrets. St John Chrysostom tells of a certain type of woman who, deprived of ordination, seeks power by trying to gain the ear of the clergy. Whichever our chosen method, we conceal the fact that we are trying to emphasise our own importance, rarely considering our true, high calling as co-operators with Christ in the salvation of the world and the reconciliation of oppositions in the creation: our calling to be Prophets, Priests and Kings – all central

³¹ Heb. 5: 14

and highly influential roles. We are tempted to replace our genuine high calling with fake ambition.

The problem of power and status also affects the disciples of Christ. They ask Him who is to be placed to the right and left of His throne in Glory and mistrust or envy those outside their group who could cast out demons and heal, unaware that God might also have conferred these gifts on others and not only on themselves.

At the same time—Christ constantly points ahead ‘greater things than this shall ye do in my name’:³² the Holy Spirit will come and help them; they will judge the twelve tribes of Israel; they will cast out demons and have the power to tread on serpents and yet not be poisoned. Christ offers a very different model of power from the one they are used to. He shows that true, divine power lies not in wealth, status, bullying and compelling others but in service, in enabling others to grow. He enters into dialogue with the woman of Samaria and uses her and others such as the centurion as examples to teach the disciples. He who made the worlds asks the woman at the well to give him water and so demonstrates the nature of His own and our kingship: leading by example, listening, fostering growth, forgiving sinners and ultimately giving up his own life: ‘no-one takes (my life), I lay it down of myself’.³³

We all suffer from the need to feel important and to be recognised just as the disciples did. Often, we also go a lot further and abuse those over whom we have power: the weak or sick, old or young, employees, the poor, those who are physically smaller, less intelligent or simply less vicious simply because we can and we think no-one will stop us. Sometimes we are passing on an abuse from which we have suffered or ‘kicking the office cat’. Because we can’t get back at our abuser we abuse someone over whom we do have power.

Not only individuals but groups are affected by this bullying behaviour which is often detached from other gains such as wealth or status. The ugly subjection of races or of women from time immemorial whether committed by individuals, organisations or by the State takes place simply because the oppressor is able to get away with it or feels in some way entitled. This happened, for example, in South Africa where the Apartheid regime claimed to have God on their side using religion and the church to support oppression in the name of Law and Order. The

³² John 14: 12; Mark 16: 17, 18

³³ John 10: 18

obedience to the State spoken of in Romans Ch. 13. V. 1-7 applies only when the State serves God. Nothing is said here about what to do if the state that is supposed to be 'the servant of God' becomes unjust or oppressive. We should be quite clear that whenever such things take place they are contrary to the example given us by Christ and are sinful. The obedience of wife to husband only applies when the husband behaves like Christ.

THE OPPRESSED

The use and abuse of power cannot be separated from the behaviour of the oppressed. Those who hope to avoid punishment or imprisonment often take recourse in lying, grovelling and flattery. Many try to escape at all costs since the love of freedom is a fundamental attribute of human beings but the literature of psychology is also full of those who have cast themselves in the role of victim from which they may sometimes gain a curious satisfaction, perhaps because it appears to absolve them from any responsibility.

The attempt to gain control for oneself even through violence may sometimes be righteous and blessed by God (as in the case of wresting back from an oppressor control over one's own life or the lives of others as Moses did when he killed the Egyptian: the response to injustice is not always peaceful— something Pacifists need to come to terms with). Often it is an attempt to dominate in return either overtly by challenging the oppressor or covertly through manipulation.

The bully deprives the victim of human dignity, sovereign power and freedom and has no right to do this: it is a sin. In the Early Church there were only three sins, murder, adultery and apostasy. To bully is to attempt to murder the soul of the other by depriving him of his humanity. Bullies should be resisted as should any temptation to cast oneself in the role of victim.

A strange situation has arisen in the Church concerning power and responsibility. Sometimes people go from priest to priest asking for blessings on every aspect of their lives – not only for church business. One friend of mine did that: she was forever hunting out yet another holy father for a blessing on her marriage. Eventually one wise priest said to her, 'I will give you my blessing provided you understand that it will not necessarily make you happy' - because what she really wanted was a guarantee of happiness and righteousness, and guarantees are not what life in Christ is about. We are guaranteed God's eternal love but there are no deals to be made with God concerning our own righteousness.

