

Thinking about Christian Leadership - a modem viewpoint

A short paper for people in business which brings together the thinking of John Adair and the key principles of the Christian Association of Business Executives (CABE)

modem is a national and ecumenical Christian network which seeks to initiate authentic dialogue between exponents of leadership, organisation, spirituality and ministry in order to aid the development of better disciples, communities, society and the world.

One of the short term objectives of the **modem** leadership committee is to invite the Church to renew its commitment to the leadership of people by encouraging and facilitating “**Thinking about Christian Leadership**” based on the life and teaching of Jesus that will be of help to people both in the Church and to Christians serving in other organisations. Every organisation throughout the world has to take account of change. Change calls for leadership. Therefore at the present time of considerable change, **modem** hopes that this paper will be found helpful to both leaders in the Church and leaders in business.

Setting the scene

In his book “The Leadership of Jesus and its Legacy Today”¹, which provides the backdrop for this paper, Professor John Adair, Britain’s first Professor of Leadership and a renowned authority on the subject, draws attention to the fact that Jesus possessed a genius for leadership. It is therefore reasonable for Christians to believe that the example of leadership set by Jesus ought to be better known to Christians and to be practised more widely. It is also interesting to note that many experienced leaders, both past and present, regard The Bible as “*the greatest book on leadership ever written*”. As well as including the story of Jesus it also tells of people before Him who, putting their faith in God, allowed God to lead them; and of people who, after Jesus’ Life and Resurrection, sought the help of God the Holy Spirit to guide them in the way ahead. Furthermore Christianity has a rich heritage of wisdom, and effective leadership requires wisdom!

***“The beginning of wisdom is
the most sincere desire for
instruction, and concern for
instruction is love of her”***
(Wisdom 6.17).

¹ Adair J, 2001, The leadership of Jesus and its legacy today, Canterbury Press, Norwich

The Early Roots of Leadership – the Ancient Greeks, Judaism, the Jews and the Romans.

Long before the birth of Christ thinking about leadership was expressed by philosophers such as Socrates and Xenophon, Plato and Aristotle. Their ideas had a profound influence throughout the known world. Ancient Greece was to become the cradle of Western civilisation and it is interesting to note that much of Plato's thinking was carried forward through the Neo Platonists; for example the question of the immortality of the soul. Subsequently much later, under Thomas Aquinas, some aspects of Aristotle's philosophy were also incorporated into Christian theology. Basically the idea that although revelation was primary, logical argument based on observed facts from the natural world had its own sphere of authority.



Over a period of some 2000 years, a great depth of learning and wisdom was accumulated by Judaism and is available to us through the books of the Old Testament. This vast fund of knowledge had a great influence on all aspects of Hebrew life, ethics and law. Indeed it shaped the basis of Israelite culture and society; the society into which Jesus was born and in which He grew up. The ancient Hebrew legacy concerning the remarkable exploits of Moses and his encounter with the voice of God on Mount Horeb is of fundamental importance to Judaism, influencing greatly Jewish life over the centuries, as it still does today. This legacy also suggests that some early appreciation of both

leadership and management, particularly some understanding about basic logistics, must have existed in some form or other at the time of Moses. A series of long hot journeys mostly on foot into the dry, dusty, waterless Sinai Desert over a period of 40 years involving many thousands of men, women, and children together with all their basic belongings was not something to be undertaken lightly! It was a feat that must have required considerable practical logistical ability. This early appreciation of the art of leadership was passed on to Joshua, the Judges, David, and Solomon and the accumulated fund of knowledge and experience has impacted for centuries on the development of leadership. It was the seedbed out of which the Christian Church, the New Israel, grew.

Later, from about BC 753, Rome gradually grew in size and influence so that by about AD117 the vast Roman Empire had become the dominant power around the Mediterranean, in parts of Europe, the British Isles and the Holy Land.



The authorities in Rome, responsible for governing and administering this vast and far-flung empire, appreciated the importance of leadership. They expected those in authority under Rome to demonstrate timely practical leadership. In particular they emphasised the great importance of leaders thinking ahead so that they developed fore sight that would help them to have a clear vision about the future task/s. They were then expected to share that vision with those they led. The Romans expected their leaders to be totally committed to the task in hand and to expect a similar commitment from their own subordinate leaders. Thereafter Rome required its leaders to identify clearly and precisely what had to be done and to delegate accordingly. These thoughts on leadership and no doubt many others were probably well known in the Holy Land during Christ's early life. Almost certainly they were known to the Roman procurators.



