

THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS IN PUBLIC LIFE, DR AMY ORR EWING

Amy Orr Ewing

The National Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast provides an annual opportunity for MPs, Peers, and Christian leaders to build relationships, pray for our nation, and to reflect on Christian faith in public life. In June 2023, theologian and apologist Amy Orr-Ewing gave a thought-provoking keynote speech. Thankfully, the [recording is available](#) for us to enjoy and engage with today.

Amy identifies a current cultural moment of increased awareness of trauma and harm, and a subsequent desire for justice. This desire for justice emerges with naming and shaming, boycotting, and 'shunning the transgressor'. With such rage against injustice there appears to be no space for forgiveness or redemption. Forgiveness is perceived as a minimisation of harm and not at all compatible with the justice that is demanded. Once cancelled, you are cancelled for good.

Amy associates this societal anger at injustice with an unconscious appreciation of the 'sacredness of life and the possibility of eternity in our hearts'. We care deeply because we are made in the image of God and there is something about human life that is sacred. In response to injustice, and contrasting with the shaming culture, Amy points us to the 'lost art of forgiveness'.

Amy refers to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission as an example of a public framework for remembering and forgiving the crimes committed on a massive scale under Apartheid. She acknowledges the challenge of forgiveness and disputes the common saying: to

'forgive and forget'. Instead, she highlights forgiveness as a recognition and remembering of suffering, an acknowledgement that suffering matters. She concludes that forgiveness 'may be the greatest gift that the Christian story can offer our age'.

As a Christian leader, I wonder about the power of forgiveness in my own life and in the life of the church. How should I model forgiveness to my own family and children? Are there people who I struggle to forgive because of the harm caused to me or to others? What does it look like for me to model forgiveness in my public life and to counter the shaming culture of social media today?

Review by The Rev Imogen Ball, Families and Community Lead, Orchard Grove Church.