Life in Christ is about being able to respond to his call and follow it. 'Put not your trust in princes nor in the sons of men in whom there is no salvation,'³⁴ says the Psalmist. It is about risk, giving up of self-will in the sense of self-seeking and taking *more* responsibility not less – moving from the pap offered to children to strong meat for adults. The injunction to become 'as a little child'³⁵ refers to purity of mind and heart, simplicity and openness. It does not mean being infantile. We are called to grow to the 'fullness of the stature of Christ'.³⁶ We should never excuse our laziness in thinking and self-scrutiny by saying 'Father so-and-so gave me a blessing therefore I don't have to think and what's more I am definitely right and virtuous too'. At the same time this grovelling attitude and subservience is often flattering to some priests and increases their sense of their own importance as St John Chrysostom comments and they will be answerable for how they have discharged their priesthood. In agreeing to the ordination of a priest with our response of 'Axios!' are we not also agreeing to taking responsibility for them; for helping them and not leading them astray?

WILL AND DESIRE

Allied to the use or abuse of power itself is power-seeking or ambition, often disguised as a good. Here we hit a great problem: "how do we do the will of God". The practice of power and freedom is closely allied to our use of will. Since the Fall our will is no longer the pure will to good but has been hijacked by fear, greed, covetousness, sloth, ambition and every other vice and so because we no longer own our own free will in the sense that we are unable to command ourselves, we often think that because we personally want something this must be God's will. 'I just feel it is right' is often proposed as a deep, even spiritual reason for someone getting their own way when what is really means is 'this is what I want at all costs'. In this case the discriminating will has been overwhelmed by desire.

Desire is the engine that drives all our actions. Without desire we cannot act with enthusiasm or carry out the simplest thing. The problem is the *object* of desire. 'Where your treasure is there will your heart be also'.³⁷ Obedience to God is not blind submission or slavishness 'I have called you not servants . . . but . . . friends,'³⁸ says the Lord. It is the capacity and willingness to listen to our Father and not just to our own incontinent

³⁴ Ps. 146: 3

³⁵ Mark. 10: 15

³⁶ Eph. 4: 13

³⁷ Luke 12: 34

³⁸ John 15: 15

lusts (the Latin origin '*ob-audire*' means to listen). This applies to all our life choices whether of what kind of work to do, our choice of marriage partner or the desire for ordination.

The legitimate exercise of human power includes the power to act, to do and to create, to decide a course of action, to be and to become ourselves? As we grow we may acquire the power to do good and avoid or combat evil, to oversee and command with the authority born of wisdom, knowledge and experience, to protect the weak, to follow Christ and give our lives for others – even our enemies if necessary. However, if we seek to own and consume a world of which we are custodians and to control and enslave other people (who also don't belong to us), we fail to do the work assigned to us by God and we lose both our kingly nature and our command of ourselves. The wages of sin are death. In losing command of ourselves we lose our ability to become ourselves, to direct our own lives, to prepare the ground for the coming of the Holy Spirit. If we lose the Spirit we fail in our vocation to become Sons of God. The devil tempts through power because the abuse of power results in the loss of our Freedom to be and to do.

He persuaded Eve that she and Adam could be like Gods, to aspire to something "higher" than mere humanity and in so doing derailed the entire human progress. He showed Christ the kingdoms of the world and suggested they could all be his.

The possession of power or its younger brother influence, whether worldly or spiritual, has to be combined with responsibility. We are answerable before God to the ways in which we have used our power – and we all do have some even if we are not aware of it.

If we are subject to the power of others we may be forced to grovel but it transgresses our kingly nature. Manipulation of the other may sometimes be temporarily necessary to avert a greater danger but ultimately it transgresses the freedom of the other.

FREEDOM

The Holy Spirit 'will guide (us) into all Truth'.³⁹ 'Ye shall know the Truth and the truth will set you free'.⁴⁰ says the Lord.