An early example of the moral leadership of Jesus was shown while He was still a young man in Judea. He was led by the Spirit into the desert where He fasted for forty days and nights and was tempted by the devil many times. Finally Jesus said: *"Away from me, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only."* (Matt 4.10). Serving the will of God was the mission of Christ's Ministry and it was His remarkable leadership that led to the formation of Christendom.

Leadership has a strong moral dimension. When a leader is seen to ignore morality, trust in that particular leader is often reduced or lost. Like faith, leadership is a personal matter but it requires a degree of personal effort

"There is no one, who with a little thought could not improve his or her ability as a leader".

Field Marshal Viscount Slim,
14th Army, Burma

The Governing Philosophy

ἀγάπη - Love

The greatest commandment to love,² as expressed in ancient Greek by the word 'agape' meaning 'duty or a commitment of devotion', is the embodiment of the life and teachings of Jesus. It is at the heart of the Christian Faith and consequently Christian leadership. The first two Commandments (Mark 12.29) "*To love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind*" and the second "*To love your neighbour as yourself*" emphasise the importance of love and they require Christians to put self-interest last. Therefore any act, especially by a leader, which detracts from the duty of devotion to those he or she leads, contradicts the basis of our faith. Accordingly moral courage, and sometimes, physical courage, humility and wisdom are all important qualities of a leader. Jesus set aside personal ambition; he was willing to take a road that led to a cross.

From time to time in any walk of life, adversity will prevail and sometimes the going can get tough. Mistakes are made; human weakness shows forth. Leaders must try to anticipate such events and be prepared to respond to difficulties with courage, humility and wisdom. Just as Jesus drew attention to the importance of two Commandments so a leader must draw attention to the importance of the Aim. Without a clear, concise aim any team will soon splinter.

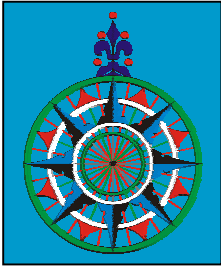
Definition of Christian Leadership.

"Serve to Lead"

Christian leaders, remembering the teachings of Jesus, have a duty of devotion to their people. Accordingly they inspire and give confidence so that the task, no matter how daunting, is achieved. Hence the old and hallowed motto of the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst; "*Serve to Lead*". To lead effectively and gain respect and trust, leaders need to be discreet servants of those they lead, displaying leadership and an awareness of the importance of management. Leaders who set such an example soon form impressive teams. Jesus was the Leader of just such a team. He showed throughout His Ministry that He was the Servant of His team. He was not above carrying out the humblest of tasks such as washing His disciples' feet at the Last Supper. Humility and selflessness are natural qualities of a leader.

² Frequently this word is confused in English today with the Ancient Greek word also meaning love - *phileo* which means expressing friendly affection

Vision and Strategy.



As already mentioned the Romans had emphasised the importance of vision but its supreme importance had already been recognised centuries beforehand in the Holy Land. The Book of Proverbs (29.18) states: *“where there is no vision, the people perish.”* Foresight, the ability always to think ahead, is a discipline required by everyone but it is an absolutely essential discipline of leadership, particularly if leaders are to honour what Jesus referred to as the two most important Commandments (Mark 12.29). It means thinking ahead about any problem or proposal and considering likely implications, thereby becoming fully prepared. Jesus’ parable about the Good Samaritan tells how two people thought that the risks of being neighbourly were too great! (Luke 10.25ff). To achieve success at a higher or wider level each team leader needs to ensure that his or her vision not only inspires the team but also meets the expectations of those above, as defined in their Strategy. Therefore, it is particularly important that leaders ensure that their proposed vision conforms to the relevant Strategy. This principle of harmonisation is firmly based on loyalty, the first quality of any Christian. The fostering of unity in any organisation is dependent upon leaders, at every level, conforming to the overall needs of higher strategy. The transcendence of Jesus’ vision may have brought a unique quality of leadership available to no one else. *“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden”*. (Matt 5.14).

Planning and Teamwork



Success in any task, great or small depends upon turning the strategy into a plan which, with foresight, takes full account of likely advantages and disadvantages. It needs to be well prepared, kept simple in chronological sequence with each phase delegated to a particular person who has a small team to help. Leaders must then with humour, encouragement and tact, build a cohesive team, keeping in balance the needs of the task to be done, the needs of the team and the needs of the individual. The more team members are actively involved, the more successful the team are likely to be.

Jesus was a genius of leadership. A major part of His life was spent inspiring and giving confidence to His disciples. They were an outstanding team. The example of teamwork that Jesus gave stands today, as it has for over two thousand years, as the ultimate example of teamwork. He delegated to His team and, following the Resurrection, the disciples, less Judas, went on to complete the Great Commission from which Christianity has grown (Matt 28.16ff).

