

Address given by Michael Fass, chairman, National Executive Committee, Industrial Christian Fellowship at St Margaret's Church, Westminster Abbey at a service on the eve of the National Prayer Breakfast 2004

Our first experiences of Leadership can be very confusing – mine certainly were! My first boss's office was on the corner of our admin block building which looked in one direction towards Dumbarton Rock and the other towards the factory car park. Whenever I went into his office to consult, or be consulted, I would find him either totally switched off in contemplation looking towards the Clyde or down at the car park enraged because someone had parked in his reserved space!

In extraordinary contrast, I would find my second boss at his desk, leaning back in his chair, jacket off and speaking for 30 minutes without pause for breaths about his vision for the company, without a question to me! Leadership and what it means in business, and beyond, has seldom been more confusing than it is today. Lists of leadership models always used to include names such as Caesar, Wellington and Churchill, all of whom displayed skills in oratory, tenacity and strategy, but in contemporary culture, leadership models now include football club managers, pop stars and TV presenters, alongside the Dalai Lama and Mother Teresa! One person's most admired leader is another's most loathed.

Yet the exercise of leadership is of critical importance for the tasks we have to fulfil in our generation:

The prophetic voices who can inspire and motivate us to creativity and action

The community and business leaders who will promote harmony, high performance and success in the public, private and voluntary sectors, because without such individuals our society will regress and people's hopes will die. In this complex situation, what qualities in leadership might we need? In a recent survey carried out by the DII, 3 qualities in leadership were identified. They were:

- Vision
- Trust and confidence
- Respect of others

How might such virtues be created and sustained?

Peter Senge in his book *'The Fifth Discipline'* writes: "The Core Leadership Strategy is: Be a Model"

The question is: "To What models can we look?" or "What should we be like?"

We Christians have some clues to the way Leaders should be: In Matthew Ch 4 v 23, Jesus first selects and then instructs his disciples about how they should behave. He tells them

- To Teach
- To Proclaim the Good News
- To Heal

And here is the link between the DII's "Inspired leadership report and its conclusions; Peter Senge's 'Be a Model' and our Living Faith.

First, Jesus was a Teacher and Preacher. He came to proclaim the Good News of the Coming of the Kingdom. He was an educator and learner without parallel. He taught that leadership is first a learning and understanding role: "People will only trust those they trust to understand them".

Next Jesus had an extraordinary insight towards individuals which helped to make him so effective in winning their trust and confidence and of leading them towards and into, a new reality for living their own lives; and by doing so, a new vision for God's Kingdom. He won their respect because he understood and proclaimed their deepest needs and aspirations.

Finally; He was a healer: He understood the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation in people's lives: That not everything can, or does, go well in human affairs; that everyone makes mistakes out of their own selfishness and that of others, but that God's unfailing love and faithfulness could, and can, renew His People and His World. It is no accident that the key word used to describe the leader – director of all incorporated bodies and of business is the word "Fiduciary" – the director's duty of faith of trust and of faithfulness to others.

And above all his other virtues, Jesus understood and accepted this fundamental virtue of faithfulness to his Father which he demonstrated all his life and right up to – and yes – through his death: "Into your hands I command myself". A key part of this 'faithfulness' which Jesus showed, and to which we are also bound as leader - directors is that we too understand and have felt the meaning of 'servanthood' and 'failure' – as he did. Servanthood means that those who aspire to lead should also have experienced what it means to follow as Jesus followed his Father and failure means that they have also felt what it means to have been rejected and to have learned that it is through the processes of forgiveness and reconciliation that the trust and confidence of others is built. Leadership is therefore an honourable profession and sacred vocation. It is based upon the duty and service of faithfulness owed by the leader - director to others, which is in turn founded upon the eternal faithfulness of God and the trust He places upon us to be in 'right relationship' both with Him and with others.

At this time, when we can be confused by alternative models of leadership; when the trust and confidence that if needed to fulfil today's leadership tasks can sometimes be missing and when visions for the future are unclear – the role of the leader has never been more critical, urgent or precious. The faithfulness of Jesus can serve as our model and help us in our time to fulfil our leadership roles so that in those famous words of Albert Schweitzer, musician, theologian and superb leader: "He will come to us as one unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake side, He came to those who knew him not. He speaks the same word: "Follow me!" and set us to the tasks which He has to fulfil for our time. He commands, and those who obey Him and whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the suffering which they shall pass through

in His Fellowship and as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience,
who he is.
AMEN