'Man is born free but everywhere he is in chains'.

³⁹ John 16: 13

⁴⁰ John 8: 32

Human beings love freedom almost more than anything else and will risk their lives repeatedly to get it. Everywhere there is a deep recognition that lack of freedom compromises our humanity. Eventually all dictatorships are overthrown.

What is freedom? Permission to do as you want? Release from suffering, bondage or prison? Being free of the influence or compulsion of others? Is it Freedom *from* or Freedom *to* . . . ?

Yet Freedom is a challenge. We do not know how to be free and we fear it. We fear what we think may be unbounded chaos or licence because we do not understand that freedom is not only freedom *from* constraints but freedom *to* be and to act. We have to be educated into freedom. When the blind man seeking healing approaches Christ He asks, 'What do you want me to do to you?'.⁴¹ Metropolitan Anthony used to say that people often do not want to be healed because they would have to give up receiving care and sympathy and carry the possibly lonely responsibility of being a well person. Are we prepared to pay the price of health that is responsibility? Do we even know how to be responsible? Slaves have no responsibilities for their actions because they do not own their own lives and are not free to choose, being under the rule of another. Christ calls us 'not servants but friends'.

Christ frees us from the bonds of sin and death but what do we do with our freedom? Are we like the house cleansed of a demon? Have we left it nice and tidy for seven more to move in? Nature abhors a vacuum. If we sweep the house we must take responsibility for what replaces those things we have thrown out. At the same time Christ does not say 'remain slaves so you don't have to take responsibility for yourself!' He invites us to share his Sonship with him. As sons and daughters, friends of the Most High, we are responsible for what we do with our energy, time, thoughts, feelings, actions. We have the freedom to choose, grow, relate, learn, act. The heart and mind of man are free even if we are bodily imprisoned.

One of the interesting things about different languages is that each has its own genius. In the genius of English the root of the word 'Freedom' means 'love'. This meaning is retained in the word 'friend' – the one whom we have chosen to love. We don't owe him anything as we might owe a father or mother, brother or child. There are no other bonds – only love freely given.

⁴¹ Mark 10. 51

Some people say that mankind is unimportant given his puniness in relation to the magnitude of the universe. If we think of ourselves as entirely insignificant and that what we do, think and say does not matter we have only to read the scripture. Here we can also study Christ's use of and response to Freedom Power and Authority.

3. THE GOSPEL: CHRIST'S AUTHORITY AND POWER

Christ taught 'as one having authority and not as the Scribes'⁴² and reserved the heaviest condemnation of all for the scribes, the lawyers, the Pharisees and the priesthood.⁴³ He calls them 'whited sepulchres'⁴⁴ – clean and pure on the outside, stinking and rotten within. He accuses them of placing burdens on people 'too heavy for them to bear'.

Christ does not condemn soldiers, any of the Roman rulers or even Pilate. In fact He is generally inclusive and helpful to them.

Those singled out for Christ's strongest criticism are the ones who held power among the Israelites, the chosen people – those with whom God has shared his intentions for the world most clearly because they know. God has revealed the truth to them.

Throughout the Gospels Christ demonstrates his authority and power over the spirit and the material worlds and He passes his power on to his disciples.⁴⁵ As Jesus says 'all power is given Me in heaven and in earth'⁴⁶ and as St Luke tells us. 'He gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases'.⁴⁷ Most importantly as St John's Gospel relates 'as many as received him, to them gave He the power to become the sons of God'.⁴⁸

The Pharisees often get a bad press but they were law-abiding people who followed the Law, to the letter. But the Law was instituted 'because of sin'. Christ encourages us to follow the Spirit of the Law, the intention, and not the letter for 'all our righteousness is as filthy rags'.⁴⁹ What is