The Team

The Task

The Individual

The Relationship of Leadership to Management.

Leadership is an art in which some proven principles are extremely important. The manner in which those principles are applied by a leader will depend entirely upon that leader.

“Leadership is about people”

Every individual is unique (including every leader) – so every leader will lead in his or her own particular manner. However every leader must take care to respect the principles of leadership that were learnt from Jesus. Therefore there is no such thing as a “*Leadership Style*” because every leader already has his or her own personal style. Everyone is born as a unique individual, so the way they lead in later life is also unique to them. Leadership, like Faith, is a very personal matter but there is nobody who, with a little personal effort, could not greatly improve their powers of leadership nor should it ever be forgotten that the position of a leader can often be very lonely.

“Management is about material things”

Management is a science concerned with the efficient, effective and economic use of material resources in conjunction with the work of people. There are formulas that must be followed and measurements that must be made. However management and leadership are inseparable because a problem on a material resource facing a team

invariably results in an adverse effect on that team. It requires the team leader and the manager concerned to work together to find a solution. Jesus indicated as much when he spoke of the owner of a vineyard, his foreman and the labourers (Matt 20.1) and the importance of good stewardship of resources (Luke 16.1ff).

The Core Principles

Throughout His Ministry Jesus demonstrated His genius as a leader and the impact of that leadership is still felt over some two thousand years later. Jesus displayed four core principles that are evident in the Gospels and these same principles have been incorporated into numerous leadership models. Although advances in technology have radically changed, and still continue to change the World, these principles remain as important today as they were in biblical times.

The Ability to Communicate.

Jesus was an absolute master of the ability to communicate. Jesus knew how to look and how to listen. His ministry focused on teaching, preaching and healing, but he did so with ‘eyes that could see’ and ‘ears that could hear’. All of these undertakings are concerned with communications. On the Sabbath He taught in synagogues and during the week He preached to larger crowds in the open air, using parables to portray and clarify His messages.

The fame of Jesus' power of healing spread all over Judea and Samaria and attracted large crowds. When He saw such crowds He 'communicated' with them. On one such occasion He delivered what has come to be called "The Sermon on the Mount" (Matt 5. 3-12; Luke 6.17-23). It defined the moral and ethical standards expected of all Christians but was of such a high moral standard that it was realised that without the help of God, Man alone cannot cope or hope to attain such standards. Jesus chose this moment on the Mount to pass this important but poignant message of humility and sincerity to Humanity. Leaders must constantly ask themselves *"Have I looked, have I listened?" "Have I made myself clear? Does the team understand all that they should?"* Or as modern people might say; *"it is not what we say, but what people hear that counts"*. Jesus brought alive the vision of the Kingdom of God to His disciples.

Knowledge

These famous words highlight the fundamental principle that a wise way to live is to develop a relationship of reverence and submission to God. Jesus understood this from an early age. St Luke tells us that as a young boy He took the opportunity to listen and to ask questions of the teachers in the Temple (Luke 2.41ff). Later, after His Baptism, He took some time out – forty days in the wilderness – to reflect on God's purpose for Him and His life. Thereafter, filled with the Spirit and knowledge of God, He was able to announce that the Kingdom of God is at hand. For a Christian leader Jesus' example is of great importance because it requires the leader to think about or reflect upon a particular issue by considering God's purpose as revealed in the teachings from scripture before making a final decision. Therefore the study of Scripture is important to a Christian leader *"The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me who is doing His work"* (John 14.10). Likewise it is widely acknowledged in life that authority goes with the one who knows and reflects in order to lead wisely and with authority. Accordingly, in every Profession, authority stems from relevant professional knowledge. Hence the wisdom of the motto: *"Knowledge dispels fear"*.

***"The fear of the Lord is
the beginning of
knowledge"***

Proverbs 1v7

If a leader incorporates into his or her life some of the wisdom learnt from Jesus, he or she is unlikely to fail. It means acquiring a fund of knowledge on Christianity as well as professional expertise. Much of that knowledge is often enhanced through a leader's preliminary consultation with a superior or with an appropriate expert; an experienced mentor, a wise counsellor, can be an invaluable aid to a leader. Wherever and whenever possible a leader should involve his or her team. Trust in their leader is strengthened by such involvement and by frequent and clear delegation of leadership responsibilities. Perhaps the most valuable component of knowledge is common sense – it is not always that common!

