

Bishop says Church helps paedophiles escape through 'call to forgiveness'

◆ The Church of England has exploited the concept of "Christian forgiveness" to allow paedophiles and abusers to get away with their crimes, a bishop has admitted.

The Rt Rev Christopher Cocks-worth, Bishop of Coventry, said the "call to forgiveness" had been used as part of collusion and cover-up in the wake of church abuse scandals.

Writing in the *Church Times*, he said victims and survivors are often told to forgive their abuser and this can "add to the harm done by abuse".

He added: "If they cannot, then the message conveyed is that they are not proper Christians: that they have failed, are guilty of sin, and cannot be part of the life of the Church until they are willing to say, 'I forgive you' without reservation or hesitation.

"For a person suffering trauma, that is a destructive message, and can only alienate them from the Church and from the good news that the Church exists to spread."

The idea that God has forgiven them also makes perpetrators feel better about their crimes, he added. "At the same time, people who have committed abuse may be reassured that receiving divine pardon for their actions makes it unnecessary to face the human consequences of their crime."

Dr Cocks-worth thinks the Church should be focused on justice as well as encouraging abusers to repent.

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