⁴² Matt. 7: 28, 29

⁴³ Luke 11: 40; Matt. 23: 1 - 11

⁴⁴ Matt. 23: 27

⁴⁵ Matt. 28: 18

⁴⁶ idem

⁴⁷ Luke 4: 36; Luke 9: 1

⁴⁸ John 1: 12

⁴⁹ Isaih 64: 6

really required of us is something much greater, comparable with the generosity of God who does not demand an eye for an eye but gives his own life that we might be saved. Anyone who has not understood this has not understood the Gospel, the Good News: no longer an eye for an eye but the Gift of Christ's redeeming love. In no way do we deserve His generosity: He simply offers it. He doesn't even make us take it: 'Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man opens to me I will enter and sup with him and he with Me'.⁵⁰

CHRIST'S RESPONSE TO WORLDLY POWER

All human power comes from God. When Pontius Pilate ask Christ if he realises that he, Pilate has power to crucify or to release him Christ answers, "Thou couldest have no power at all except it were given thee from above".⁵¹

Christ responds in many different ways to human power and authority but none of them include slavishness, grovelling or demeaning behaviour. None of them include sucking up to the powerful or important people. Christ is always and remains a King, the King who lays down his life for his people. He is never a victim: He retains his own free will and, while submitting to the Will of His Father and decision of the people that He should be put to death, he reminds us: "no-one takes my life from Me: I lay it down of Myself".

In some cases He appeals to their better nature. Seeing into the hearts of those ready to stone the woman taken in adultery and inviting them to judge themselves rather than her He says: 'let him who is without sin cast the first stone'.⁵²

Sometimes He acts radically - for example in over turning the tables of the money-changers in the Temple. Christ is not modest and self-effacing: he stands his ground, He is active, even violent when required and often downright rude to the powerful. He chooses his response carefully, adjusting it to specific circumstances and people.

Sometimes He stands His ground. He maintains his dialogue with Pilate and answers his critics. At others He is silent (when the false witnesses tell lies about Him) or He leaves (for example when people want to stone Him⁵³ because His 'time is not yet come').

⁵⁰ Rev. 3: 20

⁵¹ John 19: 10, 11

⁵² John 8: 7

⁵³ John 8: 59

Christ is 'no respecter of persons'. He accepts all who come to him regardless of their background or race: tax collectors, beggars, Samaritans, Centurions. . . .

Christ is not a bureaucrat working a heartless system. His response to all, even the most sinful is personal and particular. We should never forget this, whether as laity in our relationship with the clergy or as ordained Priests or Bishops; whether as children responding to our parents or teachers, or as parents or teachers in charge of the young; whether as bosses at work; heads of institutions or the lowest in the hierarchy. We are all called to this kind of personal response to the persons who come before us. Metropolitan Anthony understood well and taught it as best he could. He knew that God cares for us "each and all" and loves each of us in particular as well as as a group. This is why when, as an English convert, I was asked to address the Diocesan Assembly on the subject of the legacy of Metropolitan Anthony I said "He taught us the Gospel". This IS the Gospel: that Christ died and rose for us personally as well as collectively. Each and all. If we find ourselves behaving in a mechanistic way, following rules rather than the Spirit, we have lost our way completely for "the letter killeth but the Spirit giveth life"⁵⁴

CHRIST AND FREEDOM

Christ teaches us that the Truth shall make us free:⁵⁵ free from sin, free from the law instituted because of sin. Christ tells us that the law of love has come to fulfil and to replace the Law.

Mankind is bound by the fear that governs all mankind since the inheritance of death: the fear that colours all our attitudes and behaviour. Christ frees us from fear by igniting the fire of love in us for 'perfect love casteth out fear'.⁵⁶ As St Paul says, 'God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power and of love and of a sound mind'.⁵⁷

We have power, freedom and authority because God gives them to us and like the talents, he does not expect us to bury them in the ground but to spend them, invest in them make them grow.

This understanding of freedom brings us to God's Kingdom: a Kingdom of love freely given. The fellowship or community of the Kingdom

⁵⁴ 2 Cor. 3: 6

⁵⁵ John 8: 32 - 36

⁵⁶ 1 John 4: 18

⁵⁷ 2 Tim. 1: 7

(*sobornost*) is a communion of free people who love one another freely for only the free can love. Anything that is done under compulsion is foreign to the Kingdom because membership is not established by rules but by the Holy Spirit, God's free and loving Spirit who does whatever He wills. And what he wills is 'to draw all men unto himself'⁵⁸. . . that all might be saved.