Care of People

To all Christians, especially leaders, people matter most. People are more important than anything else in life. Accordingly they should be treated at all times with courtesy and compassion and be treated as one would wish to be treated oneself. Of supreme importance is the actual state of individual and collective morale. Therefore leaders must constantly be assessing the morale of their team and its members. Napoleon, who was a remarkable leader, considered that morale was three times more important than any physical or material benefit.

“Recognition is the oxygen of the soul”

“Morale is the greatest single factor affecting the performance of any team! “

Accordingly individuals should not be put into jobs for which they have not been trained or prepared and in which they will probably not be adequately supported. It is a leader’s job to think ahead, select the best person available (or cause selection to take place) and then to arrange the necessary training. This process can often identify talents, potential talents that a leader will take care to develop by using suitable opportunities.

Jesus Himself gathered various groups of people around Him, initially a group of twelve people, later a group of seventy-two, (Luke 10.10) giving them tasks to do and caring for them as they served and learned. Whenever possible Christian leaders delegate and thereby foster trust and a team approach to work but they must never delegate ultimate responsibility. Whenever anything goes wrong, especially on a delegated matter, leaders must always shoulder the full consequences. Mishaps often happen in life, things do not always go well but respect and affection for a leader are soon lost if he or she ducks out.

Christian leaders have an acute awareness of the special significance of “loyalty”. To them it is not an old fashioned virtue or a misunderstood one - *my leader right or wrong* but loyalty first and foremost to God and His Kingdom. It is an essential element of Christianity. By virtue of the second commandment, Christian leaders have a special responsibility for the care of other people, especially those placed in their care. Speaking about people, Jesus said

“Do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows”

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father and even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

(Matthew 10v29 -31)

The ability to inspire

The inspiring leader

His inspiration was such that the disciples followed him throughout His life and after the Resurrection. No doubt in a state of considerable shock eleven disciples went to a place in the mountains near Galilee where Jesus delegated to them enormous responsibilities for which some of them were to lose their lives. Jesus said *"therefore go and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you"* (Matt 28.20). He was a master of inspiring people *"This then is how you should pray"* (Matt 6.9).

There are numerous examples in the Gospels of Jesus giving thanks. The importance of a leader pausing to reflect and to express thanks to those concerned is a key part of inspiring leadership. "Please", "Thank you" and "Well done!" are some of the most important words in any language because people appreciate recognition when it is due. Leaders know that recognition is the oxygen of the soul. Leaders always show a positive outlook. Achieving the task in hand or the target to be met is what matters and leaders appreciate fully that their own enthusiasm, body language and inspiration are critically important - especially when the going gets tough.

The affirming leader

The Characteristics of a Christian Leader

Moral and Physical Courage.

Courage is rightly esteemed to be the first of human qualities because it is the quality that guarantees all others. It is not a chance gift of nature like an aptitude for games or the ability to make a cold choice between two alternatives. It is a mental state whose strength comes from Christian Faith and other material intellectual sources. There are two types of courage. First, that which urges an individual to risk injury or death in the face of danger – that is physical courage. Second, a different type of courage based on a reasoning attitude that causes an individual to stake his or her career, personal happiness or indeed their whole future on what he or she judges to be right – that is moral courage. Every human being is born with a certain amount of physical courage but if that inbuilt reserve becomes expended then the individual concerned will break down.

Those situations in life that call for physical courage can be made a little more familiar by realistic preliminary training but no such preparation can be made to impart true moral courage; a quality that is deeply rooted in the Christian Faith, it places concern for another individual or for a group of people above all personal interests. Hence, moral courage tends to be a rarer virtue than physical courage but both are all about will power. Little remains certain in this life. Events occur far beyond the control of even governments but leaders must be able to ride out the resultant storms and find a positive response. They must be at ease with uncertainty by maintaining a positive and realistic outlook.

Integrity

A leader, especially a Christian leader, has to be totally trusted and be worthy of that trust if he or she is to lead people. Complete honesty and total integrity are most precious qualities – once lost they are seldom recovered. Usually the trust of other people is lost forever. One of the greatest attributes of integrity, especially for any Christian - is loyalty. It is a sacred trust involving loyalties upwards to the boss, to one's colleagues and to one's own team and its members. At each level the leader expresses the same view. Moral courage and integrity are closely related qualities. Sir Ernest Shackleton (1874 – 1922)³, a former officer of the Royal Navy and the leader of the British Trans-Antarctic Expedition 1914-16, has been widely acknowledged as one of the greatest leaders. His example of remarkable selfless leadership in the face of acute danger under terrible weather conditions rescued and saved the lives of the 27 men who were stranded for almost two years on an Antarctic ice floe.