4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION: Implications for our lives.

'Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? – Know ye not that we shall judge angels?'⁵⁹ When we 'render unto God that which is God's', we are speaking of our souls and bodies, our very selves. The human vocation is awesome. We must in humility and repentance live up to our calling. In the same letter St Paul goes on to say that it is better to offer oneself to be defrauded than to go to law against a brother in public: 'But brother goeth to law with brother and that before the unbelievers. Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you because ye go to law with one another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? Nay ye do wrong and defraud, and that your brethren. Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?'⁶⁰

Some battles are the wrong battle. St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians describes arguments between the faithful. One says he follows Cephas, one Paul, one Apollos, and one Christ but as St Paul points out they were all baptised in the name of Christ, not Paul. He points out that both the one who plants the seed and the one who waters it are ministers of the one God and each will receive his reward. 'For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all are yours: and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's'.

A similar situation occurs in the Acts of the Apostles⁶¹ where St Paul and St Barnabas have quarrelled bitterly. In the end they split up, St Barnabas going to Cyprus and building the Church there while St Paul went through Syria and Cilicia. The two saints were, unbeknown to them, destined for different work.

⁵⁸ John 12: 32

⁵⁹ 1 Cor. 6: 2, 3

⁶⁰ 1 Cor. 6: 6 - 9

⁶¹ Acts 15: 36 - 41

When our brother desires to part from us or has different ideas we should let him go with our blessing: he may be called to other work by God in whom we are all united.

We should not encourage unnecessary suffering. If the conditions under which people live are intolerable they should if possible try to change them and be supported in so doing. Examples are offered us in the Old Testament, as in the escape of the Children of Israel from the Egyptians, and in the New: St Paul escaping in a basket to flee his pursuers. Even in the case of one destined for martyrdom there is a time a place and a cause for which to be martyred. Metropolitan Anthony used to say, 'Choose which battles are yours. You can't fight on all fronts at once'.

We can approach the reality of our lives in two different modes: the mode of God, which leads to growth, or the mode of the devil that is destructive and leads to disintegration. As the devil is the shadow of non-being, the elements of our lives appear as if in a mirror. In God's mode power is love; in the devil's it is bullying and oppression. In God's mode, organisation is structure and allows us to build and create; in the devil's it is the heartless bureaucracy that destroys life and hope. We can study all human activities in this way: are we functioning in God's mode or the devils? Are we building or destroying? Or are we teetering on the brink so that things could go either way?

If we are unavoidably caught up in a power structure in which we appear to have little control, we can look harder, search our hearts, pray and think 'outside the box'. We can refuse to be conditioned by what is around us and find ways and opportunities to behave like human beings, personally. Above all we need courage and commitment, whole-heartedness. We must be prepared to take risks, to 'put on the armour of God (and) stand'.⁶² If we lose our entire livelihood for Christ's sake it will not go unnoticed.

We are encouraged to listen to our teachers, especially when we are young and unformed. As we become more experienced in the life in Christ we may ourselves become teachers. We are responsible for deciding where our allegiances lie and with whom we align ourselves. 'Strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil'.⁶³

⁶² Eph. 6: 13

⁶³ Heb. 5:14

We must purify ourselves of the conviction that 'might is right', preferring for ourselves the lowest places. Christ is Almighty but we find him with the dispossessed of the world, healing them, freeing them of the bonds of sin and sickness, not because the mighty need no healing, no release but because their might operates as an anaesthetic. Blinded by wealth, power and status, those who are mighty are often unaware of their truly mortal need.

'But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many".'⁶⁴ God respects the freedom He has granted to each being. Power over the other or the lust to dominate is contrary to God's Will.

Freedom, Power and Authority are given to us by God: they are not our own. We are responsible for how we use these gifts or 'talents'. If we misuse them or bury them in the earth as the servant in St. Matthew's Gospel did out of fear, laziness or false humility, will we not also be called as he was 'wicked and slothful'?⁶⁵

Power is the 'elephant in the room', and even in the Church the routine avoidance of discussions concerning power plays into the devil's hands and allows the perpetuation of evil.

St Paul lists the gifts of the Spirit:⁶⁶ wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophesy, discernment of spirits, the gift of tongues and the interpretation of tongues. But ⁶⁷ he explains that all our gifts, talents and good deeds are worth nothing if we have not love. Men will know you are followers of Christ when they see how you love one another, we are told. 'Pray for those that despitefully use you'⁶⁸ . . . that none may perish. In the context of our present troubles we should be praying for those who have caused us so much grief.

We are saved 'each and all', standing on the side of the other, for him, even if he is an enemy.

⁶⁴ Matt. 20: 25 - 28

⁶⁵ Matt. 25: 26

⁶⁶ 1 Cor 12:

⁶⁷ 1 Cor 13: 1 - 13

⁶⁸ Luke 6: 28

Christ gave two commandments: 'Ye shall love the Lord thy God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul and with you're your strength and your neighbour as yourself – on these hang all the law and the prophets'.⁶⁹

It is owing to this duty of care for one another that we must never lead our neighbour into sin. In the words of one Mother of the Church 'Do not offer those lusting for power the temptation of lording it over you'. To be the cause of our neighbour's sin is a sin in itself for which we will answer as we will for every use to which we put our freedom.

When the Mother of God said 'Be it unto me according to Thy Will', she was not following instructions, obeying rules or 'being good'. She did not smirk and say, 'O surely not me' with false humility. She did not say, 'No, this seems too big a task. Pick someone else'. She was called and responded, giving her assent from the heart, a heart of flesh and not of stone, destined to be pierced with a sword for giving assent to God means suffering. In simplicity she gave herself as whole heartedly and matter-of-factly as God gives himself. What is so awesome is that she just did it: He just does it.

Lack of generosity and inauthenticity, or being fake, is at the bottom of many of our problems in being Christian. Why do we suffer so much from the temptation to be fakes? Adam and Eve in the garden hid from God when they knew themselves to be naked. We are always existentially afraid of being found out and called to account!

To comfort ourselves we seek allies with others. To maintain the fiction that everything is fine we pretend that things are not as serious as they really are and we imagine that if we do as everyone else does we won't stand out and nothing bad will happen to us personally.

When something terrible happens to someone else we heave a sigh of relief – it was not us – and we remind ourselves that we have been good and kept our heads down and that this so called 'virtue' is its own reward. If there is any vestige of humanity left in us we may pity the unfortunate one. This may not go as far as visiting him or her since we often superstitiously imagine misfortune may be contagious.

We must learn to be human. In fact we must make a decision to be human. And being human means being heroic, courageous not indulging

⁶⁹ Matt. 22: 37 - 39

in cultivating or nurturing a sense of suffering, of having been wronged, not wimps 'for God has not given us the Spirit of Fear but of Power and of Love and of a sound mind'.⁷⁰ We must decide not to flee the truth but to seek it; not to protect ourselves by colluding with evil in the form of being 'normal', 'just like everyone else'. Let us reject abstraction and the kind of socialisation which is not love but conformity leading to tyranny and notions of winners and losers. Let us stop fearing the disapproval of others and learn to be brave.

The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,⁷¹ righteousness and truth.⁷² 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,' says St Paul. All these are indications of the presence of the Spirit we are called to acquire.

Maturity is the realisation that we are free, powerful and authoritative, like Christ and that we can, with his help, break down the mental and emotional prisons we have constructed for ourselves, the secure shells where we hide, comfort ourselves and nurse and lick our wounds, the delusions we have cultivated: we can be delivered from our sins.. Christ's shining and merciful light reaches into every dark corner and reveals the truth if we have the courage to look. God is waiting for us to follow Christ; to take responsibility and be committed; to exercise our fully-realised freedom, power and authority.

⁷⁰ 2 Tim. 1: 7

⁷¹ Eph. 5: 9

⁷² 2 Cor. 3: 17