The World is undergoing massive changes. In every conceivable field, as never before in history, anyone who aspires to be a leader has to appreciate that success in the future will demand an even greater emphasis on foresight.

Awareness of Change.

A sense of vision is needed that enables leaders to anticipate what might happen in the future and what the outcomes might be for their own organisation and then to think about the possible consequences and options. This is not something that can be done overnight. It is an ongoing function of a leader's daily life.

They must frequently question their team members and be prepared to ask "*What do you think?*" Leaders create change; at times of change people look for leaders. It must never be forgotten that Jesus brought into the world in the Holy Land the greatest of change of all times.

³ For more information see Margot Morrell & Stephanie Capparell, 2002, Shackleton's Way, Nicholas Brealey Publishing. Includes a foreword by Alexandra Shackleton.

Taking the Team with You.

Leadership is about taking people with you by encouraging them to go in the best possible direction. It means being a facilitator and not a dictator. It is a similar role to that of a conductor in an orchestra. He or she does not play an instrument but, with the leader of the orchestra, the conductor inspires and gives confidence to either individual players or to sections within the orchestra, so that the musical score is confidently brought alive to the total satisfaction of the audience. In particular it means developing a rapport with the team. This requires taking time to listen and to reflect privately upon the views expressed - often there is considerable value in those views.

Leadership involves inspiring and receiving extraordinary results from ordinary people because they enjoy what they are doing and they want to do it. This can only be done when the relationship between team members and their leader is based on absolute trust. To build that trust a leader has to appreciate that every team member is unique, each person with their own personality, strengths and weaknesses but everyone has two sides to their nature; on one side – rational thinking, on the other side – emotion. Leadership is about appealing to those deeply seated human desires by giving inspiration and fostering confidence.

“Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he or she wants to do it”.

President Eisenhower

Emotional Intelligence

There are some most unpleasant adverse situations in life that can cause grave personal distress or acute collective anxiety, possibly even panic. Such situations can have a serious effect on morale. Recent medical research has shown that these situations usually involve Fear, Anger, Revulsion, Sorrow or Sadness (FARS). Leaders need to be aware of these dangers. Sorrow occurs naturally from time to time but the Christian Faith provides great comfort. Bad anger, which has been described as *“The anaesthetic of the mind”*, is the antithesis of love and is best avoided; whereas righteous anger, when confronted by evil or incompetence causing unnecessary suffering, is to be encouraged. The reverse side of love (in the *agape* sense) is to hate evil. A good leader can be tough and demanding, even formidable, especially when having to deal with thoughtless or dangerous incompetence. Christian leaders when justifiably angry do not, however, lose their temper. They are instead calm, controlled and collected. Love and compassion are deeply seated in a Christian leader’s nature.

Fear

Anger

Revulsion

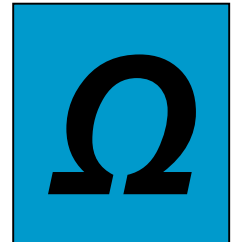
Sadness

Tolerance

Prejudice is sadly inherent in the basic nature of Humanity. It has been the cause of many past troubles, even wars, and today it has become the catalyst that creates the level of hatred that has brought about international terrorism. Leaders need to be aware of its awful dangers and to foster views that encourage tolerance and mutual regard for people of different cultures, ethnic backgrounds, races or Faiths. Jesus spoke about tolerance in the Beatitudes “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God*”. (Matt 5.1-12)

Conclusion

Christian leaders carry a great responsibility to ensure that the manner in which they lead their people make life fun, truly meaningful and fulfilling so that the task, whatever it may be, is achieved on time and to budget and to a standard that totally satisfies everyone concerned. Despite all the tribulations of life, a leader has constantly to be alert to the needs of the team both individually and collectively. The challenges of leadership are considerable. The love of God, good health and other material aspects of life bring happiness, success, joy and mirth to people and their families (and to your own family).



Pressures are therefore placed upon those chosen to be leaders. However, Christians have the enormous strength afforded by their faith in God’s loving purpose, but that profound strength must be carefully related to the more humble scenarios facing all leaders. They require them to take time out – time to think – to reflect. That is absolutely essential. Those periods of reflection give Christian leaders the opportunity to seek guidance, “*Ask and it shall be given; seek and you will find*” (Matthew 7.7).

Having taken time to think and to consider deeply the various views of their team members and having sought guidance, leaders actually become much more powerful. Their influence is greatly enhanced because their proposed course of action is based on wisdom.

*The wisdom that is rooted in the ‘fear of the Lord’
is the hallmark and strength of every Christian leader.*

What kind of leader are you?

What do you aspire to be?